

Article

René Girard's Mimetic Theory and Its Value in Understanding Sura Maryam: A Mimetic Analysis of Mythical, Biblical, and Apocryphal Transformations

Hüseyin Çiçek 

Department of Religious Studies, University of Vienna, 1010 Vienna, Austria; hueseyin.cicek@outlook.com

Abstract: This article examines the transformation of mythical, biblical and apocryphal narratives in the Surah Maryam (Surah 19) from the perspective of René Girard's mimetic theory. It postulates that this theory adds value to the interpretation of the aforementioned surah. From a mimetic perspective, it can be shown that the new, nascent, early Islamic community tried to read the religious narratives structuring its environment in terms of a nonviolent relationship between creator and creature, and thus to distance itself from a sacrificial understanding of God.

Keywords: Surah Maryam (Qur'an); mimetic theory (René Girard); Islamic community

1. Introduction

Qur'anic self-positioning in the Abrahamic doctrine of the salvific history.

The Qur'an explicitly draws attention to the fact that, as far as content and importance are concerned, none of the prophetic revelations received by the Israeli people are superior or inferior to the Qur'anic revelations. All revelations received through prophets by the Jews, the Jewish and Christians (as well as the Gentile Christians) as well as the Arabs are of equal value. Surah 2:136 emphasizes:

Say, "We believe in God, and in that which was sent down unto us, and in that which was sent down unto Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in what Moses and Jesus were given, and in what the prophets were given from their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them, and unto Him we submit."

Thus, from an Islamic point of view, the different scriptures and their narrations, commandments or rules are not threatened by an expiration date. Laymen might be surprised by this line of Qur'anic argumentation. An intense study of the Qur'an, however, leads to the rapid recognition that several passages of the Islamic holy scripture were significantly influenced by the scriptures of the Old and New Testament as well as by Pauline and other non-canonical texts. This influence is certainly jointly responsible for the inclusion of the Jewish and Christian religion in the Islamic tradition. No doubt the three Abrahamic religions share several areas of agreement; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam alike stress the importance of Abraham (Ibrahim), Moses (Musa), Job, Joseph (Yusuf) and other prophets and their faith in God (Speyer 1988; Gnilka 2007, p. 83).¹

However, many differences can equally be determined. Whereas the Jews are awaiting the arrival of the Messiah, for the Christians, the Messiah became a historic reality in the form of Jesus, and for the Muslims, Muhammad became the *seal of the prophets* and the symbol for a successfully promulgated revelation.

At the same time, it must be mentioned that regarding the possibility of equality, the equal values within the Qur'an, such as in Surah 4:171 or in the traditional tafsir (exegesis of the Qur'an), have been and will be put to a dynamic discussion.

O People of the Book!



Citation: Çiçek, Hüseyin. 2023. René Girard's Mimetic Theory and Its Value in Understanding Sura Maryam: A Mimetic Analysis of Mythical, Biblical, and Apocryphal Transformations. *Religions* 14: 912. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14070912>

Academic Editors: Halim Rane, Enzo Pace and Emin Poljarevic

Received: 28 February 2023

Revised: 5 June 2023

Accepted: 12 July 2023

Published: 15 July 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Do not exaggerate in your religion, nor utter anything concerning God save the truth. Verily, the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was only a messenger of God and His Word, which He committed to Mary and a Spirit from Him. Therefore, believe in God and His messengers, and say not “Three”. Refrain! It is better for you. God is only one God; glory be to Him that He should have a child. Unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth, and God suffices as a Guardian.”

Such developments within the Muslim history must be understood from the point of view of mimetic rivalry among the Abrahamic religious traditions. History is not only written from an objective point of view, but also serves as a mean to cope with and overcome past, present and future challenges. Clearly, many recriminations by Christian and Islamic theologians are often not based on a thorough analysis of their holy scriptures, but rather on assumptions inherited from Church Fathers, theologians and lawyers, without any explicit verification of the accusations made (Lawson 2009, pp. 1–26).

Surah 19, or Maryam in the Qur’an, provides an impressive example of the application of René Girard’s theory of mimetic desire and the scapegoat. In terms of its structure and its content, these concepts can both be uncovered and analyzed. A comparison between the story of Mary or Maryam from the Gospel of Luke and Sure 19 shows that the Qur’an strongly leans towards mainstream Christianity of its time in the Arabian Peninsula. The blanket judgment of Western Christian theologians that the Qur’an was influenced by Christian heresies of its time does not withstand objective scrutiny. The story in Surah 19 also reminds us of Leto from the Hellenistic tradition. Just as Judaism and Christianity have taken up, transformed, or rejected the late ancient religions or traditions that surround them, it is the same in Islamic religious history. With the advent of the Qur’an, the Prophet Mohammad and the early Islamic community, a new monotheistic direction has emerged, but it cannot immediately, hermetically, or theologically or historically, separate from pre-Islamic thought. The multifaceted pre-Islamic, Hellenistic and Jews-Christian religious thinking, as Angelika Neuwirth notes, had substantial influence on the Islamic tradition. My analysis is based on Girard’s thesis that desire is mimetic and imitation, and that desire can generate violence. Surah Maryam, examined through the lens of this theory, therefore, could provide us with deeper insights into these processes.

2. A Mimetic Approach to the Qur’an and Its Buried Heritage of Late Antiquity

The perspectives of mimetic theory on biblical texts are manifold. Thus, we learn, *inter alia*, about the many faces of the “sacred” and of violence. The apparatus used by the mimetic theory to deconstruct mythical texts as well as reconstruct biblical verses is, without any explicit emphasis in Girard’s writings, a combination of anthropological, historical, literary, theological and cultural methods (for more details see Palaver (2003)). Girard’s comparison of biblical stories and (e.g., Hellenistic) myths is by no means robbed of its context but is analyzed from the perspective of its communication.

The Qur’an does not *emerge* from a neutral environment, untouched by God or gods, but rather from an environment in which different religious traditions are already well established. In pre-Islamic times, Hejaz (the northwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula) was already an important region and is so still today. Due to its geographic location, different trade routes from India, Africa, Persia and the Mediterranean Sea meet on the northwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula. Not only goods but also intellectual and religious ideas were brought to and spread from this region. Without going into much detail, this region can be identified as a meeting place of different religious traditions. After Islam had been successfully established in the Arabian Peninsula, the pre-Islamic history was systematically disguised, or rather covered up. As it were, a “myth about its origin” was created by the future tafsir tradition, which, according to Angelika Neuwirth or Samir Kassir, depicted an anachronistic origin of the Qur’an. This effective uprooting of the Qur’an from its historic-religious environment led, *inter alia*, to a teleological interpretation of Islam,² as well as to a disguise of the late antique identity of the Qur’an. Therefore, the pre-Islamic time *Jahiliyyah* is called “a time of ignorance” and, at the same time, the

early Islamic community is denied any interaction with ancient non-Abrahamic religious traditions. In other words, interaction is interpreted as strict exclusion of the earlier Islamic community in relation to non-Islamic teachings. A close examination of various surahs, however, reveals that the earlier Islamic community does not, a priori, reject the different traditions of the late antiquity by which it is surrounded, but perceives, discusses, and reconstructs them from its own teachings which are yet to be developed.

“No ‘author’ is to be presumed behind the Qur’an, but—apart from the very first surahs, which portray a private dialogue between God and man—it is a congregational discussion, which lasts throughout the entire time of the prophet’s ministry.” (Neuwirth 2011, p. 44)

Amongst other things, a comparison between Mary’s story (or Maryam’s respectively) in St. Luke’s Gospel and Surah 19 shows that the Qur’an largely follows the then mainstream Christianity of the Arabian Peninsula. The categorical condemnation of Western Christian theologians that the Qur’an is strongly orientated towards the Christian heresy of its time of origin does not bear close examination.³ Likewise, the story in Surah 19 is reminiscent of Leto’s story from the Hellenistic tradition (Mourad 1999, 2002). Just as Judaism and later also Christianity incorporates, transforms or rejects the late antique religions or traditions of their surroundings, so does the Islamic history of religion. With the emergence of the Qur’an, the prophet Muhammad and the early Islamic community, a new monotheistic movement develops, which, however, cannot hermetically break away from the pre-Islamic way of thinking, even less so on a theological or historical level. Since the well faceted Old Arabic, Hellenistic and Judeo-Christian religious thinking had a fundamental influence on the Islamic tradition, as emphasized by Angelika Neuwirth (for more detail see Neuwirth (2011)).

Thus, it is important to analyze the Qur’anic verses about prophets not only keeping in mind Islamic and Judeo-Christian traditions, but also Old Arabic stories or other myths. It is not the least that because of this Ignác Goldziher, in his important work *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung*, points out that, in Islamic tradition, due to the different challenging ways of reading for “compiling” the Qur’an, the first official edition of the Qur’an was only collected by Uthman (23–35/644–656), the third caliph of Islam. Among other things, this happened due to the fact that the verses of the Qur’an had not only been influenced by many Judeo-Christian stories but also from Old Arabic and Hellenistic stories. It is at this historical origin where great similarities among all three Abrahamic religious orientations can be found. None of them could be freed immediately and entirely from the influences of the religions which preceded them, and all of them, in their very own way, had to transform the stories known in their regions.

A mimetic approach of the Qur’an must, first and foremost, expound why such an approach might be important for the study of the Islamic tradition. Girard’s theory attempts to simultaneously follow two developments in the history of mankind: (1) religions and cultures that owe their origin to the scapegoat mechanism, as well as (2) religions and cultures that, due to their refusal of this very mechanism, congregate in the shadow of the first group. The emergence of a God (Gods) or religion as well as a culture intertwines in various ways within the mimetic theory. The starting point is the victim. Due to psycho-social-mimetic processes, myths present the victim as guilty, and thus justify his killing or abandonment. The Old and New Testament take up a new perspective, which is diametrically opposed to the mythic perspective. The victim did not commit the violations he is accused of (e.g., incest) but he was killed and sacralized by the people around him, based on illusionary mechanisms of accusation. According to Girard, this mechanism is uncovered in the topos of God’s suffering servant, inter alia, in the Old Testament or in the Passion of Christ in the New Testament.

At the same time, it needs to be stressed that, time and again, a sacrificial Christian tradition emphasizes that it is God who demands the crucifixion from his only begotten son. Thus, Jesus’ willingness to die on the cross is an explicit expression of his obedience to his father. Girard clearly disapproves of such an interpretation, since it is based on a human

perception of God, salvation, guilt and community. For example, both the Genesis and St. John's Gospel begin with the same theme, i.e., human beings who, at the beginning of time, are taken care of by God and have to leave his close 'vicinity' due to their disobedience. The Prologue in St. John's Gospel attends to this story; however, it views it from a different angle. Although men made themselves guilty in God's immediate proximity, He does not abandon them. As correctly stated by Michael Kirwan: "John's Prologue retells the event, but from God's point of view, as it were. It is not humans who were cast out from God's presence, but the other way round, the Logos was rejected by his own people."⁴ Girard also specifically emphasizes that Creation was geared to the good from the beginning and that psycho-social-mimetic processes want to label God as a God of sacrifices (Girard and Chantre 2010; Girard 1977, 2001, 2008, 2011). At the same time, the biblical texts try to free the community of their illusionary ideas of God, and thus, show that it is man and not God who demands sacrifices. Therefore, considering different surahs, it is necessary to ascertain which position the Qur'an takes in the debate about the scapegoat mechanism and the overcoming of it.

Angelika Neuwirth claims that the Qur'an is a work of its time and, above all, that it incorporates and reconstructs different discussions of late antiquity about God, salvation, community and many other topics. At the same time, biblical verses are also part of the late antiquity, and therefore, they also have to deal with the old and new perceptions of God as well as the discussions about sacrifice. In the Qur'anic context, it is important to ask which topics are being discussed by the various surahs and in which way they are either analogously or differently interpreted in view of preceding religions. Thus, the following essay follows Angelika Neuwirth's perspectives of research to "expose the oral preaching of the Qur'an, the interactions between speaker and listeners, their discussion of older traditions, which is somewhat hidden under the final form of the canonized scriptures of revelation [. . .]. Despite its experimental character, despite the many hypotheses, this radically new research approach—from the finished, canonical text to the yet to be reconstructed communicational process of Qur'anic preaching—might be the only practicable path to follow to reconstruct a significant view of the Qur'an, which was buried by tradition." (Neuwirth 2011, p. 20)

At the same time, this is a newly chosen perspective, since it goes beyond Angelika Neuwirth's approach by reverting to the mimetic theory of René Girard. Along with Neuwirth, Muslim and non-Muslim theologians have also investigated the Hellenistic, Jewish and Christian influences on the Qur'an. However, their research has not been about the scapegoat mechanism or the overcoming of it, but about which Hellenistic, Jewish or Christian stories could be found in the Qur'an (Reynolds 2008). In this essay, these important understandings of Muslim and non-Muslim scholars are not only adopted but are also read with a critical and fresh eye from a mimetic point of view.

3. The Surah Maryam

Engaging with Surah Maryam in the Qur'an is of significant importance in interfaith dialogue, as it encompasses narrative elements resonant within both Islamic and Christian traditions. The shared stories and figures, such as Mary, provide a foundational platform for building meaningful and respectful exchanges between these two religious communities. The articles referenced within this essay serve as a small selection, providing initial insights into the vast array of articles in the literature dedicated to studying this surah and its critical role in interfaith discussions. They offer a starting point for those wishing to delve deeper into the complexities and the richness of interfaith dialogue.

*Isa ibn Maryam*⁵ is an important prophet and messenger of the only true God. In this respect, the Qur'an leaves no doubt. Muhammad (d. 632), the last prophet of Islam, is a descendent of ibn Maryam and, of course, of those prophets and messengers of the One who was sent to the Israelites before him. There are 19 surahs of the Qur'an that talk about Jesus or refer to his work. Surahs from Meccan⁶ and Medinan times alike refer to ibn Maryam. More than 120 verses averred the significance and importance of his person as

well as his words and deeds. The stories about Isa play important roles during the entire work of over 22 years of the prophet Muhammad and are gradually revealed to the last prophet of Islam (Bauschke 2013).

Apart from Surah 112, Surah 19, which is known as ‘Maryam’, is one of the oldest surahs in the Koran and is not only about Isa but also about his mother Maryam. She too plays a significant role in the tradition of the Islamic faith. Her closeness to and faith in God are the preconditions why God sends the archangel Gabriel to her, bearing the message that she will carry and bear he who was chosen by God. Surah 19 is not only about Maryam but also of historic value. According to historians of the Islamic history, it was Surah 19, which convinced the Christian Abyssinian king, around 616, to provide shelter for those Muslims, who then had to leave Mecca due to different religious, political and economic conflicts. Thus, they were not abandoned to their Meccan-polytheistic enemies, which would have meant their sure death.⁷ In addition, this surah does not only want to focus on Maryam but also attempts to stress the *common bond* between Christianity and Islam (Nasr 2015)⁸. From a mimetic perspective, the passage below is of great importance. Therefore, it is quoted in full length and analyzed thereafter:

“[19.16] And remember Mary in the Book, when she withdrew from her family to an eastern place. [19.17] And she veiled herself from them. Then We sent unto her Our Spirit, and it assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man. [19.18] She said, “I seek refuge from thee in the Compassionate, if you are reverent!” [19.19] He said, “I am but a messenger of thy Lord, to bestow upon thee a pure boy”. [19.20] She said, “How shall I have a boy when no man has touched me, nor have I been unchaste?” [19.21] He said, “Thus shall it be. Thy Lord says, ‘It is easy for Me.’”

One particularity of mythical stories is to illustrate that some mythical gods were involved with violence, long before their work on earth (Grant 2004; Girard et al. 2007; Girard and Williams 1996). In addition, women play ambivalent roles in myths. They are both a curse and a blessing. Apart from this, there are countless mythical stories, such as Greek stories, in which Zeus uses force and blindness to seduce women to contribute to the creation of new gods or demigods (Grant 2004). It needs to be stressed that the mythical relationship between God, or a deity, and mortals, is supported by many violent entanglements. In addition, during the emergence of Islam, women and men were by no means treated as equals within the social tribal structures in Arabia (for details, see Hoyland 2003). As customary in those days, women were subject to patriarchal structures in many parts of the world. Thus, for a woman of those days, a pregnancy outside a valid and socially accepted marriage or partnership was by no means cause for happiness, but rather equaled a death sentence.

The above quoted Qur’anic passage explicitly reveals that Maryam’s pregnancy was God’s choice (Surah 19, 20). This not only increases her value as a person, but also emphasizes her closeness to God. The Gospel according to St. Luke (vol. 1, pp. 26–34) contains the same message, i.e., any entanglement with force or violence is a priori and unquestionably denied. This is a way to preclude mythical accusations. Amongst others, these events are also embedded in the Qur’anic stories of Sarah (Surah 11, 72).

“She said, “Oh, woe unto me! Shall I bear a child when I am an old woman, and this husband of mine is an old man? That would surely be an astounding thing.”

Sarah is not a virgin, but a married woman of advanced age and despite her advanced age, she and Ibrahim are prophesied children. Violence or mimetic rivalries are irrelevant in both stories. Rather, the events portray the agreement which is based on the mutual consent between Creator and creation. From a mimetic perspective, the Qur’anic passages about Maryam refuse or prevent mythical mechanisms of accusation. Therefore, unexpected or inconceivable events within a community are not identified as sources of evil or devilish intrigues, but as incidents which can happen in a human community through divine

inspiration. Ibrahim's (Abraham's) God does not convince his creation by blindness or seduction but strives for their consent.

The relationship between Maryam and God is connected with the relationships among Isa, Maryam and God. If Maryam's story combined mythical contents, these violent entanglements would also influence future successors. In addition, the beginnings between God and his creation are not characterized by violence but by agreement and compassion, as further analyzed below. Sarah and Maryam's stories show that chosenness is not based on reciprocal mechanisms of violence. The triangular relationship in the Surah Maryam is characterized by agreement or positive mimesis and not by mimetic rivalry. The structure of argumentation between Maryam and the messenger in the surah quoted above should equally be read from a mimetic point of view; not only does Maryam emphasize her innocence and relationship with God, but she also stresses the possibility that the messenger could seduce her into doing something she did not intend to do. Therefore, the Qur'an clearly expresses that all interactions between human beings, not only sexual ones, are not the result of a negative or positive initiative of a single individual but are the consequences of the interaction of many (Girard 1986; Bauschke 2013, p. 16, chp. 8).

Mythical as Well as Apocryphal Sources of the Surah Maryam: The Palm Tree Story

As already mentioned in the introduction, the Qur'an emerges from a surrounding where Hellenistic, Old Arabic, Jewish and Judeo-Christian religions are already well established. Thus, it is not surprising that the stories of "the people of the book" were not the only ones which went down in the Qur'an. At the same time, it must be emphasized that not only Mary's story from St. Luke's Gospel was adopted in the Qur'an but also stories from the Apocrypha, especially from the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew. Thus, once again, the analogies and differences of the adopted stories are an indication of the historic entanglements of Islam with the mainstream Christianity of those days and with those Christian groups not following the mainstream. The focus is not only on the Qur'anic adoption of Judeo-Christian stories, but also on their transformation in the Qur'an.

At this point, it is important to call to mind a Greek myth which, likely, was known in the pre-Islamic-Arabic world and which is interpreted in a fundamentally new way in the Qur'an. It is the story of Leto, Apollo's mother. However, first, Surah 19, 22–26 will be quoted, and then the mythical and Qur'anic sources will be compared with each other.

"So she conceived him and withdrew with him to a place far off. [19.23] And the pangs of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a date palm. She said, "Would that I had died before this and was a thing forgotten, utterly forgotten!" [19.24] So he called out to her from below her, "Grieve not! Thy Lord has placed a rivulet beneath thee. [19.25] And shake toward thyself the trunk of the date palm; fresh, ripe dates shall fall upon thee. [19.26] So eat and drink and cool thine eye. And if thou seest any human being, say, 'Verily I have vowed a fast unto the Compassionate, so I shall not speak this day to any man.'" [19.27] "Then she came with him unto her people, carrying him. They said, "O Mary! Thou hast brought an amazing thing. [19.28] (O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not an evil man, nor was thy mother unchaste.") 19.29] Then she pointed to him. They said, "How shall we speak to one who is yet a child in the cradle?"

Now let us turn to Leto's story⁹. Apollo's mother Leto, one of Zeus's mistresses, is well advanced in pregnancy and flees from Hera, Zeus's spouse. According to the myth, Leto was allowed to give birth to her children in a place that sunlight would not reach. All over Greece she is desperately looking for a place for the approaching birth. Her opponent forbids all gods, mountains, valleys, islands and so forth, to offer Leto accommodation. She engages the dragon Python to prevent the birth. At the same time, Zeus intervenes in favor of his mistress and can win over some gods to support Leto. However, some gods, such as Asteria, are afraid that the new god Apollo might use violence against them. Eileithyia, the goddess of childbirth, also has to be persuaded to hasten to Leto so that the birth can take place. Eileithyia is detained by Hera and can only be convinced to stand by the pregnant

woman with the persuasion of other goddesses and a golden necklace. Arriving on the island Delos, Eileithyia finds Leto in labor pains, leaning on Mount Kynthos. She is holding on to a palm, and since the goddess of childbirth has arrived on the island, labor starts immediately and, before long, Apollo is born. The newborn is acclaimed by the goddesses, bathed and fed with nectar and ambrosia (food of the gods). Immediately after his first meal, the infant starts talking.

4. Conclusions: Added Value of the Mimetic Theory for the Interpretation of Surah 19

Applying René Girard's mimetic theory to the Qur'an, specifically Surah Maryam (19), reveals the presence of mimetic violence, even though the scapegoat mechanism is not explicit. Surah Maryam, deeply rooted in traditions such as Old Arabic, Hellenistic, and Judeo-Christian traditions, illustrates the early Islamic community's negotiation with surrounding religious influences. It reminds us that the Qur'an, while divine, emerged from a milieu enriched by pre-existing religious narratives. Girard's theory highlights the human tendency for mimetic violence, often leading to societal crises that communities try to resolve through scapegoating. In the Qur'an, explicit scapegoating may be absent, but the texts reflect a clear intent to counter mimetic violence. The surahs do not outright reject various traditions but engage and reinterpret them based on evolving Islamic teachings. Beyond simply inheriting narratives from other religions, the Qur'an reimagines them, drawing from pre-Islamic richness while introducing unique monotheistic perspectives. This approach blends Girard's mimetic theory and Angelika Neuwirth's research, providing a fresh, nuanced interpretation of the Qur'an. This examination of the Qur'an through Girard's lens reveals a tapestry of interfaith dialogues and helps to unearth the Qur'an's response to mimetic violence. This study's importance lies in its potential for further exploration and its foundational role in interfaith dialogues.

As already mentioned above, Surah 19 and its non-Islamic history has often been in the center of various analyses (Mourad 2002; Reynolds 2008). The various analyses only rarely, if at all, went into the fact that in Leto's story, time and again, various gods had to be bribed (necklace) or appeased to even consider being allies to the pregnant woman. In addition, the gods are quite afraid that, after his birth, the new god could use violence against them. The gods are also afraid of Hera's power, and they do not want their actions to endanger the existing order.

Although the Qur'anic story of Maryam is also about violence, this violence could not possibly come from God. Maryam's retreat to a remote place (verse 22) is a subtle allusion to the fact that her community would not have accepted the divinely ordered pregnancy and birth. This is confirmed in the text when Maryam laments her hopeless situation (verse 23). Verse 28 is about a meeting between Maryam and some members of her community, or people who know her, and their attempt to convict Maryam of unchastity. This is why her infant recommends her to avoid questions from prying people (verse 24). To put it mildly, this situation partly reminds one of the story of the adulteress in John's Gospel. The Nazarene also does not directly answer the questions of the mob, instead, he tries to stop the people around him from their intentions of condemning or stoning the adulteress by being directly in contact with them. With each direct answer, Maryam risks incensing the members of her community, who seem to not only want to subtly declare Maryam tainted, but her entire genealogy, which is indicated by explicitly mentioning Maryam's ancestry (verses 27–28). The fact that the Qur'anic text clearly points out that mankind will recognize Maryam's descendant as an act of God's compassion, must be read as a pacifying means of divine inspiration of calming the mob (verse 21).

The fact that Leto and Maryam withdraw to a place to secure the protection of their newborns is an important indication of the significance of a legitimate bond that protects both women and their infants from their certain death. However, it is important to understand that, in Leto's case, it is through cunning, violence and deception that the mother and her offspring escape violence. This means that both protagonists, Leto and Apollo, remain attached to violence. It is quite different in the Qur'anic narrative. In the case of

Maryam, there are members of her community who want to subtly accuse her of unchastity. However, this attempt is condemned by the infant itself. In the Qur'anic story of Maryam, there is neither deception nor does God try to convince Maryam by resorting to a ruse.

Irrespective of how various scientists propose to categorize the early beginnings of Islam, as emphasized by Angelika Neuwirth, the above-analyzed surahs clearly show that the Qur'an knew the late antique religious myths and stories at the time of its origin and presents them from its own perspective (Neuwirth 2011, pp. 21–22). From a mimetic perspective, the above shows that the new and early Islamic community, which is on the verge of formation, seeks to read the religious stories which are structuring its environment in view of a non-violent relationship between the Creator and creation, and thus, tries to distance itself from a sacrificial understanding of God.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: I exclude this statement because the study did not report any data.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ According to Heinrich Speyer there are more than 70 verses in the New Testament, 40 verses of the Gospels, nine Pauline and other biblical verses, which prove their influence.
- ² A more detailed discussion would go beyond the scope of this essay. Thus, for more detail see: *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike* by Angelika Neuwirth.
- ³ Compare Luke 1, pp. 26–28 and Surah 19, p. 17, Luke 1, p. 29 and Surah 18, p. 18, Luke 1, pp. 30–31 and Surah 19, p. 20.
- ⁴ Kirwan, Michael, Submission and Kenosis: Christ, Abraham, and Mimetic Theory, unpublished manuscript.
- ⁵ Isa ibn Maryam means: Mary's son, a common term for Jesus in Arabic and Muslim countries. In this essay Jesus will be referred to as Isa, Isa ibn Maryam, or ibn Maryam, in order to prevent a mixing or misinterpretation with Messiah, prophecy or chosenness, which Christianity and the Islam understand in a completely different way. Also, Maryam is used to refer to Mary. The Meccan Surahs which are dealing with ibn Maryam and Maryam are: 112,3f; 19,16–37. 88–93; 43,57–65.81–83; 23,50; 21,25–29.91(92f); 17,111; 42;13; 10,68; 6,85. The Medinan Surahs which are dealing with Isa and his mother are: 2,87. 116f. 136. 253; 3,36. 39.42–64. (79?). 84; 61,6.14; 57,27; 4,156–59.163. 171ff.; 48,29; 66,12; 9,30–32; 5,17. 46f. 72–79. 109–20.
- ⁶ The Meccan Surahs are divided according to three times of origin: the early, middle, and late Meccan period.
- ⁷ Concerning the exodus of the Muslims from Mecca, Angelika Neuwirth mentions: "As far as some developmental phases of the Qur'anic exegesis are concerned, as for example the *hidjra*, the forced exodus of the prophet from Mecca to Medina in 622, the construction of the primal scene has long been unmasked as untenable." Neuwirth (2011, p. 38).
- ⁸ All translations are based on Seyyed Hossein Nasr.
- ⁹ There are various records of Leto's and Apollo's story. Here, only the version which can be found in the Qur'an and the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew is repeated. For a Hellenistic narration see Grant (2004).

References

- Bauschke, Martin. 2013. *Der Sohn Marias. Jesus im Koran*. Darmstadt: Lambert Schneider.
- Girard, René. 1977. *Violence and the Sacred*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Girard, René. 1986. *The Scapegoat*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Girard, René. 2001. *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Girard, René. 2008. *Das Ende der Gewalt. Analysen des Menschheitsverhängnisses; Erkundungen zu Mimesis und Gewalt mit Jean-Michel Oughourlian und Guy Lefort*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder.
- Girard, René. 2011. *Sacrifice*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.
- Girard, René, and Benoît Chantre. 2010. *Battling to the End. Conversations with Benoît Chantre/René Girard*. Translated by Mary Baker. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.
- Girard, René, and James G. Williams. 1996. *The Girard Reader*. New York: Crossroad.
- Girard, René, João Cezar de Castro Rocha, and Pierpaolo Antonello. 2007. *Evolution and Conversion. Dialogues on the Origins of Culture*. London: Continuum.
- Gnilka, Joachim. 2007. *Die Nazarener und der Koran. Eine Spurensuche*. Freiburg i. Br: Herder.
- Grant, Michael. 2004. *Mythen der Griechen und Römer*. Köln: Parkland-Verl.

- Hoyland, Robert G. 2003. *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam*. London: Routledge.
- Lawson, Todd. 2009. *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an. A Study in the History of Muslim Thought*. Oxford: Oneworld.
- Mourad, Suleiman A. 1999. On the Qur'anic stories about Mary and Jesus. *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 1: 13–24.
- Mourad, Suleiman A. 2002. From Hellenism to Christianity and Islam: The Origin of the Palm tree Story concerning Mary and Jesus in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the Qur'an. *Oriens Christianus* 86: 206–16.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. 2015. *The Study Quran. A New Translation and Commentary*. New York: HarperOne Publishers.
- Neuwirth, Angelika. 2011. *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike. Ein europäischer Zugang*. Berlin: Verl. der Weltreligionen.
- Palaver, Wolfgang. 2003. *René Girards mimetische Theorie. Im Kontext kulturtheoretischer und gesellschaftspolitischer Fragen*. Münster: Lit.
- Reynolds, Gabriel S., ed. 2008. *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*. London: Routledge.
- Speyer, Heinrich. 1988. *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*. Hildesheim: Olms.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.