

**Colloquium on Violence and Religion, University of Notre Dame
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‘The end of representation: The figure of the *homo sacer* in Giorgio Agamben and its affinity with the work of René Girard’

Abstract

Though the work of René Girard has brought a special significance to the study of the interrelations between sacrifice and sacrality in our contemporary world, it has yet to be fully reckoned with the work of Italian theorist Giorgio Agamben and his project on the *Homo Sacer*. For Agamben, the *homo sacer*, as the ‘sacred man’, is that figure of the ancient Roman world which has the most relevance for understanding our contemporary state of biopolitics. This figure is the opposite image of the sacred-sovereign power which claims political authority and legitimacy precisely through its exclusion of the *homo sacer*, thus constituting the realm of the political as a whole. Agamben’s work, for its part, foresees how a re-envisioning of the figure of the *homo sacer* can actually lead to the end of political and cultural representations in general, a sign of the ‘coming community’ as he terms it. In this sense, his work contains the seeds for portraying the marginalized figures of society as those persons who must *not* become central to communal self-identity, but rather as those who should maintain a privileged position as that figure most capable of ending the violence of political representations as a whole. In this paper, I hope to demonstrate how Agamben’s formulations of sacrifice and the *homo sacer* maintain an interesting, and often critical, alignment with Girard’s work, yet with an increased focus being placed upon the political implications. It is perhaps also, and here lodging a possible critique of Agamben, to contrast the role of sacrifice in the realm of the political with that of sacrifice in the religious, something which Girard’s nuanced stance taken in relation to sacrifice throughout his career might help further elaborate.

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