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Discovering Girard



Synopsis

â œReally wonderful; an elegantly written initiation into the mimetic theory. I am lucky to have interpreters who understand what I want to say and who can write so well.â •â ”RenÃ© GirardThe work of RenÃ© Girard is hugely influential in literature and cultural studies. But it is in understanding the relationship between religion and violence that his theory has created its greatest impact. Girard’s understanding of mimetic rivalry and conflict and of scapegoating is seen by many to be the key to a completely new understanding of Christianity. Girard’s name evokes curiosity andâ ”oftenâ ”strong feelings among devotees and skeptics. Discovering Girard is the first book to present Girard’s work to a wider audience. It explains and appraises Girard’s mimetic theory, shows its impact on theology and other disciplines, and manages to convey the excitement that a discovery of Girard’s ideas often generates in readers.

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Customer Reviews

Regardless of what one ultimately thinks of theoretician Rene Girard’s ideas, the small and very

readable book "Discovering Girard" serves as a perfect introduction to his thought. At some 130 pages it only has space to cover his theories at a high level, but it seems to present enough information for anyone to walk away with at least a decent understanding. Anyone who reads even ten pages will know why Girard causes both fascination and controversy. Some may find the application of his religious beliefs to his thought anathema and self-serving while others may find this very aspect the shining gem in his work. He converted to Catholicism in the 1950s and his work eventually granted Christianity, particularly the Gospels, a very special place. Though the controversy rages on, Girard, now retired, still writes while groups such as the "Colloquium on Religion and Violence" (COV&R) continue to discuss and develop his ideas. Following a short biography and overview, the first chapter covers what many may find the most intriguing aspect of Girard's thought: the mimetic nature of desire. Simply put, Girard claims that the source of the world's violence arises from people who want what other people have, whether they have material things or non-physical or "metaphysical" things such as fulfillment, influence or power. In other words, desire arises from the need to imitate what we see as valuable. As long as the desired remains at enough distance from those that desire, conflict does not arise. Girard posits an almost geometrical triangular analogy where subject, object and model stand on all points of a triangle. The closer the subject gets to the object, the more likely that conflict and violence will arise.

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