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**Deposited in DRO:**

17 August 2018

**Version of attached file:**

proof

**Peer-review status of attached file:**

Unknown

**Citation for published item:**

Pound, Marcus (2009) 'Lacan and Girard : sex and non-violence.', *Psychoanalytische Perspectieven.*, 26 (3-4). pp. 287-302.

**Further information on publisher's website:**

<http://www.psychoanalytischeperspectieven.be/vol-26-b-2008/lacan-and-girard-sex-and-non-violence>

**Publisher's copyright statement:****Additional information:**

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## LACAN AND GIRARD: SEX AND NON-VIOLENCE

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**Summary:** This paper brings together the work of Jacques Lacan, the great Christianizer of psychoanalysis, and René Girard, the speculative anthropologist whose study of sacrifice and myth led not only to his rejection of Freud and Lacan but a dramatic conversion to Catholicism and growing conviction as to the revelatory power of the Gospels to expose the myth upon which psychoanalysis is built. Despite their antipathy I bring a psychoanalytic perspective to bear on Girard's theory, interrogating the modalities of sacrifice according to Lacan's three registers of the psyche: the imaginary, symbolic, and real. I then explore Girard's distinction between myth and Gospel in light of Lacan's claim regarding the impossibility of the sexual relation. I argue that the difference between sacrifice in the register of the symbolic, and sacrifice in the register of the real not only restages the impossibility of the sexual relation, it conforms to Girard's distinction between myth and Gospel. In this way I pave the way for a more mutual reading of their enterprises, and theology and psychoanalysis more generally.

**Key words:** Lacan, Girard, Sex, Violence, Myth, Sacrifice.

**Received:** July 1<sup>st</sup> 2009; **Accepted:** October 14<sup>th</sup> 2009.

### *Introduction*

Born in Avignon in 1923, René Girard has spent most of his life in America where he has taught and undertaken research across a range of disciplines including literary criticism, historiography, comparative religion, anthropology and psychoanalysis. He was central in promoting critical theory in America. In 1966 he organized the epoch-making International Symposium *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* (Macksey & Donato, 1972), which brought together for the first time for an American audience many of the leading figures of European structuralism including: Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Eugenio Donato, Jean Hyppolite, Jacques Lacan, Georges Poulet, and Jean-Pierre Vernant

amongst others. It was at this symposium that Derrida first delivered his seminal "*La Structure, le signe, et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines*", and Lacan would meet Lévi-Strauss for the first time (the two were formally introduced by Girard). But it was Girard's work concerning Christianity, sacrifice and violence, which brought him to international acclaim. Against the post-modern trend to disregard God and grand theorizing he made the argument for a universal anthropological theory of mimesis, violence and sacrifice to which the Gospels offered an exceptional alternative: mimetic desire breeds competition and hence potential violence which is only kept in check through a scapegoat mechanism; in the Gospels, God's identification with the innocence of the victim (i.e., Christ) brings that mechanism into full view for the first time. It's a simple theory yet one which yields extraordinary explanatory power. Girard arrived at this theory through a critical investigation of literary and religious texts, which contributed to his dramatic conversion at the age of 35 to Catholicism, and growing conviction as to the revelatory power of the Gospels to expose the foundations of violence and sacrifice through the mimetic order. All of this lends, as Maurizio Meloni (2002) notes, a profound social basis to his view of Christianity: in Girard's work, Christianity is not to be taken as a matter of personal belief, nor does he simply employ the symbols of Christianity to give a certain tenor to his anthropology; rather, Christianity reveals something unique which becomes the foundation for a social anthropology and psychology.

In this latter regard, the work of Freud and Lacan has been a significant point of departure for Girard – often utilizing their insights whilst transforming them along gospel lines – he was nonetheless led to reject psychoanalysis, and in particular its sexual bias: what matters is not sex but the violence of the victimage mechanism that ensues from mimetic desire. From a Girardian perspective the psychoanalytic unveiling of religious myth masks a deeper complicity with the victimage mechanism and hence constitutes in his terms *mythical* thinking, such that in the final analysis it is psychoanalysis that remains within myth and Christianity alone which offers Gospel truth.

In this paper I wish to elaborate and explore more fully the relation between Girard and Lacan's thought, myth, Gospel, and the sexual relation. It is not my intention to pit the claims of one against the other; nor do I intend to systematically draw out their dual heritage or dependence in the work of prior theorists such as Alexandre Kojève (both appear indebted to his anthropological reading of the Master/Slave dialectic and desire). The former approach too easily

slips into a crude entrenchment of religious truth claims *versus* science; the significance of the latter has already been admirably challenged by leading scholars such as Maurizio Meloni (2002). Nor is it my intention to highlight the various ways in which Girard misconstrues Lacan's work, attacking a straw man as it were, with view to redrawing the potential for their relationship. Rather, taking the twin themes of sacrifice and the sexual relation my aim is first: to interrogate the modalities of mimesis and sacrifice according the Lacan's three registers of the psyche: the imaginary, symbolic, and real; second: I explore Girard's distinction between myth and Gospel in the light of Lacan's claim regarding the impossibility of the sexual relation. Everything hinges on – to employ Lacan's terminology – the "real" of sacrifice. If my reading is correct, then the difference between sacrifice in the register of the symbolic, and sacrifice in the register of the real does not merely conform to Girard's distinction between myth and gospel, it reintroduces the sexual question refuted by Girard.

*Girard: Violence and the Scapegoat*

Girard makes the argument for a universal anthropological theory of violence and sacrifice to which the Gospels offer an exceptional alternative. Beginning with violence and aggression, Girard argued that these can be traced back to the mimetic character of desire: we desire objects not for their intrinsic value as such, but because they are themselves desired by others. Conflict subsequently arises out of the inevitable rivalry that competition for the object generates: the war of all against all. The circumstances impose a *double-bind* upon the subject, a contradictory double imperative because "man cannot respond to that universal human injunction 'Imitate me!' without almost immediately encountering an inexplicable counter order 'Don't imitate me!'" (Girard, 2005a: 156). The double bind accounts for the self-perpetuating nature of the process: where someone desires and encounters the obstacle of conflicting desires, the very rebuff strengthens the resolve of desire. And by a "mental shortcut" (*Ibid.*: 157) violence is seen as a distinctive attribute of the goal, and thus violence and desire become inevitably linked. Violence becomes "the signifier of ultimate desire, of divine self-sufficiency, of that 'beautiful totality' whose beauty depends on its being inaccessible and impenetrable" (*Ibid.*: 156).

Murderous violence is only averted through a scapegoat mechanism. A sacrificial victim must be found, a nodal point around which the group can coalesce, to focus their collective envy. The death of the scapegoat placates the aggression and provides a channel of release which re-establishes the social bond. And because the scapegoat subsequently restores social harmony, the victim takes on the aura of sanctity. In this way the scapegoat is said to suffer a *double transference*, loathed in the act of expulsion, only to be subsequently exalted.

However, the mechanism of the scapegoat is characteristically obscured – the basis of all mythological thinking, because the scapegoat is a substitute victim, not chosen for any intrinsic quality as such, but simply as a substitute. This re-doubling or surrogacy not only obscures the murderous quality of all human desire, it forms the basis of all ritual action: To sacrifice or scapegoat is to practice the model form of religion.

Now, given Girard's anthropological standpoint, it would be easy to read the Gospels according to a similar logic: Christ is the scapegoat, the innocent victim who must pay the price of sin, i.e. be cast out to ensure human solidarity. Moreover, like the scapegoat, Christ experiences the double transference of the crowd: initially vilified he is then heralded as a savior for resolving the mimetic crisis. However, what is really radical about Girard is that he rejects the whole edifice of sacrifice, including its psychoanalytic variation, on the basis of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Gospels. According to Girard, the bible texts, and especially the New Testament does away with sacrifice by exposing the founding mechanism of society: "The real meaning and function of the Passion" is "one of subverting sacrifice and barring it from working ever again by forcing the founding mechanism out into the open, writing it down in the text of all the Gospels" (Girard, 2005*b*: 181). Christ has no place in support of a violent revolution. God is defeated by violence on the cross because violence has no place in God's Kingdom; i.e., the two are mutually exclusive, they cannot occupy the same space. Hence Christ met violence and suffering without retaliation, but forgiveness. Christ's sacrifice is therefore an exception to the rule, a sacrifice in which the very notion of sacrifice is brought into question (i.e., the sacrifice of sacrifice) (Williams, 2001: 18). Hence to say Christ's death was a sacrifice only makes sense when what is sacrificed is sacrifice itself. And for this reason Girard claims that the opposition between violence and non-violence is repeated in the distinction between myth and Gospel. Myth

refers principally to a story which occludes the mechanism of violence through the scapegoat; Gospel exposes the violence of the mechanism.

*Girard and Psychoanalysis*

From the outset one should note the antipathy that arises in Girard's work towards psychoanalysis, both Freudian and Lacanian. It's not that Girard simply rejects Freud; on the contrary, he praises Freud for coming close to apprehending the role mimetic desire plays in conflict. The problem arises because Freud's mimetic intuitions are "incompletely formulated" (*Ibid.*: 227). For example, Freud's early formulations of the Oedipal complex show intimations of mimetic desire (e.g., in his discussion of identification in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* Freud says – "A little boy will exhibit a special interest in his father; he would like to grow and be like him" (Freud, 1921c: 105)). Yet in his later work this mimetic account gives way to a "desire that is fundamentally directed toward an object" (Williams, 2001: 226). Hence in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud says: "At a very early age the little boy develops an object-cathexis for his mother...; the boy deals with his father by identifying himself with him" (Freud, 1923b: 31-32). In short, where Freud initially insisted on the anteriority of identification, the later texts – while not repudiating its role – suggest that the son's sexual attraction to the mother is prior. The result: by grounding desire in an object-cathexis, Freud was able to persuade himself that the parricide-incest desire actually exists, relegating the mimetic effect for the super-ego.

Girard is not denying the attribution to the child of libidinal desire as such; rather, his claim is that the child is unaware of existing rivalry: the incest wish, the parricide wish, do not belong to the child, but spring from the mind of the adult, just as it is the Oracle that puts the idea into the head of Laius. The preference for object-cathexis merely masks the explanatory power of mimetic rivalry as the cause of social dis-ease and hence constitutes in Girardian terms the mythical element of Freudian thought (Williams, 2001: 233-234).

By way of an example we can read the myth of Oedipus from a Girardian perspective? When Thebes suffers pestilence and drought the cause is put down to Oedipus' sexual misdemeanor. Hence, in the manner of a scapegoat Oedipus is violently expelled from Thebes as the condition of social harmony. Yet the narrative also suggests that the cause was an arbitrary act of nature: *pestilence*; i.e., a cause that could not be supported by reference to a big Other. The expulsion of

Oedipus and revival of Thebes's fortunes merely confirms the system of sacrificial violence. And by maintaining the primacy of the sacrificial system, it maintains the myth that sex and not death is the real problem (Girard, 2005a: 188).

According to Girard, the trajectory of Freud's mythical occlusion of mimetic desire is especially compounded by Lacan's structural linguistic rendering of Freud. Lacan's psychoanalytic heritage leads him to fetishize the mimetic object by interpreting it in a unilaterally sexual fashion, and this is further reinforced through the structural aspects of his work leading to an "inertia and a-temporality of structure" (Williams, 2001: 242). In the final analysis Girard believes that Lacan's work will have a "numbing effect and inevitably lead to a sort of absolute skepticism that we can see spreading everywhere" (Girard, 2005b: 423). Indeed, the mythical element of Lacan's work is aptly highlighted by his preference for associating the violence of the real with "*the dark god*" (Lacan, 1998 [1964]: 275). Lacan's deity still contains vestiges of sacralized violence.

#### *Lacan and Sacrifice*

On the surface Girard's thought leaves little room the practice of psychoanalysis. By eliminating the conscious patricide-incest desire, Girard not only does away with the sexual bias, but also "the cumbersome necessity of the desire's subsequent repression. In fact it does away with the unconscious" (Williams, 2001: 241). However, in *Enjoy Your Symptom*, Žižek establishes the link between Girard's thesis and Lacan precisely at the level of sacrifice (Žižek, 2001: 56). How then are we to understand this relation? My aim here is less to provide a critical reading of those texts in which Lacan explicitly treats sacrifice, but rather read sacrifice, through Lacan's three registers of the psyche: the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real.

#### *Imaginary Sacrifice*

When the imaginary order determines sacrifice, sacrifice functions to give body to the Other. Sacrifice is concerned with domesticating the trauma of real which threatens to break in at any moment through an act of identification – or in Girardian terms mimesis. In short, the imaginary register, sacrifice posits and seeks to achieve a transcendental harmony or identity as a defensive measure. As Richard Boothby points out, the imaginary aspect of sacrifice is

vividly manifest in the Greek tradition which favored the sacrifice of an animal *without* blemish (Boothby, 2001: 183). This imaginary function to sacrifice is highlighted by both Žižek and Adrian Johnson: "Sacrifice conceals the abyss of the Other's desire, more precisely: it conceals the Other's lack, inconsistency [...]. *Sacrifice is a guarantee that 'the Other exists':* that there *is* an Other who can be appeased by means of the sacrifice" (Žižek, 2001: 56).

Sacrifice is not about offering an object that one knows is desired by another, it is not a straight forward transaction between a mortal and a deity, rather the function of the object is to give body to the mystery of what these obscure divine others want from human beings. To domesticate the intolerable background that is permeated by the threatening proximity of the unknown. The ritual background provides a stable imaginary/symbolic framework by which to answer the question of the desires of the real. Humans give the gods things to create the calming illusion of their being determinate wants in the gods that can be satiated (the imaginary phallus) that which the child latches onto in symbolizing what the other wants (Johnston, 2001).

Said otherwise, sacrifice follows the logic of castration: *Pars Pro Toto*: the part for the whole: an object is ceded in the hope of securing (the imaginary) whole (Zwart, 1998). For example, in *The Book of Exodus*, God is about to kill Moses but only dissuaded through his abrupt circumcision by his wife (Ex 4:24). His sacrificial act of circumcision, ceding his foreskin, serves to ensure the persistence of his being whilst at the same time giving presence to the terrifying God.

All of this accords with Lacan's early view of myth, which arose from the encounter with Lévi-Strauss which marked Lacan's early phase. Where for Lévi-Strauss myth was a rigorous mode of thought for resolving the central contradictions of existence – putting it on a par with scientific reasoning – Lacan took an altogether negative view. He named the specificity of that contradiction in terms of the impossibility of the sexual relation, and myths function as "a kind of mask" (Lacan, 2007 [1969-1970]: 121). The objective of myth was in the words of Russell Grigg, "a way of papering over the impossible, real kernel around which the myth is constructed" (Grigg, 2006: 55). One might say that myths function in much the same way as they do for Girard, albeit that for Girard it is specifically the victimage mechanism that is obscured.

Viewed from the imaginary register, religious sacrifice cannot but appear as it was for Freud: a defense against the real of nature, a social form of neurosis.

*Symbolic Sacrifice*

When the symbolic order determines sacrifice, sacrifice concerns less the occlusion of the anxiety provoking real, as the establishment of signification. This is the basis of Lacan's reading of the *Akheida* in his "Introduction to the Names-of-the-Father Seminar". Commenting on Caravaggio's *The Sacrifice of Isaac* (1595-1600) he says: "Here may be marked the knife blade separating God's bliss from what in that tradition is presented as his desire" (Lacan, 1990 [1973]: 94). The cut of Abraham's knife amounts to the cut induced by the signifier, which determines the subject and brings the differential system of signification into play.

To highlight this point, one may translate Lacan's mirror stage (governed by the imaginary) and its dissolution into the symbolic directly into Girardese: In the life of a civilization the fragmentary body which proceeds identification with the specular image – Lacan's mirror stage – corresponds to the initial lack of social differentiation which brings on the mimetic crisis or aggression that precedes the formation of any 'social contract' or symbolic order. The mirror image is the monstrous double, the surrogate victim who promises to bring wholeness by standing in for the community as a whole. It is thus synonymous with the imaginary phallus, which is nothing but the imaginary "I" whose sacrifice gives birth to the ego ideal. Through the murder of the monstrous double the war of all against all is transformed into the unanimous violence of all against one which establishes the differential system of the social order. This is the origin of monarchy, government, and the big Other, or the exception which grounds the law and organizes desire. The function of the symbolic rituals and prohibitions is to maintain the differences which prevent society from descending into mimetic rivalry and reciprocal violence. Alienation sets in when the impact of the founding murder has receded into oblivion and even its ritual re-enactments have fallen into disuse, heralding the advent of another mimetic crisis.<sup>1</sup>

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1. I am grateful to Dr. Richard Johnson for the discussion of these ideas.

Reflecting the registers of the imaginary and real back into the symbolic register of sacrifice, one could say that the real corresponds with the sacred, an uncontrollable violence which is only averted by the sacrifice of the imaginary phallus – the scapegoat itself. Hence as Richard Boothby says, sacrifice, like language, is situated on the pivot between the imaginary and symbolic, as is classically exemplified in the act of reading the entrails of a sacrifice animal – staging the transition from nature to culture. Sacrifice, like castration, establishes the operations of the signifier and hence is "the gateway through which the subject comes to language" (Boothby, 2001: 183).

Viewed from the symbolic register, Lacan's view of sacrifice sits neatly with Girard: Sacrifice is the birth of religion and hence culture; Durkheim's defense of religion.

### *Real Sacrifice*

All of this brings us to a third account of sacrifice: Sacrifice governed by the register of the real, or rather, *real* sacrifice. If imaginary sacrifice aims to pacify and give body to the Other (propitiatory sacrifice), and symbolic sacrifices allows for the establishment of difference and desire in relation to the Other (expiatory sacrifice); real sacrifice makes the more daring move by bringing the Other into question, and hence the very framework in which propitiatory or expiatory sacrifice makes sense. Real sacrifice involves what Dennis Keenan (2005: 2) refers to as "*aneconomical understanding*" in which what is sacrificed is sacrifice itself. And herein lies the link initially established by Žižek *Enjoy Your Symptom* between Girard's and Lacan's respective projects: both advance a theory which refuses sacrificial logic (Žižek, 2001: 56).

To clarify the above it is helpful to recall the "post-metaphysical" shift Lacan introduced into psychoanalysis. Unlike Freud who set in opposition his own science of psychoanalysis to religion, highlighting the latter's weakness precisely by virtue of its mythical foundation, Lacan opposed psychoanalysis to science itself, arguing that science still remained within the orbit of "theism" (Lacan, 1967-1968: 21.02.68). In other words, he claimed that science, unlike psychoanalysis, is still *too* religious. What Lacan had in mind was the way science often, albeit implicitly, depends upon a notion of a big Other – be it God, Spirit, or Nature – that has a pre-existing plan of the cosmos of which it is the scientists task to discover (Gallagher, 2000a: 1-22). Consider for example Stephen Hawking's question

"Does God play dice?" or more generally the claim that science helps us uncover nature's secrets. This big Other or *subject supposed to know* anticipates all our knowing such that in the end all learning, as Plato argued, is but a rediscovery of what is already known in the mind of the Creator. Said otherwise, the *subject supposed to know* acts in terms of a fundamental deadlock, securing the subject, nature, or the universe as whole, such that if it were to be unlocked, all other terms in the field of reference would lose their meaning. Lacan often refers to the way Descartes uses this Other – God – to guarantee the truth of his scientific starting point (*Ibid.*: 8): "Is not the sense of what Pascal called the 'God of philosophy' – from this reference to the Other so essential in Descartes, and which allowed us to start from it in order to secure our first step" (Lacan, 1966-1967: 25.01.67). In his opposition to science, Lacan took it to be the task of psychoanalysis to put into question this big Other (Lacan, 1967-1968: 21.02.68).

The overtones of Heidegger's project are striking, in particular Heidegger's criticism that metaphysics was onto-theology; i.e., God was translated into the first principle [meta/beyond], Being, the *causa sui*, who sustains being as a whole. From the perspective of theology, God's mystery is reduced to the first cause in the chain of being meanwhile philosophy is relegated to epistemology: What we can know concerning this first cause. By bringing Heidegger's critique to bear upon psychoanalysis, Lacan aimed to challenge the metaphysical structures that sustain subjectivity by challenging the Other as its locus of support (Richardson, 1983: 139-160). This is one of the meanings of Lacan's claim: "There is no Other of the other" (Gallagher, 2000*b*: 106).

Lacan brings the onto-theological critique to bear on psychoanalysis: Through the art of speaking psychoanalysis brings into question the transcendental moorings to which we give meaning to our lives. Lacan may have been less convinced than Nietzsche that we have overcome metaphysics in the death of God. As he says "This Other which is precisely the God of the philosophers is not so easy to eliminate as people believe. Since in reality, it undoubtedly remains stable at the horizon, in any case, of all our thoughts" (Lacan, 1968-1969: 4.06.69). Nonetheless, he takes it as the task of psychoanalysis to provide the 'sponge', i.e., develop the clinical tools with which to bring into question the horizon of our thoughts.

What is at issue for Lacan then is not so much being reconciled to castration *à la* Freud; i.e., recognizing that we cannot be the object of desire for the mother (symbolic sacrifice), but rather, through an

anxiety provoking encounter with immanence, come to recognize the non-existence of the Other. That is to say, come to accept that there is no external legislative authority that secures the system as a whole: the big Other through which we organize desire does not actually exist; what Lacan calls *traversing the fantasy*. In other words Lacan invites us to affirm the world as sufficient unto itself, what Heidegger referred to as the 'givenness' of *Dasein*. Hence, we need not "refer to anything outside of the world to explain the world such as forms, essences, or God: that the world contains its own principles of genesis" (Larval-Subjects, 2007).

Viewed from the register of the real, religious sacrifice is not to be taken as a defensive measure (thereby implying religion is a myth to be swept away); nor a constitutive moment (conflating religion with culture more generally); real sacrifice is neither for or against religion as such. Rather the poles are set between the metaphysical presuppositions involved in the former two accounts and a postmetaphysical account. The imaginary aspect of sacrifice invites in a metaphysical hubris by assuming a transcendental totality in the image of wholeness that it seeks. The symbolic aspect of sacrifice invites in metaphysical hubris because while it affirms castration – the blade of Abraham – it nonetheless retains intact the supposition of transcendental whole from which one must separate (in much the same way that atheism is still at heart *a* theism, simply transposing the predicates of God into man – the two are complicit in their opposition). By contrast, sacrifice in the register of the real breaks altogether with metaphysical suppositions, traversing the fantasy of wholeness in the first place. In this way Lacan's account makes good on Girard's claim that the Gospels are completely realistic, they envisage perfectly "all that is implied in going beyond 'metaphysical closure'" (Girard, 2005b: 198): Christ's sacrifice is of the order of the real, freeing one from the very need to repeat the victimage mechanism.

### *The Real Non-Violence of Sexual Difference*

Given the complicity between Girard and Lacan's view of sacrifice, how then are we to contend with Girard's claim that his own theory dispenses with the need for sexual bias? As I argue in what follows the difference between sacrifice in the register of the symbolic, and sacrifice in the register of the real is underpinned by the impossibility of the sexual relation. In short, does not Girard's distinction between

myth and gospel conform precisely to the impossibility of the sexual relation?

By way of an introduction, it is worth rehearsing Lacan's approach to the question of sexual difference. According to Lacan, the failure of feminism was that it tried to claim the existence of a specifically feminine universal. To be equal was for women to claim their own rights *qua* the feminine. However, such an approach too readily took as its normative concept a belief in "eternal mother", a concept through which they might recognize their own true nature. The problem arises because this easily lapses back into an essentialist discourse about women in which all women are identified primarily as mothers. The implications for psychoanalytic practice could not be more problematic: analyst's tended to presuppose what a woman was (i.e., a mother), and this allowed the analyst to frame in advance her problem without taking into account the specificity of each woman as she came.

Lacan's logic of sexuation tackled this essentialism head on. What they offer is not a list of essentialist predicates to describe in positive terms the distinctions between men and women (e.g., men are objective; women are subjective; men speculate; women feel, etc.) but two distinct descriptions of the antagonisms one encounters precisely when one tries to determine what masculinity and femininity are in the first place. As Lacan (1971-1972: 3.03.72) says: "The sexual relationship [...] can no longer be written in terms of male essence and female essence".

In place Lacan proposes the following two propositions to describe respectively the antagonism that defines the masculine and feminine position. On the masculine side the proposition reads:

- There exists an x (i.e., a man) who is *not* subject to phallic *jouissance*;
- All x (i.e., men) are subject to phallic *jouissance*.

In other words, the antagonism that defines masculinity can be read as the law of exception, i.e., for every rule there is an exception which paradoxically grounds the rule. The most salient example of this is to be found in *Totem and Taboo* where Freud developed Darwin's myth of the primal father. According to Freud, men lived in relatively small groups within which the strongest male's jealously prevented sexual promiscuity by keeping all the females for himself. Hence while all men were subject to his phallic law, there existed one male who was not, yet nonetheless by which the law itself was grounded (Freud, 1912-1913a: 125). That is to say, one can also describe the masculine

formula of sexuation in terms of castration: all men are castrated; nonetheless there is one exception that proves the rule. The exception has the function of the father who subsequently establishes the set of men, thereby allowing for a unitary trait: all men are castrated.

By contrast the feminine proposition reads:

- There is not one x (i.e., female) who is not subject to phallic *jouissance*;
- Not-all x (i.e., women) are subject to phallic *jouissance*.

The antagonism that defines femininity is described as the *not-All* (*pas-tout*). The upper line states that there is not one particular woman who is not subject to phallic *jouissance*. In other words, all women fall under the rule of the phallus, a claim easily discernable in the romance languages such as French or Italian where regardless of one's anatomical sex, one must use a language which takes as its normative the masculine. However, the second part of the formula reads: "*not-All* woman are subject to phallic *jouissance*". *Not-all* does not mean *not-at-all*; i.e., that women are entirely outside of the symbolic or patriarchal rule. Nor is it meant to imply *all-not-phallic*; i.e., there is a universal and integral essence of woman as distinct from an essence of masculinity, grounding women as a set. Rather, to say that woman is *not-All* is to say precisely that there is no single exception which allows for a universal set of women to emerge, or, there is no unitary trait that functions for women in the way castration does for men: There are only particulars, and hence *each* woman *is* an exception. In short, woman is only ever singular and henceforth the very principle of difference.

So how does this conform to the logic of myth and Gospel? First, one can readily associate the masculine logic of castration with metaphysics; i.e., onto-theology. For example, all men are castrated; nonetheless there is one exception that proves the rule. In this case, the father in question is God, the omnipotent and omniscient father who stands outside the system as a kind of transcendental placeholder, sustaining the system as a whole. In short, God is the exception that grounds the law. God cannot be reduced to the order of Being, because he defines the order and hence law; nonetheless, by accepting castration (i.e., symbolic sacrifice) it is possible to internalize those predicates: man is omnipotent within the order of being. Second, by postulating that "there is no Other of the Other", i.e., there is no set of women guaranteed by a primal [m]Other, the feminine subject position refuses to be grounded in a violent exclusion.

Hence, one can replace the Lacanian claim: *there is no sexual relation* with a Girardian reworking: there is no unity between the violence and non-violent; the two are constituted by two mutually distinct antagonisms. This is not to say from Girard's Christian standpoint that violence has not been a defining factor in the historical emergence of the Church or in its continued dealings with the world; nor that violence is not attested to in scripture; if anything it takes violence absolutely seriously by raising it to the level now accorded sex; but rather, violence need not of itself become the presuppositional logic upon which a culture is founded; there is an alternative logic identified as the not-All, which is not predicated upon a violent act of exclusion.

By way of interpretation, does not this underlying economy make sense of a small biographical detail surrounding Girard's conversion to Catholicism. Immediately following his dramatic conversion, Girard tells us, he took the sacrament of confession, baptized his children, and re-took his marriage vows. Yet, as Girard is quick to point out, his wife remained a protestant (Girard, 2007). In this detail we have the entire economy summed up: not only does he link the shift from myth to gospel, violence to non-violence with the sexual relation, he then states the very impossibility of that relationship.

A question remains: can we think the possibility of truth without the gospel? The answer to that question lies with an adjacent question: is Lacan's approach to sacrifice and the sexual relation conceivable outside the Christian symbolic economy (Žižek, 1996: 177)?

### *Conclusion*

In today's climate of religious fundamentalism one might be inclined to propagate, even evangelize, Nietzsche's "good news" over and against Girard (Lacan, 2007 [1969-1970]: 119): God is dead. Yet Girard's theory owes a debt to psychology and social theory as it does theology. Moreover, as Lacan recognized: "The announcement of the death of God is far from incompatible with the motivation for religion" (*Ibid.*: 119), and that while "the pinnacle of psychoanalysis is well and truly atheism", this works only to the extent one gives it another sense than "God is dead" (*Ibid.*: 119). Taken in the sense of a symbolic sacrifice, God's death may make for the consolidation of law – this is what Lacan refers to as the reverse side of psychoanalysis (*Ibid.*: 119); but both theology and psychoanalysis call for a different

type of sacrifice which implies an altogether different social, sexual, psychical, and religious configuration.

*Lacan en Girard: seks en geweldloosheid*

**Samenvatting:** In dit artikel wordt het werk van Jacques Lacan, die de psychoanalyse kerstende, geconfronteerd met dit van René Girard, de speculatieve antropoloog wiens studie van het offer en de mythe hem niet alleen leidden tot de verwerping van Freud en Lacan maar ook tot zijn dramatische bekering tot het katholicisme en groeiende overtuiging van de revelerende kracht van de evangeliën om de mythe te onthullen waarop de psychoanalyse steunt. Ondanks hun antipathie werpt de auteur vanuit psychoanalytisch perspectief licht op de theorie van Girard, waarbij hij de modaliteiten van het offer ondervraagt volgens Lacans drie registers van het imaginaire, het symbolische en het reële. Vervolgens verkent hij Girards onderscheid tussen mythe en evangelie in het licht van Lacans stelling inzake de onmogelijkheid van de seksuele verhouding. Beargumenteerd wordt dat het verschil tussen het offer in het register van het symbolische en het offer in het register van het reële niet alleen de onmogelijkheid van de seksuele verhouding herneemt, maar ook overeenstemt met Girards onderscheid tussen mythe en evangelie. Op deze manier wordt het pad geëffend voor een meer mutuele lezing van hun werk en van theologie en psychoanalyse in het algemeen.

**Sleutelwoorden:** Lacan, Girard, Seks, Geweld, Mythe, Offer.

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