GIORDANO BRUNO AND HIS INQUISITOR: THE MANIPULATOR OF MIMETIC RIVALRY CONFRONTS SAINTHOOD IN PROGRESS

Today, Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) is a rather obscure figure. On the 17th of February 1600, on the orders of the Inquisition, Bruno was burned at the stake on the Campo di Fiori in Rome.[1] Often, he is portrayed as a martyr – shall I say saint? – of freedom, democracy, science and free thought. Some scholars have proposed that Bruno intended to become the founder of a religion that would surpass Christianity, or at least the leader of another Reformation based on hermetic principles.[2] People perceive him to have taken a stand against dogmatic or traditional Christianity. Although educated people know his name, few have read his works or are versed in the details of his life and death. Even further removed is Bruno's Inquisitor, Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542 – 1621). In 1930, Pope Pius XI canonized Bellarmine, making him a Doctor of the Church in 1931.[3]

Using the theories of René Girard, I would like to show how Bruno's death as a sacrificial scapegoat made him into the hero of modern anti-Christianity. Because many modern intellectuals perceive Christian sainthood as a derivative form of pagan divinization, it is important to explore the differences. Therefore, I would like to introduce you to another picture of Bruno and his Inquisitor in order to delve more deeply into some of the central questions of this conference; namely, "What is sainthood? How is it that one person's saint is another person's devil?"

René Girard and the Scapegoat Theory

In 1972, René Girard published his groundbreaking work: *La Violence et le Sacré,*[4] where he proposed his hypothesis on the origins of myth and ritual. For Girard, the most ancient of all religious rituals is sacrifice. It is, according to him, the origin of religion and the gods. Girard's main task has been to explain how the scapegoat mechanism functioned and continues to function in the development of religion and culture. It is to this aspect of his theory that we now turn.

For Girard, the murder of a surrogate victim follows a tremendous social crisis, resulting from mimetic desire. Mimetic desire is the combination of appropriative desire (i.e. the desire to have what the other has or greed) with modelling (i.e. the attempt to "be" or to "be like" the victim). In an earlier work, *Deceit, Desire & the Novel* (1961), he explains the modelling mechanism as it is portrayed in modern literature. Humans create models, who later become their rivals. The desire to possess that which the model has is a desire aimed at the model's *being*. It is a desire that wishes to absorb the

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[1] Francis Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964) 349.

[2] Karen Silvia de León-Jones, *Giordano Bruno & the Kabbalah: Prophets, Magicians, and Rabbis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004) 16. De León-Jones follows both Ioan Couliano and Francis Yates' argument that "Bruno wished to found his own religious reformation."

[3] John O' Malley, "Preface," *Robert Bellarmine Spiritual Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989) 3. Although beyond the scope of this paper, Bellarmine was also the Inquisitor involved in the Galileo Galilei admonition (1616).

[4] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977, 1979).

other's being into one's own. The perceived object merely mediates this desire.[5] When a model turned rival's object cannot be obtained by peaceful means, people are often willing to use force to acquire it, but also to protect it with equal intensity.

According to Girard, in early societies, when violence began to spiral out of control, there were no braking mechanisms to stop it. Religion provided a solution, albeit a violent one, to channel potentially annihilatory violence through "rituals of killing and their rationalizations as 'sacrifice'."[6] To halt the cycle of violence, he posits the need for a final act of violence, which primitive societies found in the "mechanism of the surrogate victim," or the "scapegoat mechanism."[7]

At the height of a communal crisis, what Girard calls a "mimetic crisis," where everyone imitates each other's desires and violence, a disintegrating community perceives that it needs someone to take responsibility for the accumulation of crimes threatening to destroy it. A victim or scapegoat, a Greek *pharmakos*, is selected as a sacrificial victim. The selection is based on his *difference* or vulnerability, meaning his inability to retaliate. Often this was a child, cripple, or stranger.[8] The selection process might be mediated by a *pharmakeus*, in Greek, a witchdoctor or sorcerer. As implied by the Greek term, the *pharmakeus* is more conscious of how the scapegoating mechanism functions and was, therefore, able to covertly manipulate it.[9] The scapegoat became a vicarious substitute for the entire community by absorbing their accumulated crimes onto himself. As the victim was selected, the community turned into a lynch mob. The murder, which occurred in the amnesic frenzy of a lynch mob, served to take the individual members' attention away from their own defects and project them onto the scapegoat. The victim was annihilated into chaotic sameness of the Totality, so that the community avoided or at least postponed it for themselves.

After the mimetic tension was released onto the substitute, a strange calm was established over the community. A moment before the lynching, the community was literally at each other's throats, but directly after the collective murder, they became as "one". In primitive communities, this new-found peace and unity must have been remarkable. Re-established unity is attributed to the former offender, envisioning him as the divine saviour or benevolent deity.[10] The divinization of the victim served to "cover up" the crime, and *project* the responsibility for the transgression onto "the god," who was, surprisingly, the original sacrificial victim.[11] Collective responsibility for the crisis is denied or conveniently forgotten, and becomes the data of myth and the occult.

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[5] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire & the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965) 53.

[6] Burton Mack, "Introduction," *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987) 6-7.

[7] See René Girard, "The Surrogate Victim," *The Girard Reader*, ed. James G. Williams (New York: Crossroads Herder, 2001) 20-29.

[8] René Girard, "Sacrifice as Sacral Violence and Substitution," *The Girard Reader*, 82.

[9] René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001) 49-61. Girard's discussion of "The horrible miracle of Apollonius of Tyana" provides insight into the nature of this process.

[10] René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 65, 71.

[11] René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987) 165.

Girard shows that the origin of violence is not "organized religion," but "mimetic rivalry." The original murder and subsequent sacrifices, meant to repeat the original beneficial unitive forces, served to temporarily suppress internal jealousies, rivalries, and discord. Sacrifices to the gods restored both harmony and differentiated unity within the group, by focusing aggression meant for each other onto the substituted victim.[12] In reality, the victim was *not* offered up to appease the wrath of some vengeful deity, but was a "substitute for all of the members of the community, offered up by the members themselves. The sacrifice serves to protect the community from its own violence."[13]

Girard claims that although the Gospel stories about Jesus and the early stories of the martyrdom of the saints appear to have a *similar narrative structure* to myth, they are not mythical in the proper sense.[14] For Girard, the Passion of Jesus appears mythical "because it reproduces the founding event of all rituals, [and] is connected with every ritual on the entire planet."[15] The Passion Story "unmasks" what lies behind all myth and ritual: a murder by a lynch mob that is later attributed to the will of the god. The non-sacrificial religion of Christianity is about becoming *fully conscious* of the violence that lies hidden beneath the foundation of all religion, human society and, ultimately, within each individual human heart.[16] Although incomplete, Girard believes that this process already began in the Hebrew Scriptures, especially in the writings of the prophets.[17]

Still, Girard believes a full understanding of Jesus' death on the Cross and resurrection from the dead remains, to some extent, hidden and "almost universally misunderstood." To this day, most people deceive themselves about their own propensity for violence and ability to be trapped by the mimetic mechanism.[18] Christian conversion is not complete, because some have attached themselves to a sacrificial reading of the Gospels, especially through a misreading of the Letter to the Hebrews.[19] Due to their similar narrative structure, many Christians have not perceived how the Gospels unmask the scapegoating mechanism, and how pagan myths stimulate it. The scapegoating mechanism has been softened, but not eliminated. According to Girard, the distinction between "purified" Christianity and religion lies in the fact that most "religion is organized around a more or less *violent disavowal* of human violence. That is what the religion that comes from man amounts to, as opposed to the religion that comes from God (italics mine)."[20] This simple exposition of Girard's theory will help us to understand how, on the one hand, a truly anti-democratic man like Bruno could become divinized as a hero of tolerance and free thought while, on the other hand, a pious Christian like Bellarmine could succumb to mimetic scapegoating and advocate Bruno's violent death in the hopes of expelling heresy within the Counter-Reformation church. It also explains Bruno's rivalistic stance towards Jesus of

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[12] , René Girard, "Sacrifice as Sacral Violence and Substitution," *The Girard Reader*, 78.
[13] Ibid., 77.
[14] René Girard, *Things Hidden*, 167ff.
[15] Ibid., 167.
[16] Ibid, cf. 154-158, especially 157.
[17] Ibid., 141-158.
[18] René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 44.
[19] René Girard, *Things Hidden*, 227-231.
[20] Ibid., 166.

Nazareth. Bruno wanted to be the divine founder of a new religion, because he wanted to be a god. However, unlike Bruno, Jesus was not prepared to use violence to defend his kingdom (cf. John 18:36) and did not block, but encouraged his disciples to become greater than himself (cf. John 14:12).

Historical Background

Unfortunately, we cannot go into great biographical detail of Bruno's life. Bruno was born in a small town close to the Calabrian city of Naples. At an early age, he entered a Dominican convent and, in 1572, was ordained a priest. Already in 1574, he was under suspicion of heresy and forced to flee his convent. From 1579 to his incarceration by the Venetian Inquisition in 1592, Bruno wandered throughout Europe, flirting with the religion and politics associated with the decadent French king, Henri III and later with the luminaries of the court of the Protestant Queen Elizabeth I. His loyalties to religious ideas other than his own were never too deep and he became, probably, the only human in history to be excommunicated from three major church denominations (Roman Catholic, Calvinist and Lutheran). Although condemned in Italy, in April 1591, he accepted an offer to return by a nobleman, Giovanni Mocenigo, who later betrayed him to the Venetian Inquisition.[21]

His Venetian trail lasted from May through July 1592. Perceiving a possibility to go free, it seemed as though Bruno made an attempt to recant his former heretical views and ask forgiveness.[22] However, through the intervention of the newly elected pope Clement VIII (1592-1605), Bruno was extradited to the dungeons of the Roman Inquisition.[23] At the time, with "no following and few sympathizers," he posed no serious threat to the Church or to the papacy, but his relationship with powerful Protestants did not work in his favour. Edward A. Gosselin and Lawrence S. Lerner suggest that Bruno's real enemies were the Spanish, who opposed his endorsement, in *La Cena de le Ceneri* or *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, of the creation of a magical hermetic kingdom,[24] with the help of France and England,[25] Spain's political rivals. In 1599, the Jesuit Bellarmine presented the former Dominican Bruno with eight heretical propositions gathered from his most important writings, which he was required to refute.

Unfortunately, the original trial proceedings were lost after they were confiscated on the orders of Napoleon and, then, accidentally sold to a pulp factory.[26] In 1940, the Prefect of the Vatican Archives, Angelo Mercati, found a summary of the process in the personal archives of Pius IX. He

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[21] For more biographical information, see: Francis Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 190ff; Michele Ciliberto, "Bruno, Giordano (Filippo)," *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 206-213; Luigi Firpo, *Le procès de Giordano Bruno*, tome 8, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2000). For original editions of Bruno's works, see: Ed. F. Fiorentino *et al*., *Opera latine conscripta* (Naples: Morano, 1879-1891); Ed. G. Aquileccia, *Dialoghi italiani. Dialoghi metafisici e dialoghi morali nuovamente ristampati con note da G. Gentile*, 3rd ed. (Roman and Florence: Sansoni, 1958). There are no recent critical editions of Bruno's work.

[22] Arthur D. Imerti, "Introduction," Giordano Bruno's, *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964) 62.

[23] J. N. D. Kelly, *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 276.

[24] Edward A. Gosselin and Lawrence S. Lerner, "Introduction," *The Ash Wednesday Supper* by Giordano Bruno (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1995) 22.

[25] Giordano Bruno, *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, trans. Edward A. Gosselin and Lawrence S. Lerner (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1995) 161.

[26] Francis Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 349.

published the summary of the trial with a long introduction in 1942.[27] Given the lack of historical evidence, it is impossible to totally reconstruct the Roman trial; however, Francis Yates proposed that the propositions mostly concerned Bruno's philosophical presuppositions and those theological doctrines that were dependent upon them. Contrary to popular mythologization, it was not a trial about "science," but dealt with Bruno's pantheism (i.e. God is the infinite universe), asserting that the stars are beings and that infinite worlds such as ours exist. They would have also concerned his theories on the divinity of Jesus, the nature of the Holy Trinity and the doctrine of transubstantiation, but did not concern his theory of heliocentricity.[28] Particularly provocative in *Lo Spacio de la bestia trionfante* or *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, would have been his implication that Jesus was a second-rate magician, while the *magus* Bruno was his superior.[29]

Bruno was a monistic thinker, who rejected traditional Christian theism. He envisioned the *Cosmos* as God, containing a formal life-creating principle, the *anima mundi* or world-soul.[30] Although indebted to Nicholas Copernicus's (1473-1543) theories on a heliocentric universe,[31] Bruno's postulations on an infinite universe were implicit in his reversal of the Platonic and Aristotelian scale of Being,[32] mirroring his more Presocratic understanding of emanation from matter. The Presocratic notion of the "evolution" of Being starts from the *fire* in the bowels of the earth. Like plants, human beings spring up from underneath the earth, and transmigration of human souls follows an ascending order from the earth towards the realm of aither and the sun to the gods.[33] For the Presocratic Empedocles, who lived on the volcanic island of Sicily, the paradoxical realm of the fiery Underworld could be easily associated with the alchemical furnace,[34] where lead is transmuted into gold. This is the occult process of divinization, or self-salvation, where the alchemist gains for himself the Philosopher's Stone. Following a particular alchemical logic, if one wants to return to one's divine ethereal origin and escape the cycle of re-birth, then, one would have to return to the "fiery womb" of Mother Earth and be transmuted through the alchemical process back into the divine substance of the One. According to Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (3rd century

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[27] Information on the trial of Giordano Bruno can be accessed at: Vatican Secret Archives, "Summary of the Trial Against Giordano Bruno, Rome 1597," THE HOLY SEE, http://asv.vatican.va/en/doc/1597.htm.

[28] Francis Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 350-355. For example, Jesus was not the second person of the Holy Trinity, while he did consider the *anima mundi* to be the Third Person. He believed that the Christians sole the Egyptian ankh as a sacred symbol.

[29] Giordano Bruno, *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, trans. Arthur D. Imerti (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964) 255, 257.

[30] Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 60-63; Paul Henri Michel, *The Cosmology of Giordano Bruno*, trans. Dr R. E. W. Maddison (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973) 250-268.

[31] Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Late Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy*, vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1963, 1993) 283.

[32] Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: a Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936, 1964) 116-117.

[33] See "Aëtius, *Opinions* 5.18.1 Diels," *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and the Sophists*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2000) 150.

[34] Peter Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 77. "The Underworld is a place of paradox and inversion. In particular it is the place where polar opposites exist and merge, and especially the place where the paradox of destructive force being converted into creative power is realized at its greatest intensity."

A.D.), the disciples of the Presocratic philosopher Empedocles interpreted his suicide into the "alchemical forges" of Mount Etna as a self-divinizing act and confirmation of his divinity.[35]

In Rome, Bruno also seemed prepared to reject his former teachings, but suddenly changed his mind and refused. Having alienated his former patrons, he probably realized that death might be the quickest release. We are not in the position to judge Bruno. No one should be forced, on the threat of death, to assent to a particular conception of God. After spending eight years rotting in a dungeon, only a saint would be in a forgiving and reconciliatory mood. Bruno's refusal was interpreted as obstinacy and, tragically, he was turned over to the secular authorities for execution.

While keen to promote Bruno as the martyr, saint or hero of free thought and religious tolerance, some biographers ignore the accounts of Bruno's self-serving arrogance, acrimoniousness and ability to burn all bridges of friendship behind him.[36] Throughout his life, Bruno was unable to form stable relationships and, unlike his model-rival Jesus, left no disciples or followers. John Charles Nelson says that Bruno accepted the Church as a means of regulating the masses, because he considered them to be "incapable of thought. … Severely intolerant of many viewpoints different from his own philosophy and religion, he is in turn, and sometimes simultaneously, anticlerical, anti-Protestant, and anti-Jewish." As Nelson goes on to say, "clearly, such a man should not be made a symbol of tolerance."[37] Given Bruno's own personal disposition, his refusal to recant might also be interpreted as exhibiting a healthy dose of *ressentiment*. More honest than most 19th century Bruno worshippers, when the master of *ressentiment* and the most anti-Christian of philosophers, Friedrich Nietzsche, wrote about Bruno, it was in these terms.

How poisonous, how cunning, how bad every protracted war makes one when it cannot be waged with open force! How *personal* a protracted fear makes one, a protracted keeping watch for enemies, for possible enemies! These outcasts of society, long persecuted and sorely hunted – also the enforced recluses, the Spinozas and Giordano Brunos – in the end always become refined vengeance-seekers and brewers of poison, even if they do so under the most spiritual masquerade and perhaps without being themselves aware of it. … The martyrdom of the philosopher, his 'sacrifice for truth,' brings to light what there has been in him of agitator and actor; and if one has hitherto regarded him only with artistic curiosity, in the case of many a philosopher it is easy to understand the dangerous desire to see him for once in his degeneration (degenerated into 'martyr', into stage- and platform-ranter).
(*BGE*, II, "The Free Spirit", 25)[38]

Another Interpretation of Bruno's Death

Based on Nietzsche's estimation that Bruno was a "vengeance-seeker", we are in the position to propose another possibility, put forward by the late Ioan Couliano in *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*. Couliano suggests that, in the end, Bruno might have wanted the Inquisition to condemn him to be burned at the stake. He intimates that Bruno orchestrated his own death in an attempt to

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[35] "Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 8.67.8-69.8 Long," *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and the Sophists*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 140-141.
[36] Arthur D. Imerti, "Editor's Introduction," *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, 16.
[37] John Charles Nelson, *Renaissance Theory of Love: the Context of Giordano Bruno's Eroici Furori* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958) 5.
[38] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1973, 1990) 56.

become the priest and original sacrifice of his own religion. If this is true, his refusal was not a sign of his obstinacy or even madness, but would have been an act of revenge. Although we can never be sure, Couliano's suggestion makes sense in light of Girard's theories on divinization. Couliano says:

It is not impossible that Bruno envisaged being burned at the stake as the final act of a process, which had developed within himself long before: the rejection of his humanity, the transition to a state of divinity. … If he sought to be the apostle of a new religion, Bruno no doubt accomplished that wish. His name influenced the spirit and the voice of many a freemason, freethinker, revolutionary, materialist, or anarchist of the nineteenth century… Unfortunately, all those who transformed him into the champion of their social and political cause misunderstood his work and his personality, only recalling his martyrdom in the struggle against the Church. Bruno, indeed, has become the prophet of a religion of which he would never have approved, whose ideals were, on the contrary, diametrically opposed to his own. He, the most antidemocratic of thinkers, winds up as a symbol of democracy![39]

Couliano bases his interpretation of Bruno's execution on his philosophy and the self-sacrificial nature of his understanding of self-divinization. Couliano's argument rests on Bruno's interpretation of the Actaeon Myth in *Gli Eroici Furore*.[40] In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the young hunter Actaeon accidentally strays upon Diana bathing naked in a stream. As punishment for his indiscretion, Diana turns him into one of her "sacred" stags. During Diana's festival, stags were hunted, replacing a tradition of human sacrifice.[41] In Ovid's version, Actaeon's hunting dogs mistake their master for prey and, after shredding him to bits, devour him. The dogs correspond to the mimetic frenzy of a lynch mob. However, where Ovid questions the goddess's justice,[42] Bruno re-interprets Actaeon's dogs as his thoughts and the murder as a willing suicide.[43] To become the sacrificial animal of the deity is the preferred way that the *magus* unites with his object of desire: *Deus sive Natura*. The hunter who pursues divine wisdom realizes that the only way to grasp the object is to become the prey himself.[44] Instead of recoiling from one's fate, the one who recognizes the sameness of his identity with the Totality plunges willingly into the process of chaotic fragmentation and re-absorption into the nothingness of the One, regardless of the cost to his personal identity.

Although Couliano does not deal with *Gli Eroici Furore*, I, 5, this dialogue directly follows the Actaeon myth and supports his estimation. Here, Bruno identifies with the moth that is attracted to the flame. He begins the section with two provocatively interconnected questions: "What is the

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[39] Ioan P. Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, trans. Margaret Cook (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) 78.

[40] Giordano Bruno, *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, trans. L. Williams (London: George Redway, 1887) 90-120.

[41] Oskar Seyffert, *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1995) 71-72.

[42] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 57-58. "He fled where often he'd followed in pursuit, Fled his own folk, for shame! He longed to shout 'I am Actaeon, look, I am your master!' Words failed his will; their baying filled the sky. Blackhair bit first, a wound deep in his haunch; Next Killer; Climber fastened on his shoulder. These started late but cut across the hills and gained a lead. They held their master down till the whole pack, united, sank their teeth into his flesh. He gave a wailing scream, not human, yet a sound no stag could voice… But his friends with their glad usual shouts cheered on the pack, not knowing what they did, and looked around to find Actaeon; each louder than the rest calling Actaeon, as though he were not there; And blamed his absence and his sloth that missed the excitement of the kill. Hearing his name he turned his head. Would that he were indeed Absent! But he was there. Would that he watched, not felt, the hounds' (his hounds') fierce savagery! Now they are all around him, tearing deep their master's flesh, the stag that is no stag; And not until so many countless wounds had drained away his lifeblood, was the wrath, it's said, of chaste Diana satisfied. As the tale spread views varied; some believed Diana's violence unjust; some praised it, as proper to her chaste virginity. Both sides found reason for their point of view."

[43] Giordano Bruno, *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, 93.

[44] Ibid., 90ff.

meaning of that butterfly which flutters round the flame, and almost burns itself? And what means that legend, '*Hostis non hostis*?'"[45] "The enemy, who is not an enemy," but also, "The stranger, who is not a stranger." If we recall Girard's understanding of how the sacrificial scapegoat is selected in mythical accounts of divine *metamorphoses*, then, we must also consider the following possibility. Bruno perhaps intuited that in many myths the "enemy stranger" was often made into a "god" after his murder or sacrifice. Moreover, given the intensity of the Reformation debates on the Eucharistic sacrifice and the doctrine of transubstantiation, we should not totally exclude the possibility that Bruno might have intended a *double entendre* by his usage of the word, *hostis*. This word is similar to *hostia*, or a "sacrificial victim." In this case, Bruno's question could also mean, "The sacrificial victim, who is not a sacrificial victim?"[46] Given Bruno's poetic nature, it is possible that Bruno intended all of these meanings. According to Bruno's character Tansillo, the moth becomes fascinated by the splendour of the flame and goes willingly to meet its death. Tansillo later confirms that the moth knowingly destroys itself: "So sweet, so grateful, so divine, as these hard bonds, this death of mine, to which by fate, by will, by nature I incline." And if one thinks that should the moth understand its destiny, it would avoid its own destruction, Bruno refutes them. For the heroic enthusiast:

It is no less pleasing to perish in the flames of amorous ardour than to be drawn to the contemplation of the beauty of that rare splendour, under which, by natural inclination, by voluntary election, and by disposition of fate, he labours, serves, and dies more gaily, more resolutely, and more courageously than under whatsoever other pleasure which may offer itself to the heart, liberty which may be conceded to the spirit, and life which may be discovered in the soul.[47]

These passages leave few doubts as to how Bruno understood the nature of self-divinization as a form of self-sacrifice. Bruno considered himself to be the greatest magician. Before Nietzsche's Zarathustra or Byron's Manfred, he was perhaps the first modern magician. As in *La Cena de le Ceneri*, he stood alone in "the ashes of the sacrifices" on the summit of his phantasmic mount Olympus.[48] Bruno did not have to wait on lynch mobs to reach a "mimetic crisis." As a solipsistic *magus*, with no one to count on but himself, he was aware of his "subjects' expectations."[49] Bruno implies this in *De Vinculis in genere*: "Therefore the moment for bonding must be predicted ahead of time, with careful and antecedent deliberation, and the opportunity must be quickly seized when it presents itself, such that he who can bind will act and bind as soon as possible."[50] Perhaps we should give credit where credit is due. As a temporal alchemist, having already intuited how the scapegoat mechanism transfigures the victim through a so-called conjunction of opposites into the Philosopher's Stone, he perceived there was sufficient mimetic rivalry going round to absorb it all into himself. Is it possible that Bruno, the *pharmakeus* (sorcerer), made himself into a *pharmakos* (scapegoat)? Could it

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[45] Ibid., 128-129.
[46] Ed. Sir William Smith and Sir John Lockwood, *Chambers Murray Latin-English Dictionary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) 315.
[47] Giordano Bruno, *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, 130.
[48] Giordano Bruno, *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, 161.
[49] Ioan Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 90.
[50] Giordano Bruno, *Cause, Principle and Unity and Essays on Magic*, trans. Richard J. Blackwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 153-154.

be that in an attempt to imitate the death of his model/rival Jesus, he orchestrated his own death to look like a murder, making himself the priest of his own sacrifice? We cannot entirely rule out this possibility. Like his other model Empedocles, by "descending" into the alchemical flames of the stake, he could ascend to the realm of the gods. Unlike Jesus, however, there were no reports of his resurrection.

Conclusions

Bruno's martyrdom is fascinating, not only because his death strangely imitated the trial and passion of Jesus Christ, but also the death of the shamanic Presocratic philosopher, Empedocles. However, Bruno did not become the founder of the kind of religion that he envisioned, but something more like the "patron saint" of every modern solipsist that has opposed Christianity since the Enlightenment. Through Bruno's death, these movements positioned Christianity as the enemy of science and Bruno as its martyr-hero. Ernst Haeckel, fiercely anti-Christian and the main protagonist of Darwinism in 19th century Germany, was also the founder of the *Monistenbund*, a supposedly "scientific religion" that promoted the Presocratic and Brunian worship of the *Cosmos* that was to supersede Christianity.[51] Other 19th century anti-Catholic revolutionary groups like the Italian *Risorgimento* of Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882) and Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872), both Carbonari and Freemasons, took Bruno as their martyr model.[52] Annie Besant (1847-1933), the successor of the occultist Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) at the Theosophical Society, calls Bruno the apostle and martyr of both Theosophy and science. She brings together all of the mythological elements needed to sacralize him, albeit confusedly. In a lecture on Bruno's philosophy and melodramatic biography of his life (1913), she emphasizes his vulnerability, necessary for his selection as a scapegoat, and vividly portrays the mimetic frenzy of the crowd.[53] She provides him with an epitaph that would suit any mythological hero or god: "To know how to die in one century is to live for all centuries to come."[54] Using the alchemical and transfiguratory imagery of the Phoenix, in a possible allusion to *La Cena*, she says that out of his scattered ashes, the seeds of truth were blown across Europe,[55] positioning him as the ideal mimetic model of modern self-divinization.

Bruno's time was a period of turmoil and intense mimetic crisis. The fact that Robert Bellarmine was deceived by the mimetic mechanism, that Bruno could have nonetheless intuited and manipulated, should not surprise us. After leaving Louvain, Bellarmine was "appointed to a new chair of controversial theology at the Roman College," developed to help students from Protestant dominated countries in northern Europe.[56] As war raged in Europe, each side became the mimetic

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[51] Daniel Gasman, *Haeckel's Monism and the Birth of Fascist Ideology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998) 62.
[52] Robert Paris, "Bakounine en Italie ou le Socialisme Italien face á ses Origines," *Bakounine : Combats & Débats* (Paris : Institut d'Études Slaves, 1979) 155 – 165.
[53] Annie Besant, *Giordano Bruno: Theosophy's Apostle in the Sixteenth Century* and *The Story of Giordano Bruno* (Adyar: The Theosophist Office, 1913) 51. "The bright eyes are bleared when the unused sunlight touches them; the strong limbs are bent and weak as those of an old man." "To the Campo dei Fiori they take him through a howling, fanatic crowd, composed in great part of pilgrims..."
[54] Ibid., 52.
[55] Ibid., 9-10.
[56] John Patrick Donnelly, "Introduction," *Robert Bellarmine Spiritual Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989) 14.

double of the other. Bellarmine's fault was not being Catholic or religious, but being human during an epoch in history when no one was exempt from mimetic contagion. Although I do not doubt Bellarmine's sincerity, or his eventual progress towards sainthood, at the time of Bruno's condemnation, he was as blind to the scapegoating mechanism within himself as were most men and women of his generation and ours. However, unlike Bruno, Robert Bellarmine never envisioned himself as a disconnected "lone ranger" -- the prototype of the postmodern philosopher. By all accounts, Bellarmine eschewed a life of luxury, and lived a life of sobriety, charity and service to others and to the Church. Ironically, his spiritual writings were not only popular amongst Catholics, but also many Protestants.[57] By condemning Bellarmine or, as many people do nowadays, organized religion or even Christianity as such, they fall into the scapegoating trap. They take Bruno as their model and position themselves as the solipsistic god of judgement, who stands over against the world as well as the whole course of history. Should they have lived during the time of Bruno, they would have done differently. They are like scribes and Pharisees about whom Jesus said: "You hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' Thus you witness against yourselves that you are 'sons of those who murdered the prophets.'" (Mt 23:29-31)

Girard insists that Christianity achieved prominence not through a "naturalistic idea," that is through an inversion of the opposite, a *reversio*, but through becoming conscious of the non-violent essence of God,[58] through conversion or *conversio*. From a Girardian perspective, a true Christian saint recognizes his or her own susceptibility to not only murder the prophets, but also Jesus Christ himself. As the word implies, our conversion, or turning our face towards the non-violent God is a process that takes time. Shortly before his death, Bellarmine seemed to acknowledge this in his *The Art of Dying Well*, 1, 13 (1620): "How great is my cruelty! My Lord was beaten with rods, crowned with thorns, fixed to the cross with nails in order to heal my former sins and crimes. And I do not cease a moment from adding new ones."[59]

On the 17th of February 2000, four hundred years after Bruno's execution, Secretary of State, Cardinal Angelo Sodano sent a message to a conference organized in Naples concerning Giordano Bruno. With the intention of the purification of memory, he expressed regret for the Church's participation in Bruno's terrible death.[60] For some, this acknowledgement came four hundred years too late, but for the most part, it passed by unnoticed. Given the enemies that the Inquisition made out of modern Bruno modellers, the Church has had to pay dearly for its participation in Bruno's death. We should, however, take the Church's remorse as a sign of its own conversion. The Church is

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[57] Ibid., 21-24.
[58] René Girard, *Things Hidden*, 215.
[59] Robert Bellarmine, "The Art of Dying Well," *Bellarmine Spiritual Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989) 291.
[60] Cardinal Angelo Sodano, "Messaggio del Segretario Di stato, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, al Convegno su Giordnao Bruno (Napoli, 17-18 Febraio), 17.02.2000," THE HOLY SEE, http://212.77.1.245/news_services/bulletin/news/6472.php?index=6472&po_date=17.02.2000&lang=ge.

becoming ever more conscious of the non-violent nature of God, who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, and desires to witness to that event ever more perfectly.

Although we recognize his transgression, as a living member of the Body of Christ and communion of saints, Robert Bellarmine also participates in this communal process of purification. The interconnected and progressive nature of sainthood of the individual and the Church, even after death, is something that a more modern, and dare I say Brunian, understanding of sainthood is unable to comprehend. The Eucharistic Rite of Communion, directly after the Lord's Prayer, expresses the interconnection between the contrition of the individual sinners and the anticipation of communal sainthood exquisitely: "Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles 'I leave you peace, my peace I give to you,' look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom where you live for ever and ever." As individuals, the message of the Cross is that none of us – not even Cardinals -- are except from the self-destructive forces that are unleashed from mimetic rivalry and the scapegoating mechanism. However, unlike sacrificial religion, as the body of Christ, we are becoming ever more conscious that the peace and unity of Jesus Christ comes not through the sacrifice of our model and neighbour, but through the sacrifice of our own perverted, mimetic desires. This is the basis of Christian holiness and the beginning of the beatific vision *hic et nunc*. Thankfully, it appears that Bellarmine began to understand this towards the end of his life. His life was a life of sainthood in progress, as is ours.

I hope that this paper helps to illuminate some of the questions posed by this conference, namely: "What is sainthood? How is it that one person's saint is another person's devil?"

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25 January 2007
The Feast Day of the Conversion of St. Paul