

# DOES RELIGION CREATE VIOLENCE? RENÉ GIRARD EXPLAINS WHY VIOLENCE & RELIGION ARE INTERTWINED



RENÉ GIRARD (1923–2015) a French scholar of Literature and Culture, latterly Professor at Stanford University, established himself in the United States at the end of World War II. Described recently by the New York Review of Books as “one of the last of that race of Titans who dominated the human sciences in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries”, Girard was arguably one of the greatest thinkers of our age, whose work was greatly concerned with the rapport between violence and religion.

His most profound insight has to do with the nature of desire, not necessarily in the erotic sense, but of all our everyday desires. Desire, he maintained does not originate within ourselves, but from imitating others; we learn to desire what the other desires. A perfect example of this is that of two children in a playpen with thirty-six toys, both of whom want the same teddy bear. Our advertising and fashion industries are also copybook examples of institutions designed to create desire.

With this in mind, we Girardians, Susan Connelly and Sheelah Treflé Hidden in association with the Australian Girard Seminar are preparing a series of films to illustrate how Girard’s thought permeates every aspect of our everyday lives. These films will illustrate how desire works in communities, and, while most imitative desire is perfectly harmless, when two people or groups desire the same thing that they do not wish to share, resentment, envy, conflict and violence will inevitably ensue.

The rapport between violence and religion is truly the burning topic of our times, and with this project we aim to demonstrate how this mechanism of conflict and scapegoating explains the chaos and confusion of contemporary society, where everything appears to be in turmoil. And where the message of the Gospels is the only solution.

René Girard was admitted to the Académie Française by the French Government in 2005.