

Victimization and the Work of Rene Girard

The Stone the Builders Rejected Became the Cornerstone



In our modern world, it is commonplace for people to have an aversion to Christianity based on the historical record of violence perpetrated by Christians. Ever since the time of Constantine when the motto “In this sign you shall conquer” served to legitimize the blend of Christian faith and dominating force, the church has slipped time and time again into patterns of violence and oppression. The *Chi Rho* Christogram (first two letters of Christ) was used as a military emblem starting in the 4th century.

The cross is indeed a sign of conquering, but the only authentic means of conquering is one of self-giving, non-violent love. True cruciform power calls into question all forms of human power, including systems of justice that do not yield the fruit of life. This pertains not only to individual acts but also to structural or institutional injustices. The Stone that was once rejected has indeed become the cornerstone of a new way of life. As such it is still a stumbling block (skandalon) to every institutional form that once rejected that stone.

The Catholic scholar [Rene Girard](#), known well for developing a theory of sacrifice, social violence and scapegoating, also reminds us that the Judeo-Christian tradition uniquely gave rise to the modern “concern for victims,” an idea that has evolved slowly since biblical times. For example, the story of Joseph in Genesis reflects the impulse of the victim to forgive the offender rather than having revenge. Certainly the seeds of such concern can be found in the soil of other traditions. But Girard makes a strong point to show how the death and resurrection of Jesus serves as a historical benchmark that rejected all “victim mechanisms” in human societies to find peace through violent means by scapegoating those who have less power.

“Instead of blaming victimization on the victims, the Gospels blame it on the victimizers. What the myths systematically hide, the Bible reveals.” - Rene Girard

To learn more about Rene Girard:

[Youtube Video for a general introduction](#)

[Video on Religion and Scapegoating](#) about Girard’s theories by Peter Rollins

[I See Satan Fall Like Lightning](#) is one book by Girard to introduce biblical themes.

(compiled by Ted Lewis)