

WOMAN WITHOUT ENVY: TOWARD RECONCEIVING THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

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The article explores an understanding of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception viewed through the lens of mimetic theory as expounded by René Girard and James Alison. After centuries of controversy over what was eventually defined in 1854, systematic reflection is needed to relate the dogma to other dogmas and doctrines such as those on redemption, sin, and grace, and to express this systematic understanding in light of contemporary thought. Such reflection suggests a fruitful correspondence between Girard's hermeneutics and Aquinas's thought on disordered imitation and the role of rivalrous affections at the heart of sin.

“But through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company, experience it” (Wis 2:24).¹

THE MAINSTREAM THEOLOGICAL WORLD TODAY accords the dogma of the Immaculate Conception little attention.² The reasons are manifold: a general suspicion of those who would take the doctrine seriously and a tendency to dismiss them as integralists, dogmatists, or Marian pietists; a

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¹ For biblical quotations I use the NRSV unless otherwise indicated.

² For a notable exception, see *The Immaculate Conception: Calling and Destiny*, proceedings of the Mariological Society of America, *Marian Studies* 55 (2004).

general suspicion of the theological doctrine that undergirds it, namely, the doctrine of original sin and the negative anthropology stemming from an overemphasis on it; a widespread misunderstanding and misinterpretation, exacerbated by the popular media that often confuses the Immaculate Conception with the virgin birth; and the belief that the Immaculate Conception and other doctrines reflect a patriarchal construction that idealizes Mary into traditional gender roles, deemphasizes her humanity (and sexuality), and therefore prevents the faithful, particularly women, from identifying with her.³

This dogma, and Mariology in general, also presents a challenge to ecumenical relations with Protestant denominations.⁴ Although Martin Luther accepted the Immaculate Conception,⁵ perhaps the resistance to Mariology by later reformers persisted because of the dogma's association with papal infallibility—due to the fact that the definition of the Immaculate Conception (1854) preceded by only 16 years the dogma of papal infallibility (1870) but was assumed infallible retroactively.⁶ However, in more recent years there has been significant progress in ecumenical relations regarding Mariology. For example, the U.S. Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue produced the joint document, *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary* (1990); and the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) produced the joint document, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (2004).⁷ The dogma of the Immaculate Conception remains a point

³ Elizabeth Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003) 54–70.

⁴ See Frederick M. Jelly, O.P., “The Roman Catholic Dogma of Mary’s Immaculate Conception,” in *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary*, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue 8, ed. H. George Anderson, J. Francis Stafford, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992) 263–780; and Thomas A. Thompson, “The Immaculate Conception in the Catholic-Protestant Ecumenical Dialogue,” *Marian Studies* 55 (2004) 245–68.

⁵ In 1527 Luther wrote: “It is a sweet and pious belief that the infusion of Mary’s soul was effected without original sin; so that in the very infusion of her soul she was also purified from original sin and adorned with God’s gifts, receiving a pure soul infused by God; thus from the first moment she began to live she was free from all sin” (Martin Luther, “On the Day of the Conception of Mary, Mary the Mother of God,” cited in Hartmann Grisar, *Luther*, 6 vols., ed. Luigi Cappadelta, trans. E. M. Lamond (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1913) 4:238 n. 1).

⁶ That is, the dogma of papal infallibility, although defined 16 years after the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, applied to the latter.

⁷ ARCIC, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Morehouse, 2005). See Brendan Leahy, “What Are They Saying about Mary, Grace, and Hope in Christ?,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 75 (2010) 45–55. Increasing openness to the veneration of Mary is also indicated in *The Grace Given You in Christ: Catholics and Methodists Reflect Further on the Church* (The Seoul Report), report of the Joint Commission for Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council (2006), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/

of difference with the Orthodox Church as well.⁸ Perhaps the biggest theological stumbling block has to do with how the controversy unfolded historically, culminating in Pope Pius IX's definition of 1854.

While this definition may have ended the theological controversy in Catholic circles, it seems to have ended systematic reflection on the doctrine as well. That is, there have been few attempts to understand the dogma in relation to other doctrines of the church and to invoke more contemporary categories to reexpress that definitional understanding, at least inasmuch as such mysteries can be understood as pertaining to the inner life of God. However, recent developments in literary theory, specifically the theory of mimetic rivalry advanced by René Girard and James Alison, provide categories for a renewed understanding of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception.

This article explores an understanding of the Immaculate Conception in light of their work.⁹ Girard is not a theologian, but his work, especially his more recent insights, are theologically significant. His thought has attracted the attention of various theologians including, in addition to Alison, Raymond Schwager, Robert Daly, Michael Kirwan, and Robert Doran.¹⁰

Girard explores myths and stories to glean insights into mimetic rivalry and violence. He practices what Erich Auerbach terms the "figura" interpretation, "a movement forward and backwards, as seemingly unconnected events prefigure and fulfill one another." For Girard this entails an investigation of literature to identify, as Kirwan puts it, "the 'deep structure', as it were, of even apparently secular modern literature" as "shaped by the Christian imagination, the logic of incarnation, death and Resurrection."¹¹

chrstuni/meth-council-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20060604_seoul-report_en.html (this and all other URLs cited herein were accessed November 14, 2010).

⁸ See Virginia M. Kimball, "The Immaculate Conception in the Ecumenical Dialogue with Orthodoxy: How the Term *Theosis* Can Inform Convergence," *Marian Studies* 55 (2004) 212–44.

⁹ The title of this article, if taken to mean that Mary is conceived in the womb without envy, would be misleading. I intend the title to mean that by the sanctifying grace given Mary at her conception, she has the strength to resist participating in the mimetic envy endemic to the cycle of violence and the scapegoat mechanism ("the stain of original sin").

¹⁰ See Raymond Schwager, *Jesus and the Drama of Salvation* (New York: Crossroads, 1999); Robert Daly, S.J., *Sacrifice Unveiled: The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2009); Michael Kirwan, *Girard and Theology* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2009); Robert M. Doran, "The Nonviolent Cross: Girard on Redemption," *Theological Studies* 71(2010) 46–61.

¹¹ Kirwan, *Girard and Theology* 11–12. Several works by Erich Auerbach influenced Girard's method. See Auerbach, "Figura," in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1934/1978) 11–78; and *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1953).

When Girard rediscovered the Christian Scriptures, he viewed them as offering a solution to violent mechanisms.

I proceed with a brief history of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, followed by a summary of Girard's and Alison's work as pertinent to my argument. In my final section I offer a theological reflection on the Immaculate Conception in light of their work.¹²

I will be invoking a methodology similar to Girard's and Alison's, especially when I reflect on the fall of the angels or on the Lucifer myth.¹³ Since for Thomas Aquinas the first sin of the angels and of Adam and Eve is pride and not envy, this question will have to be addressed in light of Girardian hermeneutics. Girard and his followers emphasize the sin of envy.

While I focus on Girard's and Alison's theories, in my final section I suggest a more contemporary and renewed appreciation of the Immaculate Conception in light of mimetic theory. My goal is to propose a contemporary understanding of not only how Mary is free from the mimetic complexes and mechanism of violence, but also of how she offers a positive model to counter such forces in light of the sanctifying grace she is given at her conception. In this way, my article functions as a prolegomenon to a fuller understanding of the Immaculate Conception.

¹² The interpretation and the continuing meaning and validity of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception seen in the light of mimetic theory does not depend on the precritical readings of scriptural passages evident in the tradition from which Pius IX and others drew. I contend that Girard's *figura* method of interpretation is a valid approach, but I do not presume an exhaustive use of this method—or of any modern historical-critical methods for that matter. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (nos. 115–19) distinguishes the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture and further subdivides the spiritual into the allegorical, moral, and anagogic senses. In his interpretation of the death and resurrection of Jesus, Girard's hermeneutics speaks to these three senses, which are inextricably related to historical-critical approaches. In my theological reflection below, I suggest an allegorical interpretation of the passages traditionally related to the Immaculate Conception.

¹³ The Lucifer myth is the cumulative result of the early Fathers' attempts to synthesize different stories pertaining to Satan. Fragments of stories from the Hebrew Scriptures, the intertestamental writings, the New Testament, and other writings were reflected upon by various authors, principally Origen (ca. 155–284), Lactantius (ca. 240–ca. 320), and Jerome (ca. 327–420). The Lucifer myth can be summarized: Lucifer, an angel of high rank in Heaven with God, becomes envious of God's plan to become incarnate (and/or God's creation of human beings in his own likeness). Lucifer incites angels to rebel and is driven from heaven by Michael the Archangel. Out of jealousy Lucifer tempts Adam and Eve and subsequently wages war against their children, urging Cain to murder Abel. See Henry A. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (New York: Cambridge University, 2006).

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Negatively stated, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception affirms that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was conceived without the stain of original sin. Positively stated, this means that Mary was conceived in a state of sanctifying grace. Despite little scriptural evidence and after centuries of sometimes heated theological debate, Pope Pius IX, in his 1854 encyclical, *Ineffabilis Deus*, defined the doctrine as dogma.

Early traditions, even up to Pius IX himself, interpreted Genesis 3:15 as referring to Mary's Immaculate Conception: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (NIV). For reasons that are not historically clear, this passage, known also as the Proto-Evangelium, was mistranslated from the Vulgate by an anonymous scribe around the sixth century to read, "She shall crush your head."¹⁴ While "she" instead of "he" may in fact represent a mistranslation, one can question whether ultimately it alters the theological truth of the passage, at least in the sense that Mary plays an integral role in God's plan of salvation intimately linked to the role of her son.¹⁵

Scholars tend to agree that the angelic salutation in Luke 1:28, "Hail, full of grace!" is evidence of Mary's sinlessness. However, the Greek word *kecharitomene* refers to Mary's status as favored by God rather than to the condition of her soul.¹⁶ Still, the early church's reflection on Mary's holiness, relationship to Jesus, and role in the divine economy would have necessitated the theological articulation of her uniqueness. As Edward O'Connor puts it, "It is clear that only a flawless holiness would be in any way proportionate to the sacredness of her office."¹⁷ The Council of Ephesus (431) declared Mary *Theotokos*, Mother of God, and this declaration would give momentum in subsequent generations to

¹⁴ D. A. Panella, "Proto-Evangelium," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 15 vols., 2nd ed. (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2003) 11:775–777, at 776. See also E. D. O'Connor, "Immaculate Conception," *ibid.* 7:331–35, at 331.

¹⁵ Panella states: "Most independent authors reject any allusion to Mary in our text [Gen 3:15]. Catholic scholars, however, are generally of the opinion that, behind the literal sense, some Mariological meaning is to be found in either a typical or fuller sense" ("Proto-Evangelium" 776).

¹⁶ O'Connor, "Immaculate Conception" 331. François Rossier, however, makes a compelling argument for linking *kecharitomene* with the Immaculate Conception. See his "Kecharitomene (Lk. 1:28) in the Light of Gen. 18:16–33: A Matter of Quantity," *Marian Studies* 55 (2004) 159–83.

¹⁷ O'Connor, "Immaculate Conception" 331.

the church's more dogmatic definition of her uniqueness.¹⁸ Still, the question of her conception without the stain of original sin was intensely debated for centuries.

In the Middle Ages, disputes concerning the Immaculate Conception increased between the Dominicans and Franciscans and divided the two orders for generations. In general, the Franciscans favored the doctrine; the Dominicans opposed it. Aquinas did not fully accept the doctrine, his reluctance to affirm the teaching stemming in part from his Aristotelian anthropology, but more from his inability to reconcile it with the teaching on redemption. Under Aristotle's influence, Thomas believed that human animation (fusion of body and soul) occurred after conception. In terms of the church's teaching on redemption, he wanted to ensure that Jesus' redemption included everyone—Mary was equally in need of redemption. Denis Wiseman explains:

Thomas concludes that Mary could not have been sanctified before animation for two reasons. He declares that "the sanctification, of which we are speaking, is nothing but the cleansing from original sin." But sin can only be taken away by grace and grace can only exist in a rational creature. Therefore Mary needed a rational soul before she could be sanctified. This argument is dependent on the Aristotelian theory that the human soul is only given after the sensitive and then animal soul has been implanted. Thomas' stronger reason is that if Mary never had original sin, she would not have needed redemption and the salvation that comes from Christ, of whom Matthew writes "He shall save His people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21). Then Jesus would not be the "Savior of all" (1 Tim. 4:10).

Thomas asserts: "If the soul of the Blessed Virgin had never incurred the stain of original sin, this would be derogatory to the dignity of Christ, by reason of His being the universal Savior of all. Consequently after Christ, who, as the universal Savior of all, needed not to be saved, the purity of the Blessed Virgin holds the highest place. Thomas maintains: "The Blessed Virgin did indeed contract original sin, but was cleansed from it before her birth from the womb" (*Summa theologiae* [hereafter *ST*] III, 27, 2, ad 2).¹⁹

Duns Scotus (d. ca. 1308) by contrast championed the cause of the Immaculate Conception. Following his teacher William of Ware (d. ca. 1305), Scotus found it better to err on the side of honoring Mary than to risk falling short by positing that she was tainted by original sin. Both Aquinas and Scotus saw it as fitting that Mary was conceived without original sin. In response to Aquinas's concern to preserve the doctrine of the redemption, Scotus maintained that, not only was Mary in need of the

¹⁸ See Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 2009) 49.

¹⁹ Denis Vincent Wiseman, O.P., "History of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception" (July 19, 2002), <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/resources/kimmac.html>.

Mediator's grace, but given her unique mission and status, she would be in even greater need of the grace of Christ. Not only does God have the power to confer such grace, but it is also fitting that God would do so; hence Mary was preserved from both actual sin and original sin.²⁰

The theological dispute over the Immaculate Conception would continue for years to come with no satisfactory resolution until Pius IX's declaration. Wencelaus Sebastian explains:

Historians acknowledge Scotus as the herald and champion of the Immaculate Conception. Yet if it is true that he gave the thirteenth-century controversy a decisive turn, he did not by any means immediately compel universal acceptance of the doctrine. After his death, in fact, and almost to the very moment of the proclamation of the Dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception, a long and often very bitter conflict persisted between theologians and opposite schools.²¹

For several centuries after Scotus, a swelling tide of devotion to the Immaculate Conception brought petitions in favor of the doctrine to the Vatican. Specifically, the growing Catholic Church in the United States escalated the devotion's popularity. Eventually, with Pius IX's election as pope in 1846 the ecclesiastical conditions for a dogmatic pronouncement ripened.

A series of apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to a Vincentian novice, St. Catherine Labouré (1806–1876), in Paris in 1830 bolstered the cause. During her second apparition, the Blessed Mother asked for a medal to be cast in her honor to read: "O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee."²² It is difficult to determine what impact these private revelations had, either explicitly or implicitly, on the papal definition,²³ but some have wondered whether the pope had in mind the imagery of the Miraculous Medal when he stated: "At her Immaculate Conception she came into the world all radiant like the dawn"²⁴—the medallion depicts Mary surrounded by radiant light and in this way seems to depend upon the

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Wenceslaus Sebastian, O.F.M., "The Controversy over the Immaculate Conception from after Scotus to the End of the Eighteenth Century," in *The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception: History and Significance*, ed. Edward Dennis O'Connor (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1958) 213–70, at 213. The debate became so acrimonious that Pope Sixtus IV (1471–1494) forbade the accusation of heresy. See Wiseman, "Immaculate Conception."

²² Joseph I. Dirvin, C.M., *St. Catherine Labouré of the Famous Miraculous Medal* (Rockford, Ill.: Tan, 1984).

²³ *Ineffabilis Deus*, referring to the tradition of spiritual authority, declared: "Hence, nothing was dearer, nothing more pleasing to these pastors than to venerate, invoke, and proclaim with most ardent affection the Virgin Mother of God *conceived without original stain*" (<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9ineff.htm>).

²⁴ Ibid.

traditional interpretation of Mary as referring to the “woman clothed with the sun” in Revelation 12:1.

One thing is certain, however: the fruit of Labouré’s private revelations as manifested in the popular cult of the Miraculous Medal encouraged many to view these apparitions as an explicit confirmation of the heretofore implicit dogma. While private revelations generally do not directly affect definitions of dogma, in this case the principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi* probably played a role. In the 19th century, widespread Marian devotion, such as in the United States, flourished until eventually the cause of the Immaculate Conception was championed by a Marian pope.²⁵ This is not to suggest, however, that the papal definition reflected an arbitrary elevation of piety to dogma. Rather, in addition to the context of his time, the pope was relying on a tradition that pieced together many scriptural interpretations. These included the Pauline teaching on sin (Rom 8:15–25), the angel’s greeting to Mary as full of grace (*kecharitome*) (Lk 1:28), Elizabeth’s greeting to Mary (Lk 1:42), the “woman clothed with the sun” (Rev 12:1), and the postbiblical acceptance of Mary’s Dormition/Assumption into heaven. Above, I emphasized the role of piety as a factor in the momentum leading to the official pronouncement, but it would be erroneous to conclude reductively that the latter resulted from pietistic motives. Rather, the predogmatic history of the belief in the Immaculate Conception reflects an emerging, unofficial conviction of Catholic faith that demonstrates how the tradition can develop a deeper understanding of the gospel.

In many ways the definition of the doctrine in *Ineffabilis Deus* settled the dispute for most believers. Moreover, four years after the 1854 definition, the woman of the Lourdes apparitions, on being asked her name by Bernadette, replied, “I am the Immaculate Conception.” Subsequently, in his 1953 encyclical, *Fulgens corona*, Pius XII took this report as a confirmation of the dogma.²⁶

Although it may have put an end to the disputes, this declaration left the theological understanding of the dogma unsettled. The task of systematic theology is to systematically reflect on the mysteries of the faith, insofar as they can be understood. It carries out this task by relating the doctrines to one another and in dialogue with the questions of the religious-cultural context. In this case, therefore, systematic theology asks, how are we to understand the dogma of the Immaculate Conception more deeply in light of insights and questions specific to our age yet consonant with the tradition?

²⁵ The First Council of Baltimore (1846) decreed Mary in her Immaculate Conception to be the patroness of the United States. See Frederick Holweck, “Immaculate Conception,” <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07674d.htm>.

²⁶ Pius XII, *Fulgens corona* no. 3.

GIRARD AND ALISON ON ENVY AS THE ROOT OF VIOLENCE AND SIN

Girard's work is gaining attention in academic circles for the clarity it brings to understanding the cycle of violence. Numerous scholars, building on Girard's thought, are exploring envy and rivalrous affections for their power to illumine certain doctrines.²⁷ Girard developed his theory in a series of movements, each marked by a seminal monograph: (1) mimesis and mimetic rivalry (*Desire, Deceit, and the Novel*, 1965); (2) mythic imagination, ritual, and sacrifice (*Violence and the Sacred*, 1972); and (3) the scapegoat mechanism and the reading of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures in light of these hermeneutic points (*Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 1987, and *The Scapegoat*, 1986).²⁸ Girard's more recent work, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (2001),²⁹ concisely addresses these three movements. I will summarize Girard's theory with reference to this last work because it bears most directly on my argument.

Girard's theory examines the foundations of religion and culture by focusing on certain presuppositions about human nature. His anthropology is based on human desire. By "desire" he means specifically mimesis or mimetic desire. Mimesis is inextricably related to human learning because much of our learning and striving occurs through modeling—imitating others. Girard's background is literary criticism, but his presuppositions are supported by a major school of modern psychology, namely, social learning theory as developed by Albert Bandura.³⁰ Not all mimetic desire

²⁷ See, e.g., Paul M. Blowers, "Envy's Narrative Scripts: Cyprian, Basil, and the Monastic Sages on the Anatomy and Cure of the Invidious Emotions," *Modern Theology* 25 (2009) 21–43. In 1990 an international and interdisciplinary group of several hundred scholars inspired by Girard founded the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R), which meets regularly. See their website <http://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/cover/> and Michael Kirwan, *Discovering Girard* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley, 2005) 113.

²⁸ René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1965); *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1977); *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World: Research Undertaken in Collaboration with Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (London: Athlone, 1987); *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1986).

²⁹ René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. and foreword James G. Williams (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2001).

³⁰ Bandura states: "Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* [New York: General Learning,

is negative, leading to violence; in fact, mimetic desire is necessary for human learning and development. For Girard, the mythic imagination produces heroes to be imitated. Cultural and media icons exert a pressure to conform; modeling therefore plays a major role in sociality. Inevitably, when two or more people want the same thing, acquisitive mimesis leads to rivalry, which often results in conflict and even violence. The buildup of psychic contagion, the rapid and often unconscious spread of envy in a group, often leads to violence upon an innocent victim or scapegoat. The catharsis resulting from this violence against the scapegoat, which for Girard amounts to a sacrifice, restores equilibrium in the community, assuaging the intracommunal conflict, at least temporarily, until the mimetic rivalry builds momentum again. The cycle of violence is endemic and hopeless for human beings, at least without divine intervention. God's incarnation in Jesus provides the ultimate sacrifice—the innocent victim who is scapegoated. For Girard, this represents the sacrifice to end all sacrifices, and Jesus' resurrection is the new beginning that provides hope for the beginning of the end of violence in human history. (In fact, the depths of this intellectual discovery by Girard led to his return to the Catholic faith, much to the dismay of some of his critics.³¹)

Mimetic desire has its roots in the processes of human development. As children grow, much of their learning occurs through imitation, but this imitation frequently leads to coveting what one's neighbor possesses. The Ten Commandments' admonitions against coveting can be viewed as an attempt to manage social conditions so that envy does not go unbridled and the good of order is maintained. Wanting a good that our neighbor possesses is an almost inevitable consequence of the developmental process taking place within a perceived scarcity of goods. However, inordinate, covetous desire is also the root of human selfishness and violence. James Alison even suggests that it is the "original" sin.

As stated above, when left unchecked by social prohibitions as mediated by religion and culture, mimetic desire can lead to violence. More mild expressions of mimesis are exhibited through everyday competition. These occur either because one seeks to imitate a model in that one wants what the model has, or because two or more people in their desire for what the model possesses, compete with each other for it. The latter situation sets up a triangular relationship constituted by the object desired and the competing parties in pursuit of the object. Such mimetic rivalries can lead to

1977] 22); see also Bandura, *Aggression: A Social Learning Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

³¹ See "Epilogue: the Anthropology of the Cross: A Conversation with René Girard," in *The Girard Reader*, ed. James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad Herder, 1996) 262–88, esp. 283–88.

scandals. By scandal, Girard means “specifically a situation that comes about when a person or a group of persons feel themselves blocked or obstructed as they desire some specific object of power, prestige, or property that their model possesses or is imagined to possess.”³² Likewise, the interrivalry of those pursuing the object can be such that they prevent one another from obtaining it. An accumulation of scandals in a group can lead to the channeling of the release of tension upon an innocent victim. In the limit, mimesis can become a mania that leads to targeting a scapegoat—in the “single victim mechanism”—who is blamed for causing the scandal. “The whole process of a scandal developing to a breaking point is an unconscious one.”³³

Before proceeding I need to note that for Girard and his followers, Satan is not imagined in a personal sense: “The Devil, or Satan,” Girard states, “signifies rivalistic contagion, up to and including the single victim mechanism.”³⁴ Raymond Schwager clarifies that Satan stands for “the mechanisms of collective evil” that yields a collective projection onto the innocent victim. Participation in these mechanisms arises from a self-deification flowing from “an instinctive mechanism of reciprocal imitation, of anxiety and the quest for honour, by which human beings lock themselves into their world which drifts toward hell.” Schwager notes how four aspects traditionally ascribed to Satan as accuser, self-deifier, hardener of hearts, and possessor can each be accounted for in these mechanisms in which human beings are themselves the agents. However, Schwager also believes that the problem of evil is a mystery, and he cautions against applying Girard’s method comprehensively.³⁵

³² James G. Williams, foreword to Girard, *I See Satan Fall* ix–xxiv, at xi.

³³ *Ibid.* xii.

³⁴ Girard, *I See Satan Fall* 43.

³⁵ See Raymund Schwager, “Who or What Is the Devil?,” chap. 5 in *Banished from Eden: Original Sin and Evolutionary Theory in the Drama of Salvation*, trans. James Williams (Leominster, Herefordshire, UK: Gracewing, 2006) 143–65, at 151, 154. The question of the existence of the devil or Satan is complicated. One must take pains to avoid two extremes. On the one hand, those with precritical biblical conceptions of Satan tend to see Satan everywhere or to make Satan responsible for human behavior. On the other hand, contemporary biblical studies tend to dismiss stories of Satan through reductive methodologies. On this topic Karl Rahner states, “Even if the existence of demons is assumed and upheld as a fact, the concrete ideas of them in popular theology and more especially in the ordinary piety of Catholics need a decisive demythologization” (Karl Rahner, “Angels,” in *Faith and Ministry*, Theological Investigations 19, trans. Edward Quinn [New York: Crossroad, 1983] 235–74, at 255).

Schwager does not comment specifically on the ontological status of Satan. He concedes that evil is a mystery, and so it must be spoken of in metaphors. At the same time, he claims that the notion of evil should not be reduced to the collective mechanism of projection and scapegoating (*Banished from Eden* 157–58). In light of Rahner’s comments, Girard’s hermeneutics offers a postdemythologized conception of Satan.

This entire process leading to the death of innocent people is one of the primary tools of Satan. But paradoxically, Satan is a principle of order as well as of disorder in the community. As a principle of disorder he fuels the mimetic cycle that leads to violence. As a principle of order—albeit an unjust order—he acts to restore equilibrium in the community at the height of chaos through a coaxing that leads to scapegoating—the victim mechanism. In this way, “Satan casts out Satan” in the sense that the community channels its frustration toward a helpless victim whom it “demonizes” in order to justify the scapegoating. As the victim mechanism comes to term, equilibrium is restored. While the seeds of envy lie within human beings, the principal role of Satan in this process is primarily as “accuser.” This is not to say that people are not responsible for their actions; rather, it is to say that Satan also plays upon their mimetic dispositions. Then he attempts to redirect the mimetic rivals away from the direct object of their pursuit and to the potential innocent scapegoat, who is in turn blamed for causing the conflict. Still, since envy has a foundational role to play in the cycle of violence, one can presume that Satan acts to intensify envy through the magnification of delusion and deception.

Mimesis, Envy, and Original Sin

Alison examines how envy can be understood in terms of original sin. His insights have direct bearing on a fresh interpretation of the Immaculate Conception. Alison argues that the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 exemplifies the major themes outlined in mimetic theory:

The essence of the sin described in this passage is one of mimetic desire [envy]. An object (the fruit) became desirable when it became a way of appropriating something proper to someone else (the knowledge of good and evil proper to God). It was *only* when the object was seen as a way of appropriating what was proper to someone else that it became desirable. Hence the temptation was “to become like God.” The temptation was not resisted: the object was appropriated, but more than the object, desire thereafter functioned in the mode of appropriation, and relationality with the other became formed rivalistically. The other (whether human or divine) could be perceived only as a threat or rival. The immediate result of the appropriation was that good and evil became defined not according to God, but according to appropriation, which means that the self was not accepted as given, but had to be appropriated by forging itself over against some other considered as evil. The beginning of the forging of an identity “over against” is the self-expulsion from the paradise of receiving the self gratuitously.³⁶

Granted, it is not just the fact that something is forbidden that makes it desirable. What makes something desirable is that it is perceived as good. What mimetic theory emphasizes is how imitation is an inextricable part of

³⁶ James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin through Easter Eyes* (New York: Crossroad, 1998) 246.

achieving such goods. In the Genesis story the serpent uses mimetic temptation as a way of persuading Adam and Eve to disobedience. Whether all human desiring is mimetic is a further question that remains to be determined.³⁷

With this in mind, I turn to a Scholastic distinction with its origin in Augustine. He distinguished between *peccatum originale originans* (original sin as originating) and *peccatum originale originatum* (original sin as originated). The former refers to the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, while the latter refers to the state in which all human beings are born as a result of the sin of our first parents. As a consequence of this distinction, Scholastic theology further acknowledged the residual effect of original sin in concupiscence, or disordered desire, which goes against human reason. Concupiscence remains as part of the human condition in spite of the justification of sanctifying grace. Leaving aside for the moment the more recent critiques of the doctrine of original sin,³⁸ I see a potentially fruitful transposition possible in what Alison (through Girard) is suggesting. Alison offers a further clarification of basic sin. This conclusion is consonant with the work of Daly who views original sin as “the sin of non-receptivity” linked to what Girardians call the *acquisitive mimesis* of wanting to be like God or wanting to have what someone else possesses.³⁹

As Alison suggests in the above quotation, the root of original sin as originated lies in the sin of the first parents, influenced in part by the successful temptation by the serpent who encourages their desire to be like God (Gen 3:5). God has forbidden them to eat the fruit; it represents an object they may not have; and the serpent inspires or awakens the mimetic rivalry within human beings against God by promising them that they can be like God. Rebelliously, Adam and Eve appropriate the object out of a desire to be like God. In their interpretation of the Lucifer myth (which I address below), the early Fathers came to associate the serpent with the

³⁷ Doran has raised this question. This article is inspired by his creative work of bringing Girard’s work together with Catholic systematic theology. The following paragraph draws explicitly on his work; see his “The Nonviolent Cross: Girard on Redemption.”

³⁸ See, e.g., Tatha Wiley, *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, and Contemporary Meanings* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 2002).

³⁹ Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled* 210. Daly does not draw on Alison’s work but on Schwager’s *Banished from Eden*. Schwager was a longtime friend of and collaborator with Girard. Neither Alison nor Schwager directly addresses the role of pride in original sin but presumes the acquisitive mimesis that manifests itself in envy. Girardian scholars tend to conflate pride and envy. Below, I seek to clarify the difference between pride and envy by drawing on Aquinas. My analysis differs slightly from the analyses of Girard, Schwager, Alison, and Daly, in that I distinguish between *vertical* and *horizontal* acquisitive mimesis, and I seek to distinguish precisely the roles of pride and envy in terms of acquisitive mimesis.

leader of the fallen angels, identified as Lucifer. Envy and rebellion led to the fall of the angels, who in turn incited envy and rebellion in the first parents and their children. This mythic story fits well into Girardian hermeneutics identifying the contagious aspect of mimetic envy.⁴⁰

In his *Raising Abel: The Retrieval of the Eschatological Imagination*, Alison directs attention to how the mimetic appropriation of the first parents and their subsequent exile from Eden inevitably erupts into mimetic rivalries between human beings.⁴¹ The rivalries perpetuate the cycle of violence as exemplified in the story of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1–16). Therein Cain is angered because God shows preference for Abel's sacrifice. In this scenario, the mimetic contagion is perpetuated by Cain, who sets up a rivalry or competition with his brother for God's favor. In response to Cain's anger, God warns him of the danger of his closeness to sin; "its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Gen 4:6). As the story goes, Cain does not master his desire; instead desire masters him, and he kills his brother. In Girardian hermeneutics, this biblical story depicts the first act of violence resulting from mimetic rivalry. In Augustinian terms, it is the further fruit of the *peccatum originale originans*, the originating sin of the first parents.

It is possible to construe the context of mimetic rivalry and violence into which human beings are born, and which they have the propensity to perpetuate as a consequence of the state of original sin, *peccatum originale originatum*. Concupiscence is the propensity or inclination of human beings to be caught up in mimetic rivalries by succumbing to the temptation of envy to participate, ultimately, in the cycle of violence. Still, one would have to consider the doctrine of original sin as not only the entrance of sin into the created order but also the loss of sanctifying grace due to the Fall. In my conclusion I will suggest that the Thomistic tradition offers a good complement to Girard's work because of its emphasis on the role of pride in the first sin, its doctrines concerning sanctifying grace, and its notion of positive mimesis.

Pride, Envy, and the Lucifer Myth

Let me raise a question for clarification about the sins of pride and envy. It would seem that if Girard's and Alison's theories have the import I am claiming, then the sin of envy has a certain priority over the other deadly sins. How would this hermeneutic of the Fall as rooted in mimetic appropriation resonate with the traditional assumptions about the role of pride in

⁴⁰ See Kelly, *Satan*, esp. chap. 8, sec. 1: "Satan fell because of Adam, Adam fell because of Satan" 175–81.

⁴¹ James Alison, *Raising Abel: The Retrieval of the Eschatological Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1996).

the Fall? Consider Proverbs 16:18: “Pride goes before destruction; and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Do Girard and Alison give too much priority to envy with respect to sinfulness? Pride is the assertion or exaltation of oneself over and against God; it is present in every serious sin.

In a sense, envy is derivative. That is, every sin of envy implies pride, but not every sin of pride or every sin that entails pride implies envy. Despite all the recent work on mimetic envy, this question of pride and envy remains to be addressed by scholars in the field. Nevertheless, Girard and Alison may help elucidate what we might call the “mimetic concupiscent desire” that underpins all human sinfulness. Specifically I would emphasize its function in pride—which Aquinas suggested. I will elaborate.

Aquinas reminds us that because angels do not have biological sensitivity, they are subject only to the cardinal sins of pride and envy.⁴² Alison’s interpretation of mimesis applies to pride and the other deadly sins. The seven deadly sins are animated and propelled by concupiscent desires—desires for more than one needs or for more than one is entitled to, often to the neglect of one’s neighbor. Gluttons consume more food than they need or are entitled to; the greedy grab more wealth and property; the envious try to appropriate what someone else has. But what about pride? Can we say whether it is animated by a mimetic desire? Pride is rebellion against God, but how might it be construed in terms of mimetic desire?

First, there is a close connection between concupiscent mimesis leading to acts of pride and the concupiscent mimesis leading to acts of envy. Both pride and envy animate a mimetic rivalry but in different ways. When mimetic rivalry occurs between human beings (*horizontal mimetic rivalry*), envy can be thought of as the fruit of the propelling inordinate desire. When mimetic rivalry animates one consciously or unconsciously toward trying to be like God (*vertical mimetic rivalry*), the propelling inordinate desire leads to pride, in the sense of “giving in to the desire to be more than one’s nature.” In the Genesis account, Adam and Eve’s mimetic desire to possess what God has is an envious desire for knowledge of good and evil, which implies a desire to be like God. Insofar as Adam and Eve’s desire reflects their dissatisfaction with what God had already given them, and insofar as this desire leads to an attempt to be more than their given nature, the attempt is also a sin of pride. The question that then emerges in light of Girard/Alison hermeneutics is this: Does pride have a mimetic component? I argue that it does, that mimesis results in trying to impose one’s self-will and in not respecting one’s own natural limitations. In other words, it results in attempting to play God.

⁴² See *ST* 1, q. 63, a. 2 ad 2. Quotations throughout are from *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 2nd ed. (1920) trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, online ed. © 2008, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/>.

As a literary critic, Girard examines ancient myths and stories to gain insight into mimetic rivalry, the cycle of violence, and the victim mechanism. If we apply Girard's view to the legend of the fall of Lucifer, we find it to be a result of mimetic rivalry with God.

Due to the influence of the Latin Vulgate, tradition came to interpret Isaiah 14:12 as referring to Lucifer (the morning star): "How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn!"⁴³ Similarly, Lucifer's fall was read into Ezekiel 28:17: "Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground." This latter verse suggests the sin of pride as manifested in grandiosity. Hence, one can ask whether Lucifer's fall was due to pride or to envy, especially when one considers Wisdom 2:24: "but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company, experience it."

Jacques Maritan presumes that the angels fell over choosing their "own grandeur."⁴⁴ Indeed, it seems clear that for Aquinas the first sin of the angels was pride, after which came their envy of human beings.⁴⁵ Still, when one examines more closely Aquinas's definition of pride, one can identify a mimetic component to it that is consonant with Girard's analysis and with my definition of pride as "giving in to the desire to be more than one's nature." Aquinas states:

I answer that, Pride [*superbia*] is so called because a man thereby aims higher [*supra*] than he is; wherefore Isidore says (Etym. x): "A man is said to be proud, because he wishes to appear above (*super*) what he really is"; for he who wishes to overstep beyond what he is, is proud. Now right reason requires that every man's will should tend to that which is proportionate to him (*ST* 2–2, q. 162, a. 1).

. . . Now pride is the appetite for excellence in excess of right reason. Wherefore Augustine says (*De Civ. Dei* xiv, 13) that pride is the "desire for inordinate exaltation": and hence it is that, as he asserts (*De Civ. Dei* xiv, 13; xix, 12), "*pride imitates God inordinately*: for it hath equality of fellowship under Him, and wishes to usurp His dominion over our fellow-creatures" (*ST* 2–2, q. 162, a. 1, ad. 2, emphasis added).

⁴³ Kelly, *Satan* 199–207.

⁴⁴ Jacques Maritain, *The Sin of the Angel: An Essay on a Re-Interpretation of Some Thomistic Positions*, trans. William L. Rossner (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1959) 66.

⁴⁵ "Consequently the first sin of the angel can be none other than pride. Yet, as a consequence, it was possible for envy also to be in them, since for the appetite to tend to the desire of something involves on its part resistance to anything contrary. . . . So, after the sin of pride, there followed the evil of envy in the sinning angel, whereby he grieved over [humanity's] good, and also over the Divine excellence, according as against the devil's will God makes use of [humanity] for the Divine glory" (*ST* 1, q. 63, a. 2).

When speaking about why the angels fell, Aquinas quotes Isaiah 14:13–14: “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit on the mount of assembly; . . . I will ascend to the tops of the clouds; I will make myself *like* the Most High” (emphasis added). Aquinas states: “Without doubt the angel sinned by seeking to be as [like] God” (*ST* 1, q. 63, a. 3). Aquinas then clarifies what he means to be *like* God. One can desire to be like God through *equality* and through *likeness* (imitation). It is impossible to be like God in equality, something all creatures by their nature know at some level of their being. But one can legitimately desire to be like God in a way according to God’s will, such as when the divine initiative (grace) enables human beings to participate in the triune life of God. Trying to imitate God in this sense is certainly not sinful. However, the desire is sinful if one desires to be like God by one’s own power. Think of, for example, the scrupulosity that imperiled Ignatius Loyola until he overcame it by God’s grace. While one should be careful not to conflate Ignatian spirituality with Ignatius’s own personal experiences, presumably the wisdom Ignatius gained from his struggle with scrupulosity bore fruit in the counsel he gave others. As Ignatius later counseled one of his followers who suffered from the same affliction, preoccupation with one’s own sinfulness reflects pride:

Humble yourself and trust that Divine Providence will rule and guide you by means of your superior. And believe me, if you have true humility and submissiveness, your scruples will not cause you so much trouble. *Pride is the fuel they feed on, and it is pride that places more reliance on one’s own judgment and less on the judgment of others whom we trust.*⁴⁶

Those schooled in the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* know that desolation can be a symptom that one has deceived oneself and strayed from God’s will. In the case of pride this indicates that one is asserting one’s own will over God’s.

The sinful aspect of likeness to God that Aquinas speaks of concerns the devil’s rebellion:

One may desire to be like unto God in some respect which is not *natural to one*; as if one were to desire to create heaven and earth, which is proper to God; in which desire there would be sin. It was in this way that the devil desired to be as God. Not that he desired to resemble God by being subject to no one else absolutely. . . . But he desired resemblance with God in this respect—by desiring, as his last end of beatitude, something which he could attain by the virtue of his own nature, turning his appetite away from supernatural beatitude, which is attained by God’s grace. Or, if he desired as his last end that likeness of God which is bestowed by grace, *he sought to have it by the power of his own nature*; and not from Divine assistance according to God’s ordering. This harmonizes with Anselm’s opinion, who says

⁴⁶ Ignatius Loyola to Juan Marín, Rome, June 24, 1556, <http://woodstock.georgetown.edu/ignatius/letter47.htm#letter>, emphasis added.

[*De casu diaboli*, iv.] that “he sought that to which he would have come had he stood fast.” These two views in a manner coincide; because according to both, he sought to have final beatitude of his own power, whereas this is proper to God alone (*ST* 1, q. 63, a. 3, emphasis added).

Aquinas indicates a paradox with respect to the issue of imitation and the divine life. Imitation as graced enables one to be Godlike perhaps in the way that Eastern theologians suggest when they speak of *theosis*. However, turning “away from supernatural beatitude” is to attempt to attain “Godlikeness” with one’s own power, which is not possible. In other words, sinful imitativeness has its roots in relying on self-will rather than God’s will. To rely on or assert one’s will over God’s is a distorted imitation of God in that such reliance also means that one is not subject to any other authority: “Such is precisely the sin of pride—not to be subject to a superior when subjection is due” (*ST* 1, q. 63, a. 2). Again, considering the same question in the *Summa contra gentiles* (hereafter *SCG*), Aquinas states: “However, to will to rule others, and not to have his will ruled by a higher one, is to will to take first place and, in a sense, not to be submissive; this is the sin of pride” (*SCG*, 3, chap. 109.8).⁴⁷

God is the only being who does not submit to any authority, and so it is impossible for Lucifer by his own power to attain Godlikeness in the sense of answering to no one. For Aquinas, inextricably related to the sin of pride is the sin of envy:

Hence, it may appropriately be said that the first sin of the demon was pride. But since a diversified and pluralized error results from one error concerning the starting point, multiple sin followed in his will as a result of the first disorder of the will which took place in the demon: sins both of hatred toward God, as One Who resists his pride and punishes his fault most justly, and of envy toward man, and many other similar sins (*SCG* 3, chap. 109.8).

Hence, the story of Lucifer’s fall involves an envy of human beings because of God’s favor toward them: “So, after the sin of pride, there followed the evil of envy in the sinning angel, whereby he grieved over man’s good, and also over the Divine excellence, according as against the devil’s will God makes use of man for the Divine glory” (*ST* 1, q. 63, a. 2).

The tradition of the church has incorporated Aquinas’s analysis, but a more recent hermeneutics emphasizes Lucifer’s mimetic envy—the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* sees envy playing a role in both our first parents and Lucifer:

⁴⁷ All quotations from *SCG* are taken from *Contra Gentiles, On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*, ed. and updated by Joseph Kenny, O.P. (New York: Hanover House, 1955–1957), <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/ContraGentiles.htm>.

Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God, which *makes them fall into death out of envy*. Scripture and the church's tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called "Satan" or the "devil." The church teaches that Satan was at first a good angel, made by God: "The devil and the other demons were indeed created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing." Scripture speaks of a sin of these angels. This "fall" consists in the free choice of these created spirits, who radically and irrevocably rejected God and his reign. *We find a reflection of that rebellion in the tempter's words to our first parents: "You will be like God."* The devil "has sinned from the beginning"; he is "a liar and the father of lies."⁴⁸

One can speculate whether the foundational sin is pride or envy with respect to the fall of the angels and the fall of humanity, but tradition clearly holds that envy almost always flows from pride.⁴⁹ The hermeneutics of mimesis sheds light on our understanding of how concupiscence functions in both sins: acting on the desire for what another possesses (envy) and acting on the desire to be more than one's nature (pride), in other words, to envy God. Hence, while Girard and Alison have helped clarify the mimetic concupiscence at the heart of sin, we can still affirm the tradition of the priority of pride. To covet what another possesses is also a reflection of pride because, in a sense, one is voicing dissatisfaction with God's gifts; or one is unwilling to work for what another possesses (sloth). Such displays of dissatisfaction or lack of gratitude presume that one knows better than God, which, in turn, is another form of trying rise above one's nature.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Now I want to draw out implications of the preceding analysis with a view toward a renewed understanding of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception as related to a contemporary systematic understanding of the redemption. I will read the Lucifer myth in light of Girard's thought and flesh out some of his insights into mimesis and violence as they pertain to Mary.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (2000) nos. 391–92, <http://www.usccb.org/catechism/text/index.shtml>, emphasis added.

⁴⁹ "Envy represents a form of sadness and therefore a refusal of charity; the baptized person should struggle against it by exercising good will. Envy often comes from pride; the baptized person should train himself to live in humility" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 2540).

⁵⁰ T. J. Wray and Gregory Mobley, *The Birth of Satan: Tracing the Devil's Biblical Roots* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 108–12; See also chap. 9 in Kelly, *Satan*. Note that the terms "Satan," "the devil," and "Lucifer" are commonly referred to as male, but this is just by analogy. Some stories in early Palestinian Judaism depict Satan as feminine—see, e.g., "the Queen of the Demons" reference in Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (New York: MacMillan, 1973) 76.

First, Lucifer was the creature closest to God and highest in beauty; his name means “bearer of light” or “morning star.” We can surmise that the root of Lucifer’s envy of human beings is twofold: Lucifer envies human beings (1) because of God’s favor shown them in the incarnation and in the divine plan of salvation, and (2) because of the special privilege accorded Mary in that salvation. Given that pride is manifest in Lucifer’s mimetic desire to be like God, consider how envious Lucifer would have had to have been not only of God’s favor toward Mary in choosing her to bear the incarnate Word, but also of her subsequent role in that divine mission, as Queen of the Angels. Indeed, in God’s plan, Lucifer would have to submit to Mary, a mere human being, as his queen.

Consequently, in applying the Lucifer myth to Mariology there is a sense in which Lucifer’s hatred of Mary reflects the theological or spiritual origins of misogyny. That is, while there may be many explanations for misogyny—sociological, psychological, cultural, etc.—I am simply suggesting that it is reasonable to postulate a theological interpretation of misogyny as implicit in the Lucifer myth of mimetic rivalry against Mary. I do not mean to suggest that somehow the devil is to be blamed for all acts of misogyny, thereby letting their abusers off the hook. Rather, in light of Girard’s work, one can discern an evil principle within society that directs a scapegoating mechanism toward women. This mechanism has been identified by major feminist thinkers as the violent and oppressive aspects of patriarchy. However, this mechanism refers to just one form of scapegoating. Moreover, it goes without saying that the sufficient and necessary condition for vanquishing original sin, envy, and hatred is Jesus himself, not Mary. For Girard, Jesus takes the place of all victims and promises an overcoming of the victim mechanism, so that “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40).⁵¹

Second, the mythic event of the fall of Lucifer and God’s plan of salvation for human beings establishes a dialectical relationship between the fall of the angels as the origin of evil and the divine plan of salvation in Jesus and Mary’s special role in that plan. Ironically, after his fall, Lucifer, the “bearer of light,” becomes the *prince of darkness*. By contrast, in the plan of salvation, Mary, the Theotokos, becomes the *bearer of the Light*. This Light, Christ, is born as the fruit of her womb and “shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it” (Jn 1:15). In his 1915 Christmas

⁵¹ Two points of clarification: (1) Lucifer is not a major figure in the New Testament, but Satan/Lucifer plays a pivotal role in the temptation scenes in the Gospels, attempting to subvert God’s divine plan. (2) This is not to posit that, in the teaching of Jesus and the Catholic Church, hatred against women is different from all other hatreds and therefore requires separate explanations. Because Mary is a woman, her example offers a point of identification to women in the Church who may face discrimination on the basis of their gender.

homily Pope Benedict XV described this aspect of Mary's role in the divine plan: "Mother of the Prince of peace, Mediatrix between rebellious [humanity] and the merciful God, she is the dawn of peace shining in the darkness of a world out of joint."⁵² In referring to Mary as "the dawn of peace," the pope spoke of her in relation to her son, the Prince of Peace. Pius XI referred to Mary as "the dawn of every saintly life."⁵³ One can see here a juxtaposition between Mary as the "dawn" of hope and holiness and Lucifer as the prince of darkness and bringer of chaos. His previous identity as the "bearer of the dawn" and "most beautiful" has been replaced by Mary, perhaps inciting his hatred of her even more.

Moreover, in John 14:6 Jesus proclaims himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life. As the Way, Jesus' role is juxtaposed to the distorted mimicry that fosters rivalry among neighbors. This is opposed to the imitation that Jesus invites us to, one that fosters not mimetic rivalry between neighbors but love for them (Mk 12:28–31; Jn 13:34–35). As the Truth, Jesus is contrasted with the distorted mimicker of truth, Satan, the father of lies, who, in the mimetic cycle, falsely accuses the one to be scapegoated. As the Life, Jesus' kenotic self-sacrifice is contrasted with the distorted mimicry that would bring death to the innocent victim. In addition, Jesus' death will entail the beginning of the end of violent deaths brought on by the scapegoating mechanism. The legacy of this paschal mystery establishes, for Daly, the desire to imitate Jesus, or as he puts it, "Think like Jesus!"⁵⁴

Once evil has entered into the order of creation, it operates in a kind of distorted mimicry of the good. This, of course, is not to affirm that evil has ontological substance or that evil has the same power as the good. Rather, it is to suggest that, with the Lucifer myth and the introduction of mimetic rivalry and the cycle of violence into human existence with the first ancestors, we can identify a "structure" in how evil functions as a distorted mimicry of the good.⁵⁵ In referring to a "structure" of evil I am not attributing intelligibility to evil—ultimately we cannot know why anyone, human or anglic, would freely rebel against God's benevolence. However, with Girard and others I argue that we can recognize a structure or pattern to the cycle of violence, and that this recognition provides a way to name and perhaps reverse it—analogueous to Jesus' exorcisms, in which naming the demon was a step in healing the afflicted person. If this analogy has any validity, then naming the cycle of violence as rooted in mimetic rivalry may represent, from a sociocultural perspective, a turning point in human

⁵² Benedict XV, "Mediatrix of Peace" (December 24, 1915), in Catholic Church, *Our Lady*, Papal Teachings, trans. Daughters of St. Paul (Boston: St. Paul, 1961) 191.

⁵³ Pius XI, "Queen of All Saints," in *Our Lady* 222.

⁵⁴ Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled* 220.

⁵⁵ For a more extended argument see my "Naming the Demon": The 'Structure' of Evil in Girard and Lonergan," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 75 (2010) 355–72.

history in reversing and healing the cycle of violence. I am going a step further to identify a structure of evil that functions as a distorted mimicry of the good. Moreover, with the introduction of supernatural grace into the created order as the absolutely supernatural solution to the problem of evil, the dialectical tension between good and evil increases in proportion.⁵⁶ The Bible's apocalyptic literature expresses this tension symbolically, especially in the dramatic imagery of the book of Revelation.

To clarify this aspect of evil as a distorted mimicry of the good, I return to Aquinas's distinction between the two types of imitation (*ST* 1, q. 63, a. 3): (1) the desire to be like God by virtue of God's grace, and (2) the desire to imitate God by virtue of one's own power. We find in this distinction the dividing line between the life of holiness and beatitude on the one hand, and the life of sin and violence on the other. For as I pointed out concerning the latter, the desire to imitate God by one's own power entices the fallen angels and our first parents, and eventually escalates into the originating act of violence out of mimetic rivalry in the story of Cain and Abel. Consequently, I have suggested that there is a "structure" of evil in the sense that evil is a distorted mimicry of the good and antithetically opposed to it. In this way, imitation by one's own power as reflected in envious desire (or concupiscence) leads to mimetic rivalry (imitative competition with one's neighbor) and the participation in the mimetic cycle of violence that includes scapegoating of an innocent victim. Each component represents the distorted mimicry of the good and is antithetically opposed to Aquinas's notion of imitation in the positive sense, which includes: (1) our original creation in the image and likeness of God; (2) the imitation of Jesus, Mary, and the saints in the life of holiness; and (3) the participation in the life of the triune God on Earth with the promise of fulfillment in heaven.⁵⁷

Other specifications and implications could be drawn out of this analysis, but at this point I want to return to how this analysis can foster a deeper understanding of the Marian dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

The Immaculate Conception and Positive Mimesis

In God's gracious plan of salvation, God has willed that Mary, whom tradition calls the "New Eve," was conceived in sanctifying grace and

⁵⁶ Lonergan describes this dialectic as a "heightening of tension" (Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 3, 5th. ed., rev. and aug., ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran [Toronto: University of Toronto, 1991] 747).

⁵⁷ See Robert M. Doran, "Summarizing 'Imitating the Divine Relations: A Theological Contribution to Mimetic Theory,'" *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 14 (2007) 27–38.

without the stain of original sin. Thus from birth she is free of sinful mimetic actions either vertically toward God or horizontally toward other persons. In terms of the preceding analysis, this means that she is conceived with a “sufficient quantity”⁵⁸ of grace that gives her the freedom not to succumb to the sinful mechanisms of rivalrous imitative desire that lead to scapegoating and violence. In the context of this argument, the rivalrous mimetic mechanisms represent the “stain” of original sin. The grace given her enables her to resist the desire to be more than her nature—the attempt to be Godlike in the negative sense as defined above.

But let me suggest how Mary’s “fullness of grace” is manifest in specific virtues that respond to these mechanisms. Negatively stated, her freedom from original sin enables her freely to choose not to succumb to distorted mimetic desire. Positively stated, this means that she incarnates two virtues that counteract pride and envy as mimicked distortions, namely, humility and charity respectively.⁵⁹ These virtues are the corresponding principles that can assuage the propensities of pride and envy in the human soul. Regarding humility, Aquinas states: “Pride is directly opposed to the virtue of humility” (*ST* 2–2, q. 162, a. 1, ad 3). Humility is manifest in Mary’s love of God, her willingness to do God’s will (*fiat*) and her lowly servanthood. Her charity is exemplified in her readiness to “fly to the service of her cousin Elizabeth” and her attentiveness to the plight of the bridal couple at the wedding of Cana.⁶⁰

In addition, Mary’s charity flows from a spirit of gratitude as a disposition that assuages envy. The first lines of her Magnificat indicate that Mary manifests humility and charity in a spirit of gratitude and praise: “My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant” (Lk 1:46–48). These words suggest that if one is grateful for what one is given, one will be less inclined to covet what another is given. The Magnificat exemplifies Mary’s praise and thanksgiving for being favored by God in the divine plan of salvation; it also reveals humility and charity in her *fiat*. Further, the Magnificat anticipates the futility of the proud and covetous who give free rein to their mimetic impulses (Lk 1:51–52). In being conceived without sin, Mary is able to align her will perfectly with God’s in a way that no human being had before, because she possesses her full humanity in freedom and humility. Her graced strength to resist sin⁶¹ and her spirit of humility and gratitude are an affront to Lucifer’s pride and envy; they comprise the enmity between the serpent and the woman in the Genesis account.

⁵⁸ Rossier, “*Kecharitomene*” 182.

⁵⁹ Pius XII, Pontifical address “Children of Mary” no. 655, in *Our Lady* 373.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Paul Haffner, *The Mystery of Mary* (Chicago: Gracewing, 2004) 94.

Just as Girard discovers in ancient myths and stories the themes of mimetic envy and violence, so we can expect to find similar themes in the nonhistorical accounts of the life of Mary.⁶² One such account tells how she was the object of envy by other girls when she was presented in the Temple. As the story goes, Satan's antagonistic influence incited this envy. While this story may represent a private mystical revelation, it touches upon an ancient theme of envying those whom God favors.⁶³

Hans Urs von Balthasar picks up on this theme in his writing about Mary. He argues that because she is a symbol or archetype of the church, Satan harbors a special hatred of her and the entire church: "The devil's rage against the Church is as great as it is because it is not able to achieve anything against her [Mary]."⁶⁴ As a consequence, there is a dimension of the church that is lived *hidden* in the wilderness, and there is an evil principle that is at war with her; the witness of the martyrs testifies to this. Of course, sometimes evil manifests itself within the church through corrupt individuals.⁶⁵ Satan's hatred of Mary, figure of the church, is symbolized in Revelation where the dragon pursues the woman "clothed with the sun" into the wilderness, while her child is taken to heaven. In a sense, therefore, the church lives in the wilderness where it is protected by being hidden from the evil one. Because it is protected, "the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (Rev 12:17). Martyrs are victims of the scapegoat mechanism.

In his *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, Girard suggests that the paschal mystery of Jesus' self-sacrifice is the beginning of the end of mimetic envy leading to violence. Christians in union with Jesus in the sacrament of the Eucharist are able to address this condition. Within the context of communion, Christians remember the paschal mystery in a spirit of thanksgiving. The name "Eucharist" derives from the Greek verb, *eucharistein*, "to give thanks." Regular participation in this sacrament of thanksgiving comprises a recurring defense that buttresses the community against the destructive effects of mimetic envy and violence.

⁶² See, e.g., the depiction of the life of Mary by Maria of Agreda, in Raphael Brown, *The Life of Mary as Seen by the Mystics* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1951) 59.

⁶³ "Since he [Satan] could not influence her directly, he incites others to persecute her. Without much trouble he made others become inflamed with envy against her" (ibid.).

⁶⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mary for Today*, trans. Robert Nowell (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988) 11.

⁶⁵ See M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie* (New York: Touchstone, 1985), which argues that those he clinically identifies as *people of the lie* are often attracted to official church structures in order to hide from themselves.

In the Eucharist, Jesus not only gives himself to us at the foot of the cross; he also gives us his mother (Jn 19:27), who is not just any model, but the model of a woman without envy, a paradigm of humility, charity, and gratitude. Tradition affirms her to be a model to be imitated; in his encyclical *Magnae Dei Matris*, Leo XIII encapsulates the tradition:

In Mary we see how a truly good and provident God has established for us a most suitable example of every virtue. As we look upon her and think about her we are not cast down as though stricken by the overpowering splendor of God's power; but, on the contrary, attracted by the closeness of the common nature we share with her, we strive with greater confidence *to imitate her*. If we, with her powerful help, should dedicate ourselves wholly and entirely to this undertaking, we can portray at least an outline of such great virtue and sanctity, and reproducing that perfect conformity of our lives to all God's designs which she possessed in so marvelous a degree, we shall follow her into heaven.⁶⁶

Finally, recall the interpretive “mistake” several popes have used in part to justify the dogma of the Immaculate Conception: “I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel” (Gen 3:15, Douay-Rheims). In recent years, scholars and the Catholic Church's magisterium have abandoned this passage as evidence of the dogma. But in light of the previous analysis and reflection, it is possible to glean an allegorical meaning from that text. In stating this I am not advocating a return to a precritical interpretation of the Bible. Rather, I am suggesting that the interpretive mistake probably persisted for so long because it resonated with the sensibilities of the church as represented by Pius IX and others in their reading of Revelation 12:13. If this passage is taken allegorically, one can legitimately postulate an “enmity” or “antipathy” between the woman and the serpent, just as the tradition sees “enmity” between Mary and Satan. It goes without saying that Jesus is the full actuality of the seed prophesied in Scripture that vanquishes the serpent. However, the enmity or antipathy between Satan and Mary—primarily by virtue of her being the Mother of God—is heightened by the sanctifying grace she is given, which entails that she is free from all envy and mimetic rivalry. This grace and its effects would be in contrast to the diametrically opposed distorted mimicry of Satan, the animating principle of evil, motivated and inspired by envy as manifested in mimetic rivalry and actualized in recurrent cycles of the violence of scapegoating—to wage war against her children as he did against her son. The enmity between them is exacerbated by the graced person of Mary as woman without envy. While “through the devil's envy

⁶⁶ Leo XIII, *Magnae Dei Matris* (September 8, 1892) no. 26, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_08091892_magnae-dei-matris_en.html, emphasis added.

death entered the world" (Wis 2:24), it is through Mary's child, Jesus, that the mimetic cycle of violence and death, bolstered by envy, will be ended.

CONCLUSION

The stated purpose of this article was to explore a reconceiving of the Immaculate Conception in light of the theories of Girard and Alison on mimetic envy and rivalry. Negatively stated, the Immaculate Conception refers to Mary's conception without the stain of original sin. Positively stated, the dogma says that Mary entered existence in a state of sanctifying grace. Sanctifying grace is an absolutely supernatural solution to fallen nature—a gift that transforms reality. Hence, if Girard is correct in identifying something about human existence with a universal application, it would in principle have nothing to say about the Immaculate Conception as positively stated. In other words, he has more to contribute to clarification of original sin and its effects in social sin than he has to contribute to a theology of grace. Invoking Girard as a context for a renewed theology of redemption, Doran has begun to appropriate a distinction from Lonergan's thought to suggest the need for a doctrine of social grace. His suggestions cohere with the idea of the state of grace as a social condition involving the Trinity and those in communion with the Trinity, not as individuals.⁶⁷ This contribution to a theology of grace could complement Girard's endeavors.

Finally, I have sought to bring Girard's work into dialogue with the Thomistic tradition since, as I noted above, Aquinas highlights the positive aspects of imitation as well as the negative. Indeed, some scholars have criticized Girard's earlier writings for not accounting for positive mimesis.⁶⁸ In his later work, however, Girard has acknowledged the positive aspects of mimesis through the imitation of Christ.⁶⁹ Hence, engaging the Thomistic tradition supports this development in Girard's thought.

⁶⁷ Doran states: "The principal impetus for a theology of social grace is provided by Lonergan himself in the final chapter of the systematic part of his *De Deo Trino*, where 'the state of grace' is distinguished from 'the habit of grace,' and is identified as a social and intersubjective situation, where the subjects involved in the situation are the three divine subjects and a very widely inclusive community of human subjects, namely, all those who have said 'Yes,' either explicitly or implicitly, to God's offer of God's own love" (Robert Doran, *What Is Systematic Theology?* [Toronto: University of Toronto, 2005] 188).

⁶⁸ Rebecca J. Adams, "Loving Mimesis and Girard's 'Scapegoat of the Text': A Creative Reassessment of Mimetic Desire," in *Violence Renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies, and Peacemaking*, ed. Willard Swartley (Telford, Pa.: Pandora, 2000) 5–31.

⁶⁹ Girard states: "As to whether I am advocating 'renunciation' of mimetic desire, yes and no. Not the renunciation of mimetic desire itself, because what Jesus advocates is mimetic desire. Imitate me, imitate the Father. So the idea that mimetic desire itself is bad makes no sense" (interview with Girard, quoted in *ibid.* 10).