

# Cambridge Elements

Elements in Religion and Violence

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## TRANSFORMING THE SACRED INTO SAINTLINESS

*Reflecting on Violence and Religion with René  
Girard*

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# Transforming the Sacred into Saintliness

Reflecting on Violence and Religion with René  
Girard

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**ABSTRACT:** Studies into religion and violence often put religion first. René Girard started with violence in his book *Violence and the Sacred* and used the Durkheimian term “sacred” as its correlate in his study of early religions. During the unfolding of his theory, he more and more distinguished the sacred from saintliness to address the break that the biblical revelation represented in comparison with early religions. This distinction between the sacred and saintliness resembles Henri Bergson’s complementing Emile Durkheim’s identification of the sacred and society with a dynamic religion that relies on individual mystics. Girard’s distinction also relates to the insights of thinkers like Jacques Maritain, Simone Weil, and Emmanuel Levinas. This Element explores some of Girard’s main features of saintliness. Girard pleaded for the transformation of the sacred into holy, not their separation.

**KEYWORDS:** Girard; religion; sacred; saintliness; violence

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## Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Why Violence Precedes Religion and Not the Other Way Around	3
3	Violence and the Sacred	23
4	The Biblical Difference	30
5	From the Sacred to Saintliness in France	39
6	Dimensions of Saintliness	54
	References	70
	Acknowledgments	88