

# A Critical Comparison of Christianity and Islam Through the Lens of Mimetic Theory

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## Abstract

Religious conflict became an issue as a result of recent global events. The Mimetic theory developed by Rene Girard could be used to identify the roots of the interfaith conflict. The result could promote understanding and dialogue among scholars regarding some factors of human aggression as it relates to the desire to imitate a person.

KEYWORDS: mimetic theory, Rene Girard, Christianity, Islam

## Introduction

Religious violence and terrorism scenarios catapulted to center stage, since the September, 2001 attack in New York City. Almost every country in the world has been touched by religious-based violence or threats of violence. Islamic extremists have been charged as perpetrators of violence, particularly against Christians and Jews. The charges are refuted by Muslim followers or the violence is alleged to be only in defense of the Islamic faith. This paper is not intended to be an indictment of the Muslim faith. The issue of violence does exist and contributing factors should be examined in an unbiased critique.

Understanding conflicting theological perspectives that mold psychological presuppositions and are articulated in normative cultural behavior is foundational in addressing the issue of violence. Before an attempt to suppress interfaith conflicts and violence as a whole, the underlying theories, values, and beliefs of how violence is viewed by religions and interpreted by the practitioners is imperative.

Mimetic theory, developed by Rene Girard, may provide the answer to understanding interfaith conflict by drawing out an understanding of human aggression, as it relates to the desire to imitate a person. Mimetic theory was explored by Professor Girard in the early 1950s, and has been continually refined by him over the years. Although there are some scientists and theorists, who have argued against the theory, Girard has had a following of scholars, social scientists, theologians, and psychologists, who have supported his hypothesis and agreed with his studies at various levels.

It is the proposition of this paper that Girard's universal mimetic theory can be applied to analyze and compare both Christian and Muslim faiths in order to illuminate and explain how they view hostility and manage conflicts. The first section of this paper introduces Girard, his background, education, research, and faith. The second section examines the mimetic theory as a model. The theory is unpacked by relating historical development, definitions, biblical illustrations, and secular examples. Finally, Christianity and Islam are viewed through the lens of mimetic theory, as the theory relates to causal factors in the two faiths, which are often embroiled in rivalry, conflict, and violence.

### **Rene Girard**

It will be helpful to examine the background of the man behind this insightful theory before proceeding. Only then can Girard's qualifications and the source of his passion be understood. The following biographical sketch was taken from *The Girard Reader* (Girard, 2000, pp. 1-6).

Girard was born on Christmas Day 1923 in Avignon, France. He studied in Paris from 1943 to 1947, where he graduated as an archivist specializing in medieval studies. In 1947 Girard came to the U.S. for graduate studies at Indiana University, originally for a year, but has continued in the U.S. to this date.

Girard received his Ph.D. in 1950. His major was History, but he turned to literature and interdisciplinary research with an interest in cultural modes, fashions, and opinions, which eventually formed the foundation of his development of mimetic desire.

Girard first taught French at Indiana University, but was eventually identified as one of the foremost literary critics in the U.S. Early published works were historiographical in nature (Voltaire, *Marriage in Avignon in the fifteenth century*). The teacher left Indiana to become an instructor at Duke University in 1953; in 1957 he accepted a position as associate professor at Johns Hopkins University. He became a full professor in 1961 and chaired the Department of Romance Languages at Johns Hopkins from 1965 to 1968.

In the winter of 1959 Girard had a joyous spiritual event that caused his conversion to Christianity. From that point his faith became the driving force in his research. It was at a symposium on critical theory, which he facilitated as chairman, that provided the catalyst for mimetics in America. The symposium boasted great thinkers such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Georges Poulet. Girard would later develop aspects of his mimetic theory based on an essay by Derrida. Biblical literature became a source of salient arguments for his mimetic theory.

Girard's first book, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, failed to strike a chord among the critics like his later writings, beginning with *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. In the 1960s Girard's works were a literary examination of authors, such as Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Proust, and Dostoyevsky in which he used mimetic desire as a formula for study.

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In 1971 Girard was made distinguished professor at State University of New York; in 1976 he returned to Johns Hopkins University as Professor of Humanities. Girard accepted his last teaching post as Professor of Language, Literature, and Civilization at Stanford University, where he retired in 1995.

Dr. Girard is still active in the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV & R) that he founded in 1990, as well as writing and thinking. As a promoter of Christian scholarship, Girard never hid his faith from others in academia and stood unapologetic on his beliefs.

### Mimetic Theory

Girard approached mimetic theory through literature at first, and then it became apparent to him that it was pervasive in human circles of culture, psychology, sociology, and theology. Intellectuals, who either denounced theological concepts or relegated faith issues to a category exempt from true scientific research, soon found themselves giving due respect to Girard's unflinching critical examination of the connections between humanity and spirituality.

Girard did not invent the concept of mimetic desire and made no claims of ownership. This concept existed from the beginning of man's time on earth. It was revealed in the Greek tragedies, in the writings of the Hebrew prophets, in plays and sonnets of Shakespeare, and in the Gospels, to name a few sources of substance. What Girard did was to crystallize the principles and ethos and articulated them in theoretical form.

Mimetics means *imitation* and has its roots in the Greek word *mimetkos* (Merriam-Webster Online, 2010). Functionally, it was a theory of relationships in which humans imitate others in their desires. Peoples' hopes and desires were shaped and guided by seeing others possess goods and services. Simply put, people desired what they saw others desiring. These 'others' were models or a mediator for what a person desired to be. Mimetic desire was a behavior in which the desire for goods or services reinforced the desire of the model to maintain it. A person wanted what the model wanted and therefore, it was valued by the model.

Girard asserted that mimetic desire was ever-present in human society. Men and women wanted what others had in order to be like them. It was not the possession of the object so much as that perceived desire *for* the possession of the model. The model desired something, so in turn a person wanted to be like the model and desired the same thing.

Mimetic desire was not all bad. Children imitated adult models, when they desired the same things, and that was the way children learned to socialize and deal with the world. Mimetic desire inevitably led to conflict, and that was where there was a potential for violence. Culture and religion played an important part in stabilization by interceding before a conflict spread and threatened the life of the community.

Girard bridged literature and anthropology with brain science (neurology), as he developed his theory:

In the science of humanity and culture today there is a unilateral swerve away from anything that could be called mimicry, imitation, or mimesis. There is nothing or next to nothing in human behavior that is not learned, and all learning is based on imitation. If human beings suddenly ceased imitating, all forms of culture would vanish. Neurologists remind us frequently that the human brain is an enormous imitating machine. To develop a science of humanity it is necessary to compare human imitation with animal mimicry (Girard, 2007, p.1).

The impact of advertising through the use of celebrities, sports heroes, or other high profile models was apparent. People wanted what high profile models were endorsing and in essence, people wanted to be like them. It was not the possessions or status of the rich and famous that was desired, it could be a mimetic desire for a more common model, like someone of lower profile, who possessed objects or other resources.

Girard emphasized the necessity of cultural imperatives to prevent havoc from being unleashed:

If we think that cultural prohibitions are needless, we must adhere to the most excessive individualism, one that presupposes the total autonomy of individuals, that is, the autonomy of their desires. In other words, we must think that humans are naturally inclined not to desire the goods of their neighbors. To understand that this premise is false, all we have to do is to watch two children or two adults who quarrel over some trifle (Girard, 2004, p. 8).

The second element of mimetic theory was the reality that the desire always led to conflict and ultimately to violence, if unchecked. People became rivals with their models and competed with them or others to become better imitators of the model. For example, if a person saw a neighbor with a late model luxury car and living in a beautiful home, they would be caught up with the desire to imitate that person in the acquisition of the same goods. "Keeping up with the Jones'" is a well worn phrase that had deeper meaning. Girard stated emphatically,

The error is always in reasoning from categories of difference. The root of all conflicts lied rather in competition, in mimetic rivalry between persons, countries, and cultures. Competition was the desire to imitate the other in order to obtain the same thing he or she had, by violence if necessary" (Girard, Tincq & Hilde, 2002, p. 22).

The rivalry in the relationship opened the third aspect of Girard's theory, *scandal*. Scandal was translated from both Greek and Hebrew to mean stumbling block. It could also mean trap or snare. If people seeking to be like a model could not achieve the goal of acquiring what they perceived the model had, or they could not displace the model, they were blocked and beset with

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frustration and anger. If there was frequent accumulation of scandals without resolution, all those involved would seek to vent their emotions, and the society within which they lived would be threatened.

Using the same example of the model neighbor possessing a luxury auto and home, consider the presence of an envious neighbor, who has been frustrated to the point of scandal because he could not attain the same possessions. Mimetic theory predicted certain outcomes. If a person had been unable to possess what a model possessed because he had limited income, and he knew that he would not obtain a future raise from his company to compete with the model, then the envious neighbor experienced jealousy and frustration because his desires were blocked.

The neighbor's active response might not have been direct conflict or the infliction of physical violence on the model neighbor; it could take other forms of vengeance. Vengeance might be slanderous gossip or the jealous neighbor could find fault with the model's behavior or character. Envy might drive the envious neighbor to impugn the model's parenting skills of allowing his children to have everything, thus producing spoiled offspring. The accuser might criticize the model for being a party animal because the model had a social gathering on a Saturday night to which the jealous neighbor was not invited.

The scandal brought the jealous neighbor to a critical point of need for catharsis in which the envious neighbor found a *scapegoat* or *victim*. The scapegoat was the fourth element of mimetic theory. Conflict and scandal brought about the need to find a substitute for the unattainable coveted object or resources possessed by a model. A scapegoat was named and blamed, rightly or wrongly, for the frustrated desires, and violence was committed against the scapegoat. Lynching was the operational term used by Girard. "Girard calls the identification and lynching of a victim the single victim mechanism" (Girard, 2004, p. xi).

According to mimetic theory the community truly believed that the victim or scapegoat was the cause of the scandal. Girard framed the dispensing of justice in this way, "The lynching is covered and disguised due to the belief that lies at the very origin of the myths: the victim really is the source of troubles afflicting the community. Such belief results in transferring blame to the victim and exonerating the community" (Girard, 2004, p. xiii).

Scapegoating was demonstrated in the continued example by the action of the frustrated neighbor, who made the model's wife the victim. The envious neighbor's frustration and blocked progress caught on in the community, as they banded together covertly, and the wife of the model became the target of revenge. The community drafted a petition to scapegoat her for her production of a luxuriant garden, which they asserted had allergenic plants. This contributed to hay fever and allergic reactions in the neighborhood.

Representatives of the community presented a petition to the city health department and the wife was censured for raising plants affecting the welfare of the community. In Girard's scenario, the victim might or might not have been guilty of breaking a specific taboo or law or might have been guilty of an unrelated offense:

Only someone who prevents us from satisfying a desire which he himself has inspired in us is truly an object of hatred. The person who hates first hates himself for the secret admiration concealed by his hatred. In an effort to hide this desperate admiration from others, and from himself, he no longer wants to see in his mediator anything but an obstacle (Girard, 2000, p. 40).

Girard did much to simplify human behaviors, as being driven by mimetic desire. Girard was aware of the complexity of the whole person and incorporated the mind, community, spirit, and emotions in his paradigm. Social Identity Theorists were in agreement that self was formed through social interactions. A differentiation of multiple selves and the overall self was what gave human beings identity (Burke & Stets, 2009, pp. 9-10). This suggested that the mimetic desire might be obscured in one or more of the multiple selves and the critical nature lies beyond the consciousness of the whole person's identity. People rarely consider themselves evil, and they justify their actions. The presence of multiple identities made up the human personality and provided a guilt-free avenue because persons afflicted by mimetic desire could assume a self-righteous description in their mental filing system.

In summary, mimetic theory was a powerful urge for what others desired and to be like them. Desire could and usually did escalate into rivalry; if the desires were blocked (scandal) then frustration and anger were created. Frustration and anger inevitably led to violence toward a scapegoat in order to stabilize social and individual balance. Mimetic theory was embedded in a number of models and applied different terms relevant to varied categories such as psychology, anthropology, and social sciences. Girard initially began study of literature by applying mimetic theory observations to human behavior in fiction and graduated to a real life laboratory.

### **Christian Theology**

The theological concepts were not discussed in the previous section of the paper. Girard's faith and reasoned study of Scripture to illustrate points in his theory were intertwined with mimetics. The exclusion of religious nuances was done to emphasize the universality of the model. Irrefutable evidence was available to support Girard's theory, as it pertained to Christian life.

Girard saw mimetic desire being propagated by both classical and modern literature. He recognized in ancient myths and cultures the same desire being played out. His acceptance of the Christian faith solidified his support for mimetic theory. It seemed that Scriptures were overflowing with lessons in mimetics, beginning with Adam and Eve's desire to be like God and to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This was mimetic desire in its purest form. Obviously, Satan had already failed to be like God. Satan was encouraging the same phenomenon

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in the first humans that he had embraced. In Satan's desire to be like God, he was alienated from God. Adam and Eve were the perfect scapegoats for Satan's thwarted desires and they repeated the cycle of mimetic desire.

In Adam and Eve's children, Cain slew Abel because of jealousy, a desire to be like his brother and to be favored by God. The Bible is replete with cases of mimetic desire and conflicts and subsequent violence on a victim.

Girard suggested that primitive people offered victims for sacrifice in order to restore harmony in the community. The scapegoat or victim became that sacrifice. The action of sacrifice created myths that institutionalized the ritual.

Britton Johnson, Presbyterian minister and scholar of mythology, declared in a web paper, *"How Girard's Mimetic Theory Can Help Us Understand the Relationship between Science and Religion"* (Johnson, 2010), the importance of maintaining a collection of myths. The myth served to preserve an event, while limiting the need for sacrifice.

The sacred sacrifice, Jesus Christ, became the ultimate solution in mimetic desire for Christians. Every mimetic desire, which ended in a sacrifice in the Old Testament, was a taste of what was to come. While other sacrifices were viewed as sinful or guilty, Jesus was completely innocent making Him the sacrifice to end all sacrifices, if a person chose redemption and accepted Christ. Again the pastor researcher Johnson framed the Passion this way:

The biblical revelation (in both the Old and the New Testaments) breaks the power of this sacred violence by revealing it for what it is, the collective murder of an innocent victim. The voices of the prophets, and especially the revelation of Christ on the cross, demythologize human culture by forcing us to acknowledge our sacred sin. Because the sacred depends upon denial, the biblical revelation renders sacred murder unworkable. The Bible brings the workings of the sacred to an end. This is why Jesus is described in the Gospel of John as "the lamb of God who takes away the sin [singular] of the world" (John 1: 29) (Johnson, 2010, p. 1).

Accepted behavior included sacrifice in archaic cultures. This was to shore up society by the removal of the stumbling block through ritual. Girard stated that breaking of laws or cultural taboos did not attain justice, but stabilized society, held revenge in check, and satisfied injured parties:

The curative procedures employed by primitive societies appear rudimentary to us. We tend to regard them as fumbling efforts to improvise a judicial system. Certainly their pragmatic aspects are clearly visible, oriented as they are not toward the guilty parties, but toward the victims -- since it is the latter who pose the most immediate threat. The injured

parties must be accorded a careful measure of satisfaction, just enough to appease their own desire for revenge, but not so much as to awaken the desire elsewhere (Girard, 1979, p. 21).

Girard's emphasized the mimetic desire of people toward the model or mediator, Jesus. The reasons differed, but the results were the same. For the Romans it was suspected power over the people, for the Sadducees it was the political power they saw in the making, and for the Pharisees it was rivalry for the affections of the common man. When frustration and anger toward the Lord became so great and they felt blocked, conflict ensued. Challenges, threats, and charges were made against Jesus in an ever escalating cycle. When scandal prevented them from gaining what He possessed, His enemies looked for a scapegoat, who would not be defended. Jesus was the model and the scapegoat.

The people, who followed Christ, and His friends, the disciples, deserted Jesus and left Him to be the obvious sacrificial victim. The Jews and Romans found it necessary to rid themselves of scandal (blocked desires) in order to regain their place in the community and stabilize the society. Girard declared:

The desire that lives through imitation almost always leads to conflict, and this conflict frequently leads to violence. The Bible unveils this process of imitative desire leading to conflict and violence, and its distinctive narratives reveal at the same time that God takes the part of victims. In the Gospels, the process of unveiling or revelation is radicalized: God himself, the Word becomes flesh in Jesus, becomes the victim (Girard, 2004, p. x).

God in his wisdom provided a prohibition against mimetic desire because it was so dangerous. The Old Testament Decalogue ended with the longest verse prohibiting it. All the other commandments concerned dos or don'ts in a pragmatic action sense. Commandments one through nine were an empirical behavioral guide, but the last commandment forbade even desirous thoughts for something. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or *anything* (ital. added) that belongs to your neighbor" (Bible (NIV), Exodus 20:17). Although most of today's societies no longer maintain servants, oxen, or donkeys, it was clear that Jehovah God intended limits on the thought process of coveting or desiring *anything* belonging to another person.

The Scriptures does not permit the cerebral act of dwelling on a sin because of where it would eventually lead, to the enactment of the sin. When the Ten Commandments were issued to the Israelites, they were for individual instructions, and they were to solidify and protect the community. Obviously, God viewed mimetic desire as an important concern of human nature, when He leveled the warning.



All mimicry, desire, conflict, violence, and victimization in the past triangulates on the pivotal event of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was and is the ultimate sacrifice. The differences in His victimization and sacrifice were the willingness and the innocence of Christ:

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Not only has God provided the sacrifice in the person of His Son, He did it to end all need to continue finding a scapegoat for mimetic desire. Jesus was the innocent lamb for slaughter and all who embraced Him had no need to search for a victim to appease the scandal (blockage) that initiated conflict and violence. Christians were to confess their sins of mimetic desire, as well as tangible sins, which were covered by the Lord's grace.

In essence, Jesus was fully cognizant of the human weakness of mimetic desire. Jesus offered something to replace the weakness and sin and to fill a void. The Lord instructed believers to be like Him in His desire to please God:

The invitation to imitate the desire of Jesus may seem paradoxical, for Jesus does not claim to possess a desire proper, a desire 'of his very own.' Contrary to what we ourselves claim, he does not claim to 'be himself'; he does not flatter himself that he obeys only his own desire. His goal is to become the perfect image of God. Therefore he commits all his powers to imitating his Father. In inviting us to imitate him, he invites us to imitate his own imitation (Girard, 2004, p. 13).

Christians have a lawful and laudable process for their mimetic desires. They were instructed to turn the human passion of desire to imitate on the personage of God through emulating the life of Jesus Christ. He, the God/man, made it possible to have both the model and the sacrifice in His person. Reverend Johnson expressed the philosophy of mimetic theory for Christians when he proposed:

The loss of the sacrificial mechanism would result in our self-destruction, if some alternate form of functioning were not provided. Fortunately, the Gospel also gives us new means to avoid mimetic rivalry, supplanting the old taboo systems by calling us to

imitate Christ. When we imitate Christ ('Set your minds on things that are above' Col 3:2), we are possessed by a desire for the well-being of our neighbors, in place of the old desire to have what the neighbor wants (Johnson, p. 1).

### Islamic Beliefs

In this section, a critical look at Islam through the prism of mimetic theory exposed a radical contrast to Christian theology. This was not an exhaustive study of Islam. Only descriptive definitions and historical elements were applied. The scrutiny of Islam disclosed contrasts with the Christian faith in how each dealt with mimetic desire.

Girard's concept of the existence of mimetic desire was universal and included every culture. An examination of how religions dealt with this dilemma was apparent. Specifically, Islam's answer to the issue was structured around the *Five Pillars*, the foundation of Muslim life:

- Faith or belief in the Oneness of God and the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad
- Establishment of daily prayers
- Concern for and almsgiving to the needy
- Self-purification through fasting
- Pilgrimage to Makah (for those who are able) (Zahid, 2010).

The Five Pillars were mandatory for all follower of the prophet Muhammad. There were a myriad of rituals, behavior codes, and laws spelled out in Islam's holy book the *Qur'an*, Sharia laws, *Hadith* and other peripheral writings. Although the belief in Allah and his messenger Muhammad was a focal point, salvation can only be achieved by the obedience and faithfulness to the Pillars and adherence to additional directives. Short of martyrdom to Allah, there is no assurance of a heavenly afterlife.

The program encapsulated a works righteousness theme that has prevailed in Islam according to the *Qur'an*. Because of necessary rituals and behaviors set forth by the *Qur'an* and other sacred writings, there was a need by Islam to control the community environment. If the environment was not strictly controlled, it was difficult, if not impossible, for the Islamic adherent to follow Muslim values and rituals.

The religious conflicts between Muslim and Christian were many. Dress and prohibition of many behaviors that were accepted in Western secular culture was an affront to faithful Muslims. Readily available products such as alcohol, adult movies, and seductive advertising were publicly traded commodities in Western culture but were against Muslims beliefs.

Over 60 countries with a Muslim majority have made religious principles inclusive in government in order to create an environment conducive to the faithful. Religion and culture served to keep mimetic desire in check, which was evident in Islamic societies, where spiritual salvation was dependent on works performed on earth. If Muslims controlled the environment, it

could be structured according to religious values by establishing a system of government with direct faith authority. Religious propriety could be maintained, and through government law enforcement the behavior and social stability was maintained. Segregated Muslim communities in Western cultures attempted to maintain a controlled environment by the inculcation of Sharia law within the Islamic community. Enforcing Sharia law has been a challenge because of the pressures and influences of the surrounding Western secular culture and legal system.

The establishment of Muslim communities within other nation states has contributed to mimetic desire with a variant dynamic. The desire elicited was not so much for forbidden possessions or activities not in keeping with Islamic culture, as it was to have the power and positions endemic in Western society. Although Muslims journeyed to the U.S. for education and the benefits of a free society, a large percentage returned to their homeland spouting vitriolic condemnation against the U.S. Muslims desired many of the liberties, educational opportunities, and artifacts of Western culture. Many Muslims saw those experiences and resources in need of reformation to be appropriate for their culture. The conflicted emotions arose out of the need for positions of power that Westerners enjoyed, a mimetic desire, but with intent to infuse Muslim values and relevancy, as cultural norms.

A majority of Muslims do not differentiate between being American or European and being Christian. It was expedient to make Westerners the object of disdain, since most Muslims related ideology with faith.

The Islamic historical relationships with Christianity and Judaism established the foundation for suspicion and aggression. The Prophet Mohammad originally sought to bring Jews and Christians into the fold of his faith. There was a peaceful coexistence between the three religions as Mohammad urged Jews and Christians to subscribe to his faith. In the beginning, Muslims even knelt and prayed facing Jerusalem instead of Mecca. It was considered a holy site because it was on the Temple Mount, where Mohammad experienced ascension into heaven.

The attempt to befriend the Jews by Mohammad was practiced primarily in Mecca, when Mohammad began his ministry. Mohammad was driven out of Mecca and found refuge in Medina, where he became an important figure with a growing number of followers. Soon his followers were of sufficient size and strength that the Prophet was able to form a militant band. The empowerment of Mohammad transitioned into a sterner, unyielding approach within the community. He had military capabilities. When the Jews in Medina refused to accept Islam and openly criticized Mohammad, the demeanor of the Prophet changed and Jews were vilified.

There was an underlying jealousy of Jewish successes by Arabs in general and Mohammad in particular (Peters, 2001, p. 1). Mohammad's animosity ended with the brutal execution of Jews, who lived in Medina. Mecca was conquered by the Medina Muslim forces, which became the holiest of cities for Islam. The Prophet instructed his followers to turn from facing Jerusalem in daily prayers to the holy city of Mecca. Islam considered Jerusalem, as the second most holy site. Consequently, Muslims have an ongoing competition with the Jews stemming from the covetous

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desire to control the holy site in Jerusalem on which they built a mosque. Muslims seek control of the surrounding area to entrench their faith.

In mimetic theory, scandal prevented Muslims from achieving the imitation of the models revealed by Western culture, Jews and Christians. This blockage was sometimes acted upon by proactive *jihad* and sacrifice. Jihad for some was the only way out in counteracting scandal through scapegoating and victimizing Christians and Jews.

The mimetic desire to possess and imitate the enemies of Islam was emotionally- driven. When mimetic desire was met with resistance or outright hostility, the model or someone else becomes the victim or scapegoat to allow the Islamic community to resolve the conflict and reinstate harmony.

Several years ago the focus of world media was a blasphemy charge by Islamic Imams for cartoons depicting Mohammad in an unfavorable light. The accumulated frustration and anger at the West found a target (scapegoat) in the person of the cartoonist. The cartoonist was tried and convicted in absentia for blasphemy and a death warrant was issued by Islamic Imams. The cartoonist remains under watch for his own protection. The scapegoat was provided in the cartoonist and the assassination of him was felt by the Muslim community to be a source of restoration to regain stability in their society.

Sharia law was frequently implemented, when a Muslim attempted to adopt Western behaviors. Women in Muslim countries have been beaten or sentenced to death for imitating Western culture in dress and behavior. The victims had the misfortune of being scapegoats for Islamic mimetic desire for Western models.

### Christianity/Islam Contrasts

Christianity sharply contrasted with Islam in how it managed mimetic desire. While the mimetic desire was common to all cultures, the response to that desire was different. Islam's answer in the *Qur'an* was to attack and destroy the infidel, if they refused to convert:

And when the sacred months are passed, kill those who join other gods with God wherever ye shall find them; and seize them, besiege them, and lay wait for them with every kind of ambush: but if they shall convert, and observe prayer, and pay the obligatory alms, then let them go their way, for God is gracious, merciful (Muhammad, 2004, p. 126 [Sura 9:5]).

There were other verses, which condoned violence toward unbelievers. A Muslim was given license in his Holy Book and a way to assuage his frustration brought on by his mimetic desire. Jihad, which means *struggle*, was routinely defended as a spiritual struggle against one's self by practicing Muslims. While that was true, the definition continued further to issue a permit to engage in violence against those, who did not embrace Islam.

A classic Muslim manual translated into English gave a clear picture of two types of jihad. First, the *greater jihad* was identified, as spiritual warfare against the lower self. The second definition, *lesser jihad* was explained in great detail in 11 pages of the manual. Lesser jihad focused on war against non-Muslims, particularly Jews and Christians (Naqib al-Misri, 1999).

There were conflicting arguments about the acceptance of Jews and Christians (People of the Book) in the *Qur'an*. In some verses Muslims were directed to be kind and considerate of Christians and Jews. In the media today many reporters applied this as proof that Islam was not targeting Christians or Jews. The proponents of Islamic peace purveyors omit the key verses in the *Qur'an* and other writings, which explained the contradictions that were present. *Abrogation* was the operative term for dismissing one verse over another of Mohammad's sayings. All sayings were reputed to be true, but when one utterance seemed to be in disagreement with another, the latest verses took precedence and the former was abrogated, or overruled.

The *Qur'an's* explanation for the contradictory verses was stated, "Whatever verses we cancel, or cause thee to forget, We bring a better or its like. Knowest thou not that God hath power over all things" (Muhammad, 2004, p.11 [Sura 2:100])? The *Qur'an* had a number of changes by the Prophet and the abrogation rule offered a defense for those changes. The verses, which advocated striking Christians and Jews and forcing them to submit, were clearly later accepted directives. The early verses compiled by Mohammad in Mecca promoted interfaith respect. The verses delivered in the Medina era of the Prophet were aggressive and called for the eradication of infidels.

Robert Spencer in his book, *Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West*, proclaimed the cancelation of the peace treaties:

The distinction between Meccan and Medinan suras becomes important because of the Muslim doctrine of abrogation (*naskh*), to which Ibn Juzayy referred when he said that the Verse of the Sword abrogated the Qur'an's peace treaties. Abrogation is the Islamic doctrine that Allah modifies and even cancels certain directives, replacing them with others (Spencer, 2003, p. 135).

The revealed truth of Christianity recognized the innate dynamics of mimetic desire. Scripture cautioned men and women about the desire to be like someone else or possess what they had. The Bible not only cautioned about desire, it made the prohibition of envy into law in the Decalogue. God provided for a release or avoidance of what was inevitably the consequences of mimetic desire by sending His Son to be the innocent scapegoat.

This provided Christian believers with an alternative route, when overwhelmed with mimetic desire. Believers were urged to mimic the Holy One. Our Creator provided a satisfactory and absolute sacrifice.

In Islam the experience of mimetic desire afforded no opportunity for a solution other than violence. Extremist groups faced with powerful desires to imitate the West came into conflict. They turned to violence, which was encouraged as a legal and moral option in the *Qur'an*.

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## Conclusion

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This initial study presented perspectives, Christianity and Islam. The mimetic theory offered a view of how violence is managed within the two religions. This paper offers a plausible theory in explaining how two faiths deal with violence in the world. Both Christians and Moslems have been guilty of episodes of violence throughout history. According to Jesus and Scripture, violent behavior was not in keeping with the teachings of the Christian faith. Islam offered a contrasting point of view for a devout follower of the *Qur'an*. The need for Christians specifically, and the West generally, was to understand the dilemma a Muslim faced in managing violence, as the result of mimetic rivalry. Until mimetic rivalry is resolved, scapegoating and hostile engagements will continue, as incidents toward other faiths.

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