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3

Eliade and Girard on Myth

John D. Dadosky

Introduction

Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) has fallen out of favor in the mainstream study of religion. The reasons are compound: (1) the increasingly specialized emphasis in religious studies as evidenced by the particular topics in the journal *History of Religions,* a journal that, ironically, Eliade founded, and (2) the postmodern/post-structuralist resistance to the kind of theories he espoused, which often claims them to be ahistorical and unable to account for the particularism of various groups. To make matters worse, there are questions surrounding Eliade's affiliation with fascist groups in Romania during the Second World War. Still, time will tell whether this neglect of his thought is permanent or just a passing fad, and whether the criticisms are well-founded or not. Personally, I believe there is a lot of value to his work. For example, I discovered in my research with the Diné (Navajo) of the Southwestern United States that Eliade's notion of *sacred time, sacred space* and *cosmogenesis* seem to be corroborated by the Diné creation story and in their religious architecture, especially the *hooghan.*

While Eliade may have receded in popularity, the literary critic turned religious thinker, René Girard (b. 1923) is winning fans for his theories of mimetic rivalry and religious violence, theories that are inextricably linked with his interpretation of myths. A peculiar aspect of Girard's method is that his insights are gleaned directly from literary criticism rather than from other scientific approaches. However, at least one aspect of this theory, mimetic envy and rivalry, can often be adequately corroborated by a direct concrete self-reflection and scrutiny of one's own interpersonal relations, rather than by some scientific measure.

Both Eliade and Girard have made contributions to the study of ancient myths and both have a particular view of traditional aboriginal myths. However, Eliade takes a much more favorable view toward aboriginal

and indigenous myths than Girard does. Indeed, Girard has what seems to be a pejorative view. For him, all extra-Christian myths contain the themes that embody and perpetuate the cycle of violence. I should state that this is a controversial and untested aspect of Girard's theory that requires a critique and more nuanced reflection. Certainly many myths contain themes of ritual sacrifice, but whether they all do is another question. Hence, Girard makes provocative claims that remain subject to scrutiny by anthropologists and other disciplines.

The purpose of this paper is to present an overview of Eliade's and Girard's respective theories on religious/sacred myths with a view toward clarifying and contrasting the different aspects of sacred myths.

Different Approaches to Myth

It is relevant to this analysis to situate the comparison of Eliade's and Girard's approaches in context of Robert Segal's distinction between the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western approaches to myth. In the nineteenth century, myth was seen as the "primitive counterpart to science" (*Myth*, 3). Accordingly, myth is inferior to the rational method of science, which is now viewed as replacing previous mythic explanations. "Science rendered myth not merely redundant but outright incompatible, so that moderns, who by definition are scientific, had to reject myth" (3). In contrast to nineteenth-century views of myth, Segal states, "twentieth century theories have tended to see myth as almost anything but an outdated counterpart to science" (3).

Accompanying the nineteenth-century pejorative view of myth were the colonial presuppositions, which dismissed any value to traditional aboriginal views in the so-called New World. Moreover, we can make some further points about the potentially negative aspects of myth.

First, the nineteenth-century approach to myth by science had some legitimate historical context for its suspicion against myth. This is to say there is a distorted approach to myth that refuses the legitimate advances of human knowledge due to an unwillingness to engage mistaken assumptions about the universe or nature. Such mythic consciousness,[1] for example, was behind the condemnation of Galileo. His advances in science challenged the reigning assumptions about the origins of the universe in the Genesis accounts. The Roman Catholic Church pardoned him 500 years later.

Related as well to the context of the nineteenth-century approach to myth is the scientific rejection of myth as superstition—the belief that fortune or misfortune are linked to certain nonrational acts, and

by nonrational, I mean that there is no apparent logic or intelligible reason behind a certain behavior. For example, there is a superstition that bad things are more likely to happen on Friday the Thirteenth. While this may indeed have religious rationale in some ancient folk tradition, there is no apparent logical reason to assume that bad luck may befall a person on that day as opposed to any other day or that there is any such thing as bad luck at all. It is a superstition, a perhaps mild example of mythic consciousness. Closely related to this aspect of myth is the belief that the external elements can be controlled. Historically, for example, the practice of alchemy with its belief that base metals can be turned into gold occupied the minds of many, including the early proponents of modern science such as Isaac Newton.

Furthermore, one can ask to what extent did Newton's fascination with alchemy influence his own mythic consciousness regarding the explanatory power of science? If Newton's example teaches us anything, it should be noted that mythic consciousness can be so pervasive that even those who are deeply involved in science can succumb to mythic consciousness. This is especially prevalent in those adherents of classical science whose theories strain for a comprehensive explanation and lead to a scientific reductionism. In such cases, the idea that the scientific classical laws can completely explain natural processes becomes itself a "myth." The legacy of Newton's mechanist determinism, although eclipsed by modern physics, remains an all too seductive ideal for many social scientists.

Finally, there is a pejorative notion of myth that is in many ways less a product of the nineteenth century and a more a product of a less critical approach to myth characteristic of the twentieth century. I refer to the myths that are present in political and religious ideologies. Robert Johnson refers to the ancient Nordic myths that were part of the fabric of the German psyche and provided a propellant for the Third Reich (Johnson, 61). Ideologues can co-opt myths and with rhetorical skill incite mass movements and bloodshed. It is perhaps this aspect of myth that most worries Girard. Myths can function as psychological fuel for the cycle of mimetic rivalry and scapegoating of innocent people.

In addition to the pejorative, negative, and even dangerous aspects of myth, Segal also identifies a positive approach to myth. Such views are more reflective of the twentieth-century approaches in which myth is taken more seriously in its ability to communicate meaning. The rise of anthropology, psychology, and religious studies, to name a few of the principal disciplines, have brought a more positive attitude

toward the content and function of myths. Myths can offer data for insight either into a particular group or perhaps more universally into humanity as a whole. Anthropological theories focus on the role of myth in providing a communal frame of reference and meaning for particular societies. Psychological theories, particularly those of Carl Jung, presuppose a universal significance to myth and their function in psychological development. Religious scholars, such as Mircea Eliade, highlight the ability of myths, and non-Western traditional understanding of myths, to communicate something about the deep structures of human societies in their natural expression of religiosity. It is to this expression that Eliade refers in his phrase *homo religiosus*. The myths, like a sacred text, mediate the mysteries of the originating time and place of the creation of a people. In reenacting those myths in ritual contexts, societies can recreate themselves and their worlds. The meaning of such myths provide explanations for the seasons, cycles, and geography by which people live.

In terms of this study, Eliade and Girard reflect positive and pejorative aspects of myth respectively. For Eliade, myth mediates the sacred meanings surrounding the foundations of the cosmos particularized to specific cultural groups. For Girard, myths are about the origin of a culture, but it is a violent origin. Although they may be seen as sacred, the myths conceal extratextual events of violence and a founding murder.

In the following sections, I will look at the respective approaches of Eliade and Girard more closely and offer some concluding thoughts on their different approaches to the understanding of myth.

Eliade: Myth as Sacred, Exemplary, and Cosmogenic[2]

Given the plurality of meanings ascribed to the word "myth," Eliade's definition is very specific. Myth refers to "a 'true story' and, beyond that, a story that is a most precious possession because it is sacred, exemplary, significant." This view of myth is in contrast with the legacy of Enlightenment presuppositions that dismiss myth as fantastic fiction (*Myth and Reality*, 1). In this way, Eliade is in agreement with Segal's comment above, although Eliade places the dismissal in the broader context of the Enlightenment's privileging of logical reason, whereas Segal associates it with the epistemic privilege that accompanied the rise of modern science.

For Eliade, myths of traditional societies are *cosmogenic* in that they recount the original act of creation of the universe or the origin

of some created reality that the followers consider to be sacred. He explains:

> Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the "beginnings." In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality—an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior, an institution. Myth, then, is always an account of a "creation"; it relates how something was produced, began to *be*. Myth tells only of that which *really* happened, which manifested itself completely. The actors in myths are Supernatural Beings. They are known primarily by what they did in the transcendent times of the "beginnings." Hence, myths disclose their creative activity and reveal the sacredness (or simply the "supernaturalness") of their works. In short, myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred (or the "supernatural") into the World. It is this sudden breakthrough of the sacred that really *establishes* the World and makes it what it is today. (*Myth and Reality*, 5–6)

Since myths of traditional societies recount the origin of existing realities, they are considered sacred and likewise *true* or *real*:

> [M]yth is thought to express the *absolute truth*, because it narrates a *sacred history*; that is, a transhuman revelation which took place at the dawn of the Great Time, in the holy time of the beginnings (*in illo tempore*). Being *real* and *sacred*, the myth becomes exemplary, and consequently *repeatable*, for it serves as a model, and by the same token as justification, for all human actions. In other words, a myth is a *true history* of what came to pass at the beginning of Time, and one which provides the pattern for human behavior. In *imitating* the exemplary acts of a god or of a mythic hero, or simply by recounting their adventures, the man of an archaic society detaches himself from profane time and magically re-enters the Great Time, the sacred time. (*Myths, Dreams*, 23)

Myth is "regarded as a sacred story, and hence a 'true history,' because it always deals with *realities*." Accordingly, Eliade contrasts sacred or mythic time with profane, historical time. "[B]y 'living' the myths one emerges from profane, chronological time and enters a time that is of a different quality, a 'sacred' Time at once primordial and indefinitely recoverable" (*Myth and Reality*, 6, 18). Douglas Allen explains:

> In Eliade's interpretation, the mythic person views homogeneous, irreversible, ordinary profane time and history as without significant

> meaning. By contrast, the sacred time and history of myth and religion are significant and meaningful. What is ordinarily part of profane time and history can become part of a coherent, significant world of meaning only when it is experienced through superhuman, exemplary, transcendent, mythic and other sacred structures. (206)

For Eliade, myth, as a recounting of the "true" history of a particular group, serves as an exemplary model for human behavior. Consequently, the origin of much of the cultural and religious norms of traditional societies are traceable to the paradigmatic patterns established by the characters in these sacred myths. As a sacred story, the myth recounts the actions of the gods or divinities in the primordial time of creation. The principal resource for the behavioral and ethical code of the community lies in the sacred myths. These contain the significant meanings of a group or culture that they hold to be sacred, ultimately true, real, and valuable (*Myth and Reality*, 6–7). Moreover, the themes of these myths carry over into the symbolic life of a group in the symbols of the (1) sacred center, the place representing where the sacred is most readily accessible, (2) sacred space that symbolizes the sacred geography and reenacts its creation, and (3) sacred time that depicts the original moment of creation. In the case of the Diné, or Navajo, for example, the traditional dwelling or *hooghan* is at once a center, in that it is the primary setting for religious ceremonies; a symbol of sacred space, in that it symbolically represents the sacred geography; and a symbol of sacred time in its representation of the originating time of creation and the emergence of the people from between the four sacred mountains.[3]

Sacred myths are the perennial resource for the religious and cultural behavior of the community and so serve as the foundation for religious life and rituals. The primary means of contact with the sacred for the religious person is through a ritual life that repeats or ritually imitates the original acts and original time of the gods or mythical ancestors depicted in the sacred myths (*Eternal Return*, 22). Eliade claims that "for the traditional societies, all the important acts of life were revealed *aborigine* by gods or heroes. [Human beings] only repeat these exemplary and paradigmatic gestures *ad infinitum*" (*Eternal Return*, 32).

This ritual performance of sacred myths is inextricably linked to his anthropology of *homo religiosus*. Psychologically, the latter represents the self-transcending person who yearns for perennial contact with the sacred beyond the ephemeral. The sacred is a reality often symbolized in a powerful regenerative center where one can more easily accesses it.

More precisely, myths reveal reality through *archetypes*, although Eliade does not mean what Jung means by archetypes. Eliade means that myths contain the source for ritually repeated "exemplary and paradigmatic gestures." He explains:

> I have used the terms "exemplary models," "paradigms," and "archetypes" in order to emphasize a particular fact—namely that for the man of traditional and archaic societies, the models for his institutions and the norms for his various categories of behavior are believed to have been "revealed" at the beginning of time, [and] that, consequently, they are regarded as having a superhuman and "transcendental" origin. In using the term "archetype," I neglected to specify that I was not referring to the archetypes described by Professor C. G. Jung. This was a regrettable error. For to use, in an entirely different meaning, a term that plays a role of primary importance in Jung's psychology could lead to confusion. I need scarcely say that, for Professor Jung, the archetypes are structures of the collective unconscious. But in my book I nowhere touch upon the problems of depth psychology nor do I use the concept of the collective unconscious. As I have said, I use the term "archetype," just as Eugenio d'Ors does, as a synonym for "exemplary model" or "paradigm," that is, in the last analysis, in the Augustinian sense. But in our day the word has been rehabilitated by Professor Jung, who has given it new meaning; and it is certainly desirable that the term "archetype" should no longer be used in its pre-Jungian sense unless the fact is distinctly stated. (*Eternal Return*, xiv–xv)

For Eliade, the archetypes operate as paradigms or exemplary models that are revealed in the creation myths of traditional societies. We have indicated that they are considered sacred and real, relative to profane time history. Specifically with respect to myth, the archetypes are *real* and have the power to confer reality insofar as one imitates them. In turn, the extent to which reality is conferred on the profane time is the extent to which the profane becomes sacred. Imitation involves repeating the archetypes or exemplary models established by the "gods" or mythical ancestors. Accordingly, Eliade states: "an object or act becomes real only insofar as it imitates or repeats an archetype. Thus, reality is acquired solely through repetition or participation; everything which lacks an exemplary model is 'meaningless,' i.e., it lacks reality" (*Eternal Return*, 34). Hence, the repetition of archetypes as acted out in the ritual life of traditional aboriginal cultures enables the actors to stay in close contact with the sacred while simultaneously enabling them to confer reality and meaning (i.e., constitute reality and meaning) upon

every aspect of their lives. "[T]his repetition has a meaning. . . . [I]t alone confers reality upon events; events repeat themselves because they imitate an archetype—the exemplary event" (*Eternal Return*, 90). He explains further:

> What does living mean for a man who belongs to a traditional culture? Above all, it means living in accordance with extrahuman models, in conformity with archetypes. Hence it means living at the heart of the *real* since . . . there is nothing truly real except the archetypes. Living in conformity with the archetypes amounted to respecting the "law," since the law was only a primordial hierophany, the revelation *in illo tempore* of the norms of existence, a disclosure by a divinity or a mystical being. And if, through the repetition of paradigmatic gestures and by means of periodic ceremonies, archaic man succeeded, as we have seen, in annulling time, he none the less lived in harmony with the cosmic rhythms. (*Eternal Return*, 95)

To sum up, for Eliade, sacred myths are the "revelations" to particular traditional societies that tell the story of the sacred origins of a people, their land or geography, and their customs and rituals. They are imbued with archetypes that serve as models to guide ethical and religious behavior and rituals. As stories acted out in rituals, myths can be restorative: during the ritual, one returns to the sacred time and place of the foundation of the world, and one is regenerated, symbolically reborn in the renewed creation represented by the ceremony or ritual. Closely related to the cycles and cosmic rhythms, the sacred myth reflects the continuing of the sacred story in the memory and performance of a people.

Girard: Myth and Violence

In order to summarize Girard's view of myth, one must first be acquainted with some basic features of his theory of religious violence. Girard's background is not religious studies but literary criticism. From his genetic engagement with classical literary texts, he developed a theory of religious violence that also has implications for psychology, particularly for what he would come to call "interdividual psychology" (Girard, *Hidden*, 368 ff). In contradistinction to Emmanuel Levinas's emphasis on the spontaneous deference to the other that flows from a sense of responsibility, interdividual relations imply an obsession with another person, that is, either a "model" who has something one covets, or with the mimetic rival or double with whom one is in competition for the coveted "object."

The root of Girard's theory is mimetic or triangular desire (Golsan, 1–2). It begins when a desire is aroused in a person for something a mediator or model possesses. In order to obtain it, one emulates the model. Individuals inevitably find themselves in competition with others for the same thing. We envy what the model possesses, and this sets off a mimetic rivalry with others who want the same thing we do. The triangular nature of this desire is comprised by the model and the two parties who are competing for what the model possesses. There is a frustration that the competitors encounter as they pursue the object of their mutual desiring. The obstacles to one's attainment or scandals (from the Greek *skandalon*) increase the volatility and frustration of the rivalry. Within a community, the rivalry becomes contagious and leads to the desire to vent the frustration on someone who is innocent (Girard, *Satan*, xi–xii). The scapegoating of an innocent person restores equilibrium and gives the community a temporary reprieve from the mimetic tensions (*Satan*, 43).

For Girard, this scapegoating or single-victim mechanism is inextricably bound up with the origin of a culture or civilization. Such a mechanism is coded into the founding myths of the cultures, but as the myths are handed down generationally and dispersed through various versions, they also disguise the founding murder, the original scapegoating event upon which the culture is founded. Girard calls this *mythic crystallization* (*Scapegoat*, 88–94).[4] Myths "originate in real or historical events and are in fact distorted representations of these events" (Golson, 61). Over time, this mythic crystallization distorts, waters down, or disguises the extratextual events of the founding murder. Prima facie it may not appear that a particular myth contains the founding murder. However, upon closer inspection, Girard is able to detect its traces. Those traces, he believes, inevitably lead back to the founding murder of a scapegoat, which subsequent retellings have disguised.

One of the examples Girard cites is the myth of Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome. First, there are varying accounts of the death of Romulus: in one of them he ascends to heaven on a cloud. However, in three of the accounts, according to Plutarch, Romulus is also a victim of collective violence (*Scapegoat*, 88). For Girard, these latter versions are probably more accurate than the one of his celestial ascension. This is because, Girard claims, as myths are handed down from generation to generation, there is a tendency to sanitize them of any evidence of a collective murder. "Mythological transformation moves in only one direction, toward the elimination of any traces of violence" (*Scapegoat*, 94).

Similarly, there are conflicting accounts of the death of Remus. In one account, Remus is killed spontaneously by mocking and thus provoking Romulus. In other accounts, Remus is killed out of envy as the culmination of a rivalry between the two. The collective component of Remus's death is literally lost in the translation from the Latin (Girard, *Scapegoat*, 6).[5] Again, for Girard, the second story is probably the older and more authentic account. In the words of Golson, "It has been 'doctored' by subsequent transmitters of myth so that the unpalatable taste of unanimous violence is removed" (80).

At this point, Girard's argumentation may sound impossible to refute. One is reminded of the tautological arguments made by Freud, where resistance to his theory is indicative of a person in denial. While it may be that Girard is too exhaustive in the application of his theory, perhaps out of the enthusiasm of his important discoveries, it is still interesting that a similar presupposition in his analysis of Job corroborates the historical critical analysis (Golson, 97). For example, it is commonly held that the prologue of Job (i.e., Job 1:6–8), where God makes an agreement with the accuser, was probably added later and is historically separate from the dialogues of the text. "The Job of the Dialogues is not the Job of the prologue" (Girard, *Job* 11). In the dialogues, Job's anguish is linked to his being taunted and blamed by the community for his own misfortune (*Job* 19:13–19). Job has been scapegoated by his community, and the prologue covers up this event.

The redaction of adding the prologue after the fact is evidence, at least for Girard, of the crystallization of the story. In his view, this reveals the de-emphasis or covering over of the mob's scapegoating and blaming of Job that is evidenced by their accusations that he is somehow responsible for his own misfortune. The addition of the prologue not only glosses over the community's scapegoating of Job, but it does this by emphasizing that his misfortunes are justified by the divine sanction, i.e., God's desire to test his faithful servant by sanctioning the devil to do so.

Because Eliade focuses on archaic and traditional indigenous traditions, let's look at how Girard analyzes a Nanda myth of South Africa (Girard, "Nanda," 152–53). As we will see, there is not much difference in his analysis from the Western notions of myth. Girard focuses on the story of the god Python. He has two wives. The second wife does not realize that her husband is a god. The first wife conspires to keep Python's divine identity hidden from the second wife. However, the second wife remains curious and eventually discovers his true identity.

In response to her discovering his secret, Python takes flight and hides in the bottom of a distant lake. However, following upon his withdrawal, all of the water from his home area also disappears and a drought ensues. Upon discerning the "true" nature of the problem, the village seeks to appease the god by returning his second wife to him. They send her into the lake with a beer offering. She submerges and disappears. The drought abruptly ends, and the crisis is resolved. According to Girard, this myth conceals an "extratextual" event of a real death to a real victim at the hands of a crowd. The second wife is a scapegoated victim of collective violence. Generations of mythic crystallization conceal this fact.

Girard spends a considerable amount of time arguing for his distinctive hermeneutics. While a more extensive critical engagement of this approach lies outside the scope of this paper, his creative hermeneutics is worth probing deeper, if for no other reason than to raise the issue of the cause of religious violence, or what he sometimes refers to as "deviated transcendence."

To sum up Girard's thinking about myths: he does not distinguish between ancient classical Western myths and the myths of traditional aboriginal societies. Therefore, his approach to the latter is equally pejorative and even echoes previous colonial approaches. Myths are often communal stories that refer to extratextual events of collective murder against the innocent. This scapegoating functions as the founding of a society. Subsequent versions of the myth, as they are handed on through generations, conceal the fact of these violent origins in an attempt to sanitize them. The emerging historical revelation in the ancient Hebrew and Christian scriptures reveal that God intervenes in history to take the side of the victim and propel humanity beyond these violent mechanisms. While Girard's arguments concerning the extratextual events are all but impossible to verify, still, the provocative nature of his approach demands further reflection. As stated at the outset, on several accounts Girard's approach to myth is controversial.

Observations and Concluding Comments

The first thing to observe when comparing Eliade and Girard's respective approaches to myth is that they both have philosophically anthropological starting points. For Eliade, human beings are naturally religious, and he calls this universal orientation of the human spirit *homo religiosus*. It is this religious component of human beings that moves them to imbue their world with religious symbols of transcendence. In this way, communities inevitably express the religious symbols

of their lives consciously or unconsciously. This is true even in a secular age where explicit religious belief has been eclipsed in many ways. The religious imagination does not fail to find its expression in elaborate architecture, whether it be in the towers of finance or, as the elaborate cathedral-style Eaton Centre in downtown Toronto demonstrates, in shopping malls. In developing his theory of *homo religiosus*, after scouring the data on the various world religions, Eliade's anthropology opens up to a universal religiousness beyond the specificity of a particular tradition. It is an anthropology that matches, at least to some extent, his own movement away from the Eastern Orthodox Christianity of his upbringing in Romania and toward a more generic interest in the sacred as contradistinguished from the profane.

Girard's anthropological presuppositions, on the other hand, are not as generous as Eliade's toward the nature of the human spirit. Rather than being naturally religious in the positive sense of the word, human beings are naturally prone to mimetic rivalry and violence, a drive perhaps rooted in their lower animal instincts for survival. They are far too easily caught up in the contagion that leads to the scapegoating mechanism—the death of the innocent victim. Moreover, Girard's generic encounter with myth leads to his belief that the evidence emerging in the Hebrew scriptures and coming to fullness in the Christian New Testament is the historical insight that God is not violent, does not want sacrifices, and that Jesus Christ is the ultimate scapegoat whose sacrifice began the end of scapegoating once and for all. He is the scapegoat who sets history on an eschatological trajectory toward the ultimate overcoming of the murder of innocent people.

In contrast to Eliade, who moved away from the religious traditions of his youth, Girard's discoveries lead to his conversion, or perhaps more accurately, to a profound reappropriation of the nominal Christianity of his childhood. It is perhaps paradoxical that, as a postmodern theorist, the priority Girard gives the Christian narrative over and above other myths, including aboriginal myths, invites a postcolonial critique.

Next, the two thinkers have differing presuppositions about the foundations of culture in relation to myth. For Eliade, cultural codes, customs, moral behavior, and the like have their origin within traditional societies in the stories contained in the sacred myths. The myths provide the etiological explanations for the codes and conduct of a people, despite the fact that the specific knowledge of those explanations varies among individuals in a society.

For Girard, on the other hand, the sacred myths often cover over, through mythic crystallization, the fact that many societies are founded on the basis of the murder of an innocent person as the resultant climax of a mimetic scandal. We noted above the founding murder upon which Rome was established, but in addition Girard notes that following Cain's murder of Abel and the former's exile, Cain founds a community (Gen. 4:16–17). Girard emphasizes the violent origins of a society and the role that myth plays in covering over that "real" history (*Things Hidden*, 39, 146, 159).

Closely related to these contrasting views of the foundation of culture are the scholars' differing views about religion. For Eliade, religion is a primary vehicle through which *homo religious* may encounter, and perennially return to, the sacred. Religious beliefs, practices, and rituals provide an ongoing access to the sacred, and with it, a resource for personal and social transformation. For Girard, on the other hand, the criteria for authentic religious practice is proportionate to the extent to which the religious tradition overcomes the scapegoat mechanism and becomes an advocate for the poor and the marginalized. For Girard, the Judeo-Christian tradition exemplifies this view in the unfolding of the historical revelation where God incarnate, crucified and resurrected, sets humanity on a new course of nonviolence by testifying, reversing and ameliorating this mimetic cycle of violence. This is not to say that there are no authentic manifestations of nonviolence in other religious traditions, nor is it to hide the fact that throughout history Christians have participated in the scapegoating process. Rather, for Girard, it is to say that that religion can be a vehicle for violence, and it is only true religion, that is, religion that transcends sacrifice, that overcomes such violence.

Closely related to their contrasting views of religion are their views on history relative to myth. For Eliade, myth is distinguished from temporal history. As distinguished from temporal history, the sacred myth provides an escape from profane time to that originating moment of cosmogenesis. It represents the eternal moment to which one returns in order to reencounter the sacred and rejuvenate and restore oneself and one's community. Religious rituals repeat archetypal gestures to relive the time of creation. And Eliade writes: "any repetition of an archetypal gesture, suspends duration, abolishes profane time, and participates in mythical time" (*The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 36). Clearly, "there is an implicit abolition of profane time, of duration, of 'history'" (*The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 35).

By contrast, given his reappropriated Christian faith, Girard's theory entails a history that is linear and eschatological. It is one that implies a salvation history wherein centuries of revelation unfold in order to communicate and implement the insight that God takes the side of the victim, detests violence, and seeks to overcome it in the eschatological proleptic reverberations of the Christ event. History is linear, but it also has a term, a goal, and a potential culmination.

Also, something should be said about the contrasting use of the term *model* in the two thinkers' respective approaches to myth. For Eliade, the myth provides what Girard would describe as *external mediators* in that the sacred myths provide the accounts of actions of the divinities and gods from the time of creation to be emulated. In order to regenerate and recreate oneself and one's community, one imitates the models or characters of the sacred stories. This certainly corroborates my own work with the Dine-Navajo in the Southwestern United States. At a certain point in their ceremonies, the *hatathli*, or chanter, performing the rites becomes one with the divinity being invoked. So for Eliade, the model is used in a positive sense because it is the model that provides a pathway to the potency of the sacred.

For Girard, on the other hand, the model as an internal mediator can be the occasion for mimetic rivalry, as we said above, insofar as two people are in a rivalry for what the model possesses. The model is a modeler for what is to be desired. Girard has perhaps primarily focused on the negative aspects of modeling, although more recently he has turned his attention to the positive aspects. Still, the provocative implications of his theory lend themselves to focusing on the negative connotations of modeling.

Finally, this brief overview of these towering interpreters of myth does not do justice to the subtle nuances of their thought nor have we been able to explore, for example, Girard's profound respect for Eliade's work. Still, I hope I have illustrated in these representations the two dimensions of myth articulated by Segal, a positive one, where myth authentically mediates mystery, and a more pejorative one, where myth conceals the violent acts on which a society is founded.

Notes

1. The term "mythic consciousness" comes from Lonergan, *Insight*, 560–566.
2. I have addressed the topic of sacred myths in Eliade's thought in the larger context of the ontological status of the sacred in chapter 7 of my book on Eliade. I have adapted and reworked some of the exposition from that chapter into this section. See Dadosky, *The Structure of Religious Knowing*, 102–105.

3. For an account of the Diné (Navajo) creations story, see Zolbrod, *Diné bahané: The Navajo Creation Story*.
4. Girard does not use this explicit phrase very often, but Golson's (74) highlighting of this phrase appropriately speaks to Girard's distinctive hermeneutics of myth.
5. Girard points out that Livy's account of the myth where Remus is killed "in the scuffle" should be translated from the Latin "in the crowd," *in turba*, thus suggesting the collective murder. Girard, *Scapegoat*, 92–93.

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