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Harrison Chapman
Sacrifice and Terrorism: Symbolic Connections

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I. Introduction

On November 25, 1975, thirty-four year old Francis Crossan walked out of the Holy Cross Bowling Club in Belfast. He had enjoyed an evening of drinking with friends, and as it was shortly past midnight transportation was scarce. Rather than waiting for a taxi, he headed towards the City Centre. Crossan knew these roads well, as his family had lived near this area before conditions forced them elsewhere. While walking, a taxi drove past Crossan and stopped. Three men stepped from the taxi, and without warning, one of the men hit Crossan across the head with a lug wrench. Two other men dragged Crossan’s body into the taxi. Inside the taxi, the men continued to beat Crossan with their fists and the lug wrench. As the beating continued, Crossan was unable to defend himself and by the time the taxi arrived at its destination, the taxi was covered in Crossan’s blood.

Francis Crossan’s mutilated body was found in an alley the next day. Still connected in the back, his head had been hacked by a butcher knife and laid almost at a ninety degree angle from the body. Police confirmed his death was ultimately caused by hemorrhaging from the neck wound.

The group committing these horrendous acts of violence surfaced as the Shankill Butchers, who were a subgroup of the Ulster Volunteer Force, outspoken anti-Catholic Protestants. Lenny Murphy, who severed Crossan’s head, was the leader of the Butchers. Why Crossan falls victim to the Butchers, killers of at least 23 people, ultimately boils down to unfortunate circumstance, chance, and religious differences. The killing of Crossan was not personal; political-religious reasoning led Murphy to attack Crossan. Murphy attempted to strike fear into the Catholic Community in Northern Ireland.

Although, religion, society, and politics are so closely intertwined that an analysis of one invariably relates to the others, this paper aims, as much as possible, to strip away the social and political elements, and examine religious violence in isolation. The foundation of religious violence is sacrifice, a form of ritual violence embedded in a system of symbolism. Although historical sacrifice is not directly responsible for modern terrorism, a significant and undeniable correlation between the two acts exists.
Both the violence of sacrifice and terrorism serve a system of intelligible symbolisms. By its very nature, religion cannot help but be symbolic and, as a social phenomenon, theatrical. Because violence is not ordinarily a part of regular social organization, the justifications for religious violence must somehow exceed moral consideration, or at least suspend ordinary morality for the individual. This paper’s thesis is that religious violence, as symbolic expression through the theatrical, is justifiable only through a Kierkegaardian ethical interpretation. The paper analyzes religious violence through sacrifice, terrorism, symbolism, theatre, and teleological suspension of the ethical, from which a conclusion follows. These sections on sacrifice and terrorism also include case studies. Through this analysis, I will develop the connections between the violence of religious sacrifice and terrorism.

II. Literature Review

A. Hubert and Mauss on Sacrifice

Sacrifice is intimately tied to religion. Today, multiple religions continue to practice some form of it, even if what is offered is understood in a more figurative way than at its origins. The Christian Eucharist exemplifies this modern practice; with the blessing of the priest, the unleavened bread and wine are consecrated and “transformed” into the body and blood of Christ. The transubstantiation highlights not only a form of sacrifice, but cannibalism as well. While not all denominations of Christianity practice this, the cannibalism is completely symbolic. Though not literally eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ, if the transubstantiation truly changes the bread and wine, then the followers believe that it represents Christ. So when they receive the bread and wine, they are symbolically receiving Christ. Christ again sacrifices himself.

Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss define sacrifice as “a religious act, which, through the consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it or that of certain objects with which he is concerned.” They further distinguish between personal and objective sacrifice. In personal sacrifice, “the personality of the sacrificer is directly affected by the sacrifice.” In objective sacrifice “objects, real or ideal, receive directly the sacrificial action” (Hubert and Mauss 13). In other words, Hubert and Mauss claim that the identity of either the person
offering the sacrifice or of the presumed recipient of the sacrifice are changed through the religious action.

**B. Geertz and Religious Symbolism**

Religion, in itself, is symbolic. The deities do not appear, revealing the absolute “truth”; religion requires of its followers a leap of faith. Human understanding limits what we can know. Even if the adherents of religion divinely receive information, “truth” requires faith. There is no sufficient way to ground religious knowledge outside of faith. We believe because we put our hope, our self in it. Due to this limitation, religion is symbolic. If I believe in a religious doctrine, I recognize its symbolism as truth.

Clifford Geertz writes on the impact society and culture has on an action’s meaning. After discussing the different interpretations of a wink, Geertz remarks on it as, “a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures in terms of which twitches, winks, fake-winks, parodies, rehearsals of parodies are produced, perceived, and interpreted, and without which they would not in fact exist, no matter what anyone did or didn’t do with his eyelids” (313).

Though he uses winking as an example, he intends to supply us an understanding of how social communication is made in general. Since religion is communally and socially based, his analysis of winking applies to the religious context as a way to understand these symbolisms. We communicate symbolisms in very special ways, which Geertz analyzes as, “(1) deliberately, (2) to someone in particular, (3) to impart a particular message, (4) according to a socially established code, and (5) without cognizance of the rest of the company” (Geertz 312). His five aspects emphasize what religion intends to provide in its symbolic messages. Religious symbolisms deliberately express, to a particular person or group, a certain message, in support of a religious code, and are not aiming to communicate to outsiders. Ultimately, Geertz is telling us the significance of the religious symbolism rest in the interpretation of those who intend to get the message.

Geertz further remarks, “Culture is public because meaning is” (Geertz 315). Since religion is a cultural function, his remark applies to the religious experience; in other words, religion is public because its meaning is. Finally, Geertz claims that the aim of analyzing anything “makes available to us answers that others have given, and thus to include them in the
consultable record of what man has said” (Geertz 323). Religious symbolisms are answers given by others. We attempt to analyze them, so that we may relate or understand the specific message. Thus, we can understand religious violence as symbolic, because it conveys additional meaning.

C. Juergensmeyer on Terrorism as Dramatic Performances

Typically, we limit our thoughts on terrorism by only acknowledging the person or groups who express their beliefs through terror. Often neglected are the witnesses. Juergensmeyer claims, “The definition of a terrorist act is provided by us, the witness - the ones terrified- and not by the party committing the act.” (5). For terrorism to be fully effective, the act requires both the perpetrators and the witnesses to view it as such. The religious perpetrators that commit these acts intend to cause terror and fear but this is only accomplished if the witnesses act accordingly. Yet, Seung-Hui Cho, the shooter of the Virginia Tech Massacre, also caused fear on the campus; so what distinguishes Cho from a group like the Butchers? While Cho causes terror, there is no religious connotation in his act (Hausser and O’Connor). Murphy killed to protect his Protestant faith in Ireland at the time. Thus, what separates religious terrorism from any other form of terror is exactly the religious message it sends. For religious terrorism the emotion of terror is secondary or only using to press for meaning. The terror and fear are significant in the action but the primary meaning must remain religious or the action only causes terror, as in the case of Cho.

Though I emphasize the religious significance in terror, terrorism remains prominent because of its effects on victims and their society. Terrorism does not succeed from the number of casualties it generates, but from the psychological turmoil it produces for a society. Once the initial attack ends, the resulting fear comes not from the terrorist organization, but from “hysterical rhetoric from political leaders, alarmist, and the breathless coverage from journalists” (Munson 78). The result of the hysterical rhetoric incites terrorists to continue with their violence. Though we typically perceive the terrorist as deranged or mentally unstable, terrorism results as an action from a more purposeful ideology. Munson explains that terrorism starts “because the terrorists believe it will help them gain recognition, highlight issues they perceive as being ignored, force concessions from existing power holders, or solidify the allegiance of supporters. It is often a publicly declared campaign opposing the status quo” (78). While the victims view them as murderers, terrorists view themselves as
revolutionaries, protecting their rights and religion.

Religious sacrifice and terrorism connect through the concept of drama. Religion, itself, is not inherently theatrical. When God demanded that Abraham sacrifice Isaac, the command was not theatrical. The theatrics surface only as Abraham lived through the actions. God watches him and we watch Abraham through the story. It becomes theatrical as the audience watches. In the Aztec creation story, the gods created the sun and moon, because they no longer wanted to remain in darkness. However, no human witnessed this event. The Aztecan gods did not do this as a performance to show man their omnipotence. They only created out of self-interest; they were their own audience. The Aztecs, believing that the gods created the moon and sun, constructed their own religion from which they drew symbolic meaning in life. Thus, to explain man’s existence, we superimpose symbolism in nature, through the divine.

In an interview, Mahmud Abouhalima (who was part of a group of Muslims, living in the outskirts of Queens, New York, who followed Sheik Omar Abdul Rahman [62]) tells Juergensmeyer that the attacks of public buildings had a “long-range strategic value” (123). Understandably, Juergensmeyer hesitates committing entirely to violence as extensively “strategic.” However, he indicates that “acts of terrorism are usually the products of an internal logic and not of random or crazy thinking” (Juergensmeyer 123). This “internal logic” is suggestive and important. The internal logic of a religious group affirms their aggression as justified by a strategic religious conviction. Through this internal logic, the religious group creates a pseudo strategy. Juergensmeyer explains that “Strategy implies a degree of calculation and an expectation of accomplishing a clear objective that does not jibe with such dramatic displays of power” (123). Religious violence does not imply a precise strategy, as some of the perpetrators intend; there is no clear, concise strategy to the violence. Symbolism is an authentic intention in religious violence. Juergensmeyer suggests, “Such explosive scenarios are not tactics directed toward an immediate, earthly, or strategic goal, but dramatic events intended to impress for their symbolic significance. As such, they can be analyzed as one would any other symbol, ritual, or sacred drama” (123). Each action contains a meaning that goes beyond mere extra-realities.

Since Juergensmeyer asserts strategy in religious violence, he explains analogously that these assaults are a model of performance violence. This is not a claim to be taken lightly, instead, what he alludes
by this is “like religious ritual or street theater, they are dramas designed
to have an impact on the several audiences that they affect. The symbolic
significance of such events is multifaceted; they mean different things to
different observers” (124). Juergensmeyer differentiates between two parts
of the performance: performance events and performative acts. Perfor-
mance events intend to make a symbolic statement; performative acts aim
to change the nature of things.

Additionally, the assailants designate a certain audience and a
certain setting for the attack. Any form of religious violence promotes or
legitimizes an underlining ideology. But as Juergensmeyer notes, “whether
the power and legitimacy implicit in acts of terrorism are like play-acted
marriage vows or are the real thing depends in part on how the acts are
perceived, on whether their significance is believed” (125). Thus, perfor-
mative acts accomplish their function only if given creditability through
their social context and impact, as Geertz notes generally on interpreting
symbolisms. The transformation of an object in sacrifice is not authenti-
cated, unless the witnesses of the sacrifice believe it; terrorism requires the
same type of authentication. Though the religious practitioners of violence
intend a certain meaning in the action, the audience may not view it as
such. The symbolic meaning of religious violence is acknowledged accu-
rately only if the audience perceives the correct meaning.

III. Methodology

Before analyzing the results, the methodology deserves a brief
discussion of why each case study was chosen and studied. The binding
of Isaac and the Aztec sacrifices were selected because they emphasize
well-known cases of human sacrifices. Initially, the Shankill Butchers and
Aum have similarities in case studies relating to Jurgensmeyer’s research.
But more importantly, I choose the Shankill Butchers as an extreme case
that tie closely with politics. If they are to be tied to religious violence
(and not just politics), there must be something sacrificed. The Butchers
morality is sacrificed during their killings, and thus, connects them with
sacrifice through the Kierkegaardian suspension of the ethical, which will
be discussed in the following section. Aum Shinrikyō also has the same
dilemma and was chosen to highlight this symbolic connection. I also aim
to include analysis of both Western and non-Western cases. The analysis
of the Akedah relies solely upon Biblical accounts in a Kierkegaardian
interpretation. The results are four case studies; each one concluding with
my synthetic reflections from the previous symbolism and theater sections.

IV. Religious Violence Case Studies

A. The Akedah

The Akedah is one of the most profound stories of human sacrifice in Western religion. After years of empty promises, God finally rewards Abraham with a son, Isaac, by his wife Sarah. Then, God commands Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac. Accompanied by two servants and Isaac, Abraham departs for Mountain Moriah, as God demands. Unable to disclose the truth, Abraham easily lies to Isaac. Isaac asks, “Where is the ram for the burnt offering” and Abraham replies, “God will see to the ram for the burnt offering” (NSRV Gn. 22 7-8). Before ascending Mt. Moriah, Abraham tells his two servants to wait for them. Atop the mountain, Abraham binds Isaac for the burnt offering. Before killing his son, an angel appears, and rewards Abraham for his faith. A ram replaces Isaac and Abraham receives his son again. However, Abraham knows full well what nearly took place. He fully prepares to sacrifice his most precious possession, not only his son, but also the descendants that he had long been promised.

B. The Aztecs

Although many religions have practiced human sacrifice, no culture or religion has performed such extensive sacrifices with such intensity as the Mesoamerican Aztecs. We know about Aztec sacrifices from both archeological record and from Spanish accounts of the early 1500s. Depending on the festival or time of the year, the Aztecs performed different sacrifices to give homage to their gods. Children are used as offerings to the rain god, Tlaloc (Anawalt 44). If the children cry heavily during the sacrifice, then the Aztecs believe this was a sign of a plentiful season of rain.

One of the most prominent sacrifices was the offering to the Aztec sun god. With all the inhabitants attending the spectacle, the offering climbed the steps of the temple. Reaching the pinnacle of the temple, he saw five priests patiently waiting for him. Four of the priests grabbed the man, and threw him down on the sacrificial stone. With the victim’s extremities bound by the four priests, the fifth priest, with a flint knife in hand, would cut open the chest of the still conscious offering (Carrasco, 109). Then, the priest violently pulled out the beating heart of the victim,
and held it towards the sun as an offering to the sun god. After the offering, the priest placed the heart into a bowl, called *cuauhxicalli*. Different accounts explain what became of the victim’s body. At times, the Aztecs threw the body down the temple stairs. They sometimes decapitated the victim and displayed the head in public. More disturbing though is the cannibalistic practices that took place after the sacrifice. The Aztecs divided the remains of the victim; the Emperor received a thigh. The rest of the body was then given to the original family or captor who offered the victim. Then, the blood relatives partook in a ritual feast. The main course of the meal was a stew “made of dried maize and beans, to which strips of human flesh were added,” called *Tlacatolli* (Carrasco 190).

The Aztec sacrifices generally reenact their cosmic creation stories. As Michel Graulich states,

> Reenacting the founding myths implied the ritual killing of victims impersonating dema and other deities whose death in primeval times had made the earth, the sun, the stars, the maize and other useful plants appear. Helping the universe to function sometimes called for sacrifice in which deities were rejuvenated or revitalized through their own death (via impersonators) or through oblations of human blood (354).

The Aztecs perform their sacrifices in the name of their gods. Their sacrifices are multifaceted, and convey an array of meanings. This ranges from revitalizing gods, to placating deities to abstain from an action, to consecrating certain places, to “expiating transgressions or sins to win a glorious or happy afterlife” (Graulich 354).

Returning to Hubert and Mauss, the *Akedah* is an example of personal sacrifice because Abraham is changed -- not God. Abraham was forever changed when he fully prepared himself to kill Isaac. Among the Aztecs, the sacrifice to the sun god is also a personal sacrifice because the offering alleviated the sins of the sacrificer, changing their personality. However, this sacrifice bears a closer resemblance to an objective sacrifice because the primary function of holding the heart towards the sun was to rejuvenate the god. Thus while we may distinguish between personal and objective sacrifice as different, Hubert and Mauss’ types of sacrifice may overlap in one sacrifice, functioning in two ways.

C. The Shankill Butchers

The Shankill Butchers, already mentioned, formed out of the political distress intimately linked to a religious struggle. The violence in Northern Ireland stems from the political divide that roughly maps onto
the identity of two religious sects. The Catholic denominations are considered the original inhabitants of Northern Ireland, dating back to the late twelfth century. The Protestant community emerged around the seventeenth century when,

English monarchs, frustrated by generations of Irish resistance, decided to build a loyal (to the Crown) community in Ireland which, it was thought, would facilitate control of the native population. Thus, Protestants from Britain entered a cauldron which seethes to this day a united Ireland, as a threat not only to their group identity but also to their physical survival (Butler 49).

Established in 1966, the Ulster Volunteer Force primarily consists of Protestants and is a Loyalist “terrorist” group. The Provisional Republican Army opposes the UVF. *Combat*, a UVF magazine, licenses younger members to use any measures necessary to fight the Catholic Republicans. In one issue, the magazine claims that the group was forced into war, and the members must take arms. But more importantly, it states, “There are no humane methods of warfare, there is no such thing as civilized warfare; all warfare is inhuman, all warfare is barbaric; the first blast of the bugles of war sounds for the time being the funeral knell of human progress” (Dillon 39). This battle cry gives the authority for a person like Lenny Murphy to be “barbarically religious.” Murphy interpreted the magazine’s claim as a validation for his sadistic crimes. If all warfare is inhuman, then his butcherings were justified as valid forms of killing in the name of the UVF.

With Murphy working diligently to place himself in leadership, his dedication, not only to the cause, but to violence in particular did not go unnoticed. A few higher ranking UVF members expressed concern about Murphy’s sadism; however, they were silent out of fear of what might happen to them. Seeing how eager Murphy was to kill, UVF member, Long Kesh, outlined what an enemy constituted. He stated that UVF does not “wish to wage war on anyone except armed Republicans determined to overthrow Ulster in order to force us into an Irish Republic” (Dillon 53). Unlike Kesh, Murphy thought that any Catholic deserved to die; they all opposed the UVF’s causes. Kesh realized the power the UVF’s magazine gave to a person like Murphy and challenged the sadistic killings in his statement. However, he was unsuccessful and could not stop the eager Murphy from his violent crimes.

When finally forming the Shankill Butchers, Murphy kept that knowledge from the UVF at large. In order to avoid attention, the group
agreed not to carry firearms. Instead, they used knives, particularly butcher knives to kill their victims. Because one of the Butchers worked at a meat plant, they would claim he accidentally brought the knife with him if they were stopped. The Butchers drove a taxi cab, so that if the police pulled the car over, Murphy could claim he was merely transporting his customers. Murphy was careful in his planning, making sure that they were never on the streets more than 10 minutes in the taxi, so as not to get caught. As Dillon notes, Murphy chose his route for many reasons, but “more importantly, any person in the vicinity of the lower Antrim Road and Clifton Street was likely to be a Catholic” (55). The person chosen for the brutal event did not matter; as long as the person was a Catholic, they were an acceptable substitute for the actual members of the IRA. With everything in place, Murphy and his Butchers launched their barbaric violence.

D. Aum Shinrikyō

On March 20, 1995, five men boarded different trains in the Tokyo subway system. These five men had carried with them bags of liquid sarin. While on the trains, they dropped the bag of poison on the floor and each poked holes in the bags with an umbrella whose point had been sharpened. Before the sarin vaporized into a gaseous state, the five men exited the trains, and escaped. The five trains, where the sarin gas was released, arrived at approximately the same time at the Kasumigaseki station, which was “the nerve-centre serving numerous government offices including the National Police Agencies Headquarters” (Reader, Religious Violence 214-215). According to the reports, twelve people were confirmed dead, and the effects of the poison severely injured thousands of others.

Aum Shinrikyō, who was part of the “New New Religions that have emerged since the 1970s,” was assigned responsibility for this terrorist attack (Metraux 1140). Matsumoto Chizuo, the founder of a religious order named for Aum Shinrikyō was born in Kumamoto in the southern island of Kyūshū in 1955. Chizuo moved to Tokyo in 1977. During his time there, Chizuo’s interest in spirituality grew, particularly in herbal medicine and new new religions (Reader, A Poisonous Cocktail? 19-20). His new admiration for the contemporary religious movements provides the motivation and knowledge for Chizuo to establish his own religion. Through Matsumoto’s charismatic nature, he drew to this religion young Japanese men and women, who were looking for an alternative to hard scientific materialism. Many young adults at the time in Japan were waiting for a
leader to present an alternative to hard, scientific materialism. Matsumo-
to, already intensely devoted to religious knowledge, saw an opportunity.
Matsumoto give the young adults a new metaphysical and epistemological
approach to life, to nature, to the human experience.

Matsumoto Chizuo changed his name to Asahara Shōkō in 1987
(Reader, *A Poisonous Cocktail?* 19). He formed Aum Shinrikyō out of
a mixture of pre-existing religious doctrines. “The name is a mixture of
Indian and Japanese themes: Aum comes from the Sanskrit and refers to
the powers of destruction and creation in the universe, while the Japanese
Shinrikyō means ‘teaching of supreme truth’” (Reader, *A Poisonous Cock-
tail?* 15). Aum emphasizes both Hindu and esoteric Buddhist practices and
cosmology. Additionally, Aum requires of its adherents renunciation from
the modern world. Additionally, The *Christian Revelations of St. John*
influences Asahara’s interest in millennialism. He proclaims the immedia-
cy of an Armageddon and an apocalyptic world. Asahara claims that he is
the savior, foretold by Nostradamus, and “identifies himself as the Christ,
who has come to save the world or, as he also at times prophesizes, to be
sacrificed in order that the world might be saved” (Reader, *A Poisonous
Cocktail?* 18).

In 1989 the Tokyo Metropolitan Government officially announced
Aum Shinrikyō as a religious corporation. As an act of renunciation of the
modern world, Aum’s followers live as a commune. However, Asahara’s
commune has a very intricate and organized hierarchy and resembles a
form of self-government. Yamaori Tetsuo “divides members of Aum into
three tiers. ‘At the top are the leaders- Asahara’s closest advisors and
friends; next come the upper-level authorities, who are extremely knowl-
dgeable about science and highly skilled in the use of advanced technol-
gy and information equipment; below them are the true believers who
have taken the tonsure and abandoned normal life to seek salvation in their
master” (Metraux 1147-1148). Without acquiring the upper-level intellec-
tuals, Asahara would lack the capabilities to produce his mass violence.
These scientist and engineers create the necessary weapons for Aum,
particularly the sarin produced and released on the Tokyo subway.

In the spring of 1993, Aum campaigns to acquire vast amounts of
weapons, and technologies. In 1994, Asahara’s preaching focused entirely
on apocalyptic themes, millennialism and the inevitable war. Using Chris-
tian symbolism, he claims Aum followers are “slaughtered lambs,” used
to signify sacrifice, and persecution. Asahara proclaims “spiritual value
in killing for salvation” (Reader, *Religious Violence* 196). He made it the duty, the right of every disciple of Aum to carry out the cosmic war. Aum declares destruction to their opposition in the name of “vengeance to the concomitant theme of karmic retribution” (Reader, *Religious Violence* 196). In March 1994, Asahara told his disciples that Shiva, herself, came down and spoke to him. She informs the time for war is now and Asahara is the only one “who could purify this polluted world.” Having this divine command, Asahara tells his disciples the need for sacred war, and to “poa” the forces of evil. The disciples practice many rituals and chants to prepare for the final war. The Varajyãna Ketsui chant prepares “the practitioner to ascend to higher spiritual realms, pledged commitment to ‘poa’ the forces of evil, that Armageddon, as prophesized in the Bible, was close at hand, and the practitioner would without fail join the sacred army” (Reader, *Religious Violence* 200). Other religions and government officials then began scrutinizing Aum. Asahara and his followers felt pressure to respond, and if the Armageddon would not come naturally, they would ignite it through their violence.

With the sarin gas created in his laboratories and with the practitioners willing to sacrifice their body in the name of Aum, the sarin gas was released in Tokyo subway station on March 20, 1995. The sarin attack led police to heavily raid Aum’s facilities. They slowly captured and deprogrammed (as much as possible) the Aum army. However, it was not until May 16, 1995 that the police finally apprehended Asahara Shōkō.

E. The Kierkegaardian Suspension of the Ethical

Faith is just this paradox, that the individual as the particular is higher than the universal, is justified before the latter, not as subordinate but superior, though in such a way… that the individual who, having been subordinate to the universal as the particular, now by means of the universal becomes that individual who, as the particular, stands in an absolute relation to the absolute (Kierkegaard and Hannay 84-85).

In *Fear and Trembling*, Søren Kierkegaard analyzes the dilemma Abraham faces in sacrificing his son Isaac: namely, how is Abraham not a murderer? Kierkegaard’s interest lies in a Judeo-Christian consideration; however, his question applies to a broader range of religious violence. How can the proponents of religious violence not consider themselves murderers? Kierkegaard indirectly analyzes this dilemma in his teleological suspension of the ethical.

The ethical is its own telos; it considers no end purpose outside
of itself. It is “the telos for everything outside and has no further to go” (Kierkegaard and Hannay 83). The individual dissolves his own interest to adhere to the universal. Kierkegaard considers the telos of the individual should express the universal, which is the ethical. If this is the case, then to oppose the universal is to sin. If universal ethics are the highest goal, then the violently religious remain as murderers. If they are not to remain murderers, then the ethical must suspend or cease all together.

Kierkegaard considers faith to be in a paradox, where the individual goes beyond the ethical in relation to the divine. We mediate the ethical judgments, which rely on universality. However, faith is absurd, and cannot be universally understood; faith explains itself by the particular experiences of the individual. Kierkegaard considers faith as subjective, and why it cannot be mediated. Thus, faith cannot be understood by all; therefore, it remains outside of the universal, implying that faith is excluded from the ethical. Faith is the highest of passions a human reaches. It does not build from past generations; its experience lies in the individual. Faith allows the individual a relationship with the divine, and by virtue of that relation the individual exceeds the ethical.

Even if they do not realize this, the violent perpetrators build within themselves an individual relation with what they hold divine. In a leap of faith, the ethical becomes their temptation. For most sacred texts require tranquility, and not to kill, but the divine may call for them to sacrifice themselves, or innocent people. In this paradox, the individual stands alone, and belief reveals their absolute duty to the divine, which suspends the ethical. The religious zealots must consider themselves beyond ethical consideration. But, they are not just beyond consideration; the ethical becomes their temptation. But what if the divine requires you to sacrifice your son, as God does to Abraham? Ethics demands that the father loves his son more than himself. Abraham’s temptation is his love for his son. However, the duty to the divine is an absolute relation to the particular. So when required to sacrifice his son, in the absurdity and passion of faith, he must fulfil his duty to the divine and sacrifice his son unconditionally. Kierkegaard considers Abraham the father of faith precisely because of this paradox. In absolute faith, Abraham suspends the ethical by offering God his beloved son. However, God rewards Abraham’s devotion by supplying a ram, right before the sacrifice; and thus, Abraham receives his son once again. Though not explicitly stated in all of religious violence, the teleological suspension of the ethical applies to violent religious actions. If the
teleological suspension of the ethical does not occur, then these people remain murderers, and not “knights of faith.”

The suspension of the ethical functions as a symbolic transformation and applies to religious sacrifice and terrorism. The Aum and Butchers sacrifice a completely internal phenomenon, their morality. The minute that the Butchers kill Crossan, and the Aums release the gas, conventional morality is sacrificed. The perpetrators may not consciously realize this but morality suspends or ceases completely in their transformation and this movement can only be done under the pretenses of the religious experience. In their moments of terror and violence, the followers of Aum and the Butchers sacrifice what holds them intimately to society, namely their morality. If this offering of morality does not take place in the individuals, then they remain outside the religious realm and can only said to be politically or egotistically motivated for their violence.

Sacrifice also suspends morality and is found in the Aztec human sacrifices and the *Akedah*. The gods require homage, and energy, from the Aztecs and to receive that rejuvenation, they allow for the priests to kill. This final connection bridges sacrifice and terrorism under religious violence. Each act of religious violence “modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it or that of certain objects with which he is concerned” (Hubert and Mauss 13). The ethical suspension is the final and a significant connection between religious terrorism and sacrifice. Religious terror is a form of sacrifice because of what engaging with violent dramatic symbolism does to the ethical self. In religious violence, the ethical self is sacrificed.

Thus we see that the followers of Aum released the sarin gas, because of the impending apocalypse. Murphy and his Butchers killed Catholics for not only political reasons, but in defense of their Protestant faith. The Aztecs offered sacrifices to give energy to their sun god. But before the any of these events took place, the symbolisms preceded the movement. Each had their specific symbolic meaning, as shown, but they all relate together, insofar as they appeal to a religious symbolism.

When the five followers of Aum released the gas, it was not for them alone. They aimed to send their symbolic message to the masses, namely that the end has come. The Butchers struck fear in the Catholic community by violently killing any Catholic, innocent or guilty. The Aztec priest holding the sacrificial heart to the sun is already symbolic, for the priest could perform this by himself, and it would have some meaning,
but if he were to do it alone, it would not be as dramatic. But in front of thousands of Aztecan people, it is staged and no longer only symbolically theatrical, but now dramatic. The meaning is no longer dependent on one viewer, but is now dependent on how the society perceives it. They performed a spectacle for their community.

V. Conclusion

Violence, in itself, is neither symbolic nor theatrical. A person might simply kill for pleasure. Both symbolism and theatrics may depart from nonreligious violence as well. The death penalty is both symbolic and theatrical. The justice system operates in full public view so that the executions of the criminal will serve as a deterrent and symbolically represent the restoration of social order avenging the losses suffered by the victims of crime. Yet, this type of violence remains outside the realm of religion. Violence becomes religious when the audience perceives the actions as such. The movement for violence to become religious begins with understanding that faith is uncertain and that belief requires a leap of faith. This leads individuals or groups to engage in extreme actions on a public stage to convince themselves and others of the symbolic efficacy of their faith. But before any individual engages in the violence, conventional morality suspends or ceases as the first offering.

Religious symbolisms and theatrics depend on an audience’s interpretation of the religious action. For man to express the religious, Juergensmeyer remarks that terrorism, and for that matter sacrifice, “are not tactics directed toward an immediate, earthly, or strategic goal, but dramatic events intended to impress for their symbolic significance” (123). The Butchers brutally murder Crossan, the Aum followers aim to kill hundreds of people with sarin gas, and the Aztecs stage a gruesome sacrifice in order to “impress for their symbolic significance.” My analysis of religious violence contains a general form with two separate categories - sacrifice and terrorism. Though I discuss them as distinct categories of religious violence, they connect in various ways. “The definition of a terrorist act is provided by us, the witness - the ones terrified- and not by the party committing the act” (Juergensmeyer 5). Sacrifice depends on this function as well. The transformation of a person depends on whether the observer perceives it to carry out this function. Thus when the Aztec priest offers the heart to the sun, the observers must believe this gives the sun god the necessary energy to persist, or the sacrifice is ineffective. The performance
events intend to make a symbolic statement, the performative acts intend to change the nature of things (Juergensmeyer 124). When the Butchers killed Crossan, the transformation is internal; they sacrifice their morality. Thus, this internal transformation for the Butchers functions as a performative act, as their nature changed, and as a personal sacrifice, as “the personality of the sacrifice is directly affected” (Hubert and Mauss 13). In objective sacrifice, the object directly receives the sacrificial action. This sacrificial action is symbolic, as in the Aztecan sacrifice, which makes a symbolic statement as in performance events. Therefore, we may bridge Juergensmeyer’s and Hubert and Mauss’ theory of religious violence by assessing performative acts with personal sacrifice and performance events with objective sacrifice.

No religion can provide compelling evidence of its superiority to all other religions, therefore all particular religions require their adherents to take a Kierkegaardian leap of faith. This super-rational commitment leads to two types of religious violence - sacrifice and terrorism. Even though we consider them as separate categories, an analysis of arguments by Juergensmeyer and by Hubert and Mauss shows that many similarities connect them. The symbolic nature of religion renders both theatrical actions whose significance creates theatrical dramas, where the exact meaning of the violence depends upon the audience that perceives it. Sacrifice typically affects the inner community; while terrorism typically affects a broader demographic. However, both produce either external or internal transformations of a person. This paper argues that prior to all instances of religious violence morality is the first sacrificial victim.
Works Cited


