

Summary

1. Humans are fundamentally imitating creatures. We imitate others. [*Baby story. Shopping story*] Girard argues that imitation (mimesis) is the most significant fundamental. It is how we learn and grow.
2. We imitate the desires of other humans. We learn to desire (things, values etc) by imitating the desire of others. It is not merely that we desire the same things, it is that we imitate the desire. This is called *mimetic desire*.
3. Mimetic Desire leads to rivalry (for the thing desired).
4. Rivalry leads to conflict.
5. Conflict leads to violence.
6. This violence itself is imitated, leading to collective violence.
7. A spiral of increasing violence begins and order and stability disintegrates.
8. The way to stop the spiral is for the mob to converge on a victim. The victim (scapegoat) takes the blame for the violence and is (usually) killed.
9. The common purpose of the murder of the scapegoat removes the violence from society. Peace and stability return.
10. This peace and stability is maintained in two ways:
 - i. By the introduction of prohibitions against objects which might create mimetic rivalries (eg., the prohibition against incest);
 - ii. By ritual re-enactment of the original scapegoating event. Myths are developed around the event to obscure the reality of the event.
11. But the scapegoating mechanism only works so long as you don't know it is a mechanism.
12. Jesus reveals the scapegoating mechanism. For the first time in history, the story is told from the point of view of the victim. We see and hear the victim and we see what is going on.
13. Thus, the power of the Gospel in the world since Christ has been to continually undermine the scapegoating mechanism. It has been rendered increasingly ineffective as a method for creating stability in societies.
 - i. The scapegoating mechanism can no longer preserve culture, and we face (and are seeing loosed abroad) a mad explosion of mimetic violence.
14. Also, it has asserted the moral authority of the victim. This is the work of the Holy Spirit as advocate (*paraclete*).
 - i. In the second half of the 20th century this moral authority of the victim grew explosively in that part of the world most exposed to the Gospel. And, along with it, an explosion in victim-responding organisations like World Vision.

Implications:

15. Some of the implications are:
 - a. Violence will continue for the very reason that it is more and more

- ineffectual. More and bigger doses will be required to get an effect.
- b. The message of the Gospel is much more radical and relevant than most Christians realise.
 - i. “Violence can no longer cast out violence, Satan can no longer cast out Satan, and only our return to the gospel can save us.” – J. Bottum “*First Things*”
 - ii. We are invited to join “the Divine Conspiracy to undermine the power of evil” – Dallas Willard “*The Divine Conspiracy.*”
 - c. Accommodations to the scapegoating mechanism, by “justified violence” on behalf of victims for example, may be expedient in the short term, but are at best band-aids and at worst unwitting support for the system Christ came to eliminate.
 - d. The route out of the scapegoating system will begin with personal piety.
 - i. Since we are essentially imitative creatures, we must ask whom we shall imitate? Whose desires shall we imitate? We are creatures who are constructed-by-another. Who will that other be?
 - ii. Is it the Father of Jesus Christ who makes us anew with peaceful and loving desire? Or is it the other of distorted desire which continues to enmesh us in pride, rivalry and scapegoating?

1 Corinthians 11:1 Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Joshua 24:15 Choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

- e. This “imitation” is not merely acting. Seen through the angle of “mimetic desire” – a phenomenon so profound and powerful that it shapes us and our societies – it is a call to a kind of living, a kind of being, that results in the radical transformation of our lives.
- f. That’s why spiritual formation – of the profound life-altering kind – must be the beginning of World Vision ministry.
- g. This is what the phrase in our mission statement – *to follow Jesus* – truly means. To allow our desires to be shaped through living *in* Him.

Resources:

Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads, by Gil Bailie.

www.cornerstoneforum.org -- Gil’s home page

<http://theol.uibk.ac.at/cover/> -- Colloquium on Violence and Religion