

Sacrifice in Modernity: Community, Ritual, Identity

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Sacrifice in Modernity: Community, Ritual, Identity

*From Nationalism and Nonviolence to
Health Care and Harry Potter*

Edited by

Joachim Duyndam, Anne-Marie Korte
and Marcel Poorthuis



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Introduction



Sacrifice in Modernity: Community, Ritual, Identity

Joachim Duyndam, Anne-Marie Korte and Marcel Poorthuis

Sacrifice, Opfer, Yajna – the various terms for sacrifice that can be found across different religious traditions show the many aspects that are perceived as constituting its core business, such as making holy, gift-giving, exchange, or the loss of something valuable. Since the mid 19th century, scholars studying written or performed sacrificial acts have tried to capture its essence with concepts such as bribery (Edward Burnett Tylor), a gift to the gods (Marcel Mauss), an act of consensual violence (René Girard), or a matter of cooking (Charles Malamoud). The act of offering sacrifices is undoubtedly one of the most universal religious phenomena. From time immemorial, offering a sacrifice has been considered the proper way to approach the godhead. Whether the goods to be offered were products from the harvest, the firstlings of the flock, flowers, or flour, the believers expressed their gratitude, begged for divine favours or tried to appease the godhead or the community.¹ The transformations – or re-embodiments – of sacrifice that have taken place in many religions have included prayer, almsgiving, fasting, continence, and even martyrdom. These acts not only imply an effort to offer something of value, but often also a form of self-surrender, a surrender to the divine. However, these sacrificial religious practices, as such, seem to have lost most of their relevance and resonance in the context of modern western societies. Secularization and the decline of institutional religion have rendered them obsolete, dissolving the specific contexts and discourses that made these practices self-evident and meaningful.

But is this indeed the case? In this volume, consisting of a collection of studies into contemporary forms and manifestations of sacrifice, or sacrifice-like activities, it is argued that religious phenomena such as sacrifice, even when they have lost their significance as a strictly religious ritual, have persisted in manifold manifestations. Philosophers and sociologists of religion have argued that the classical secularization thesis, which states that religion declines when science makes progress, is no longer tenable for large parts of the modern world. They view, on the one hand, secularization as an intrinsic outcome

1 Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press 1997), 112: "Some form of sacrifice can be found in almost all societies."

of, especially, Christianity,² and point, on the other, to a nascent post-secular condition of western societies.³ Without reaching any definitive conclusions about these tendencies, the studies that follow explore the centrality of rituals of sacrifice in a variety of areas, such as politics, daily and communal life, ethics, art, and popular culture. Indeed, the subtitle of this book has been aptly chosen: among the cases that will be covered are the *Harry Potter* book series, the movies of the *Twilight Saga*, and present day self-sacrificing caregiving. Without a doubt, many of these examples draw upon centuries old sacrificial patterns and images and can only be understood in combination with a thorough knowledge of sacrifice in all its ramifications.

Although the phenomenon of sacrifice is a central characteristic of most religious traditions, at first glance it seems difficult to fathom it in the context of modernity. Why is it that sacrifice takes on the appearance of an opaque, old-fashioned religious phenomenon, pervaded with strangeness, while at the same time it appears to excite a great topical fascination? In recent years, scholars in cultural anthropology, theology, religious studies, and philosophy have put sacrifice on the agenda again, pointing out the complex and emotionally charged relations between sacrifice and violence, self-sacrifice and autonomy, and religious martyrdom and terrorism. In research and debates, they have attempted to get to the heart of the current fascination with sacrifice.⁴

2 Especially in France, this thesis has found its protagonists, such as Jean-Luc Nancy, Luc Ferry, Giorgio Agamben, and Gianni Vattimo. In a way, the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor belongs to the same trend.

3 José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society", *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2008): 17–29.

4 See Jonneke Bekkenkamp and Yvonne Sherwood, eds, *Sanctified Aggression: Legacies of Biblical and Post-Biblical Vocabularies of Violence* (London: T & T Clark International, 2003); Dennis King Keenan, *The Question of Sacrifice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Jan N. Bremmer, *The Strange World of Human Sacrifice* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007); Paul Kahn, *Sacred Violence: Torture, Terror and Sovereignty* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2008); Kathryn McClymond, *Beyond Sacred Violence: A Comparative Study of Sacrifice* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008); Cleo McNelly Kearns, *The Virgin Mary, Monotheism, and Sacrifice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Sarah Coakley, *Sacrifice Regained: Reconsidering the Rationality of Christian Belief* (inaugural lecture as Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge, October 13, 2009); Stanley Hauerwas, "Sacrificing the Sacrifices of War," in *Religion and Politics of Peace and Conflict* (eds Linda Hogan and Dylan Lee Lehrke; Princeton: Princeton Theological Monograph, 2009), 83–104; Ingolf U. Dalferth, "Self-sacrifice: from the Act of Violence

This fascination seems to coincide with an increasing dissemination of the term ‘sacrifice’ outside the strictly religious domain, it being applied to various phenomena within the public and private spheres that relate sacrifice to, on the one hand, self-destruction and merciless terror, and, on the other hand, to devotion, submission, and self-effacement for the benefit of other people. The violent aspect of sacrifice seems often to be over-emphasized, perhaps due to the highly influential theories of the French philosopher René Girard, on the one hand, and the (over)representation of instances of ‘terrorist’ martyrdom in the media, on the other. However, a sacrifice can also express gratitude, praise, community spirit, and commitment to the poor, and for many of the faithful the primary meaning of a sacrificial act is best captured in these rather benign dimensions.

The approach to sacrifice guiding this volume is not confined to the dynamics of violence and victimization that often dominates contemporary interests and theories of sacrifice in public debates and academic discussions. We locate our starting point in three central and interlocking aspects of sacrificial performance: sacrifice as a community focused act, sacrifice as a ritually performed act, and sacrifice as an act that is constitutive of (individual or collective) identity. These three angles each point to conjunctures of religiously acknowledged and contemporarily (re)discovered aspects of sacrifice. Combined, these three angles render it possible to address the actual multifacetedness of the phenomenon of sacrifice, and to identify and evaluate its contemporary fascination. These three dimensions make up the three main sections of this book, and in this introduction we clarify the choices and procedures that have engendered its content.

1 Sacrifice: Changes and Challenges

Sacrifice in Modernity: Community, Ritual, Identity addresses the above introduced conglomerate of questions about the (re)appearance and (re)interpretation of sacrifice in contemporary societies. It represents the outcome of an interdisciplinary and interreligious academic research project examining the current fascination with sacrifice, both in the light of its classic religious

to the Passion of Love,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 68, no. 1–3 (2010), 77–94; Douglas Hedley, *Sacrifice Imagined: Violence, Atonement, and the Sacred* (New York, London: Continuum, 2011); John Dunnill, *Sacrifice and the Body: Biblical Anthropology and Christian Self-Understanding* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); A. Houtman, M. Poorthuis, J. Schwartz, and Y. Turner eds, *The Actuality of Sacrifice, Past and Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

origins and meanings, and through the study of present-day appropriations of sacrifice and their interpretations. Bringing together these two fields of study in an ongoing academic discussion has been one of the project's explicit aims. This joint research project has been organized through a thematic research group (2009–2012) supported by the Netherlands School of Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion (NOSTER). Scholars from various backgrounds and disciplines (religious studies, theology, philosophy, cultural and literary studies) have joined the project, with participants coming from the Netherlands and Flanders.⁵

A central tenet informing the explorations in this volume is the acknowledgment that religious developments have steadily changed the idea and practices of sacrifice, while the extraordinary power and the impact of sacrifice have, in turn, made specific contributions to the development of religious practice and reflection. For instance, not only classical antiquity but also Judaism and Christianity have experienced a decisive turn towards “the discovery of the inner self” during the first centuries of our era.⁶ In the history of sacrificial practices, we simultaneously notice a transition from the literal sacrificing of animals, crops, and libations to more abstract and spiritualized sacrifices in the form of religious study, prayer, charity, and ascetic practices.⁷ Furthermore, the discovery of the inner self has produced new views on corporality and guilt while also changing the function and meaning of ritual as such, and these changes have transformed and ‘reinvented’ sacrifice. Buddhism, too, shows a spiritual reinterpretation of sacrifice as practiced in Hinduism.⁸ Still, the Vedic sacrifice is seen as the oldest sacrificial practice in human history, and to this day sacrifice constitutes the heart of Hindu religion.⁹

5 See also www.noster.org.

6 Jan Assmann and Guy Stroumsa, eds, *Transforming the Inner Self in Ancient Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

7 Guy Stroumsa, *La fin du sacrifice: Mutations religieuses de l'antiquité tardive* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2005).

8 James Egge, *Sacrifice and Purification: The Meanings of Religious Giving in Theravada Buddhism* (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 1998); Reiko Ohnuma, *Head, Eyes, Flesh, and Blood: Giving Away the Body in Indian Buddhist Literature* (New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2007).

9 Frits Staal, ed., *Agni: The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1983); David M. Knipe, *Hinduism: Experiments in the Sacred* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991); Selvanayagam Israel, *The dynamics of Hindu traditions: The Teape Lectures on Sacrifice, Gita, and Dialogue* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1996); Kathryn McClymond, “Death Be Not Proud: Reevaluating the Role of Killing in Sacrifice,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 6, no. 3 (2002): 221–242; Timothy Lubin, “Veda on Parade: Revivalist Ritual as Civic Spectacle,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69, no. 2 (2001): 377–408.

Sacrifice, as conceptualized and practiced in various religious traditions, has not only experienced major changes, it has also constantly propelled opposition, legitimization, debate, and reflection. Therefore, sacrifice has been at the heart of religious practice as well as of formative religious narratives, imagery and disputes. Famous stories from the Torah, the Qur'an, and the Bible – such as Genesis 22, “Abraham’s sacrifice”, and the passion of Christ – mirror sacrificial practices and comment on them simultaneously.¹⁰ Theological discussions from the history of religion display the ongoing urge to restate the meaning of sacrifice, evoked by the engraved place it occupies in scripture and liturgy. From time to time new debates emerge which call for reinterpretation of ideas of sacrifice in old and venerated texts. For example, in patristic texts on the biblical figure of Samson we can find a fierce battle over the question of whether Samson, by destroying the temple, his enemies, and himself in one final gesture, was a martyr or someone who merely committed suicide – and even whether what he did was an act of religious terrorism. Other issues have retained their relevance to this day, such as whether Christ’s death on the cross should be seen as a unique and single sacrifice or whether – as its consequence – a sacrificial attitude is expected and required from a believer as well. This issue continues to divide Roman Catholics and Protestants. Is sacrifice ultimately an achievement and a means to influence the deity, or does it imply submission to the source of life?¹¹

Still, it is our conviction that the relevance of sacrifice for understanding modernity’s inner tensions, in particular regarding the establishment of community, the practice of rituals and the formation of (individual and collective) identity, goes much further than only these isolated issues. This is why we have brought together various present-day approaches to sacrifice: philosophical perspectives (from the work of, among others, Giorgio Agamben, René Girard,

10 See e.g. Jacob Milgrom, *The Binding of Isaac: The Akedah, a Primary Symbol in Jewish Thought and Art* (Berkeley, CA: Bibal Press, 1988); Aharon Agus, *The Binding of Isaac and Messiah: Law, Martyrdom and Deliverance in Early Rabbinic Religiosity* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1988); Carol Delaney, *Abraham on Trial: The Social Legacy of Biblical Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Jerome I. Gellman, *Abraham! Abraham! Kierkegaard and the Hasidim on the Binding of Isaac* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); Ed Noort and Eibert Tigchelaar, eds, *The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and its Interpretations* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Edward Kessler, *Bound by the Bible: Jews, Christians and the Sacrifice of Isaac* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Lippman Bodoff, *The Binding of Isaac, Religious Murders & Kabbalah: Seeds of Jewish Extremism and Alienation?* (Jerusalem, New York: Devora Publishing Company, 2005).

11 Ivan Strenski, *Theology and the First Theory of Sacrifice* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

Julia Kristeva, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Slavoj Žižek); multidisciplinary debates on autonomy and heteronomy; gender-related questions (as put forth by, among others, Carol Delaney, Nancy Jay, Julia Kristeva, Wendy Doniger, Grace Jantzen, Sarah Coakley); ethnological studies; political issues (terrorism, fundamentalism); and theological disputes. Together, these approaches constitute an exciting challenge for interdisciplinary and socially relevant academic research, which has been the aim of this project from the outset.

We have recognized that the term sacrifice refers to a profusion of views and practices, ranging from the actual sacrificing and killing of animals, people, or oneself on behalf of a higher good (a deity, an ideal) to the substitutive and symbolic sacrificing of crops and gifts. Although it is probably impossible to locate one essential characteristic that is shared by all views on sacrifice or common to all sacrificial practices, there are networks of similarities, such as the ritualistic character of some sacrificial practices, the symbolic meanings of others, the way in which the loss implied in sacrifice is legitimized and assessed, or the gift-like character (in either a generous or an economic sense) of sacrifice.

In *Beyond Sacred Violence: A Comparative Study of Violence* (2008), Kathryn McClymond, a comparative scholar of religion, distinguishes six contemporary approaches to sacrifice: as a dramatized myth; as an exchange or trade; as something people eat (a meal or *cuisine*); as a ritual without a function, goal, or (symbolic) meaning (structuralism); as a gender-related issue; and as violence.¹² During the first phase of the project that has led to this book, Kathryn McClymond was invited to elaborate on her approach and to elucidate its value for interdisciplinary and comparative research of religion(s). We are very grateful for her generous and stimulating contributions to the initial debates and presentations of this research project, and we are delighted that she has written the epilogue, in which she discusses the contributions to this volume in light of the comparative study of sacrifice. She rejects the facile association of sacrifice with violence. A community's enjoyment of ritual can also convey an identity of sharing and celebration. Vegetarian sacrifice, flowers, and frankincense, wine libations, prayer and charity – there are many ways to celebrate life without resorting to violence. The threefold division of approaches in this volume, indeed, allows for a much broader exploration of sacrifice, in which the non-violent elements of sacrifice receive as much attention as the violent aspects.

¹² McClymond, *Beyond Sacred Violence*, 1–24.

2 Three Exemplary Narratives

In order to trace the present-day challenge of sacrifice in its many manifestations, this research project has taken its departure in three exemplary narratives about sacrifice, each stemming from a different religious tradition. In the first stages of the research collaboration, these narratives were presented to all the participants. After the formation of three groups, studying sacrifice from the angle of community, ritual, and identity respectively, the narratives were distributed and taken up in the separate groups' deliberations. Hence, each section opens with a presentation and analysis of one of these key narratives, describing a religious sacrifice in a traditional setting: an African community ritual, a Hindu fire ritual, and the Islamic feast that commemorates Ibrahim's readiness to sacrifice his son. The discussion of the key narratives offers detailed insight into the act of sacrifice as way of establishing community, executing ritual, and marking one's identity. By focusing on the sacrifice as performed or written and exploring their particular context and details, the concerned authors have created a hermeneutical space for discussing the particular complexity of these sacrifices and confronting their often hybrid and enigmatic character. For instance, rather than a simple bargain of *do ut des* (I give in order that you give), the sacrifice may denote an acute awareness of life as a gift to be enjoyed, and to be shared by those who need it, and consecrated to the divinity who is considered the real owner of it. Hence, sacrifice may denote charity as well as violence, responsibility for the other as well as victimizing the other.

In each section of the book the introduction of the key narrative is followed by the contributions of an interdisciplinary cluster of authors. They were invited to respond to the key narrative and to connect it to a concrete case, narrative, or practice of sacrifice from either their own or a different religious tradition (depending on their own choice). In a series of meetings (both general and per cluster) the authors have discussed the individual contributions. Their topics and approaches will be introduced here by section.

3 Section I: Sacrifice and Community

The first section highlights the communal character of sacrifice. The home sacrifice of the Kapsiki, living in Nigeria and Cameroon, is meticulously analysed by the cultural anthropologist Walter van Beek, showing how family ties are renewed and re-established during the celebration of the sacrificial meal. Simultaneously, the implicit exclusion of some family members and

acquaintances makes clear that communal sacrifices have a complex mechanism of inclusion and exclusion. The remarkable privileged position of the blacksmith only stresses this mechanism further.

Exploring similar and other community establishing dynamics and effects of sacrificial acts, the next contributions in this first section take their inspiration from the refined anthropological research into the Kapsiki home sacrifice. Philosopher of religion Theo de Wit, debating the ideal of offering one's life for a political community in historical and philosophical perspective, demonstrates how soldiers who have died in war are often viewed as martyrs who have sacrificed their lives for their country, thereby strictly demarcating one's own community from that of the other/the enemy. The question arises whether every state needs an enemy in order to create internal coherence and a sense of community.

The highly enigmatic movie *The sacrifice*, by the famous Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky, suggests that performing a sacrifice might have implications for the global community. An impending nuclear disaster can be averted if the main character is willing to sacrifice his possessions. Even his son's life is jeopardized in the end. As such, the protagonist seems to be in a similar plight as the patriarch Abraham. Frederiek Depoortere, a theologian from Leuven University, draws parallels to philosophical reflections by Nietzsche and Žižek. Whether the obligation to sacrifice is either a phantasmagoric delusion or a genuine obligation towards the godhead remains ambiguous.

The German poet Friedrich Hölderlin offers another artistic expression of sacrifice, in which the poet seems to allude to himself as the glorified hero – or the victim – which brings up the relationship between the individual and the community. Humanistic scholar Rebecca Prevoo and philosophical anthropologist Joachim Duyndam analyse the different versions of the tragedy of the Greek philosopher Empedocles, who threw himself in the Mount Etna volcano. His self-destruction could be explained as a reaction to the people's contempt, in which case Empedocles took it upon himself to assume the role of a scapegoat. Even then, the sacrifice and the community maintain an intrinsic relationship.

The expression “sacrifice of the self” may point to violence and a denial of autonomy, but the researcher of humanistic studies Saskia van Goelst Meijer points out that freedom fighters, like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, use precisely this expression to describe what they see as a prerequisite for non-violence. However, what they point to is a very different understanding of (self-)sacrifice, one that actually leads to autonomy and empowerment. In any case, an easy dismissal of the concept of “sacrifice of the self” as no longer being acceptable to modern people is apparently not a viable option. Noting

the non-violent connotation of sacrifice, her views align with those of Kathryn McClymond, who we have already mentioned.

4 Section II: Sacrifice and Ritual

The second section, on sacrifice and ritual, opens with a narrative from Vedic Hinduism. Myths about the origin of sacrifices are strongly intertwined with rituals, which revives the old debate about the priority of myth over rite, or vice-versa. Again, there is a shifting away from the facile association of sacrifice with violence. At first sight, these highly intricate and age-old rituals seem to escape logic as well as explanation. Indologist Albertina Nugteren emphasizes their refined creative connotations: creation itself is re-enacted in these rituals. As such, the ritual of sacrifice transgresses the thin demarcation line between the rational and the irrational, between the functional and the sacred, the linear and the cyclic, as well as between human and animal existence.

Early Christianity had its own perspective on sacrifice. The rituals of sacrifice were transformed into the Eucharist rather than abolished, the historian of Christian theology Gerard Rouwhorst argues. Although the bloody sacrifices were considered a pagan remnant or a Jewish practice that should not be continued, the sacrificial terminology and the reminiscences of the Temple remained in force. Even the practice of bringing food to be distributed to the poor to the Church, thereby transforming sacrifice into charity, can be documented in early Christianity and has remained relevant to this day.

The unexpected relevance of sacrifice to the position of religion in modern society came up with the debate in the Netherlands about the ritual slaughter of animals in Judaism and Islam. Voices to stop this practice altogether received unexpected support. Historian Bart Wallet demonstrates how this debate comes up time and again, sometimes initiated by extreme right-wing parties, at other times by environmental activists – not to mention the medical profession. The supposedly cruel sacrificial ritual fuels the image of religion as an outdated phenomenon within Western society.

In the work of the Japanese Catholic novelist Shūsaku Endō, the theme of the relationship between humans and animals plays a considerable role as well. Theologian Sigrid Coenradie, exploring the theme of sacrificial substitution in Endō's fictional works, describes a ritual process of *Stellvertretung*, the substitution of the human life by an animal, not unlike the story of Abraham and the ram. Coenradie's comparative reading of sacrificial substitution in Endō's narratives brings to light several interesting differences with regard to Abraham's ritual focus and its moral consequences: in Gen. 22, the relationship

between Abraham and God seems to take priority over the human relationships of Abraham and his wife Sarah, his son Isaac, and his friend Eliezer, whereas the relationship of the main character in Endō's stories to the unknown giver of the animal substitute seems to improve the relationship to his family.

Young girls can tell you all about it: the extremely popular vampire stories of the *Twilight Saga*, encompassing four bulky volumes and several films. Theologian and ethicist Grietje Dresen shows the highly erotic nature of the central notion of ritually shedding blood in the saga, paradoxically combined with a culture of sexual abstinence. Although the young – mostly female – readers recognize the fictional character of the saga, its strongly 'romanticized' vampire stories offer them the possibility to confront and appropriate the highly ambivalent ritual meanings of female blood that in many cultures constitute the greatest taboo.

The so-called apocryphal story of the biblical heroine Judith has fascinated painters and libretto writers alike. The height of her heroic action is undoubtedly the display of the head of Holofernes, who was decapitated by this beautiful woman while lying on his bed. The story ends, however, with Judith and the Israelites bringing the spoils to the Temple in Jerusalem to be dedicated to God. Biblical studies scholar Anne-Mareike Wetter discovered numerous rituals and sacrificial acts in the biblical text. She draws a picture of Judith not as the violent femme fatale, which may be a modern projection of male fantasies, but as the embodiment of religious female creativity, via trajectories different from the traditional male ritual performance.

5 Section III: Sacrifice and Identity

Central to the third section, on sacrifice and identity, is the famous story, common to the three monotheistic religions, of the patriarch Abraham being asked by God to sacrifice his beloved son. Abraham/Ibrahim proves his identity as a firm believer and thus becomes the paragon of faith. Islamic theologian Abdelilah Ljamai acquaints us with this story as told in the Qur'an. The wealth of commentaries makes clear that for Islam, when it comes to the question of the identity of the son, Ishmael is not the only option, as is often thought. The story remains a prime example of the act of sacrifice because of the three crucial elements of the enhancement of the identity of Abraham/Ibrahim by showing his faith, the conscious consent of the victim (the beloved son), and the replacement of the human victim with an animal. The redemption of the human victim by an animal sacrifice is celebrated as a major religious holiday in Islam.

A phenomenological description of sacrifice in human relations makes clear that victimizing the other or victimizing oneself in order to influence the other can easily happen within families. As such, the redemptive value of sacrifice should be sought for in a therapeutic context, theologian and ethicist Mari le Wulf argues. The free act of sacrificing oneself for the other should be distinguished from being branded as the scapegoat.

Gertrud von le Fort's *Die letzte am Schafott* (1931, translated as *The Song at the Scaffold*) contains a severe criticism of imposing sacrifice upon someone else, theologian Marcel Poorthuis argues. The story pictures Carmelite sisters resisting the confiscation of their convent during the French revolution and the condemnation to death of sixteen sisters. The highest and most self-assured authority among the Carmelite nuns flees from the scaffold, whereas the young Sister Blanche, full of fear from her childhood onwards, joins her fellow nuns out of free will on their way to martyrdom. By recognizing one's fear of death and by embracing life in all its beauty, can sacrifice have the meaning of enhancing one's identity, Gertrud von Le Fort seems to profess.

Historian Marjet Derks tells the history of a spiritual Catholic movement of young women, the Grail movement. Initially, in the 1920s, sacrifice was considered the essence of this spiritual community. The founder, a charismatic priest, even advocated sacrificial and ascetic exercises especially for these women, because of their supposedly greater ability to bear pain. After the 1960s, however, the sacrificial language gave way to self-affirmation and autonomy. At times the initial predilection for sacrifice has even become flatly denied.

It is no coincidence that the ethics of care comes across the issue of self-sacrifice so often. The easy solution, to replace self-sacrifice by autonomy and self-determination, does not satisfy ethicist Inge van Nistelrooij. She explores the ambiguous dimensions of caring for the other, both in its possibilities and its limitations. The tragic element in the awareness that more can always be done should not be ignored, but sustained.

Perhaps the most famous of the literary protagonists featured in this book is Harry Potter. Theologian Sigrid Coenradie sees striking similarities between his story and the biblical story of Abraham and his son, as well as between Harry's and Jesus' suffering and death. There is an element of vocation in Harry's life, coupled with the fact that he never kills but, instead, is prepared to give his life out of love. Just like the son in the Qur'anic story, Harry acts out of free will.

The story of Abraham being commanded to sacrifice his son constitutes a formidable challenge to modernity because of its seemingly heteronomous character. Although the story has a happy ending and militates against human sacrifice, the story does not fail to shock a modern predilection for autonomy. The many Jewish commentaries on the story of Abraham and Isaac introduce

an altogether new figure, Satan, by which the story receives a multilayered tapestry of ethical deliberations. Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son is traditionally considered to be proof of his identity as a believer in God. The post-Biblical re-readings strongly challenge this picture. Satan's arguments seem to coincide with those brought forward by modern thought. Let us face it: he is the one who tempts Abraham not to kill his son. Theologian Elliot Lyons describes how in a strong dialectics of good and evil the Jewish Midrash portrays Abraham as almost the embodiment of evil and as being out of his wits, whereas Satan appears as the wise adviser. Even the offering of a lamb belongs to the latter's recommendations, but apparently Abraham has to endure the test until the very end before this solution becomes relevant. It is clear that this way of re-interpreting the biblical story avoids a monolithic message of sacrifice, allowing all sorts of objections and new perspectives instead.

Ethics, responsibility, scapegoating, the individual and the community between autonomy and heteronomy, compassion, grace, creativity in the postmodern ritual, the relationship between humans and animals, which has become a highly relevant issue in modernity – these are only some of the themes that have proved relevant while pondering over the ongoing fascination with sacrifice. It is the axiom of this volume that substantive insight into modernity's fascinations and paradoxes regarding community, ritual, and identity could be gained from a sacrificial perspective, or, at least, a perspective informed by the sacrificial practices, vicissitudes, and reflections of religious communities and traditions.

PART 1

Sacrifice and Community



The Kapsiki Home Sacrifice

Walter E. A. van Beek

1 Introduction: The Setting

The Kapsiki/Higi are one of the numerous groups living in the area south of the Chad Basin, along the western edge of the Mandara Mountains straddling the border between Cameroon and Nigeria. In Cameroon they live on a plateau at 1,000 meters surrounded by mountain ridges rising to 1,300 meters. The plateau is dotted with spectacular volcanic outcroppings. On the western side in Nigeria, the Higi, as the group is called there, cultivate the mountain ridges and the plains to the west extending farther into Nigeria. Before the *pax colonialis*, this mountain habitat offered good protection against slave raiding, while still allowing for subsistence cultivation. After colonial rule was established, people gradually moved down from hilltops, spreading out over the plateau or into the lower river valleys.

The Kapsiki/Higi number about 200,000, the largest part living in Nigeria.¹ Situated in an old volcanic area, the plateau and hillsides are quite fertile and are cultivated on a permanent basis by crop rotation and few inputs. In fact, the mountains are well suited to labor intensive horticultural production using relatively simple technology and mixed husbandry, and that is how the Kapsiki make their living. Kapsiki villages are autonomous, within the formal political structures of present-day Cameroon and Nigeria. Each village has a traditional chief with a predominantly ritual function, and consists of several wards, each with a ward chief, mainly for administrative duties. The crucial social unit is the individual compound, *rhè*, housing a nuclear or extended family, usually polygynous. A classic mountainside, Kapsiki compound is a veritable fortress with its man-high stone wall, a reminder of the bad old days when walls formed a last defense against marauders. And, as we shall see in the sacrifice, the wall is still important.²

1 The 2003 Cameroonian census gives 96,000 Kapsiki; Nigerian figures are less reliable, but the Higi tend to be twice as many as the Cameroonian Kapsiki. I keep the conservative estimate of 200,000, accounting for some over-reporting by censuses. See Walter E. A. van Beek, "Introduction," in *Contes Kapsiki du Cameroun* (ed. Walter E. A. van Beek and H. Tourneux; Paris, Karthala, 2013), pp. 7–23.

2 Oxford University Press is thanked for its kind permission to use and rework material from Walter E. A. van Beek, *The Dancing Dead. Ritual and Religion among the Kapsiki/Higi of North Cameroon and Northeastern Nigeria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), chapter 5.

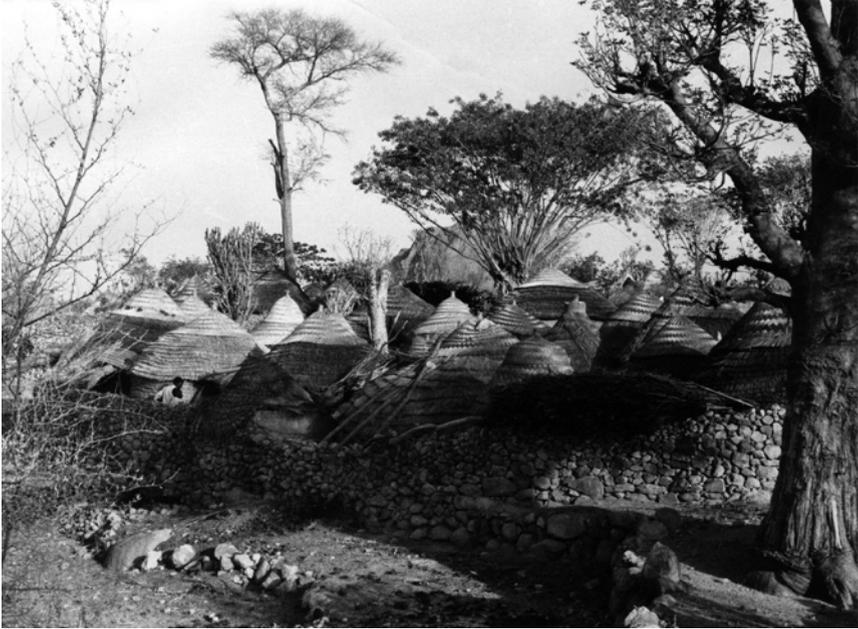


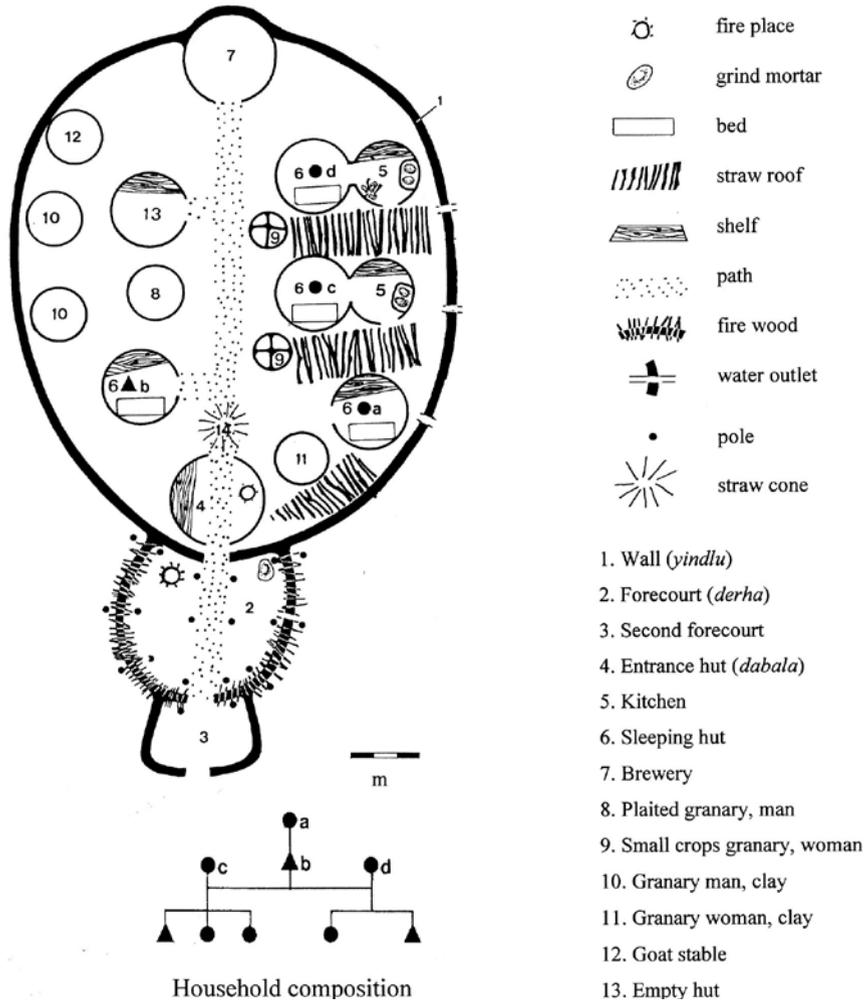
FOTO 1 *A Kapsiki compound from the outside.*

The man-high stone wall is a center of ritual attention. Its height shields the inhabitants from view or, as the Kapsiki say, it hides their poverty. At the narrow entrance, the wall is higher and bears many traces of former sacrifices and libations. The wall effectively separates the inside from the outside, the family from the rest of the society, and kin from non-kin – distinctions resonating in the sacrifice. Outside the wall is situated the forecourt (*derha*), a lower structure serving as the social space of the *rhè*. The house as a whole is oriented more or less north-south, as neither the setting nor the rising sun are allowed to shine directly through the opening of the wall; this would be considered unhealthy.

In the dry season, most family activities and all public functions take place in the entrance court, the *derha*. People freely enter the forecourt, but no stranger advances through the wall at the back of the *derha* without very good reason. Just behind the opening in the wall is the entrance hut proper, the *dabala*, a round hut with two openings, where the family cooks and eats in the wet season. The inside of the compound is divided into a male and a female side. The male side houses sleeping huts for the master of the house and his sons, and the female side has huts for each of the women. If the wives want to

have their own kitchen, they have double huts, a kitchen plus a sleeping hut, but in many families the wives share a kitchen and have just sleeping huts. Each woman has her own washing spot between her sleeping hut and the wall, with a small outlet at the base of the wall, an important ritual spot, as women bury the umbilical cords and placentas of their children here. For a man it is a dangerous place that he will not readily enter, fearing for his virility.

The layout of a typical compound is as follows:



2 The Sacrifice

Tlimu Vandu has consulted the crab diviner and received clear instructions about holding a *melè rhè*, a sacrifice in his compound, in honor of his father, Vandu Zra Tè, who had died two years before. The sacrifice is also held at the request of a close friend of his father's.³ In the evening before the sacrifice, he buys some red beer, *tè*, to fill his sacrificial jar. In the early morning, at half past five, he takes a red rooster which he has bought at the market for this purpose, as instructed by the diviner. His neighbors are not aware of what is happening, and because visitors are not welcome, Tlimu closes the compound entrance with a large stick: Now it is taboo to enter the compound as a stranger. Only a smith may be invited to perform the sacrifice, but that is more usual when slaughtering a goat than a chicken.

Without any ritual preparation, Tlimu takes his large sacrificial jar, called *melè*, from under the granary, plucks the rooster's neck (the jar has to taste the first blood), cuts it and lets the blood drip on the jar. He gently touches the jar with the dying rooster, saying:

My *shala*, here you have something to eat.⁴ Father, here is your friend, he has not forgotten you. I have not seen you for a long time and people have arrived after your burial to honor you with the *tè shingli*, in order for the people to be healthy, healthy after your demise.

He throws the rooster on the ground, and watches how it dies. If the dying animal flaps its wings, *shala*⁵ (god) has accepted the sacrifice: "Thank you, *shala*,

3 That, in fact, is me. I asked for this sacrifice for two reasons. Vandu Zratè was a close friend and I could not attend his funeral, which happened while I was in The Netherlands. Also, attending a sacrifice that is not one's own is difficult in Kapsiki religion, and I liked to participate in this one – a typical example – and participatory dilemma – of a close friendship that is instrumental as well.

4 *Shala ta da, nde wusu kezeme ashè gè*. In order not to confuse readers, I use a simplified orthography for the Kapsiki language, officially called *Psekyè*, in which implosive consonants are not marked.

5 The notion of *shala* is complex. Though increasingly used to indicate some kind of monotheistic being, it in fact is a personal god: Every Kapsiki has his or her own *shala*, but at a certain level they shade over into each other. See Van Beek, *The Dancing Dead*, chapter 6, as well as Walter E. A. van Beek, "Why things go wrong. Agency and evil among the Kapsiki of North Cameroon," in *Agency and Changing World Views in Africa* (eds Dieter Neubert and Christine Scherer; Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2014), 73–98.

thank you *shala*.⁶ If not, he would be disappointed but would not repeat the sacrifice. Then Tlimu walks round the inside of the wall, counter clockwise, slapping the bloodied neck of the rooster against the wall, as a part of the ritual called *kayisù yindlu* (sprinkle the wall). He ends his round in the *dabala*, where some of his children sit around a small fire. With a glowing ember he sings the feathers of the rooster and holds it for a moment over his children's heads. With two of his sons taking the rooster's legs, Tlimu cuts off the legs and throws them into the compound – “for his father” – to be eaten later. The oldest son takes over one of his father's duties, puts some of the intestines, especially the liver, on the *melè* and starts roasting the chicken. The whole procedure appears a routine, ‘work’ as Tlimu calls it, and the children know what to do. It is done quickly, and at 6.30 am the family is in the *dabala*, waiting for the rooster and some mush, cooked by one of Tlimu's daughters. His whole family cannot be present as its size is spectacular (four wives and 37 children, with numerous grandchildren)⁷ but the youngest are there. When the animal is roasted, Tlimu takes his *melè* again from under the granary, picks up a piece of the rooster's liver, some mush, and with his right hand smears the mix on the *melè*. He then takes a mouthful of beer from the jar and sprinkles his breast, for the *mpisu hwu*, spitting on the chest, a rite aimed at the “bad thoughts in the heart”, especially bad thoughts about other people.

Shala, give me health.⁸ Take the evil out of my belly, make me healthy, I say. I have to hear the words from outside. Whoever is jealous, I trample under my feet. Our children, who have stayed behind, we should not be jealous. Whatever illness we have should disappear like the wind. May the illness pass because you want it.⁹ [Words from the ‘outside’ means that any news, bad news, comes from another home.]

6 *Hana shala, hana shala.*

7 Tlimu is a highly successful husband and father, as discussed at length in Walter E. A. van Beek, “Dynamic of Kapsiki/Higi marriage exchanges,” in *Les échanges et la communication dans le bassin du lac Tchad* (eds Sergio Baldi and Geraud Magrin; Naples: Studi Africanistici, Serie Ciado-Sudanese 6, 2014), 105–131.

8 *Yita, ndeke da lèngelèle pe 'ya. Pelu tengwela jive 'ya kafa rhena. Mpelè ya ngkede wundu nya kedema ntsu ta da mbe hwu seda.*

9 Meaning that *shala* has to want the illness to disappear and thus has to be convinced by the speaker.



Liver on the chest of the kids.

Then one by one the children come along, and Tlimu smears liver on their chest: “Here, eat”. One crying toddler gets some meat in advance, the others simply wait.

Tlimu gives each of his wives, who are watching him from their hut, some mush which they put on her own *melè*, a small jar inside their hut. They have been discussing among them whether the whole family had to be called in, as far as feasible, or whether just the present kids were sufficient for the sacrifice. After some debate they decided that it was not a *melè keshi*, a lineage sacrifice, which the mention of their father-in-law might suggest, but indeed a *melè rhè*, house sacrifice. So just the ones present would do. Tlimu pours beer from the *melè*

in an plain white calabash (it should be a traditional oblong calabash, but he has none) and then one of the high points of the sacrifice follows *batle melè*, inundate the jar:

This is for you, Vandu, because your friendship has to be fresh, everybody has to be fresh after your death. *Shala*, let the wind take whatever is evil. Please have them return safely to their villages, for them to visit us again.



Tlimu sacrificing on his melè.

In the meantime a neighboring smith woman has come into the house – which is her right – as her presence enhances the status of the ritual. She loudly ululates and praises Tlimu for his work in keeping the house in order. Later her husband joins Tlimu in drinking from the *melè*; he has assisted Tlimu in building a hut, and now brings some rice from his daughter's wedding for everyone to taste.¹⁰ A young son of Tlimu drinks first and the family gathers to drink the beer, the men around the *melè*, and the women in front of their own huts with the smith woman. When the beer in the *melè* is almost finished, Tlimu calls the men to witness the *mekele melè* (lifting the jar); they all watch Tlimu tilt the jar upside down to empty it, the end of the sacrifice proper, and the oldest of the men, his father's friend drinks first of this last calabash. Finally, Tlimu puts the meat and mush in his personal vase and all finish the beer and eat, clapping their hands to thank *shala*.



Tlimu hands out the sacrifice to some of his children at the end of the sacrifice.

10 Smiths form a special category of people in Kapsiki society. The men forge, divine, bury, make music or medicate, while their women make pottery and are specialized in treating children's illnesses. Smiths, *rerhè* in Psekyè, are so by birth, marry among themselves, thus forming an endogamous echelon with a lower social status than the *melu*, the common Kapsiki. Smiths of both genders are welcome at *melu* sacrifices, due to their position as intermediaries between this existence and the "other world". Cp. more general, Mircea Eliade, *Schmiede und Alchemisten*, (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag 1956).

Now that the first part of the sacrifice is over, the beam shutting the entrance is removed so neighbors are welcome once more. In the evening, the rooster is cooked as part of the evening meal. Then Tlimu takes some of the liver from the cooking pot with sorghum mush and puts the mix on the jar, which is back at its resting place under the granary: "Here, father, some food for you. Give me health, take the illness away".¹¹ The family then eats the mush and the rest of the rooster.

3 The Sacrificial Jar

The central object in the sacrifice is the *melè*, the sacrificial jar, a piece of pottery shaped like a standard beer jar but for a few symbols: It has a ring of small clay cones around the neck and a symbolic indication of the male or the female sex. Closed with a cow's horn, its usual resting place is under a granary. The women keep theirs inside their own huts. Both parents can be represented in such a jar, and an individual can also have a special *melè* as circumstances dictate. One special type is the *gumeze*, a jar with a threefold neck with one opening. A man has this kind of *melè* made if he has killed someone in battle or if he has killed a special kind of bird. Killing this particular bird brings bad luck, like the death of a child, unless he has such a *gumeze*. If he killed someone in war, two jars are made, one large, one small. The small one receives the name of the victim and is buried in a field, while the larger one is used for sacrifices. The small one is dangerous and is not actually used; in his final spoken will, the owner of a *gumeze* has to tell his son where he has hidden the small jar. He is to break it when his father dies.

Another kind is called after the sun, *veci*, and looks just like a normal jar, so without any symbols. It is an exacting jar to own. Anyone who rises very early may see the sun at the horizon in the shape of a ram, ascending into heaven at sunrise. Viewing such a ram implies that it will rain in the morning, and the ram signifies the transition from moon to sun. In such a case it is wise to perform divination to ascertain who has to make the jar, who can drink from it and who cannot, and whether it has to be hidden. Such a *veci* demands many sacrifices, which can be a source of pride, if one is able to perform all those sacrifices.

A sacrificial jar is made at the death of a parent. Before that time a man has another type of *melè*, usually a flint stone the size of a fist, whereas a woman has just a small jar. A boy gets his flint from his father, a girl from her mother;

11 *Nde nganga wusu kezeme, yita. Ndeke da lèngèlènge, kelemte zererhwe nya kiku.*

during initiation a boy gets his first proper *melè*, while a girl uses a small jar as *mèle* presented during their first wedding¹² and given by her groom. Smith women fabricate the *melè*, like all pottery. So after the death of his father a son orders one. When the *mèle* is ready, the blacksmith woman takes a fistful of sorghum flour, mixes it with water and pours the mix on the jar with the words: “Let everyone be healthy”, which is also called *batle melè*, in fact a sacrifice in itself. Later the son gives her a huge bowl of millet flour; if he forgets it, she will harass him at his home, telling him that she is “so very hungry”. She also has to be invited at the first use of the jar, after the funeral rites, when it is inaugurated as a real *melè*, that is, as the representation of the parent. During the sacrifice, the *melè* is addressed as ‘father’ or ‘mother’. The jars serve only the direct descendants, as a personal *melè* is destroyed during one’s funeral rites. Therefore the *melè* can never represent a grandfather.

A *melè* proper, with the cones plus the genital decoration like Tlimu’s, is only for one son, the oldest firstborn son of one of the deceased’s wives, if possible his first bride. Other brothers, like the firstborn sons of other wives, have a *veci* made, and so have the younger brothers, just a smaller jar. This *veci* has no danger element. When they sacrifice on it, they do not call on their ‘father’ but on *shala*, god, as the connection with their father is through the proper *melè* only. If there is no son, the oldest daughter will take the *melè*.¹³

4 Varieties of Sacrifice

There are several types of home sacrifices. The one just described is, in principle, just for the family, often generated by a problem and indicated by divination. More extensive home sacrifices, as we shall see, involve sacrificing a goat. But sometimes a quicker procedure is used, with a simple mix of sorghum flour with water. Most of the mixture is put on the entrance in the wall, the *mè pelu*.

12 Kapsiki marriage is unstable, and most women have more grooms, consecutively, the main theme of Walter E. A. van Beek, *The Kapsiki of the Mandara Mountains* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1987). The first marriage of a girl is a large ritual event, her eventual secondary marriages are much less ritualized.

13 When people convert to Christianity or Islam, these jars are the first things they leave behind, being the icons of the traditional religion; this holds not just for the Kapsiki, but also for other mountain cultures, such as the Mafa, their northern neighbors. See José van Santen, *They leave their jars behind: the conversion of Mafa women to Islam* (Leiden: VENA, 1993).

Other types of sacrifices are classified depending on the social echelons of the village: A lineage sacrifice, a ward sacrifice, and the most important one, the village sacrifice.¹⁴ Any sacrifice consists of four essential elements: Slaughtering the animal, pouring upon the jar, spraying the belly, and putting food on the jar.

Though divination¹⁵ does give directions for the sacrifice, the variation rests in the detail: Who is allowed to be present, the color of the sacrificial animal, whether a blacksmith performs the ritual and any special words to be said. The format can be found in sacrifices at any social level. One common element in all sacrifices is chasing away “bad things” or “bad thoughts”, which are not defined in any greater detail but are ubiquitous. Evil has to leave, has to go to someone else; it has to be elsewhere, not here. Some evil is inevitable, so someone who should suffer, is possibly someone else.

The home sacrifice has also a larger variant, reaching beyond the confines of the compound. When the reason for the sacrifice is more important, that is, when social problems indicate a sacrifice, a goat has to be slaughtered. Yet the main difference is not the animal but beer. When a goat is sacrificed, the man has to brew the ritual beer of the Kapsiki,¹⁶ which provides the time frame for the major rituals in Kapsiki. The recipe for brewing beer is similar all over the world. One soaks sorghum grains in water for a day, and lets them sprout and dry. Sprouts in Kapsiki should not remain exposed to the air too long, because otherwise “the beer is for one’s one burial”.¹⁷ The brewing process includes a long cooking period, a day and a night, and then the beer is taken from the large cooking pot into beer jars, including the *melè*. For ritual beer, the brewer does not add yeast but he simply waits three days for the beer to ferment on its own. After the second day, the beer starts to ferment and is called *sarerhè*

14 A special sacrifice in these Mandara Mountains involves the largest of all sacrificial animals, a bull hand-fed in the stable. This complicated sacrifice bears some quite distinct characteristics. See for the North of the Mandara area, Charlotte von Graffenried, *Das Jahr des Stieres: Ein Opferritual der Zulgo und Gemjek in Nordkamerun* (Studia Ethnographica Friburgensia 2, Freiburg: Freiburg Universitäts Verlag, 1984). For the Kapsiki variant, see Van Beek, *Dancing Dead*, chapter 5.

15 Usually with a crab. See Walter E. A. van Beek, *The Smith in Kapsiki/Higi Culture, North Cameroon and Northeastern Nigeria* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015), in press.

16 Walter E. A. van Beek, “Kapsiki Beer Dynamics,” in *Ressources vivrières et choix alimentaires dans le bassin du lac Chad* (eds Eric Garine, Olivier Langlois and Claude Raimond; Paris: IRD, 2006), 477–500.

17 The crux of the brewing process, viz. sprouting the sorghum, in effect is the very reason these people are called Kapsiki: *psekè* means to sprout.

(the smith drinks), and then it will be used for sacrifice.¹⁸ The sacrifice follows the same general liturgy as the sacrifice of a chicken, but spitting on the belly and putting ground millet on the *melè* is only done if the diviner has specifically indicated the need to do so.

The man and his son keep the goat's neck above the jar, and the father stabs it to let the first blood fall on the *melè*. Everybody listens to the man praying "Shala, let us all be healthy, here is something to eat". The man cuts the throat of the animal, the blood is collected in a pot, and all who live in the compound put some of it on their own *melè*. With the goat dead, beer is poured in a special oblong calabash and the owner pours on his *melè*, asking for health, children and good feelings in the house and the ward. His son gives all people of the family some beer for their personal *melè*, and the man pours blood and beer on the entrance of the wall, putting some blood and beer every few meters on the inside of the wall. Finally, he pours blood and beer in the hollow stone at the lower end of the forecourt. He is the first then to drink, and his wives and children follow him, spraying beer on their bellies and putting the food stuff on their belly as well, as we saw in the sacrifice of a chicken. The goat is skinned, butchered and cooked, and life in the compound resumes its normal daily rhythm. In the evening, the rest of the meat is cooked as part of the sauce. The owner then takes the broiled liver from the pot and, with both hands, puts a few morsels and some excrement on the *melè*, with similar words. His family does the same.

One may invite a sister's son as a special guest. While a nephew performs the actual slaughter on normal occasions, he does not do so for sacrifice, but his presence will add to the well-being at the sacrifice. The link between mother's brother and sister's son in Kapsiki is close and affectionate and this task is deemed fitting. After a non-ritual slaughter the boy will get a substantial amount of meat, the neck, liver, first stomach (*omasum*) and a piece of a hind leg. All this precious meat he will bring home proudly, to eat with his family.

The main difference between a chicken and a goat sacrifice can be seen early the next morning. In case of a goat, close kinsmen and invited neighbors assemble for the last phase of the ritual, drinking from the *tè melè*. The beer now has its optimal level of fermentation. In such a ritual drinking spree, the owner carefully distributes a number of beer jars, one for the old men around the fire place, one for some other guests, while the *melè* itself remains in the

18 The Kapsiki also know a white beer variant that is brewed exclusively by women for immediate consumption or for the market. Recently, the women have taken up brewing the red *tè* for the market, developing a quicker process enhancing the taste.

house for the immediate kin. Then he explains the reason for the sacrifice in often extremely vague, even elliptical language:

I was at somebody's who dreamt that I had to do a sacrifice, a few nights ago. I have put some grains in the water and on the *melè*. I have something left and invited a few people to drink together with me.

He indicates no specific problems, just the fact that he 'dreamt', that is, consulted the diviner and has prepared beer. But the neighbors probably know the reasons anyway, as such a sacrifice is aimed at "usual problems" like illness or infertility, though it also might be held at more regular intervals to keep the house healthy.

The owner himself drinks first, while his family drinks from the *melè* inside the house. The old men applaud the owner and the oldest or the village chief offers flattering comments. He should do that also in the favored Kapsiki speech style, in which a lot is said with as little clarity as possible. Hyperbole, hidden references to happenings in the past, and parts of stories are mixed into a discourse which is real "inside speak". "Some grains in the water" is quite an understatement because between 80 and 120 liters of beer is standard, and this ritual drinking takes all morning.

A house owner may invite a blacksmith, either at his own wish or because divination has told him to. In that case the smith sits at the side, softly clapping his hands; if the sacrifice is done in the evening, the smith may perform the sacrifice, but it will be something small, like a chicken. For some serious issues, a sacrifice will take place outside home, for example at a spot associated with *shala* (god) in the bush; in that case a blacksmith has to do it, as it would simply be too dangerous to do it oneself. For such a sacrifice the color of the goat is clearly indicated, usually black, and the animal is left in the bush; sometimes its feet are broken and then it is left behind. In a few cases the blacksmith may take some of the immolated beast back home, depending on the divination. Reasons for such intense sacrifices are, for example, a child's death or prolonged infertility.

The general mood during a sacrifice is usually quite relaxed. The ritual does not call for a reverential attitude or for special outfits; Kapsiki ritual is often quite homely, part of everyday life, without specific formulas or attitudes. Only in rituals for the whole village, such as the village sacrifice, is the whole day marked off as a day-out-of-time, as a liminal day and then nobody should cultivate. The transition from daily time to ritual or liminal time is usually not marked, and is gradual and smooth; yet there is a recognizable core to the ritual, a symbolic focus, which defines the high point of the proceedings.

In sacrifice, this is the killing of the chicken, although the prayers and blessings during a sacrifice are straightforward and in normal language.

5 Discussion

Sacrifice has received much theoretical attention since the start of religious studies and anthropology. Not only is sacrifice the core rite in Kapsiki religion, this is the case in many religions throughout the world, and with good reason. Sacrifices come ‘naturally’ in religions; in the past they have been characterized as bribe (E. B. Tylor), as gifts to the gods (M. Mauss), as acts of consensual violence (R. Girard) and throughout as communion with the sacred. But if anything characterizes the Kapsiki sacrifice it is the notion of a meal, a family meal; the classic scholar of religion Robertson Smith would recognize this immediately. It is in many respects a standard family meal, but for the presence of the unseen, of a family member who is dead – the father – or of a special guest who is invisible, in this case *shala*. In the terminology of the new cognitive theory of religion,¹⁹ such a sacrifice is a cognitively optimal ritual, a ritual that comes quickly to mind, is easily remembered and has a liturgy that does not require a good memory, as it is just a normal meal with an invisible guest.

The core notion here is “minimal counterintuitive”, a term coined by Pascal Boyer for supernatural concepts. Supernatural beings conform our inbred expectations of human beings but with one single but significant change: A ghost is a person, but without a material body; a witch is a normal embodied person with a spirit that detaches itself and can do harm; a god is a being like a person with some special power of omnipresence.²⁰ The power of these concepts is that they fit in well with our existent cognitive framework, but through their one minor-but-crucial difference stick to the memory. They are quick to learn, easy to transmit and hard to forget. I think that this productive concept can well be used for rituals too. Concepts that are minimally counterintuitive are called cognitively optimal, and hence rituals that are minimally counterintuitive I will call optimal rituals.²¹

Such a meal becomes an optimal ritual because of one minimally counterintuitive aspect, the invisible guests. They are human, addressed yes, fed

19 Harvey Whitehouse, *Modes of religiosity. A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* (Oxford: Altamira Press, 2004).

20 Pascal Boyer, *Religion explained: The Human Instincts that fashion Gods, Spirits and Ancestors* (London: Vintage Books, 2002).

21 Whitehouse, *Modes*, chapter 4.

definitely, personally known without a doubt, but nobody sees them and they digest nothing. As one eats every day in almost the same way, the exegesis remains close to home: Eating with the 'other'. The model for the optimal ritual is a daily event, ordinary, normal and not easy to forget. In a similar vein, in one of the few gestures that are out of the ordinary in the home sacrifice, the children get their first food on their belly instead of inside them. When Tlimu put the stripes of mush on his children's belly, the act in itself was cognitively optimal. Feeding the belly is normal, feeding the belly on the outside is minimally counterintuitive, an optimal ritual act.²²

The minimal counterintuitive aspects are in the unseen presences and in the act as slight but crucial departures of the normal meal, but are also represented materially, in the *melè* itself. The jar represents the conceptual beings plus the different way of eating. So the counterintuitive aspect is not only thought and done, but also embodied, a special object stored at a special place, to be used and addressed only at this occasion. Although some *melè* are recognizable as special pots, many in fact have no distinctive features. A jar is a *melè* thanks to its history: It was fabricated as a *melè*, has functioned as such in the rites of farewell for the father, and simply is considered special.²³ That unseen presence has a clear material focus in the sacrificial jar, the *melè*, but also in the wall of the house, which renders the unseen less invisible after all.²⁴ Thus there are not only minimally counterintuitive concepts and rituals, but also

22 This closeness to everyday experience also enhances the self-referential function of ritual, in the words of Rappaport, implying a self-contained act in which the actors have a definite position, but where the basic and overly clear message is that people are inside a ritual. Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

23 Pots are usually used for shrines in this region: Judy Sterner and Nicholas David, "Pots, stones and potsherds: Shrines in the Mandara Mountains (North Cameroon and Northeastern Nigeria)," in *Shrines in Africa: History, Politics and Society* (ed. Allan C. Dawson; Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2009), 1–40. The notion that pots *are* people, as argued for the Bulahay and Mafa to the North of the Kapsiki, does not hold for the Kapsiki, at least not nearly so strong: Nicholas David, Judy Sterner & Kondji Gavua, "Why Pots are Decorated," *Current Anthropology* 29, 3 (1988): 265–289. Compare the Mofu situation, Jeanne-Françoise Vincent, "Le prince et le sacrifice: pouvoir, religion et magie dans les montagnes du Nord-Cameroun," *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 2 (1987): 89–121, as well with other West African types of shrines, Walter E. A. van Beek, "Shrines and sacred places in two traditional West African religions," in *Sacred Spaces and Contested Identities* (eds Paul Post, Philip Nel and Walter van Beek; Trenton: Africa World Press), 65–82.

24 For a treatise on the cognitive weight of the various senses in Kapsiki, see Walter E. A. van Beek, "Eyes on top. Culture and the Weight of the Senses," in *Invisible Africa: Sprache und Geschichte in Afrika* 21 (ed. Anne Storch; Köln: Koppe, 2010), 245–270.

objects. This sacrificial complex is, as an optimal ritual, what I would call with Whitehouse an “attractor point”: A series of minor changes in the daily routine and entourage, constituting a rite in which people can feel at home, can do almost as they are wont to do and yet feel connected with the other world.

This cognitively optimal characteristic is highlighted by, for instance, the absence of formulaic speech. People tell *shala* or their father directly what they want, and this entails just the basics of life: Food, health, fertility and reasonable relations. And please no evil, not here in this compound at least. The unseen presence is addressed in terms of reciprocity:

We give you food, so give us health, or even the reverse, if you do not give us ours, then you can forget about any claims upon us. If you let us suffer, you will suffer as well.

And what could be more cognitively optimal than reciprocity? Both the visible and the unseen are joined at the hip, interdependent in one fragile universe. For the rest, nothing special there, and thus sacrifice is in a way “nothing special”, it is just doing what comes naturally.

Pro Patria Mori: Sacrificing Life in Service of the Political Community

Theo W. A. de Wit

1 Introduction

At Christmas, 1915, five months after the German invasion and occupation of neutral Belgium, Cardinal Mercier, the primate of Belgium, published a pastoral letter entitled *Patriotism and Endurance*. In this letter, Mercier passionately argued that the Belgians were justified in regarding their patriotism as ‘consecrated’ and consequently, the German violation of Belgian national sovereignty as a “sacrilegious profanation”. The letter specifically sought to respond to a pastoral-theological question, put to Mercier by members of his flock, namely whether or not it is justified to view soldiers falling for a just cause (“which ours clearly is”) as martyrs. Mercier’s immediate response was ‘no’, not in the theological sense of the word, for after all, unlike soldiers, the Christian martyr does not resist his executioners. At the same time however, Mercier had little doubt that any soldier who, in avenging violated justice, laid down his life in honor of his fatherland, would be assured of eternal salvation:

The soldier who dies to save his brothers, to protect the hearths and the altars of his country, fulfils the highest form of love. (...) We are justified for hoping for them the immortal crown which encircles the foreheads of the elects. For such is the virtue of an act of perfect love that, of itself alone, it wipes out a whole life of sin. Of a sinner instantly it makes a saint.¹

A few months later his French counterpart, cardinal Billot, responded with severe disapproval:

To say that the mere fact of dying consciously for the just cause of the Fatherland “suffices to assure salvation” means to substitute the

¹ See for the full text of the pastoral letter in English <http://www.zum.de/psm/1wk/ww1/mercier.php3>.

Fatherland for God (...), to forget what God is, what is sin, what is divine forgiveness.²

To Billot, positing any political-theological link between God and fatherland, between the forgiving of sins and the imperatives of patriotic duty, was *theologically* indefensible and should therefore be resisted.

In 1951 the medievalist Ernst Kantorowicz, who was a great authority on medieval political theology, revisited this remarkable and fundamental difference of opinion within the Roman Catholic Church at that dramatic moment in modern European history, in an article entitled *Pro Patria Mori*. Kantorowicz's historic-systematic reflections in this article point to the conclusion that, during the first half of the twentieth century, the notion of sacrificing one's life in service of the fatherland had fallen into discredit. This conclusion, which I will reformulate as a statement of problem, will be my point of departure (II).

Not long after the First World War however, Carl Schmitt (1888–1985) – a controversial, seminal, German jurist and political thinker – would reestablish the notion of laying down one's life in service of the state as central to our political existence, and to the state's sovereignty, in his polemical treatise *The Concept of the Political*³ which was aimed against post-war, liberal Weimar Republic Germany's putting in perspective of state and politics. Schmitt's invocation of Thomas Hobbes in support of his argument however, fails to square with the fact that specifically Hobbes may be regarded as one of the first modern political theorist to attack the notion of the primacy of community over individual (III).

Current political-philosophical and political-theological discussions regarding the continued meaningfulness of *pro patria mori* may be viewed in the continuum of the initial debate between Mercier/Schmitt on the one hand, and Billot on the other. Recently, the American philosopher of law Paul W. Kahn

2 E. H. Kantorowicz, "Pro Patria Mori in Medieval Political Thought," in *Selected Studies* (eds Michael Cherniavsky and Ralph E. Giesey; New York: Augustin, 1965), 308–324 (309). See also E. H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), v.3, "Pro patria mori," 232–273.

3 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996). Translation of Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen. Text von 1932 mit einem Vorwort und drei Corollarien* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1963). The first version of the text appeared in 1927 as an article in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 58, 1 (1927), 1–33. See also Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology. Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). The common translation of *Politische Theologie; vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1921).

chose to emphatically side with Schmitt. His compatriot, the theologian and ethical theorist Stanley Hauerwas, in following Billot (and theologians such as Karl Barth⁴), however appears to harbor grave reserves, specifically regarding the corollary to the willingness to die for one's country, namely the willingness to kill for it (iv).

2 An Ancient Value, Dissolving Like Smoke

To Kantorowicz, the cardinals' difference of opinion is cause for launching an historical investigation into the whole notion of *pro patria mori*. For, as he phrases his consideration:

If two eminent princes of the Church disagree so profoundly on a fundamental matter of life and death, and of life after death, we may be sure that the reasons for such a basic disagreement are to be sought in a distant past and that the whole problem has a long history.⁵

In an exquisitely documented contribution, he then shows that death in service of the community – for *patria* read here 'city' (*polis*), and all the city stood for – was first and foremost a cherished ideal of Greek and Roman classical antiquity. In subsequent feudal times, mainly as a result of the growing influence of Christianity, this notion of laying down one's life for the good of the city however gradually lost its emotional and (semi-)religious significance. For, as we may already read in St Augustine, Christians not so much fight and fall for the sake of earthly fame, but rather – as martyrs – for that of the invisible *patria aeterna*, the heavenly Jerusalem.

Only in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries would the temporal notion of *patria* (now framed in terms of national territory or kingdom) regain its emotional appeal, and thus, by manner of speaking, return from heaven to earth. A precedent for the contrasting positions of Mercier's politico-theological affirmation and Billot's theological reservations, may be found in a much earlier debate, namely that of whether participation in a Crusade would contribute

4 The *Wikipedia* article on Hauerwas (accessed January 1, 2015) explicitly mentions Karl Barth as an influence. With regard to Barth's position on the First World War, see Dieter Schellong, "Jenseits von politischer Theologie und unpolitischer Theologie. Zum Ansatz der Dialektischen Theologie," in *Der Fürst dieser Welt. Carl Schmitt und die Folgen* (ed. Jacob Taubes; München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag/Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 1983), 292–316.

5 E. H. Kantorowicz, "Pro Patria Mori in Medieval Thought," 308 and 309.

to the crusader's salvation or not. While the Council of Clermont (1095) clearly established that the crusader would be absolved of any unfulfilled churchly penances (for instance prescribed fasting, giving alms, prayers), but not of all sins (*remissio peccatorum*), in political and churchly practice this distinction was generally ignored. As a result, common understanding held that any crusader who fell in defense of the Holy Land would automatically become a martyr, gaining direct access to paradise.

By the early fifteenth century, at the height of this development towards a sacralization and a greater appreciation of the emotive value of the notion of country (France, *Francia Deo sacra*, constitutes the paradigm in this regard), some authors were even starting to draw close parallels between the martyr's death (or that of the crusader), and the act of sacrificing one's life in defense of the *corpus mysticum* of the fatherland – both namely acts rooted in love (*caritas*).

Kantorowicz concludes that the positions of both Mercier and Billot, each in their own way, find vindication in tradition: While Mercier's pastoral patriotism follows a well-established tradition of ecclesiastical and political thinking, Billot has theological dogma on his side when he admonishes against the 'substitution' of fatherland for God. Of most relevance to us however, is a concluding remark Kantorowicz permits himself at the end of his investigation. This remark is not only indicative of the modesty of this great medievalist, but also betrays a certain dismay when he lets slip that:

It may be left to the reader to figure out all the distortions which the central idea of the *corpus mysticum* has suffered by its transference to national, party, and racial doctrines in more distant and in most recent times.⁶

Kantorowicz here refers to the examples of the "Tombs of the Martyrs" which the National Socialists erected in Munich in 1932, and to the gigantic banner, proclaiming *Chi muore per Italia non muore*,⁷ draped over the façade of the Milan cathedral as backdrop to the 1937 Christmas memorial service for Fascist Italy's fallen combatants in the Spanish Civil War.

To Kantorowicz, these 'distortions', together with a growing "disenchantment of the world", signal that "the ancient ethical values, miserably abused and exploited in every quarter, are about to dissolve like smoke". Given the "cold efficiency" witnessed during and since the Second World War on the

6 Kantorowicz, "Pro patria mori in medieval Thought," 324.

7 "Whoever die for Italy do not die."

one hand, and the contemporary individual's fear of falling into the trap of religio-ideological 'illusions' on the other, it would seem the days of the traditional religious and ideological 'superstructure' are numbered. As a result, Kantorowicz suspects that:

Human lives (are) no longer (being) sacrificed but 'liquidated'. We are about to demand a soldier's death without any reconciling emotional equivalent for the lost life. If the soldier's death in action – not to mention the citizen's death in bomb-struck cities – is deprived of any idea encompassing *humanitas*, be it God or king or patria, it will be deprived also of the ennobling idea of self-sacrifice. It becomes a cold-blooded slaughter or, what is worse, assumes the value and significance of a political traffic accident on a bank holiday.⁸

If I were to – for my own purposes in this essay – somewhat reformulate and actualize Kantorowicz's concluding remark from 1951, I would describe the new constellation he points towards, as follows. By instrumentalizing traditional, ancient values (such as that of *pro patria mori*), the great totalitarian movements of the twentieth century – the century of the "slave revolt of technology" in Walter Benjamin's apt description⁹ – suddenly restored the political relevance of certain theological, eschatological reservations which have been present within Christianity for a long time. Specifically, reservations pertaining to any strong affinity towards, or 'cohesion' with, political-military power. The catastrophic devastation of two world wars have taught Europeans the bitter lessons that nation is best not tied to religion, that churches should refrain from lending their weight to the exaltation – the "praising to heaven" – of dying in war.

But the simultaneous loss of what Kantorowicz indicates as an "idea encompassing *humanitas*" also points towards a nascent void. Especially during the past two decades, Western politics, both within Europe and abroad, once more seem to hover between a bleak and defensive liberalism (Kantorowicz's "anti-ideological individual") with rational management and a purely formal notion of citizenship on the one hand, and on the other, the longing for a (greater) sense of community, and the reemergence of nationalistic politics. The German journalist Richard Herzinger's book *Die Tyrannei des Gemeinsinns*

8 Kantorowicz, "Pro Patria Mori in Medieval Thought," 324.

9 W. Benjamin, "Theorien des deutschen Faschismus," in *Schriften* III (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), 238: *Jeder kommende Krieg ist zugleich ein Sklavenaufstand der Technik.*

(1997) provides a good example of the first tendency.¹⁰ In this book, Herzinger bids farewell to the *Gemeinsinn* (community spirit) and its “sacrificial logic”, instead making a strong plea for the “egoistical society”. The second tendency may be observed in the reemergence of what many see as that kind of populist, nationalist sacrificial politics which Erich Voegelin in 1939 had termed “political religion” – that is, of the sacralization of collective identities such as state, nation and race.¹¹ As we shall see below, these contradictory trends were already apparent to Carl Schmitt’s writings in the 1930s.

3 Carl Schmitt: Killing and Dying for “One’s Own”

At first glance, Schmitt provides a Hegelian¹² ‘statist’ defense of the notion of sacrificing one’s life for the political community – this already during the early 1920s in Weimar Germany, and most explicitly in his renowned *The Concept of the Political* (1927; 1932). In the central fifth paragraph of this treatise on the political (*Das Politische*), entitled “decision concerning war and enemy”, one reads for instance:

The state as the decisive political entity possesses an enormous power: The possibility of waging war and thereby publicly disposing of the lives of men. The *ius belli* contains such a disposition. It implies a double possibility: The right to demand from its own members the readiness to die (*Todesbereitschaft*) and unhesitatingly to kill enemies

10 Richard Herzinger, *Die Tyrannei des Gemeinsinns. Ein Bekenntnis zur egoistischen Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1997), especially “Lob des Egoismus” (80–91) and “Verlocherungen der Transzendenz oder Opfer und Interesse” (183–211). Particularly the German ‘Opferkult’ (193) gets Herzinger hot under the collar: *Gefeiert werden in Deutschland die Märtyrer, die Aushalter auf verlorener Posten, die immer an ihrem Platz stehen und nicht anders können. Die Linke verehrt die Messiasgestalten der Ausgebeuteten und Entrechteten, die sich schlachten liessen.* Here Thomas Münzer, Rosa Luxemburg and Che Quevara are the heroes. *Die Rechte verehrt dagegen den Frontsoldaten, der, von Führung und Heimat verlassen, tapfer seine Pflicht tat bis zum bitteren Ende, von Verdun bis Stalingrad.* In brief: “Opfern für die Zukunft, ausharren für die Ewigkeit” (86–87).

11 E. Voegelin, *Die Politischen Religionen* (Stockholm: Bermann-Fischer Verlag, 1939). See also John Gray’s actualization thereof, *Black Mass. Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London: Penguin, 2007).

12 For Hegel’s justification of sacrifice in service of the nation, see Peter Jonkers, “Justifying Sacrifice,” *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 50 (2008): 313–329.

(*Tötungsbereitschaft*). (...) By virtue of this power over the physical life of men, the political community transcends all other associations or societies.¹³

The state particularly also ‘transcends’ the “individualistic principles of a liberal economic order”. In an essentially individualist liberal society however, the individual himself decides which causes are personally worth dying for – that is, as “a thoroughly private matter, decided upon freely”.¹⁴ According to this principle, “sacrificing one’s own life” (*sein Leben opfern*), in the traditional sense of *pro patria mori*, cannot be justified on any grounds:

War, the readiness of combatants to die, the physical killing of human beings who belong on the side of the enemy – all this has no normative meaning, but an existential meaning only, particularly in a real combat situation with a real enemy. There exist no rational purpose, no norm no matter how true, no program no matter how exemplary, no social ideal no matter how beautiful, no legitimacy nor legality which could justify men in killing each other for this reason.¹⁵

Schmitt also identifies what is actually at stake in this extreme ‘existential’ situation, when the sacrifice of the individual’s life is demanded. What is being defended, is the own, “one’s own form of existence” (*Die eigene Art Existenz*).¹⁶

But why does Schmitt, writing in the context of the young Weimar democracy, place such emphasis on precisely this unique position of the state – the sacrifice of the lives of its citizens and their willingness to kill? Because the state’s sovereignty and ‘transcendence’ have ceased to be self-evident, and – in Schmitt’s own diagnosis – may even be under radical threat. This is already evident from the very first, somewhat cryptic sentence of his treatise: “The concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political”.¹⁷ With this

13 Schmitt, *Concept*, 46 and 47.

14 Schmitt, *Concept*, 48.

15 Schmitt, *Concept*, 48–49.

16 Schmitt, *Concept*, 27.

17 Schmitt, *Concept*, 19. Also the sentence from the *Political Theology* which brought Schmitt enduring fame and notoriety (5 and 35: “Sovereign is he who decides on the Exception”) contains this message – after all, the sovereign does not necessarily, per se, have to be the state. According to Wolfgang Palaver, the first sentence of *The Concept of the Political* – in its reference to the Polis – already indicates the ‘Greek’ and ‘mythical’ (not biblical) roots of Schmitt’s concept of the political, as Schmitt himself recognizes in a letter to Christian Meier from 29 mai 1968. See Palaver, *Die mythischen Quellen des Politischen*.

Schmitt directly distances himself from traditional German political theory, in which politics are identified with state, *politisch* coincides with *staatlich*.¹⁸

Schmitt takes his point of departure in establishing that the state, as a result of the emergence of a new type of political subject, is in the process of losing its monopoly on politics. To Schmitt, the fundamental political-philosophical question with regard to the proper or specific of the political (*Das Politische*) therefore needs to be raised anew. Schmitt's response is by way of a conceptual definition, expressed in the form of a criterion: "The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced, is that between friend and enemy".¹⁹ Ultimately, albeit to varying degrees, all relations which may rightly be termed 'politics' refer to "the ever present possibility of combat", in extreme instances, of civil war, or, once political unity (for instance the state) had been established, the possibility of an external, foreign enemy. To varying degrees: Properly viewed, the political constitutes no own domain or territory ('politics', as we are in the habit of saying) of its own; it denotes "the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation", and may be fed from a number of sources or domains.²⁰ Religious, economic or ethnic differences within a society may become politicized to the point of a confrontation *ad mortem*. To Schmitt, concepts such as friend, enemy and struggle all ultimately refer to the actual possibility of the "physical act of killing".

3.1 *Reflection on the Independence of the Political from the State*

Two aspects of Schmitt's thinking this far deserve closer attention within the context of my own investigation into the fate and legitimacy of the notion of *pro patria mori*.

Firstly, only once the political ceases to indicate an independent domain, once it comes to indicate the "intensity of a union or separation", can one truly speak of the *emancipation of the political from the state*. And because we know that for Schmitt the highest intensity is achieved in the willingness to kill or be

Carl Schmitts Freund-Feind-Theorie (Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln: Kohlhammer, 1998), 35; and Wolfgang Palaver, "A Girardian Reading of Schmitt's 'Political Theology,'" *Telos. A Quarterly Journal of Critical Thought*, 93 (1992): 43–68. The rest of my analysis will confirm his thesis.

18 In this regard, see Christoph Schönberger, "Der Begriff des Staates in Begriff des Politischen," in *Carl Schmitt. Der Begriff des Politischen. Ein kooperativer Kommentar* (ed. Reinhard Mehring; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003), 21–45.

19 Schmitt, *Concept*, 26.

20 Schmitt, *Concept*, 26.

killed, this emancipation potentially also holds a detachment of *mortal sacrifice* from the sphere of the national state.

What Schmitt observed in his own time, was that other political subjects were now vying with the state in demanding the ultimate sacrifice: Warring civil parties, partisans, guerillas, revolutionary classes and religions, terrorist groupings, etc.²¹ In this regard, Schmitt's theorizing anticipated our own world, where sacrificial willingness has long since become detached from state. Schmitt himself, however has a clear nostalgia for the 'transcendental' state which protects society "from above", and in exchange demands obedience from its citizens, and, in war, the supreme sacrifice. Schmitt therefore views these new political subjects as, in the first instance, competitors of the state, as proto-states. Into the 1930s he would keep hoping for a new, strong state, one able to harness and transcend social discord and conflict potential – thus his notorious backing of Hitler and the Nazi regime. At this point, the theory of René Girard on the 'scapegoat-mechanism' can be applied on Schmitt's theory of the Political, as – among others – Wolfgang Palaver did: "The civil War, the enmity within the State, is superseded by the transposition of enmity to an enemy outside".²²

Nevertheless, already in the late 1920s, Schmitt clearly saw and described the political reality of new, non-state, political subjects, equally demanding from their members a willingness to be killed, or to kill – potentially also of non-combatants. And with this, a new type of war and a new image of sacrifice appears on the horizon. 'Symmetrical' warfare, between sovereign states of equal rank in which regular combatants lay down their lives, becomes supplanted by the 'asymmetrical' warfare of partisans, guerillas and terrorist groups, internally demanding total engagement; externally, the willingness to sacrifice the lives of innocent civilians in pursuit of a grand ideal.²³

Attentive readers of Schmitt, such as Leo Strauss, Helmut Kuhn and Heinrich Meier – the first two already when the second version of Schmitt's treatise appeared in 1932 – have noted that the roots of Schmitt's emphatic

21 See also Carl Schmitt, *Theorie des Partisanen, Zwischenbemerkung zum Begriff des Politischen* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1963).

22 Wolfgang Palaver, *Die Mythischen Quellen des Politischen*, 36. See also Paul Dumouchel, *Le sacrifice inutile. Essai sur la violence politique*, Paris: Flammarion, 2011, especially 118–124 about Schmitt, and 134–138 about Girard: 'Cette structuration de l'espace de solidarité/hostilité vise à protéger le groupe contre la violence' (134).

23 With regard to this development away from symmetrical towards asymmetrical warfare, see: H. Münkler, "Symmetrische und asymmetrische Kriege," in *Merkur* 58. Jg. Heft 8, (2004), 649–659; H. Münkler, *Die neuen Kriege* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2002), especially Ch 5, „Der internationale Terrorismus," 175–207.

defense of *Das Politische*, as a realm of diverse human associations laying claim to the ultimate sacrifice, are essentially *moral*, even *theological* or *mythical* in nature.²⁴ Schmitt does not believe in a post-political world in which political struggle and the existential significance of sacrificial willingness have become supplanted by straightforward economic competition, eternal discussion, an unquenchable quest for entertainment and wanton consumerism – in other words, the liberal Utopia, “The End of History” which Fukuyama optimistically hailed following the downfall of communism.²⁵ The political and its ‘intensity’ – and with that, (self)sacrifice – are however unavoidable, says Schmitt. On this point, he indeed pays resemblance to many of today’s anti-liberal – both religious or conservative as well as revolutionary – movements, shunning neither the sacrifice of self or (innocent) others in the name of a fictional *patria* or *Heimat*, projected onto the past or future.

3.2 *The Demise of Self-Sacrifice: Thomas Hobbes’ ‘Individualistic’ Liberalism*

We have now arrived at the second aspect of interest to my investigation. As we saw, to Schmitt *the risk of death* constitutes the very reason for the existence of politics, its *raison d’être*. It is the existential risk – never completely predictable, never to be decided by a previously determined norm – which distinguishes the *political* community from all other human associations and affiliations: Only a political community or grouping can ask of its citizens, *casu quo* adherents, to kill or to be killed on its behalf.

It is therefore somewhat odd that Schmitt – in this treatise, but also in some of his other works – would make frequent appeal to the work of the seventeenth

24 Heinrich Meier, *Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss und „Der Begriff des Politischen,“ Zu einer Dialog unter Abwesenden*, (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1988); Theo W. A. de Wit, *De onontkoombaarheid van de politiek. De soevereine vijand in de politieke filosofie van Carl Schmitt* (Nijmegen: Pomppers, 1992). Wolfgang Palaver argued – convincingly, I think – against Heinrich Meier that Schmitts defense of the Political has ‘mythical’ (Greek, Roman and ‘heidenchristliche’), not theological-eschatological roots. Papaver, ‘*Die mythischen Quellen*’, 4: “Die mythische bzw. religiös-rituellen Quellen des Begriffs des Politischen,” 35–50.

25 Leo Strauss, “Notes on Carl Schmitt, The Concept of the Political (1932),” in Heinrich Meier, *Carl Schmitt*, 97–125; Helmuth Kuhn, “Besprechung zu: Carl Schmitt, Der Begriff des Politischen,” *Kant-Studien* 38 (1933): 190–196. With regard to Fukuyama’s utopia of the ‘end of history’, Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the last Man*, (New York: Free Press, 1992), and for my commentary, Theo W. A. de Wit, “De lompenverzamelaar en het libretto van de geschiedenis,” *Armada* 45 (2006): 27–42.

century thinker Thomas Hobbes.²⁶ Certainly, also to Hobbes the possibility of death constituted the fundamental *raison d'être* of politics – and no longer, as was the case for a whole classical tradition stretching back to Aristotle, the pursuit of the good life. On closer inspection however, precisely here also lies an important distinction between our two thinkers. To Hobbes, the violent death of the individual in the “state of nature” (in Hobbes’ construct of state, a fictitious *status* in which each person is law unto itself) is the very epitome of evil. It is the fear of death which drives mortal human beings towards a “civil state” and towards the state – a supreme, sovereign entity which establishes the rule of law, and is capable of offering effective protection. Guaranteeing the self-preservation of the individual therefore also constitutes the primary function of the state. Therefore, to Hobbes, the duty of obedience only holds as good as the guarantee of protection.

Seen in terms of Hobbes’ construct of state, where individual *self-preservation* is at the very heart of the political covenant, Schmitt’s political defense of the individual’s willingness to kill or be killed on behalf of the collective existence is therefore plainly an anomaly. After all, as Hobbes puts it:

Obligation of Subjects to the Sovereign, is understood to last as long, and no longer, than the power lasteth, by which he is able to protect them. For the right men have by nature to protect themselves, when none else can protect them, can by no Covenant be relinquished.²⁷

Some have noted that with this statement, Hobbes’ entire construct of state degenerates into an “absurdity”. For, when it comes to the crunch, when the sovereign really needs the utmost support of its subjects (that is, when the state itself is in danger) “they are admitted to be free to withdraw their support if in their judgment he is no longer clearly able to protect them”.²⁸

At this point we need to revisit one of the key building blocks of Hobbes’ construct of state. Hobbes starts out by fixing the citizen’s most important motives for choosing for the state – in other words, for a peaceful existence –

26 See also *Der Begriff des Politischen*, and especially the reference to Hobbes (121–123) – unjustly lacking from the English translation version. See also Carl Schmitt, *Der Leviathan in der Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes. Sinn und Fehlschlag eines politischen Symbols* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1938).

27 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or the matter, forme & power of a commonwealth ecclesiastical and civil* (ed. Macpherson; London: Pelican Books, 1968), 272.

28 C. B. Macpherson, ‘Introduction’ in Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 62.

in a series of moral prescriptions, or laws of nature.²⁹ Together, these constitute the conscience of the common, average (obviously still Christian) citizen. By transforming these moral prescriptions into positive laws, the state ensures the conditions necessary for their observance – something which was impossible in the “state of nature”. In this scheme however, military service, courage and dare (“the Contempt of Wounds, and violent Death”)³⁰ have no obvious place. Hobbes therefore also explicitly denies the status of courage as a virtue.³¹

Therefore, in Hobbes’ theory of state, military virtues and the love of one’s country unto death, suddenly become problematic – a firm departure from tradition, which, in Kantorowicz’s reconstruction, stretches back to Greco-Roman times. On the contrary, says Hobbes, it is precisely the state’s duty to ensure the *moral innocence* of its subjects, to prevent them from becoming “guilty of warre”³² – as would otherwise likely have been the case in a state of nature. Herewith the modern *separation of politics and morality*: Simply put, the norms of civilian life do not apply to the state and its *raison d’etat*, such being intimately related to matters of aggression and enmity. The citizen is *protected* and simultaneously *screened off* from evil by the state: Ideally, the conduct of war is not the business of the common citizen. Ideally, for the weakness of the Hobbesian state becomes apparent as soon as the state has to appeal to its citizens in times of peril, in other words, when the protector itself becomes in need of protection.

In agreement with Leo Strauss, this difference between Hobbes and Schmitt may be encapsulated as follows: While Hobbes, living in an illiberal world, may be regarded as the founder of liberalism and its attendant ideal of peaceful civilization, human rights and a humanity underway towards a single, united “partnership in consumption and production”, Schmitt, living in a liberal world, sees his task in undertaking a critique of liberalism by pointing out the overlooked lasting ‘intensity’ of the political.³³

29 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 14 and 15.

30 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 717. See Th. W. A. de Wit & Marin Terpstra, “Afschrikking en zelfopoffering. Thomas Hobbes en het nucleaire tijdperk,” *Krisis* 29, 1987, 27–46.

31 Leo Strauss reminds us of this in his discussion of Schmitt’s treatise on the political, “Notes,” 91.

32 That is at the core of the famous chapter 13 of the *Leviathan*, concerning the “Natural Condition of Mankind,” *Leviathan*, 183–188.

33 Strauss, *Notes*, 92–93.

4 The Current Divide: The Sniper and the Terrorist

Could the Hobbesian ideal of a peaceful life without (self)sacrifice – which Hobbes himself ultimately failed to convincingly conceptualize³⁴ – nevertheless still be realized? In the modern history of the right to self-preservation, the *factual* response to this question has been to re-conceptualize warfare as the ever-diminishing physical deployment of citizens – war which has therefore become more disembodied, abstract, technical and devastating. A good account of the *Rationalization of Slaughter* in modern times is given by the British historian Daniel Pick in his book *War Machine*.³⁵ The threat of nuclear holocaust embodies the ultimate consequence of this development. Nuclear weapons, in common with all other weapons which raise the *threat* of catastrophic war to unimaginable proportions, are the paradoxical outcome of a culture which elevates self-preservation to an absolute norm, while at the same time refusing to renounce the protection of state or world order against external threats. The impotent, pyrrhic, threat of the sacrificial pyre (Holocaust) is therefore in fact the corollary of our cultural *repugnance* towards any resolution of conflict by violent means, and especially towards the notion of self-sacrifice – something which countless people today would no doubt view as nothing short of insanity. By the way, Hobbes also brilliantly anticipated this development when voicing his deep skepticism of Christian ambitions of martyrdom and of those who come into conflict with the civil authorities as a result of their homespun evangelical doctrines.³⁶

During the Cold War, this doctrine of deterrence would present the world with a huge dilemma: Absolute peace between the two superpowers, or global annihilation. In our own time, the dilemma has become whether or not it would be equitable to effectively freeze existing global political-military power relations in order to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons (in for instance Iran).

34 At the end of *Leviathan*, in the “Review and Conclusion,” Hobbes suddenly comes up with a new ‘last’ natural law, namely: “That every man is bound by Nature, as much as in him lieth, to protect in Warre, the Authority, by which he is himself protected in time of Peace.” (*Leviathan*, 718–719). With regard to this inconsistency, see De Wit & Terpstra, “Afschrikking en zelfopoffering,” 27–35.

35 Daniel Pick, *War Machine. The rationalisation of slaughter in the Modern Age* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993).

36 See especially Ch. 42 of his *Leviathan*, ‘Of Power Ecclesiastical’, 521–609.

But it is particularly the following divide which nowadays determines the status and deployment of the notion of ultimate sacrifice in politics. The liberal, secular and democratically governed part of the world, hardly longer able to justify the notion of community-spirited self-sacrifice to itself, is increasingly confronted by that part of humanity which regards peaceful civilian existence without a hereafter simply a material and spiritual impossibility: Irredeemable warmongers, mercenaries and irregular terror groups of all ilk; but also poor and oppressed masses, receptive to the religious compensations to poverty and defeat offered by their leaders.

These two worlds have become embroiled in a number of political-military conflicts; none ever boding well, for all are morally utterly questionable. The moral weakness of a 'Hobbesian', post-heroic (especially European) world, essentially stripped of the notion of ultimate sacrifice, lies in the way she seeks to conduct her wars (nowadays often termed punitive strikes, peacekeeping missions and pacifications): That is, killing, while shunning the risk of getting killed. The American political philosopher Michael Walzer thus refers to Albert Camus ("You can't kill unless you are prepared to die") in his criticism of US intervention in Kosovo during the late 1990s. By mainly relying on superior air power and guided missile strikes, US strategy essentially entailed the massive deployment of firepower against Serb forces – with inevitable, significant Serbian "collateral damage" – while keeping the risk of its own losses to a bare minimum.³⁷ The soldier has now essentially become a *sniper* – executing the enemy from a distance. The same is true for the introduction of *drones* by states in their "war on terror": Sacrificing lives in the name of 'our' security is getting identical to 'liquidation' (as Kantorowicz suspected)

The moral poverty of the second world, one until recently symbolized by Osama bin Laden, lies in using poor and humiliated groups and masses for its paradise's insatiable appetite for martyred lives; while its 'victories' purely reside in a perverse quest to take as many opponent lives as possible. Punishment and revenge better describe their practices than the older European concepts of war,³⁸ For example, 'revenge' was the explicit motive of the terrorists who liquidated a great part of the editorial staff of the French journal *Charlie Hebdo* in January, 1915.

In a spiritual universe based on the pursuit of the earthly happiness of the greatest number of individuals – as Europe had largely become – it is becoming

37 Michael Walzer, *Arguing about War* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2004), 101.

38 See Marcel Hénaff, "Terror und Rache. Politische Gewalt, Gegenseitigkeit, Gerechtigkeit – zehn Jahre danach," *Lettre internationale* 94, 2011, 11–15.

increasingly difficult to ascribe any continued meaning to the notion of mortal self-sacrifice. “These guys have chosen for it”, would be a typical (but not uniquely) Dutch response to such casualties as may be suffered in, for instance, Afghanistan – a response indicative that, to many, the notion of supra-individual duty has become alien, incomprehensible even. After all, is not the state – or political community – merely an administrative device in service of its citizens? Now *who* would want to lay down their lives for the inland revenue service *anyway*? The classical *pro patria mori* is reframed and reduced to a job-risk, and falling in Afghanistan now becomes an occupational hazard rather than a matter of mortal self-sacrifice. And this is precisely what Kantorowicz had in mind when talking of soldiers dying in action “without any reconciling emotional equivalent”.

Not infrequently, their opponents in the *War on Terror* invoke the exact mirror image of this scenario. Here the martyr’s death is elevated to the pinnacle of human endeavor, and becomes the ultimate manifestation of the political or religious community and its triumphing sovereignty. Thus these two worlds hold one another in a curious and often deadly embrace. At the same time, we have all become inhabitants of a perverse moral universe: Suicidal dying in order to inflict punishment (religiously sanctioned violence), or killing from a safe distance (the war of calculating citizens).

4.1 *Paul Kahn: Sovereignty and Sacrifice*

In conclusion, let us turn to two contemporary American voices which are clearly recognizable as a continuation of the debate between Mercier/Schmitt and Billot, bearing in mind that Hobbes’ plea for peace appears to indicate greater affinity with the eschatological reservations of modern theology than Schmitt’s sacrificial concept of sovereignty. In *Political Theology*, a recent study whose very title bears homage to Carl Schmitt, Paul Kahn, author of a number of works on jurisprudence, demonstrates that, in the United States, the concept of state sovereignty continues to remain premised on the notion of patriotic self-sacrifice. Kahn presents a phenomenology of the political which seeks to identify and describe “the presence of the sacred, wherever it appears”.³⁹ He presents his study as an actualizing interpretation of Schmitt’s *Politische Theologie* (1921), but under the banner of the discipline of ‘political theology’ he

39 Paul Kahn, *Political Theology. Four new Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 25 and 121. Kahn’s title only adds the word ‘new’ to Schmitt’s original, *Politische Theologie. Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität*. (see note 9). From the same author, see also *Sacred Violence: Torture, Terror and Sovereignty* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

also provides a fairly original description (without any normative intentions) of specifically the American social imaginary of the political, in which he also regularly distances himself from Schmitt's ideological anti-liberalism.

According to the central thesis of his book, a political community is not simply a contractually assented rational entity, governed by the rule of law. The modern American state, forged in revolution, is a unity of identity and law, exception and norm, faith and reason, love and justice, sovereignty and constitution – in short, of *reason* and an existential *will* rooted in the revolutionary past. What the political imagery of such a community looks like – and not the part played by religious faith – is what is of relevance to a phenomenological and genealogical investigation into the “political theology” of such a political entity. In this regard, Kahn convincingly shows that, in terms of the United States' political self-conception, (national) sovereignty continues to play a key role. Only in light of this notion of sovereignty can one make sense of American's (in)famous ‘exceptionalism’ – the reluctance to join international human rights conventions and transnational courts – and other manifestations of national self-assurance such as the Pledge of Allegiance, the iconography of the flag, and the memorialization of citizen sacrifice.⁴⁰ The fact that the US president is always trailed by an officer with the nuclear strike codes on hand is further testimony to the fact that Schmitt's famous definition of sovereignty, as he who “decides on the state of exception (*Ausnamezustand*)” is no mere dead letter in the United States of today. These are all matters largely neglected by dominant liberal theory (Kahn regularly refers to John Rawls in this regard).

We may term Kahn's central thesis Schmittian, for also Schmitt believes that a world which still holds potential enemies cannot be completely governed by law alone, and that the state ought to keep a firm grip on the free exercise of ‘exceptional’ decisions – precisely in defense of the own way of life and the rule of law, including the possibility of demanding mortal self-sacrifice. Kahn also sees a political-theological continuity with the medieval doctrine of “the two bodies of the king” (one mortal, the other immortal), and the ‘transfer’ of this sovereignty to the revolutionary concept of national sovereignty.⁴¹ Just like the king's coronation endowed him with sacred status, the revolution forged the (American) nation into a trans-generational, ‘eternal’ subject. The revolution had enduringly recast (American) history as the progress towards national sovereignty, while the revolution's ‘truths’ remain at

40 Kahn, *Political Theology*, 8–17 and 2.

41 Concerning this doctrine, see Kantorowicz's famous book (note 1).

the heart of its citizens' allegiance – to the point of being willing to make the supreme sacrifice.

4.2 *Hauerwas: The Sacrifice of the Unwillingness to Kill*

As remarked, Kahn has no normative intentions, even though he clearly has a corrective of liberal political theorizing in mind – which, in his view, is as inclined as European politics to disregard the existential dimension (i.e. of will) from politics, then only to be surprised by its sudden reappearances. Rightly so, for as I have already mentioned, also Europe is experiencing the reemergence of nationalist impulses, and of emotionally charged issues around collective identity.

It would seem that his compatriot, the well-known theologian and ethical theorist Stanley Hauerwas, author of a number of studies on the ethics of war, not so much wants to challenge Kahn's phenomenology, as insist on a normative and theological evaluation of the American social imaginary of the political. Thus, Hauerwas calls in question the Christian-theological legitimacy of Kahn's political theology, as did – as we saw – Wolfgang Palaver in the case of Schmitt. In 2009, Hauerwas published an essay on the sacrificial aspect of war.⁴² His empirical thesis, essentially not entirely dissimilar from Kahn's, has two aspects. War – with also Hauerwas in the first instance thinking of his own political community's numerous wars – not only demands the supreme sacrifice of soldier's lives, war by nature is a "sacrificial system". War has a unique "moral power", that "war creates its own justification".⁴³

War gives purpose and meaning to the lives of many, across generations. It also enables the transformation of common history into a coherent patriotic narrative in which the sides of good and bad, 'us' and 'them', are clearly defined. War also teaches us many valuable moral lessons: That meaning is more important than happiness, that self-interest is less important than noble-minded sacrificial willingness, that hardiness and chivalry are important virtues, and in general, that there are more important issues than our trivial daily concerns. And, while not often admitted, war even has a certain aesthetic dimension to it. As many first-hand accounts testify, the spectacle of war can be

42 Stanley Hauerwas, "Sacrificing the Sacrifices of War," in *Religion and Politics of Peace and Conflict* (eds Linda Hogan and Dylan Lee Lehrke; Princeton: Princeton Theological Monograph, 2009), 83–104. Also note that the article is also included in Hauerwas' most recent book, *War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on violence and National Identity* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011).

43 Hauerwas, "Sacrificing," 86 and 93.

a captivating affair, powerfully blending destruction with an aesthetic pleasure “beyond good and evil”. And many a soldier has experienced that ecstatically intense degree of camaraderie, where combat essentially becomes a matter of killing or dying for one’s comrades, one’s ‘buddies’. And in conclusion, says Hauerwas, war manages to “to close the gap between piety – which required self-abnegation and self-sacrifice – and violence”, by for instance establishing the death of Christ and those of the fallen within the same continuum.⁴⁴ As we have seen, this was what Cardinal Billot had protested against in 1915.

Apart from conveying a well-defined ethos and political-religious narrative, war is self-justifying in another way. The state sending its troops to war is forced to provide some kind of meaning to the deaths of its fallen. For this reason, politicians would hardly if ever concede that a particular war mission had been a mistake or a failure, and rather tend to portray defeats as victories. To concede to error would after all mean to betray those lives sacrificed. Thus war has become self-justifying, almost impossible to criticize. For historical truth needs to be adapted to the unchangeable facts of dying and the death of the enemy.

The second part of Hauerwas’ thesis concerns the killing of the enemy. For in war, of soldiers is required not only “the willingness to be killed”, but also “as its dark side, *the sacrifice of our unwillingness to kill*”. In evidence, he quotes a number of empirical studies which indicate that killing not only leaves most soldiers with deep emotional wounds, but that it also “creates a world of silence, isolating those who have killed”.⁴⁵ Therefore, we may say that “no sacrifice is more dramatic than the sacrifice of those sent to war, that is, the sacrifice of their unwillingness to kill”, and that possibly even greater cruelty lurks in the expectation that those who have killed in action, would simply slip back into the ‘normality’ of civilian life when returned home.⁴⁶

In terms of delineating his own position with regard to the above empirical thesis, the *theologian* Hauerwas stands closest to Cardinal Billot’s eschatological reserve. As members of the body of the *Civitas Dei* (Hauerwas explicitly refers to St Augustine), the Christian cannot identify himself with an (American) patriotism which – as we have seen in Kahn – turns the nation into a ‘religion’, worthy of killing and dying for. After all, “in the cross of Christ, the Father has forever ended our attempts to sacrifice to God in terms set by

44 Hauerwas, “Sacrificing,” 89. Hauerwas here leans on Allen Frantzen’s *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice, and the Great War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

45 Hauerwas, “Sacrificing,” 94 and 95. (Italics are mine).

46 Hauerwas, “Sacrificing,” 100.

the city of man". Translated into secular political philosophical terms, this means "that the World no longer needs to make sacrifices for tribe or state, or even humanity".⁴⁷ Hauerwas here recalls the statement which brought him to theological fame, namely that "the first task of the church is not to make the world more just, but to make the world the world".⁴⁸ Thus, no sacralization of war and its sacrificial practices, and skepticism towards all unions precipitated by the specter of war – in other words, a political-theological *task of demythologizing*.

Hauerwas' affinity to Hobbes as an *ethical theorist* and to the Hobbesian appeal to the laws of nature and the basic dictates of reason is only at first glance. According to Hauerwas, there is "no more basic natural law than the prohibition against killing".⁴⁹ Also to Hobbes "to seek peace, and follow it" constitutes the first and fundamental law of nature.⁵⁰ But Hauerwas finds the consequence of the Hobbesian world described above (that is, the liberal striving for security while shunning the risk of self-sacrifice), difficult to accept, as may be seen in the following quote:

"I think, that Christians must insist that what is true is not what a society thinks is worth killing for, but rather that for which they think is worth dying." To Hauerwas, we were "created to be at peace with one another and God (...) created to be in communion with one another".⁵¹

Faced with the choice of having to kill or be killed, his answer would be *rather martyr than murderer*, a conviction rooted as much in Christianity as in Socratic tradition. Hobbes however no longer believes in the inherent *telos* of communion, thus immediately qualifying his newly formulated first law of nature with "and when he cannot contain it (i.e. peace), that he may seek, and use, all helps, and advantages of Warre".⁵² Within the rhetoric of *Leviathan*, this qualification sought to make acceptable the sovereign's monopoly on violence, for only then could moral prescriptions become practice, and the Christian really can follow his conscience. As mentioned, here starts the Hobbesian separation of morals and politics – a historic development which has ended up in

47 Hauerwas, "Sacrificing," 102.

48 Hauerwas, "Sacrificing," 101.

49 Hauerwas, "Sacrificing," 103.

50 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 190.

51 Hauerwas, "Sacrificing," 102–103.

52 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 190.

a strategy of “killing without risk”, and which, to a theologian such is Hauerwas, is completely unacceptable.

5 Conclusion

So what conclusion can we draw with regard to the fate of the notion of *pro patria mori*, with regard to its legitimacy? Kantorowicz’s diagnosis of the abuse of this ancient value in modern times has not managed to completely discredit it, as is evident from the work of influential authors like Schmitt and Kahn. The actuality of the notion of self-sacrifice is perhaps most apparent in the Arab world, where many are prepared to give their lives for a new future and true national sovereignty, rooted in the people. These revolutions illustrate an old insight, namely that peace by itself can never be the highest objective, for peace is not always just, and in some cases nothing but a cynical euphemism for decades of repression.

In my view, modern theology has rightly distanced itself from the ‘nationalist’ notion of sacrifice. The core message at the heart of the eschatological reserve is the following: We ourselves cannot determine whether ‘our’ wars are just in the eyes of God or not. Therefore, not infrequently nations have to wait a long time before knowing for sure whether a revolution had been a ‘felicitous’ one or not – also here there is no divine sanction. The Hobbesian legacy of making absolute self-preservation has led to nuclear stalemate, and for some, to a pacifistic criminalization of war – the latter not necessarily pursued by peaceful means. The hunt is now open on the last remaining warmongers (currently of course termed ‘terrorists’) in a war on war. And here I think we need to support Albert Camus: It is better to run the risk of an honorable and chivalrous death, than to claim the moral high ground without being prepared to risk one’s life for it. Schmitt also thinks back nostalgically to the chivalry of the duel between sovereigns – ‘classic’ warfare – but at the same time diagnoses the rise of asymmetrical forms of struggle and terror, where chivalry is far away. Confronted with the threat of civil war in Weimar Germany he gave way to the temptation, to forge national homogeneity through an external enemy and trough scapegoating. Wolfgang Palaver rightly let Schmitt’s attitude correct by F. M. Dostoyevsky, who in *The Brothers Karamazov* defends the position that:

The rejection of sacrifice and the devotion to universal divine love depend on each other. Only if human beings are ready to give up their lives for each other, only if they accept that they are responsible for the whole

world and all the sins of human beings, is it possible to avoid scapegoating others.⁵³

Thus, the Christian attitude rejects sacrifice *and* accepts self-sacrifice as a possible consequence of love. Following Jesus' saying about the grain of corn in John, 12:24, which was the motto of his novel.

53 Palaver, 'Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism,' 70.

Self-Sacrifice and the Other(s): Reflections on Andrei Tarkovksy's *The Sacrifice*

Frederiek Depoortere

1 Introduction

In 1986, the year of his death from cancer at the age of 54, the expatriate Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky published his last film, titled *The Sacrifice*. It presents the character of Alexander, a former actor who has now become an essayist and lecturer. The film takes place on his fiftieth birthday, a day celebrated with his family and a few friends in his mansion in a remote corner of the Swedish countryside. This party is interrupted when the television news announces that a nuclear war has broken out. In his desperation Alexander turns to God, in whom he had not believed until then. He promises God to sacrifice all he possesses and to remain mute for the rest of his life, if only God will save his family and friends from the imminent nuclear holocaust. When he wakes up the next morning, everything has gone back to normal, as if nothing had happened the previous day. Alexander then fulfils his part of the deal: He burns down his house, and is taken in an ambulance to be locked up in a psychiatric hospital, unable to explain his deed because of his vow of silence.¹

2 A Multi-Layered Plot

Tarkovsky's last film has confronted its viewers and interpreters with many puzzles and unresolved questions. As pointed out by the Australian cinematographer Gino Moliterno, many critics, even those who think favorably of Tarkovsky, have claimed that the film is "flawed" and "strongly undermined by considerable narrative and thematic confusion".² Part of this confusion is

1 Andrei Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays*, trans. William Powell and Natasha Synnessios (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 505–560; Andrei Tarkovsky, *The Sacrifice* [film]; with Erland Josephson, Susan Fleetwood, Allan Edwall. For further details on the film, see <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0091670/>. In what follows, I refer to the 142 minutes version of the film as distributed by Moskwood Media, Haarlem, The Netherlands.

2 Gino Moliterno, "Zarathustra's Gift in Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice*," *Screening the Past: An International, Refereed, Electronic Journal of Screen History* 12 (2001), <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fro301/gmfr12a.htm>.

caused by the fact that in the film we actually get two crises at the same time. There is – just as in the narrative of the African sacrifice³ – a close connection between sacrifice and the fate of the community. As outlined by Mark Le Fanu in his discussion of the film, next to the political crisis on a planetary scale (the imminent nuclear holocaust), there is also a personal crisis: A marriage crisis between Alexander and his wife Adelaida, who is suggested to have an affair with their friend Victor. The significance of this affair for his sacrifice is never completely fleshed out.⁴ On top of this, things become even more complex when Alexander, after he has made his vow to God, is visited in the middle of the night by Otto, the postman and a friend who was also present at his birthday party. Otto urges him to go to the house of his servant Maria and to sleep with her. She is a witch of the best kind, Otto knows, and spending the night with her will return things to normal. Alexander first objects, but eventually yields and goes off to Maria's. This narrative complication is a remainder of the first drafts of the manuscript of the film, which was originally titled *The Witch* and would tell the story of a man who is cured of a fatal disease after sleeping with a witch.⁵ The imminent nuclear holocaust and the pact with God were only added at a later stage. The relation between Alexander's pact with God and Otto's promise of redemption through Maria remains unclear, however. Or, as Peter Green puts it: "Is this [promise] an immediate answer to [Alexander's] prayers, the response to his vow, or is it an alternative to sacrifice?"⁶ In the end it is, as Le Fanu notes, unclear what returned things to normal: The deal with God, the night spent with Maria, or neither: Maybe the superpowers returned to their senses and the nuclear war was stopped anyway, independently of any act of Alexander.⁷

3 Three Philosophical Issues

Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice* also raises several questions of a philosophical nature. A first question concerns the characterization of the sacrificial gesture in *The Sacrifice*. During an interview in March 1986, Tarkovsky stated that

3 See the contribution of W. E. A. van Beek in this volume.

4 Mark Le Fanu, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky* (repr., London: British Film Institute, 1990), 125.

5 Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin, University of Texas Press 1989), 219–220.

6 Peter Green, "Apocalypse and Sacrifice," *Sight and Sound* 56, 2 (1987), 111–118 (118).

7 Le Fanu, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky*, 126–127.

The Sacrifice is a film on self-sacrifice.⁸ He made similar claims in *Sculpting in Time*, the book in which the filmmaker discussed his work.⁹ Yet, is it correct to designate Alexander's sacrificial gesture as a *self*-sacrifice? Alexander indeed offers a number of things that matter a lot to him (such as his house and the contact with his young son, nicknamed "Little Man"), but he does not seem to be offering *himself*.

Another problem raised by Tarkovsky's depiction of Alexander's sacrificial gesture is the way the latter's family is involved in it. Several critics have formulated their unease in this regard. Moliterno, for instance, has put this as follows: "How can burning the home of his loved ones, the ones *for* whom he makes the pact with God, be an appropriate *self*-sacrifice for Alexander?"¹⁰ In this regard, Moliterno quotes Philip Strick, who in a 1987 review of *The Sacrifice* wondered why Alexander would deprive his family of their possessions (by burning down their house) in *his* attempt to offer atonement.¹¹ A similar observation has been made by Le Fanu, who asks whether "sacrifice [can] *be* sacrifice if it implicates innocent people".¹² The example of Alexander suggests that others are always involved in any act of sacrifice and raises the question of the role played by sacrifice in the relationship of an individual with these others.

A further question that is raised by *The Sacrifice*, as pointed out by Le Fanu, is to what extent we should take Alexander as an exemplar.¹³ Is a sacrificial gesture like Alexander's advisable, and is it desirable? Should we all try to do like him? There are reasons to accept that Tarkovsky intended the hero of his last film to function as a moral exemplar. In the aforementioned interview from 1986, he explained that as far as he is concerned, self-sacrifice is what makes a human being truly human and distinguishes him or her from the animals. Somebody who does not possess the desire for self-sacrifice, in Tarkovsky's view, has "ceased to be a man" and "begins to revert to the animal condition and becomes a strange machine, an object to be experimented with by society and the state".¹⁴ But was Tarkovsky correct in defending the moral desirability of self-sacrifice?

8 Annie Epelboin, "Andrei Tarkovsky on *The Sacrifice*," interview, see http://people.ucalgary.ca/~tstronds/nostalgia.com/TheTopics/On_Sacrifice.html.

9 Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 218.

10 Moliterno, "Zarathustra's Gift."

11 See Philip Strick, "Offret (*The Sacrifice*)," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 636 (January 1987), 7–8 (7).

12 Le Fanu, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky*, 125.

13 Le Fanu, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky*, 124.

14 Epelboin, "Andrei Tarkovsky on *The Sacrifice*."

In what follows, I will take up the three philosophical issues that arise from *The Sacrifice* (the character of self-sacrifice, the role played by self-sacrifice in the relationship with one's others, and the desirability of self-sacrifice), seeking to clarify the philosophy of sacrifice that is present in Tarkovsky's final film.

4 Is the Sacrifice of "The Sacrifice" a Self-Sacrifice?

Let us begin with the question whether Alexander's sacrificial gesture can rightly be considered a self-sacrifice. To answer this question, we of course need to know what a self-sacrifice, or sacrifice of the self, is. This immediately raises two further questions: What is sacrifice? And what is "the self" that is sacrificed in an act of self-sacrifice? The *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* distinguishes between two meanings of the verb "to sacrifice". The dictionary's first meaning of *to sacrifice* is "to give up something that is valuable to you, in order to help another person",¹⁵ the second is "to kill an animal or a person and offer them to a god or gods".¹⁶ These definitions clearly show that sacrifice, be it secular or religious, involves someone else: Be it the god(s) to whom the sacrifice is addressed or the person or people for whose benefit one sacrifices. This suggests that in a sacrificial gesture four elements can be distinguished: The sacrificing subject (A), the sacrificed object (B), the addressee of the sacrifice (C), and the reason for the sacrifice (D). We might design the formal structure of a sacrifice as: "A sacrificing B to C for the sake of D".¹⁷

This leads us back to the concept of self-sacrifice. The main problem with it is the meaning of 'self' in the word 'self-sacrifice'. An evident way to understand the 'self' in 'self-sacrifice' is as pointing to self-sacrifice as reflexive sacrifice, a sacrifice in which the subject sacrificing (A) and the object sacrificed (B) are identical (B = A). This is the way Claudia Welz understands self-sacrifice. In her view, self-sacrifice has the following formal structure: "A sacrificing A to C for the sake of D".¹⁸ Regarding the required identity of the subject sacrificing and the object sacrificed, Welz writes the following:

15 http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/sacrifice_1. The addition of 'that is valuable to you' is important: the term sacrifice is only used appropriately when it refers to a giving-up which is costly and painful.

16 http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/sacrifice_2.

17 I have adopted this formal structure of sacrifice from Claudia Welz, "Love as Gift and Self-Sacrifice," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 50, 3–4 (2008), 238–66 (at 246).

18 Welz, "Love as Gift and Self-Sacrifice," 246.

If the sacrificed self is not exactly the same as the sacrificing self, the self-sacrifice is incomplete. It is only a feature of the self or an aspect of its self-image that might be sacrificed. The self sacrificing itself survives the sacrifice of itself, ready for repeated self-sacrifices.¹⁹

Thus, according to Welz, a sacrifice can only be considered a self-sacrifice in cases where somebody dies for somebody else, when the sacrificing self does not survive the sacrifice.²⁰ If we adopt this view, Alexander's sacrifice as it is depicted in Tarkovsky's film is *clearly not* a self-sacrifice: He does not give his life. If we put Alexander's sacrificial gesture in a formula, we get the following: Alexander (A) sacrificing his house and the contact with his son (B) to God (C) for the well-being of his family and friends (D). The sacrificing subject (Alexander) and the object sacrificed (his house and the contact with his son) are clearly not identical, in contrast to what one would expect if one follows Welz in defining self-sacrifice as a sacrifice in which B = A. Does this show that Tarkovsky was wrong in designating the sacrifice in his last film as a *self-sacrifice*? Or does Alexander's example suggest that we can understand self-sacrifice in another way?

4.1 *Moliterno's Nietzschean Interpretation*

To help us answer these questions, I now turn to Gino Moliterno's interpretation of Tarkovsky's film. Moliterno proposes a Nietzschean reading of Alexander's gesture to burn down his house. This interpretation is accounted for by a reference to Nietzsche during a conversation between Alexander and his friend Otto in the first scene of *The Sacrifice*. Otto reprimands Alexander for always being gloomy and depressed. He suspects that Alexander is like most people, who are waiting their entire life for "something real and important" to happen, but who meanwhile forget to live life here and now. Otto admits that he is no different in this regard: He, too, is waiting, but he adds that he is often haunted by that notorious hunchbacked dwarf from Nietzsche, "the one that sent Zarathustra into a fainting fit."²¹ This is a reference to the second section of the third part of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In this section, which is titled "On the Vision and the Riddle", Zarathustra tells about his encounter with "the spirit of gravity", his "devil and arch-enemy", who is sitting on his

19 Ibidem.

20 Welz, "Love as Gift and Self-Sacrifice," 246–47.

21 Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays*, 518–19; Tarkovsky, *The Sacrifice* [film], 09:25–11:15 (i.e. a fragment starting at 9 minutes and 25 seconds and ending at 11 minutes and 15 seconds in the film).

shoulders and is pushing him down, while he wants to go upwards. This devil is subsequently depicted as “half dwarf, half mole, lame, paralyzing, dripping lead into my ear, lead-drop thoughts in my brain”.²² This hunchbacked dwarf is thus a symbol for everything that sickens the human spirit and pulls it down. Or, as Moliterno puts it:

[T]he dwarf is a personification of nihilism, [which is the] failure to value the present moment in its eternal ‘nowness’, thus manifesting a dissatisfaction with, and ultimately a hatred of, the world, life and oneself. For Nietzsche, nihilism is an existential ailment or nausea, a sickness typified by a yearning for a different, better world or condition but a yearning which, in its ‘otherworldliness’, inevitably deprecates and de-values this earth and this life.²³

Given this characterization of nihilism, Moliterno concludes that Alexander clearly passes the test as a nihilist. This can be derived from the second scene of the film, immediately following the conversation between Alexander and Otto. In this scene, we get a long monologue by Alexander in which he complains about the deplorable state of humankind. Since sin is everything that is not necessary, he views human civilization as mostly, if not completely, sinful.²⁴ However, he is aware of the fact that he is no better than the rest. Towards the end of the scene, Alexander gets annoyed with his own idle chatter and expresses a desire for action, something of which he is not capable himself.²⁵ Alexander is clearly infected by the spirit of gravity, which depresses and paralyzes him. His desire for another, better world makes him melancholy, gloomy, and weary. He wallows in self-pity and pessimism. He is a prototypical nihilist.

This leads Moliterno to his Nietzschean interpretation of Alexander’s sacrifice, which should, in his view, be understood as “a joyful act of affirmative self-transfiguration”.²⁶ In this respect, it is highly significant that Alexander’s

22 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, eds Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin, trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 124.

23 Moliterno, “Zarathustra’s Gift.” In this regard, Moliterno refers to Bernd Magnus, *Nietzsche’s Existential Imperative: Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 42 and 144–145, where nihilism is interpreted as being caused by “systematic dualism,” that is, a “contempt for the earth and the earthly,” the yearning for “a different, a better world or condition.”

24 Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays*, 523; *The Sacrifice* [film], 19:38.

25 Tarkovsky, *The Sacrifice* [film], 20:23–20:51.

26 Moliterno, “Zarathustra’s Gift.”

sacrificial gesture consists in burning down his *house*. The house is not only, as pointed out by Moliterno, “a fairly transparent symbol of the self”,²⁷ it also stands for one’s past. At home, the past can live on. It is a place where memories are kept alive, where souvenirs and other objects constantly serve as reminders of past events and people one once knew. As such, one’s house can become a place in which one can hide from the real life out there. This is precisely the role the house plays in *The Sacrifice*. It is no coincidence that it is situated in a remote corner of the Swedish countryside, since its owner is a man who has given up his busy life as an actor in London, has turned his back on the world and is now leading a secluded life of nostalgia and world-weariness. By burning down his own house, Alexander is breaking free from the burden of the past, from his “domiciled worldweariness”, from everything which pulls him downwards, “anchoring [him] to the past and fatally undermining the joy of the present through a yearning for another time, another place, another state”.²⁸

If there is a self which is sacrificed in Tarkovsky’s *The Sacrifice*, it is Alexander’s nihilist and world-weary self. This suggests that we should write the formalization of Alexander’s sacrificial gesture as follows: Alexander (A) sacrificing his nihilist self (A’) through sacrificing his house (B) to God (C) for the well-being of his family and friends (D).

4.2 Was Alexander’s Deed a Self-Sacrifice?

Moliterno’s characterization of Alexander as a prototypical nihilist is convincing. But does his Nietzschean reading of Tarkovsky’s *The Sacrifice* not confirm Welz’s reluctance to talk about self-sacrifice? In *The Sacrifice*, is it not “only a feature of the self or an aspect of its self-image that [is] sacrificed” (in other words, its nihilism and world-weariness), while “the sacrificing self itself survives the sacrifice of itself?”²⁹ Does *The Sacrifice* not show, confirmed by Moliterno’s interpretation, that, except in the case that someone is actually giving up his or her life for the other (which Alexander is clearly not doing), “the sacrificing self [A] is irreducible to the sacrificed self [A’]” and “unable to get rid of itself?”³⁰ And should we therefore not reserve the term ‘self-sacrifice’ for the rare and exceptional cases in which someone gives up their life for the other?³¹

27 Moliterno, “Zarathustra’s Gift.”

28 Moliterno, “Zarathustra’s Gift.”

29 Welz, “Love as Gift and Self-Sacrifice,” 246.

30 Welz, “Love as Gift and Self-Sacrifice,” 246.

31 Welz, “Love as Gift and Self-Sacrifice,” 248.

In my view, *The Sacrifice* offers a negative answer to these questions. This can be substantiated by Tarkovsky's own understanding of the gesture of Alexander's sacrificial gesture. In *Sculpting in Time*, the director explained that "Alexander (...) burns all the bridges behind him, leaving not a single path by which to return"³² and "breaks irrevocably with the world and with its laws", losing in this way his family and placing "himself outside all accepted norms".³³ Put differently, Alexander cuts himself loose from the social fabric and becomes an outcast. And in this way he dies, not a biological death, but a "symbolic death", the death that consists in being separated from the symbolic order of language and community.³⁴ That this kind of symbolic death is at stake in *The Sacrifice* is confirmed by the fact that Alexander's sacrifice precisely consists in giving up speech and the contact with his family (and his son in particular). What Alexander gives up is his symbolic self, his place in the symbolic order, his identity.

Thus, we can enlarge Welz's understanding of self-sacrifice and view Alexander's sacrificial gesture to be a self-sacrifice: We can speak of a self-sacrifice, not only when someone gives up their life for the sake of someone else but also when someone forsakes their symbolic self for something or someone. This leads us back to the second philosophical question that is raised by *The Sacrifice*, the question of the role played by sacrifice in the relationship of the sacrificing subject with the others.

5 The Role of Alexander's Sacrificial Gesture in the Relation to his Others

Although Moliterno's characterization of Alexander as a prototypical nihilist is convincing and has allowed us to interpret the sacrifice in *The Sacrifice* as a self-sacrifice, his interpretation of Alexander's sacrificial gesture is not without problems. Moliterno ignores the obvious religious context of that sacrifice, the fact that Alexander burns down his house as the outcome of a pact with God, and he also leaves aside the issue that this pact with God is made to save Alexander's beloved others (family, friends). For this reason, I will continue by taking a closer look at the role Alexander's sacrifice plays in the relationship

32 Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 224.

33 Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 227.

34 The distinction between "biological death" and "symbolic death" is adopted from the work of the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, in whose work it is a recurrent theme. See, for instance, Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 135.

with his others and with God. In doing so, I make use of a section from an article of the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, in which he distinguishes four ways sacrifice can play a role in a subject's relationship with the others and with God.³⁵ I will discuss these four roles of sacrifice and examine to what extent each of them can be found in *The Sacrifice*.

5.1 *Do ut des*

As noted by Žižek, the most elementary role sacrifice can play in the relationship with the other is that it serves to provoke a positive answer from that other: I give to the other something which is important to me, in order to get something back which is even more important to me (*do ut des*).³⁶ If we formalize this, we get the following: A sacrificing B to C for the sake of D, where D = getting B' from C, while B' is more important than B. Alexander's sacrifice can be interpreted as such a simple *do ut des*: To the other, in casu God, he offers things that are very dear to him – his house, the contact with his son – to obtain something even more important: The well-being of his family and friends.

In *The Sacrifice*, however, there seem to be deeper grounds than just, as Žižek puts it, "some profitable exchange".³⁷ This is corroborated by the fact that Alexander, who is entering into a pact with God, had admitted earlier, in the first scene of the film, to having no relationship with God at all.³⁸ Let us therefore take a look at what ultimately motivates Alexander's turn to God in the dark hour in which he and his beloved ones find themselves. If we turn to Alexander's prayer, we see that it culminates in his imploring to be released from the "deadly, sickening, animal fear" that he experiences in the face of the imminent nuclear holocaust.³⁹ This fear is not merely the fear of death but of a far more terrifying fate. A nuclear war will not only result in Alexander's own death but in the death of most, if not all, human beings. Life on earth will be wiped out. Or, as Alexander puts it in his prayer:

35 Slavoj Žižek, "The Thing from Inner Space," in *Sexuation* (ed. Renata Salecl; Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 216–259 (243–247). See also Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (Thinking in Action; London: Routledge, 2001), 69–74.

36 Žižek, "The Thing from Inner Space," 243; Žižek, *On Belief*, 69.

37 Žižek, "The Thing from Inner Space," 243; Žižek, *On Belief*, 69.

38 Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays*, 517–518; *The Sacrifice* [film], 08:45–09:00.

39 Tarkovsky, *The Sacrifice* [film], 01:13:06–01:13:07. See also Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays*, 544: "sickening, deathly fear".

[T]his war is the last, and terrible, and will leave neither victor nor vanquished; no towns, no villages, neither grass nor trees nor water in springs nor birds in the heavens.⁴⁰

The death at stake here is not an individual's death, which has its place in the natural and symbolic order that consists in a succession of generations, but the complete destruction of that order, the total interruption of the succession of the generations. Or, to phrase it differently, the threat of a nuclear holocaust opens an abyss of nothingness, of the utter and complete meaninglessness and insignificance of everything that mattered for Alexander until now.

5.2 *A Way to Restore Meaning*

This leads us back to Žižek and the second role of sacrifice distinguished by him. According to Žižek, sacrifice can, beyond the profitable exchange of the *do ut des*, also serve as *a way to restore meaning* in the face of utter meaninglessness. Or, to put it in Žižek's own terms: Sacrifice is a way to convince ourselves that there is an Other (with capital O) out there, the big Other who is pulling the strings and guarantees the good outcome of history. This means that we have the same formula, A sacrificing B to C for the sake of D, but with D = convincing A of C's existence. In this regard, Žižek speaks in an earlier book about "the trick of the sacrifice":

Sacrifice is a guarantee *that the Other exists*: That there is an Other who can be appeased by means of the sacrifice (...). [B]y the very act of sacrifice, we (presup)pose the existence of its addressee that guarantees the consistency and meaningfulness of our experience – so, even if the act fails in its proclaimed goal, this very failure can be read from within the logic of sacrifice as *our* failure to appease the Other.⁴¹

Even in the case that an act of sacrifice fails in its proclaimed goal, it still enables us to save the consistency and meaningfulness of our experience. Or, as Žižek explains:

Even if the Other does not grant my wish, I can at least be assured that there is another who – maybe – next time will respond differently: The

40 Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays*, 543; *The Sacrifice* [film], 01:11:57–01:12:22.

41 Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 64.

world out there, inclusive of all catastrophes that may befall me, is not a meaningless piece of blind machinery, but a partner in a possible dialogue, so that even a catastrophic outcome is to be read as a meaningful response; we do not live in a kingdom of blind chance.⁴²

It is clear that Alexander's sacrificial gesture can be interpreted as a way to assure the existence of the big Other. By approaching the universe as a dialogue partner, he is turning the course of events into a meaningful answer of the big Other: Even if the big Other would not respond as he would wish, he can still believe in the meaningfulness of what happens – for it is the result, not of some blind process, but of an agent that acts intentionally. Even if God, who occupies the place of the big Other for Alexander, would decide not to respond positively to Alexander's offer, his gesture would still enable him to save the meaningfulness of the world: The nuclear holocaust is no longer the outcome of blind and arbitrary processes, but wanted by God.

5.3 *Sacrifice for the Other*

However, it would be one-sided to say that Alexander is only interested in saving himself from the meaninglessness of the world. Before he promises God to give up everything he has, he prays for others, not only for his son, his wife and friends but also for humankind in general.⁴³ This shows that Alexander's offer to God aims at saving others. This leads us to what Žižek has written on *sacrifice for the other*, the third type of sacrifice that he distinguishes. This third type of sacrifice can be formulated as follows: A sacrificing B for the sake of D, with D = saving the other. As can be derived from this formula, this kind of sacrifice does not (necessarily) have an addressee. Žižek finds an eminent example of such a sacrifice for the other in the Hollywood classic *Beau Geste* (1939).⁴⁴ In this film, the eldest of three brothers, Michael Geste, steals his family's prize possession: An immensely expensive piece of jewellery. In doing so, he turns himself into an outcast, an ungrateful scoundrel. However, he did it to save his family, in particular his beloved aunt, from the shame of discovering that their prized jewel is actually a worthless replica. Or to express it once more within the formula: Michael (A) sacrificing his reputation (B) to save the reputation of his beloved family-others in the gaze of the big Other of society (D).⁴⁵

42 Žižek, "The Thing from Inner Space," 243–44; Žižek, *On Belief*, 69.

43 See Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays*, 543; *The Sacrifice* [film], 01:10:40–01:11:57.

44 See <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0031088/> for further details.

45 Žižek, "The Thing from Inner Space," 244; Žižek, *On Belief*, 70–71.

If we compare the sacrifices of Michael from *Beau Geste* and Alexander from *The Sacrifice*, we find that in both cases somebody is becoming an outcast to save his family: Michael becomes a thief, Alexander a lunatic. In reference to the distinction between biological and symbolic death that was introduced above, we can say that both Michael and Alexander undergo a symbolic death. Michael is sacrificing his own reputation in order to conceal the truth for the big Other of society and to save his beloved family-others from shame and disgrace; Alexander engages in a bargain with the big Other, God, and promises to sacrifice his symbolic self because he wants to save his beloved others from an imminent nuclear holocaust.

5.4 *Sacrifice to Dupe the Other*

The example of Michael from *Beau Geste* shows that sacrifice can also serve to *dupe the Other*. In *Beau Geste*, Michael's sacrifice aims at letting the big Other, society, believe that his family possesses an expensive necklace, while in reality it possesses only a worthless replica. However, sacrifice can also be a means to make the Other believe that one does *not yet* possess some valuable and beloved object (A sacrificing B for the sake of D with D = duping the Other). This is the fourth role of sacrifice in the relationship to the Other that is distinguished by Žižek. To give an example of this, Žižek refers to a course of events returning in many Cold War spy films, such as *Enigma* from 1981:⁴⁶ a secret agent is sent out on a mission which the agent's superiors intended to fail from the very start. The poor fellow had to be captured so that the Russians would believe that the CIA was still searching for what they actually already possessed (for instance, as in *Enigma*, some special computer chip enabling the CIA to decode the messages sent from the KGB headquarters to its outposts). Or, as Žižek explains:

The strategy here is to stage a search operation in order to convince the Other (the enemy) that one does not already possess what one is looking for – in short, one feigns a lack, a want, in order to conceal from the Other that one already possesses the *agalma*, the Other's innermost secret.⁴⁷

More in general, the example of *Enigma* shows that sacrifice offers the subject a way to enjoy what is forbidden by the Law of the big Other. Žižek puts this as follows:

46 See <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0083891/> for further details.

47 Žižek, "The Thing from Inner Space," 244–45. See also Žižek, *On Belief*, 71–72.

Insofar as the Other of the symbolic Law prohibits *jouissance* [enjoyment], the only way for the subject to enjoy is to feign that he lacks the object that provides *jouissance*, that is, to conceal its possession from the Other's gaze by staging the spectacle of the desperate search for it.⁴⁸

In this way, Žižek adds, the subject is able to escape from the pressure of the superego. The superego is, as noted by Dylan Evans, "the Other insofar as the Other commands the subject to enjoy". It is the dark underside of the Law and is nothing but the imperative to enjoy,⁴⁹ that is, the implicit injunction to do precisely what is explicitly forbidden by the Law. This results in a guilt-ridden subject, torn between what is explicitly stated by the Law and the implicit command in the explicit prohibition to do the forbidden thing. Therefore, a sacrifice that aims at convincing the big Other that one does not yet possess the object of enjoyment is the ideal way to escape from this deadlock.⁵⁰

This function of sacrifice, which can offer an individual a way to deal with the guilt that is caused by the enjoyment he experiences, can also be found in Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice*. This is suggested by the *prima facie* strange reaction of Alexander when he hears the news that a nuclear war has broken out: "I've waited for this all my life . . . all my life was spent in expectation of this."⁵¹ This reaction is understandable in light of Alexander's long monologue at the beginning of the movie in which he, as we have seen above, expressed his desire for some action. Now, at last, something truly interruptive occurs and Alexander's deepest desire – what he was longing for at the outset of the film: Being freed, to put it in Moliterno's Nietzschean idiom, from the spirit of gravity that infects him – is about to be realized. Yet, this imminent realization of his desire (and the enjoyment that comes with it) conflicts with his symbolic existence as a father, a husband and a friend, and with the obligations connected to these roles. Therefore, that enjoyment is also a source of guilt, since, ultimately, Alexander enjoys the prospect of the death of his son, wife and friends as well as the total destruction of humankind. Alexander is trapped between the loyalties that are connected to his existence in the symbolic order and the enjoyment that comes with the prospect of an imminent end of the world. In this way, Alexander's sacrificial gesture can be understood as

48 Žižek, "The Thing from Inner Space," 246. See also Žižek, *On Belief*, 72.

49 Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (repr., London: Routledge, 1997), 201.

50 Žižek, "The Thing from Inner Space," 247; Žižek, *On Belief*, 74.

51 Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays*, 538; *The Sacrifice* [film], 00:54:10–00:54:21.

a compensation for the enjoyment he experiences: Through his self-sacrifice he can do something for his beloved others, paying off the guilt caused by enjoying the prospect of their destruction.

6 Third Philosophical Issue: Is Self-Sacrifice Desirable?

In the preceding pages, we have discussed Gino Moliterno's Nietzschean reading of Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice* (with an eye to showing that Alexander's sacrificial gesture can be considered a self-sacrifice) as well as Slavoj Žižek's view on the role sacrifice can play in the relation of an individual with others and the big Other. At the end of this chapter, I want to examine what light Moliterno and Žižek shed on the third philosophical question that is raised by *The Sacrifice*: To what extent should we take Alexander as an exemplar? Is a sacrificial gesture like Alexander's advisable? Is it desirable? Should we all try to do like him?

In answering the question of the desirability of a sacrificial gesture like Alexander's, Moliterno and Žižek point in opposing directions. Moliterno's Nietzschean interpretation of *The Sacrifice* allows for a positive evaluation of Alexander's sacrificial gesture. As we have seen, Moliterno praises the sacrifice as "a joyful act of affirmative self-transfiguration" that enables Alexander to break free from the spirit of gravity, the burden of the past and his cultivation of world-weariness. Through a separation from language and community (or symbolic death), he receives an unprecedented freedom vis-à-vis the symbolic order. However, it is not clear how this symbolic death can be understood as 'joyful' and 'affirmative', and as an act of 'self-transfiguration' instead of self-destruction (the destruction of the symbolic self), implied by our description of Alexander's sacrificial gesture in terms of symbolic death (a term I adopted from Žižek).

Moreover, as I have mentioned above, Moliterno ignores the obvious fact that Alexander's sacrifice was the outcome of a pact he made with God in order to save his family, friends and humankind at large from an imminent nuclear holocaust. And if we consider Alexander's sacrificial gesture in light of Žižek's discussion of the role sacrifice can play in the relationship between individuals with their others and with the big Other, that sacrifice appears in a completely different light. At least, this is the conclusion Žižek himself has drawn. Although he does not apply the four functions of sacrifice to the film, his discussion of these functions in the aforementioned article is framed by a twofold rejection of Alexander's sacrificial gesture. The section from which

I have been quoting is titled “The Fake of the Sacrifice” and the question Žižek intends to answer here is what is wrong about the Tarkovskian sacrifice.⁵² After discussing the four roles, Žižek concludes that the problem posed in *The Sacrifice* is false and misleading.⁵³

6.1 *A Disavowal of the True State of Affairs*

But what, then, is wrong about it? What exactly is false in it? Looking back at Žižek’s four functions, we find that – once we move beyond profitable exchange – sacrifice in one way or another *serves the aim of disavowing the true state of affairs*. It is a means to conceal the truth: Either the truth that the big Other does not exist and therefore there is no ultimate guarantee of the meaningfulness of the universe, the truth that the beloved other is actually lacking and impotent, or the truth about my own lack. And this is, in Žižek’s view, what is wrong with a sacrifice like Alexander’s: It is, in the end, about sustaining illusions – the illusion of the other whose lack can be filled by what I have to offer, the illusion of the other that would be able to fill my lack, and the illusion of a big Other who guarantees the good outcome of the course of history.

According to Žižek, the fundamental problem with *The Sacrifice* is that its protagonist offers himself “as the instrument to deliver the big Other”. *The Sacrifice* suggests that it is:

[O]nly by accomplishing an act which is totally senseless and ‘irrational’ that the subject can save the deeper global meaning of the universe as such.⁵⁴

Or, to put it differently, what makes Alexander’s sacrificial gesture false is that his:

[R]enunciation is functionalized in the service of the big Other, as the redemptive act destined to restore spiritual meaning to life.⁵⁵

And this is why, according to Žižek, we should not follow Alexander’s example, but resist the fatal attraction of sacrifice and accept that the big Other does

52 Žižek, “The Thing from Inner Space,” 243.

53 Žižek, “The Thing from Inner Space,” 247.

54 Žižek, “The Thing from Inner Space,” 247.

55 Žižek, “The Thing from Inner Space,” 247.

not exist, while the lack of the other as well as our own lack are constitutive for what we are.

6.2 *Tarkovsky's Riddle – A Dual Interpretation Mode?*

Given the different evaluations of Alexander's sacrificial gesture offered by Moliterno and Žižek, what to conclude about the desirability of a self-sacrifice like Alexander's? What may account for the difference between Moliterno and Žižek is what they make of the fact that Alexander's act of sacrificing his symbolic self and disconnecting from the symbolic order does not disrupt or transform the established order. Whether this is considered problematic depends on one's perspective. From the perspective of someone who sacrifices their symbolic self, such a sacrifice may indeed be experienced as something positive because it enables, as we have seen, an unprecedented freedom from the burdens and constraints of existence in the symbolic order. This is the view defended by Moliterno. Yet, from the perspective of societal change, which is shared by Žižek, a self-sacrifice like Alexander's – which consists in a withdrawal from the symbolic order that does not affect that order as such – can only be highly troubling. After all, it rather confirms than challenges the current status quo and therefore sustains the powers that be.

This of course raises the question which perspective is defended by Tarkovsky himself in his last film. If we can take Alexander to express Tarkovsky's personal view when he laments civilization as sinful (see above), there is a good reason to think that Tarkovsky would agree with the interpretation of Alexander's sacrifice in terms of symbolic death – which is confirmed by what the filmmaker wrote about Alexander's gesture in his book *Sculpting in Time* (see above). Yet, what distinguishes Tarkovsky from both Moliterno and Žižek is that he clearly understands Alexander's symbolic death in *religious* terms. In the aforementioned interview from 1986, Tarkovsky even spoke about the sacrifice of *The Sacrifice* in terms of redemption and spiritual rebirth: The movie is about “restor[ing] one's independence vis-à-vis the material things of life and consequently reaffirm[ing] one's spiritual essence” and “[Alexander] is a man who has understood that, to redeem himself, it has become indispensable to efface himself”.⁵⁶ Thus, according to Tarkovsky, Alexander is realizing his higher destiny through his sacrificial gesture. Žižek's atheism, in contrast, does not allow for this possibility. For him, there is no such higher destiny of humankind and any withdrawal from the world that does not disrupt the

56 Epelboin, “Andrei Tarkovsky on *The Sacrifice*.”

present order of things is false and misleading insofar as it contributes to the perpetuation of that order.

Ultimately, it is the presence or absence of God which decides about Alexander's sacrifice as desirable or false. If there is no God, any attempt to reach a higher destiny beyond this world is mistaken and Žižek is right to reject Alexander's sacrifice. But this very issue the film leaves unsolved. There are no clear signs in the film that there is indeed a God – although Tarkovsky believed there is. Therefore, Alexander's sacrifice remains ambiguous: In the end, it is not possible to decide whether he is a saint or a lunatic.

“Das Opferthier, das nicht vergebens fällt”: The Meaning of Sacrifice in Friedrich Hölderlin’s *Der Tod des Empedokles*

Rebecca Prevo and Joachim Duyndam

1 Introduction

To deepen our understanding of the phenomenon of sacrifice today and its relation to the community at large, it may be helpful to explore its meaning in historical periods that mark the turning points of modernity. The German intellectual discourse at the end of the eighteenth century, in which the issues of community and national identity were fundamentally debated and redefined, presents itself as a particularly fruitful ground for such an investigation. In the search for answers to the triple crisis of this period – in which social, political, and philosophical problems are entangled¹ – all leading thinkers assign a crucial task to the poet.

This article analyzes the work of such a *Dichter*,² Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), whose voice like no other echoes the turbulence of the time. However, we will not concentrate on his famous and important poems but shift attention to his dramaturgy. In the years preceding the turn of the century, Hölderlin is absorbed in a project to create a modern tragedy based on an ancient topic: the mythical death of the Greek philosopher Empedocles. In this work, the themes of sacrifice, community and identity are deeply and intriguingly connected. We will trace three different meanings of sacrifice as they can be identified in the subsequent versions of the text.

Hölderlin never completed his attempt to create a Greek tragedy for modern times; only three unfinished fragments remain. We seek to show how this failure marks a defining turn in Hölderlin’s thought, and how new and original insights into the problem of modern identity are initiated that will profoundly affect the meaning of sacrifice.

1 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy and Anne Marie Lang, *L’Absolu littéraire: théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemand* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978), 13–14.

2 Poet. As we see it, the word may be used in a wider sense of an inspired, sensitive and eloquent person.

2 Longing for a Meaningful Death

In 1799, Hölderlin writes a poem in which the themes of sacrificial death and community are explicitly connected. The ode *Der Tod fürs Vaterland* evokes a battle scene in which youthful heroes descend a hill to fight the intruding enemy. Although this enemy – described as *Würger* (stranglers) and *Ehrelöse* (those without honor) – is physically stronger, they lack the spiritual weapons of the young heroes: their soul, the justice of their cause and their songs for the fatherland. In the third stanza, the wish to join their ranks is exclaimed, culminating in a motto expressing the longing for a meaningful death:

O nimmt mich, nimmt mich mit in die Reihen auf,
Damit ich einst nicht sterbe gemeinen Tods!
Umsonst zu sterben, lieb' ich nicht, doch
Lieb' ich, zu fallen am Opferhügel³

Already in the next stanza, the wish to die for the native country (*"Für's Vaterland, zu bluten des Herzens Blut/ Für's Vaterland"*)⁴ – is completed and the fallen youth descends into a realm which is closest to the images of the underworld in ancient Greece.⁵ Here, arriving as a 'humble foreigner', the hero is welcomed by the *"Helden und Dichter aus alter Zeit"* (heroes and poets of ancient times) who treat him as a brother. The final stanza completes the legitimization of the hero's sacrifice and of sacrificial death in general:⁶

3 Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, ed. Michael Knaupp, 3 vols., vol. 1 (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1992), 225. "O enlist me, enlist me in the ranks/ So I won't die some paltry death!/ I don't want to die in vain,/ I'd rather fall on the field, a sacrifice." Translation from: Friedrich Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies* (ed. Nick Hoff, Wesleyan Poetry Series; Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 55.

4 "For the fatherland, to bleed my heart's/ Blood for the fatherland." See Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 55.

5 See Götz Schmitt, "'Der Tod fürs Vaterland': Hölderlins Ode und die Zeitgeschichte." *Hölderlin Jahrbuch* 35 (2006/2007), 360. "Griechisch sind die Vorstellungen vom Zustand der Gefallenen. Sie werden nicht in ein himmlisches Walhalla aufgenommen (...) sie kommen *hinunter*." (Greek are the conceptions of the condition of the fallen soldiers. They are not received in a heavenly Walhalla (...) they *descend*.)

6 Unsurprisingly, this poem, which ends with a justification of casualties in the name of the fatherland, has been appropriated and abused to sanction, glorify and promote war and nationalist violence. A blatant example of such an abuse can be found in the Nazi propaganda movie *Stukas*, where the third and sixth stanza of the poem are recited to justify the

Und Siegesboten kommen herab: Die Schlacht
Ist unser! Lebe droben, o Vaterland,
Und zähle nicht die Todten! dir ist,
Liebes! nicht Einer zu viel gefallen.⁷

The meaning of sacrifice in Hölderlin's ode is inextricably linked to images and ideas of death as a violent killing, a sanctified death which fulfills the desire to essentially belong to a community that shares a spiritual identity.

According to the American scholar Kathryn McClymond, prevailing theories of sacrifice in religious studies are too often restricted to sacrifice as sacred violence.⁸ To counter the dominant paradigm of sacrifice, which overemphasizes the importance of violent killing, McClymond introduces a multilateral, polythetic approach. She distinguishes seven activities during sacrificial events, in which killing represents only a single – and not necessarily the most important – stage.⁹ In her work, McClymond examines Hebrew and Vedic texts and practices, but her general insight may also prove to be a fruitful starting point for the analysis of sacrifice in the literary writings of a canonical Western author such as Friedrich Hölderlin. Although our reading of *Der Tod fürs Vaterland* has led us to a one-dimensional view on sacrifice, it would be premature to discard the theme of sacrifice in Hölderlin's thought as self-evident. To show its layered and multifaceted significance in Hölderlin's oeuvre, we will turn to the contemporaneous text mentioned in the title of this chapter, which also carries 'death' in its title: *Der Tod des Empedokles*.

3 The Myth of Empedocles

In a letter to his publisher Neuffer, October 10, 1794, Hölderlin announces his initial idea to write a tragedy about the death of Socrates according to the

death of a young pilot. See Karl Ritter, *Stukas* (Germany, 1941), <http://www.wagneropera.net/Themes/Wagner-In-Movies-Stukas-1941.htm>.

7 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band I, 226. “And messagers of victory arrive: The battle's/ Ours! Live, O Fatherland, remain there on high/ And don't count the dead! O my beloved,/ Not one too many has died for you. See Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 55.

8 Kathryn McClymond, “Death Be Not Proud: Reevaluating the Role of Killing in Sacrifice”, *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 6, nr. 3 (2002); Kathryn McClymond, *Beyond Sacred Violence: A Comparative Study of Sacrifice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

9 The seven activities are: selection, association, identification, killing, heating, apportionment and consumption. Kathryn McClymond, *Beyond Sacred Violence*, 29–33.

ideals of Greek drama.¹⁰ Three years later – working on the second volume of his epistolary novel *Hyperion* – Hölderlin refers to a detailed plan for a mourning-play in a letter to his brother: “*Ich habe den ganz detaillierten Plan zu einem Trauerspiel gemacht, dessen Stoff mich hinreißt.*”¹¹ The subject matter that captivates Hölderlin is no longer the death of Socrates, but the mythical death of another ancient Greek philosopher, Empedocles. This pre-Socratic thinker who is famous for his cosmogony of the four classical elements of fire, earth, water, air and their mixture and separation through the forces of Love and Strife, is said to have thrown himself into the Mount Etna volcano.¹²

In the original design of the tragedy, laid down in the so-called *Frankfurter Plan*, Hölderlin envisions his *Empedokles* as a traditional five-act tragedy. In the following three years, Hölderlin’s work on the project results in a number of different texts. He subsequently composes three unfinished versions of *Der Tod des Empedokles*, of which the first is the largest and most complete.¹³ After the second version, Hölderlin also writes a theoretical essay entitled *Die tragische Ode*. This article contains a section called “Grund zum Empedokles”, where Hölderlin unfolds a foundation for his play which builds on his newly gained insights into dramaturgy. A short poem from the same period is also dedicated to Empedocles’ death. In our discussion, we will concentrate on the subsequent versions.¹⁴

10 Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band II, ed. Michael Knaupp, 3 vol., vol. 2 (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1992), 550.

11 Ibid., p. 661: translation: “I have made the very detailed plan for a tragedy with a very fascinating subject.”

12 Though Hölderlin consulted several authors on the life and work of Empedocles, he mainly relied on the account of Diogenes Laertius in *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* (VIII, 51–53), of which he possessed the Greek Latin edition of Stephanus (1570). See Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band III (ed. Michael Knaupp, 3 vols., vol. 3; München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1993), 327–328.

13 In a letter to Neuffer on July 3, 1799, Hölderlin defines the rejection of all *accidental elements* as an essential feature of tragedy. See Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band II, 781. The different versions, from the Frankfurter Plan to the third and final version of *Der Tod des Empedokles*, illustrate this progressive “Verläugnung des Accidentellen” (disavowal of the accidental). Only the third version displays a unity of time and place. See Maria Cornelissen, “Die Manes-Szene in Hölderlins Trauerspiel ‘Der Tod des Empedokles’”, *Hölderlin Jahrbuch* 14 (1965/1966), 98.

14 Different editions of the *Empedokles* exist, which differ from each other significantly. See Friedrich Beissner, “Hölderlins Trauerspiel ‘Der Tod des Empedokles’ in seinen drei Fassungen”, in *Hölderlin. Reden und Aufsätze* (F. Beissner; Köln-Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1969). We will use the 1992 edition of Michael Knaupp.

4 Sacrifice as Victimage

The first version opens with a dialogue between Panthea, a young woman from Agrigentum, and Delia, a visitor to the city. They meet in front of Empedocles' garden and talk about him incessantly with fearful adoration. Empedocles is characterized as a semi-divine figure who lives harmoniously with plants, earth, water and the clouds.

Man sagt, die Pflanzen merkten auf
ihn, wo er wandre, und die Wasser unter der Erde
strebten herauf da wo sein Stab den Boden berühre!
und wenn er bei Gewittern in den Himmel blicke
theile die Wolke sich und hervorschimmre der
heitre Tag.¹⁵

Panthea relates the recent miraculous cure from her deadly illness by Empedocles, affirming his superhuman command of nature. The first scene ends with a foreshadowing of Empedocles' death, which is inimitable to common mortals. The wrath of the gods is insinuated as a possible cause of his demise.

(...) denn groß ist auch der Tod der Großen.
Was diesem Manne widerfährt,
Das, glaube mir, das widerfährt nur ihm,
Und hätt' er gegen alle Götter sich
Versündigt und ihren Zorn auf sich
Geladen (...)¹⁶

In the second scene, this possibility has become real. Critias, the archon (ruler) of Agrigentum and the priest Hermocrates, both declared enemies

15 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, 769. “They say the plants gaze up at/ him as he walks by, and the waters ‘neath the earth/ strive upward to the surface when his staff grazes the ground!/ and when in a storm he looks at the sky/ the clouds part and reveal the shimmering/ cheerful day.” See Friedrich Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, tr. David Farrell Krell (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 38.

16 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, 773. “For great is also the death of the great/ what is coming to confront this man,/ Believe me, will confront but him alone,/ And if he were to sin against all gods, and/ Invite their wrath upon him (...).” See Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, 42.

of Empedocles, conspire to bring him down. The opportunity seems ripe because apparently Empedocles has made himself vulnerable by committing a fatal mistake. *“Denn es haben/ Die Götter seine Kraft von ihm genommen,/ Seit jenem Tage, da der trunkne Mann/ Vor allem Volk sich einen Gott genannt.”*¹⁷ Empedocles has publicly declared himself a god in front of the people of Agrigentum. Hermocrates and Critias plot to bring about the expulsion of Empedocles on account of the inexcusable *hubris* (arrogance) of ranking himself among the gods: *“Damit er nimmerwiederkehrend dort/ Die böse Stunde büße, da er sich/ Zum Gott gemacht.”*¹⁸

When Empedocles enters the stage in the following scenes, he is shattered by feelings of guilt and abandonment, as he confesses to Pausanias, his favorite pupil: *“(.) ich allein/ War Gott, und sprachs im frechen Stolz heraus – / O glaub es mir, ich wäre lieber nicht/ Geboren!”*¹⁹

In a dramatic confrontation with a crowd of angry citizens, led by Critias and Hermocrates, the priest pronounces a violent curse upon Empedocles which seals his banishment from the polis:²⁰

(.) du hast mit uns
Nichts mehr gemein, ein Fremdling bist du worden
Und unerkant bei allen Lebenden.
Die Quelle, die uns tränkt, gebührt dir nicht
Und nicht die Feuerflamme, die uns frommt, (.)
Und wenn du stirbst, die Grabesflamme dir
Bereitet, wehe dem, wie dir! – hinaus!²¹

17 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, 775. “The gods have robbed him of his force, ever since/ The day the man, besotted, to be sure, in front of all/ The people recklessly proclaimed himself a god.” See Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, 44.

18 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, 777. “That there, never to return again,/ He’ll pay, and dearly, for that evil hour he/ Made himself a god.” See Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, 46.

19 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, 784. “I alone/ Was god, and spoke it out in haughty insolence – /Oh, believe me, would I never had/ Been born!” See Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, 53.

20 Though the curse is not a death sentence in the physical sense, the banishment from the polis does entail the deprivation of vital resources and – worse than a death penalty – the refusal of a proper burial in the future.

21 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, 789. “(.) you and we/ Share nothing any longer; a stranger now,/ You are unknown to all that lives./ The source that slakes our thirst is not/ For you, nor is the fire that serves us well; (.) And when you die, whoever

In the second version of *Der Tod des Empedokles*, the envy of his antagonists and their machinations are emphasized even stronger, when Hermocrates states unequivocally: “*Er oder wir! Und Schaden ist es nicht/ So wir ihn opfern. Untergehen muß/ Er doch!*”²²

In the first Act of version I of the play and in the corresponding scenes of the second version, the meaning of Empedocles’ sacrifice originates in his hubris. By unthinkingly declaring himself equal to the gods, the great man brings about his own downfall. This is what makes Empedocles an essentially tragic figure, whose desire for elevation leads to his fall into the depths.²³ Feeling isolated from the gods and excluded from the community, he finds himself in a state of paralysis. In his banishment from the polis, Empedocles appears as a victim (‘*Opfer*’).²⁴ His sacrifice is an act of atonement for the violation of the divine and social order.²⁵

5 Sacrifice as a Speculative Death

The motive of sacrifice as victimage finds a dramatic reversal in the second act of the play. Roaming through the wild, Empedocles and Pausanias arrive at a peasant’s hut where they beg for food and shelter. But the owner, having recognized Empedocles as the banned and cursed Agrigentian, refuses any hospitality and chases them away. Completely exhausted, they find a place to rest at a fountain. The moment Empedocles drinks water from the well, he regains his former power and finds his own *Quelle* (source) again. Hölderlin explicitly added a stage direction to underline the transfiguration of Empedocles from

sets a flame upon/ Your funeral pyre-woe to him and you! begone!” See Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, 58–59.

22 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, 845. “It’s him or us! We do no harm when/ We sacrifice the man. He must go down/ In any case!” See Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, 118.

23 In this context, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe refers to the double meaning of the Latin word *altus*. See Jane Hiddleston and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, “Stagings of Mimesis: an interview”, *Angelaki Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 8, nr. 2 (2003), 63.

24 In German, the word *Opfer* has a double meaning, signifying both ‘sacrifice’ and ‘victim’.

25 It would be interesting to approach this motive from a Girardian perspective. On the one hand, mimetic desire and communal scapegoating seem to be pervasive. But the scheme is complicated by the fact that the object of desire and the scapegoat seem to coincide in the figure of Empedocles. Moreover, there are many implicit analogies to be found between Empedocles and the figure of Christ (miraculous healing, elevation and condemnation by the crowd, accusation of claim to divinity etc.).

an outcast and humiliated victim into the hero he used to be: “*Von hier an muß er wie ein höhers Wesen erscheinen, ganz in seiner vorigen Liebe und Macht.*”²⁶ The return to his original strength at the same time leads to a clear vision of a future destination:

Siehst du denn nicht? Es kehrt
Die schöne Zeit von meinem Leben heute
Noch einmal wieder und das Größre steht
Bevor; hinauf, oh Sohn, zum Gipfel
Des alten heiligen Aetna wollen wir²⁷

From now on, Empedocles' determination to climb Mount Etna only increases. The people and leaders of Agrigentum, who soon feel the absence of their benefactor, regret their decision to expel Empedocles. They follow him and urge him to return, offering unlimited honors and power. Empedocles declines, in a reply that exposes his resolute decision and acceptance of his fate:

Laßt diese Glücklichen doch sterben, laßt
Eh sie in Eigenmacht und Tand und Schmach
Vergehn, die Freien sich den Göttern liebend
Opfern, denen alles Erstgeborene
Der Zeit ist heilig. Mein ist diß.²⁸

To freely and lovingly sacrifice himself to the gods, this is the will and the fate of Empedocles. How can the meaning of such a death be understood?

According to Joseph Suggia, the necessity of Empedocles' death derives from the “reflective idealist pathos for reconciliation between the self and the

26 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, 810. “From now on Empedocles must appear as a higher form of essence, altogether restored to his prior love and power.” See Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, 78.

27 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, 811. “Have you not seen? They are recurring/ The lovely times of my entire life again today/ And something greater still is yet to come;/ Then upward, son, upward to the very peak/ Of ancient holy Etna, that is where we'll go.” See Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, p. 79.

28 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, 827. “Allow the most felicitous of human beings/ To die before they fall to self-aggrandizement,/ Frivolity, and shame; let free humanity, upon/ The fitting hour, offer itself as a loving sacrifice unto the gods,/ For whom time's early harvest is holy. This is mine.” See Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, 97.

world.”²⁹ Already the Frankfurter Plan shows Empedocles’ desire for unification with the infinite nature.³⁰ Empedocles’ suicide is therefore a philosophical death; an intrinsically motivated death to overcome the chasm between the self and the outer world, or, in Fichtean terms, between ‘*Ich*’ and ‘*nicht-Ich*’ (‘I’ and ‘non-I’). The French philosopher Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe also points to the evident speculative desire of Empedocles as constituting the heart of the play:

Empédocle y est la figure même du désir spéculatif et de la nostalgie de l’Un-Tout, souffrant de la limitation temporelle et voulant s’arracher à la finitude. Le drame s’organise alors – je simplifie – autour du débat intérieur du héros (...). Son seul sujet pratiquement, c’est la justification du suicide spéculatif.³¹

The dialectical structure and the speculative desire to overcome oppositions is profoundly discussed in the enigmatic text *Der Grund zum Empedokles*, in which Hölderlin elaborates the fundamental principles of the tragedy.³² In this document, another dialectic pair is added to the speculative scheme:

Natur und Kunst sind sich im reinen Leben nur harmonisch entgegengesetzt. Die Kunst ist die Blüthe, die Vollendung der Natur; Natur wird erst göttlich durch die Verbindung mit der verschiedenartigen aber harmonischen Kunst, wenn jedes ganz ist, was es seyn kann, und eines verbindet sich mit dem andern, ersetzt den Mangel des andern (...) dann ist die Vollendung da, und das Göttliche ist in der Mitte von beiden.³³

29 Joseph Suglia, “Empedokles and the Absence of Sacrifice”, *Focus on German Studies* 10 (2003), 12.

30 Ibid.

31 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *L’imitation des Modernes*, Collection La Philosophie en effet (Paris: Galilée, 1986), 60–61. “Empedocles is here the very figure of speculative desire and nostalgia for the One-Whole, suffering from temporal limitation and wanting to escape finitude. The drama is then organized (I am simplifying) around the hero’s internal debate (...). Its sole subject, virtually, is the justification of speculative suicide.” See Christopher Fynsk (ed.), *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 228.

32 Joseph Suglia, “Empedokles and the Absence of Sacrifice”, 15.

33 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, 868. “When life is pure, nature and art oppose one another merely harmoniously. Art is the blossom, the perfection of nature; nature first becomes divine when it is allied with art, which differs from it in kind but is in harmony with it, first when each is everything it can be and when each allies itself with the other, supplying what the other lacks (...) at that point perfection is achieved and

Hölderlin introduces the opposition *organisch* and *aorgisch*, to describe the all-important dialectic movement between art and nature. It is in their reciprocal relation (*Wechselwirkung*), that the opposition between the immeasurable and destabilizing forces of nature and the measuring order of art can reach a higher harmonic level. Along these lines, Empedocles' auto-sacrifice symbolizes the extreme limit of the dialectic pairing of the organic and the aorgic.

We have distinguished two meanings of sacrifice which run as separate layers through Hölderlin's text. Using Empedoclean terms, one could characterize the first motive of sacrifice as a movement of repulsion and strife. Empedocles' sacrifice is an extrinsically imposed act of atonement. Cursed and victimized, Empedocles has become an outcast from the community. The second account of sacrifice, on the other hand, is motivated by an inner longing to reunite the fundamental antinomies of finitude/infinity, art/nature and between the organic and aorgic. The moment Empedocles reconnects to his inner source of strength, he is attracted to the fire of the volcano of Mount Etna, beckoning to come up and fulfill his philosophy, his chosen destiny.

6 Sacrifice as a Black Sin

The third version opens with a monologue by Empedocles, who has just woken up from his sleep. Both sacrificial motives mentioned above are unmistakably present and seem to reinforce each other in his words. Empedocles speaks of the ridicule, humiliation and curse (*"Schmach," "Hohn," "Fluch"*) which accompanied his banishment from the polis. But he also designates it as just, curative, and a blessing (*"wohl verdient," "heilsam," "Seegen"*). Describing himself as a sinner, incapable of love for mankind, and a dreamer, he has now been released from all human bonds to freely embrace his fate. The speculative nature of this fate leaves no doubt. Empedocles evokes the volcano (*"Vater Aetna"*) and the beckoning of Nature: *"Du rufst, du ziehst mich nah und näher an."*³⁴ The flame of death is calling: *"Du zauberische/ Furchtbare Flamme! (. . .)/ Mir wirst du helle, denn ich fürcht es nicht/ Denn sterben will ich ja. Mein Recht ist diß."*³⁵

the divine stands at the midpoint of the two." See Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, 114.

34 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, 885–886. "You call, you draw me close and closer to yourself." See Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, 173.

35 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, p. 886. "you thaumaturgic/ Frightful flame! (. . .)/ I'll see you clearly in the light, for I am not afraid./ And, yes, I want to die. This is my right." See Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, 173.

Even the devotion of his beloved pupil Pausanias, the only remaining tie to worldly existence, cannot change Empedocles' determination. At the end of the second scene, he sends Pausanias away: *“Da ich geboren wurde, wars beschlossen . . . / Wir müssen scheiden, Kind! und halte nur / Mein Schicksaal mir nicht auf, und zaudre nicht.”*³⁶

The second scene ends with a statement that conveys the inevitability of Empedocles' will and fate in the strongest possible way: *“Und was geschehen soll, ist schon vollendet.”*³⁷

However, with the sudden appearance of a new and mysterious character in the third scene the justification of Empedocles' speculative suicide is abruptly challenged. In ironic and provocative terms, Manes the Egyptian defies Empedocles to quickly consummate the deed: *“Nun! säume nicht! bedenke dich nicht länger / Vergeh! vergeh! Damit es ruhig bald / Und helle werde, Trugbild!”*³⁸

Initially, it is not clear whether Manes himself is not a mirage, a “*Trugbild*”. When demanded to disclose his identity, *“Was! woher? / Wer bist du, Mann!”*, Manes reveals himself as a mortal, *“ein Sterblicher, wie du.”* It becomes clear that Manes is an old teacher of Empedocles, an omniscient sage (*“Alleswissender”*). The appellation *“Aegyptier”* symbolizes his intimate knowledge of the divine Nomos, the eternal fate which transcends all individuality.³⁹ Manes understands the sacrificial nature of the fate which Empedocles has chosen for himself:

Umkränze dir dein Haupt, und schmük es aus,
Das Opferthier, das nicht vergebens fällt.⁴⁰

36 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, p. 890. “For at my birth, already then, it was concluded (. . .) / We have to part, my child! do not / Delay my destiny, do not procrastinate.” See Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, 177.

37 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, 895. “And what / Is yet to happen already is accomplished.” See Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, 182.

38 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, 895. “Now! do not delay! don't ponder any longer / But pass away! yes, pass! that we may have some quiet / And a brighter day, mirage!” See Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, 182.

39 See Cornelissen, “Die Manes-Szene in Hölderlins Trauerspiel ‘Der Tod des Empedokles’”, 102.

40 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, 896. “Enwreathе your head and decorate / The sacrificial beast that does not fall in vain.” See Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, 183.

But in the *rhexis* (speech) which follows, Manes questions the legitimacy of Empedocles' speculative death and it is his auto-sacrifice which is exposed as a "Trugbild".⁴¹

Nicht unbesonnen, wie du bist, hinab –
Ich hab ein Wort, und diß bedenke, Trunkner!⁴²

Manes' doubts whether Empedocles is the savior of his time:

Der Eine doch, der neue Retter faßt
Des Himmels Stralen ruhig auf (...)
Die Menschen und die Götter söhnt er aus (...)
Bist du der Mann? derselbe? bist du diß?⁴³

Empedocles' sacrifice would merely be a vain death, and Manes calls it a black sin: "*Nur Einen adelt deine schwarze Sünde.*"⁴⁴ Empedocles replies in what may be the most enigmatic passage of the play. He speaks of the retreat of the god of his people, and his country's demise:

Denn wo ein Land ersterben soll, da wählt
Der Geist noch Einen sich zuletzt, durch den
Sein Schwanensang, das letzte Leben töne.⁴⁵

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- 41 Hölderlin uses the same phrase in the "Grund zum Empedokles" when he describes the very moment of organic and aorgic unification: "Aber die Individualität dieses Moments ist nur ein Erzeugniß des höchsten Streits, seine Allgemeinheit nur ein Erzeugniß des höchsten Streits (...)" so daß der vereinende Moment, wie ein Trugbild, sich immer mehr auflöst (...)", see Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, 869. "Yet the individuality of this moment is but a supreme strife, and its universality is but a product of that supreme strife (...) the outcome will be that the unifying moment, like a mirage, will dissolve more and more (...)", see Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, 145.
- 42 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, 897. "Abandon me and go down thoughtlessly, not as you are;/ I have a word that you must ponder, my besotted friend!" See Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, 184.
- 43 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, 897. "The one, however, the newborn savior, grasps/ The rays of heaven tranquilly (...)/ The human being and the gods he reconciles;/ Are you that man? the very one? are you this?" See Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, 184.
- 44 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 1, 897. "Only one is ennobled by your black sin."
- 45 Ibid. 899. "For when a country is about to die, its spirit at the end/ Selects but one among the many, one alone through whom/ Its swan song, the final breaths of life, will sound." See Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles; A Mourning Play*, 186.

In spite of Manes' disapproval, Empedocles claims his right to the forbidden fruit (“*verbotne Frucht*”) of his suicide. However, when Manes inquires in resignation about Empedocles' intentions (“*So gehst du nun?*”) the answer is “*Noch geh ich nicht, o Alter!*”⁴⁶

The postponement of the act of suicide is to be read as a sign of hesitation and fundamental doubt.⁴⁷ At this point, the third version is aborted and this also marks the deadlock of Hölderlin's entire project.

7 After Tragedy

Hölderlin's project to create a tragedy for modern times fails: all three versions remain unfinished and fragmented. But this very stagnation also represents a turning point in Hölderlin's thought. In his exemplary analysis, Lacoue-Labarthe characterizes Hölderlin's standstill as a “*césure du spéculative*”, an interruption which opens new perspectives and which will eventually allow him to breach the dominant mimetic scheme of his time. We will explain this in the following.

While Hölderlin gives up on Empedocles, he starts translating the work of Sophocles. According to Lacoue-Labarthe, this return to the ultimate Greek tragedy is a fruitful ‘regress’ through which Hölderlin develops his answer to two elemental questions: first, the problem of theatre (is tragedy still possible?). Second, the difficulty of translation (do the Greek still talk to us and how can we make them speak to us?).⁴⁸

Both questions are inherently linked to – and can be interpreted as a more precise investigation of – a broader issue, which preoccupied all leading intellectual figures at the end of the eighteenth century. It is the problem of mimesis and the search for a modern identity which more than anything haunts contemporary Germany. A first answer to the obsessive quest for a German identity is given in the widely influential work of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768). For Winckelmann, the only possibility of a unique German identity lies in the imitation of the Greeks, as he expressed in the famous formula:

46 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band I, 900. Manes: “So, you will go now?” Empedocles: “Not yet do I go, old man!”

47 Joseph Suglia rightly emphasizes the fact that in the play, “which announces the death of a tragic hero – death takes place nowhere in the space of its presentation.” Suglia, “Empedokles and the Absence of Sacrifice,” 11.

48 Lacoue-Labarthe, *L'imitation des Modernes*, 78.

*“Der einzige Weg für uns, groß, ja, wenn es möglich ist, unnachahmlich zu werden, ist die Nachahmung der Alten.”*⁴⁹

This position is superseded by Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) who proposes a different solution. In his essay *“Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung”* from 1795, Schiller introduces an antagonism between ‘naiv’ and ‘sentimentalisch’, where ‘naiv’ corresponds with nature and the natural, and ‘sentimentalisch’ with culture and the cultural.⁵⁰ This opposition also has a historical dimension: the Greek were ‘naiv’, we moderns on the other hand are ‘sentimentalisch’.⁵¹ A return to the ‘naiv’ is not possible for modernity: this option is sealed. For Schiller, modernity can only achieve reconciliation with nature through a synthesis with its culture and art:

Sie sind, was wir waren, sie sind was wir wieder werden sollen. Wir waren Natur, wie sie, und unsere Kultur soll uns, auf dem Wege der Vernunft und der Freiheit, zur Natur zurückführen.⁵²

This speculative scheme of transcending the opposition between ‘naiv’ and ‘sentimentalisch’ by means of a dialectical resolution constitutes the theoretical framework for Hölderlin’s *Empedokles*. In the speculative nature of Empedocles’ death, overcoming the divide between organic and aorgic, Schiller’s ideas and aspirations reverberate. Only with the impasse of his project, Hölderlin starts to free himself from this dominant Schillerian scheme.

49 Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1755/2007), 4. “The only way for us, to become great, or even, if this is possible, to become inimitable, is the imitation of the ancient Greeks.”

50 Friedrich Schiller, *Friedrich von Schiller. Werke in zwei Bänden*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (München: Knauer Klassiker), 642–710.

51 According to Lacoue-Labarthe, this dialectic pair also entails a whole series of philosophical oppositions, derived from Kant: intuitif-spéculatif, objectif-subjectif, immédiat-médiat, sensible-idéal, fini-infini, nécessaire-libre, corps-esprit. Lacoue-Labarthe, *L’imitation des Modernes*, 75.

52 Friedrich Schiller, *Friedrich von Schiller. Werke in zwei Bänden*, 643. “They are what we were; they are what we ought to become once more. We were nature as they, and our culture should lead us back to nature, upon the path of reason and freedom.”

8 The Chasm between Greek Culture and Modernity

In 1801, Hölderlin writes a notable letter to his friend Casimir Böhlendorff. In this letter, the fruits of Hölderlin's immersion in the questions of tragedy and mimesis come to the fore.

While discussing a dramatic idyll of his friend, Hölderlin makes a remark about a deep difference between Greeks and moderns:

Denn das ist das tragische bei uns, daß wir ganz stille in irgend einem Behälter eingepackt vom Reiche der Lebendigen hinweggehn, nicht daß wir in Flammen verzehrt die Flamme büßen, die wir nicht zu bändigen vermochten.⁵³

The tragedy of modernity is its absence of a meaningful death. The pathos of life and therefore the possibility of a tragic and heroic death, which the Greek possessed, are no longer accessible to us. This is why Hölderlin's attempt to carry the meaning of Empedocles' death into modernity was doomed to fail. Elaborating on this lack of fate – or *dysmoron* – in the modern condition, Hölderlin detects an underlying chiasmic structure in the divide between Greeks and moderns. While the Greek were naturally endowed with sacred pathos (“*heiliger Pathos*”) in their lives, their art – from Homeric times on – has acquired austerity (“*Nüchternheit*”). These oppositions are reversed in modernity: we can attain pathos in our art, while our lives are imbued with austerity.

Deßwegen sind die Griechen des heiligen Pathos weniger Meister, weil es ihnen angeboren war, hingegen sind sie vorzüglich in Darstellungsgaabe, von Homer an, weil dieser außerordentliche Mensch seelenvoll genug war, um die abendländische Junonische Nüchternheit für sein Apollonsreich zu erbeuten, und so wahrhaft das fremde sich anzueignen.

53 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band II, 913. “For this is the tragic to us: that, packed up in any container, we very quietly move away from the realm of the living, [and] not that – consumed in flames – we expiate the flames which we could not tame.” See Friedrich Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, tr. Thomas Pfau, *Intersections* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 150.

Bei uns ist es umgekehrt. Deßwegen ists auch so gefährlich sich die Kunstregeln einzig und allein von griechischer Vortreflichkeit zu abstrahiren.⁵⁴

The chiasmic rupture envisioned by Hölderlin bears far-reaching consequences. Hölderlin discovers a deep-rooted duality in Greek culture itself, which undermines the previous classicistic solutions of imitation. Greek art has achieved an occidental austerity and is itself divided from the archaic, oriental Greece of sacred Pathos. Only imitating Greek art would therefore amount to repeating the appropriation of austerity instead of solving our need to appropriate pathos. Still, Hölderlin's distinction between "*abendländische Nüchternheit*", which is innate, "*Eigen*" to the Occident, and the "*heiliger Pathos*", which is foreign ("*Fremd*") to us, does not eliminate but only changes the relevance of the Greek example:

Aber das eigene muß so gut gelernt seyn, wie das Fremde. Deßwegen sind uns die Griechen unentbehrlich. Nur werden wir ihnen gerade in unserm Eigenen, Nationellen nicht nachkommen, weil, wie gesagt, der freie Gebrauch des Eigenen das schwerste ist.⁵⁵

According to Peter Szondi, this passage by Hölderlin has been widely misinterpreted and has given rise to a distorted image of the poet. In his groundbreaking and authoritative interpretation of the *Böhlendorffbrief*, Szondi mentions Wilhelm Michel as a representative of a reading of the letter as a formulation of a historical mission ("*historischer Auftrag*").⁵⁶ Hölderlin's words are understood as a call to the Occident to obtain a new superiority by means of capturing the foreign pathos – "*Leidenschaft*" in Michel's terms – in a struggle against its own austerity ("*Bestimmtheit*"). Evidently, such an "*abendländische*

54 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band II, 912. "Hence the Greeks are less master of the sacred pathos, because to them it was inborn, whereas they excel in their talent for presentation, beginning with Homer, because this exceptional man was sufficiently sensitive to conquer the *Western Junonian sobriety* for his Appolonian empire and thus to veritabily appropriate what is foreign. With us, it is the reverse. Hence it is also so dangerous to deduce the rules of art for oneself exclusively from Greek excellence." See Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, 149–150.

55 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band II, 913. "Yet what is familiar must be learned as well as what is alien. This is why the Greeks are so indispensable for us. It is only that we will not follow them in our own, national [spirit] since, as I said, the *free* use of *what is one's own* is the most difficult." See Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, 150.

56 Peter Szondi, *Schriften I* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978), 350.

Wendung” would be foremost a German task, which would make Hölderlin a sanctified German leader.⁵⁷

Against such an interpretation, Szondi emphasizes Hölderlin’s doubts of equaling – let alone surpassing – the Greek example. The poet has the double task of learning to use the innate freely (“*das Eigene frei gebrauchen*”) and of appropriating the foreign (“*sich das Fremde aneignen*”). Only a fruitful balance between both, *Eigenes* and *Fremdes*, can produce the tension and interplay in an artwork that guarantee its life (“*Lebendigkeit*”) and meaning.

9 A Shattered Foundation of Tragedy

In 2007, the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy delivered a lecture in Gießen, entitled *Nach der Tragödie*.⁵⁸ In this lecture, held in memory of his close friend and collaborator Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy alludes to the modern condition (“*abendländische Conditio*”) as nihilistic in its ultimate consequences.⁵⁹ The origin of tragedy for Nancy – as it was for Hölderlin – coincides with an irreversible loss. Tragedy is a departure from the archaic cult which produced the presence of the gods through sacrifice: “Tragedy itself, already, comes *after*. It comes after religion, that is to say, after sacrifice.”⁶⁰ This results in a distorted relationship of the Occident with death: “It is the relation to death that it has – or believes it has – lost or unsettled through sacrifice, and later through tragedy.”⁶¹

We started with a poem of Hölderlin which seemed to suggest a clear solution to this modern predicament. The quest for a meaningful death (“*Umsonst zu sterben, lieb’ ich nicht*”) is answered by the choice of sacrificing oneself for a

57 Szondi also cites Michel’s qualifications of Hölderlin as “Wortführer des Nordens” and “Gesetzsprecher des Deutschtums”.

58 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Nach der Tragödie*, tr. Jörn Etzold and Helga Finter (Stuttgart: Jutta Legueil, 2008). Nancy held the same lecture in April 2008 in NYU. An English translation which is to be published was provided by Micaela Kramer. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *After Tragedy*, (ed. Micaela Kramer, *Catastrophe & Cesura; Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe Today*; New York: New York University Press and Cardoso Law School, April 10–12, 2008).

59 In words which bring to mind the famous last stanza of Hölderlin’s *Schicksalslied*, Nancy states: “But we do not emerge (or extricate ourselves) from anything, nor do we head towards anything. We are given no origin, no destination, and we are promised no way out.” See Nancy, *After Tragedy*, 3.

60 *Ibid.*, 10.

61 *Ibid.*, 18.

higher ideal. The violent and heroic act of dying for the fatherland (*“doch Lieb’ ich, zu fallen am Opferhügel”*) seems to hold the promise of reawakening the sacred pathos.

A similar promise appears to have inspired Hölderlin’s attempt to create a tragedy for modern times. The death of Empedocles can only be meaningful if it is understood as a sacrifice for a higher purpose, be it as an act of atonement between the gods and the community, or as a heroic surrender of individual existence to reach an all-unifying synthesis. When the possibility of Empedocles’ sacrifice (*“Das Opferthier, das nicht vergebens fällt”*) is radically questioned, the foundation of the tragedy is shattered. This aporia inevitably forces a radical reconceptualization of modernity and national identity.

What remains is an attitude of retreat. Hölderlin’s poetry can no longer lead us out of modern despair or provide guidance to (national) identity.⁶² But Hölderlin’s questions and groundbreaking insights have the power to profoundly enrich our understanding of sacrifice.

62 As Götz Schmitt convincingly demonstrates, even the identity of the Fatherland in Hölderlin’s *“Der Tod fürs Vaterland”* is far from self-evident. Schmitt refers to Hölderlin’s unbroken belief in the ideals of the French Revolution and the possibility to accomplish reforms under French authority. Instead of a contemporary historical reference for *“Vaterland”*, he lists a number of alternatives such as *“die Hermannsschlacht, die Schweizerkriege, Marathon und die Perserkriege.”* See Schmitt, *“Der Tod fürs Vaterland; Hölderlin’s Ode und die Geschichte”*, 361.

The Nonviolent Sacrifice: The Role of Tapasya in Nonviolence

Saskia L. E. van Goelst Meijer

1 Introduction

According to René Girard, one of the leading thinkers on the role of sacrifice in human society, violence lies at “the foundation of the world” as we know it.¹ His theory holds that violence is part of the dynamic of human communities because human beings are mimetic creatures. Mimesis, according to Girard, is the unconscious imitation of desires in which everyone is engaged, which leads people to desire the things their important others desire. Because people desire the same things as the people around them, this eventually leads to intense rivalry. This predicament would create complete social chaos, a situation of all against all were it not for a periodic release of tension in the form of violence against a scapegoat. Blaming a scapegoat for the tension and the violence in the group unites its members against a common enemy. A sacrifice, then, is a ritualized form of ousting a scapegoat.

In his narrative on the Kapsiki people in this volume, Walter van Beek shows that sacrifice can enhance the sense of community and belonging. Tensions and problems seem to be reduced through such a ritual.² According to Girard, this can be explained because the sacrifice is a ritualized reminder of how previous inter-group violence was reduced by ousting the scapegoat. Furthermore, it allows for an accepted amount of violence to take place, in a confined setting, which in turn helps to prevent large amounts of violence from erupting within the community. Thus, sacrifice, community, and violence (and temporary peace) are necessarily connected.

That this connection between sacrifice and violence is only one possible view on sacrifice Kathryn McClymond shows in her book *Beyond Sacred Violence*.³ She advances that although violence often is a part of sacrifice, the

¹ René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1987).

² See the contribution of W. E. A. van Beek in this volume.

³ Kathryn McClymond, *Beyond Sacred Violence: a Comparative Study of Sacrifice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

two are not interchangeable. Because sacrifice, as Van Beek suggests as well, plays such an important role in bringing communities together, she urges us to consider a broader understanding of sacrifice. Violence against a scapegoat is only one (and as McClymond states: limited) way in which sacrifice can serve to create unity.

It is noteworthy, in my view, that nonviolence thinkers, practitioners, and movements often use the image of sacrifice. Moreover, in the context of nonviolence thinking sacrifice is also connected to the strengthening of communities. However, it is not connected to the use of violence. The question I will try to answer in this article is: how can we understand the concept and role of sacrifice in a process of nonviolence?

In the following paragraphs, I will first briefly introduce *tapasya*, the term I use in my own analyses of nonviolence to denote the element of sacrifice and the acceptance of suffering present in all nonviolent practices. I will then explore Girard's ideas on mimesis and sacrifice. I will go on to explore an alternative reading of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Bible text that, according to Girard, is chiefly responsible for the creation of a sacrificial understanding of the Gospels. However, Eugene Webb suggests that the text actually points to a different understanding of sacrifice, tied to nonviolence. By looking at Webb's interpretation of Hebrews, and comparing his notion of sacrifice to the writings of major nonviolent actors in modern history, we might gain some insight into the role of sacrifice in nonviolence thinking. I will show that *tapasya* points to a nonsacrificial (in Girardian terms) understanding of sacrifice. In the last sections, I will explain this difference and draw on the popular uprising against the dictatorship in the Philippines in the 1980s as a practical example.

2 Nonviolence

The roots of nonviolence as a way toward (social) change lie in the work of Mohandas Gandhi, who was the first to use mass organized nonviolence to significantly alter the sociopolitical reality of his age. His understanding of nonviolence included not merely the absence of violence but also what was to take its place. He understood nonviolence as a concrete tool that could be used to create change, a tool for which he used the term *satyagraha* or truth-force. Gandhi construed nonviolence in a new, systematic and pro-active way that made it applicable to modern society. His work directly inspired others like Martin Luther King, Lanzo del Vasto and Dom Helder Camara and still functions as a jumping-off point for many others, individuals or organizations

that want to work with nonviolence.⁴ They take up Gandhi's concepts and translate them to their own circumstances, expanding and elaborating different elements. When looking closely at these theories and practices of nonviolence from around the world, five core elements emerge that together create a dynamic framework. These five elements, in their Sanskrit terms originating from Gandhi's work, are: *satya*, or truth-seeking, *ahimsa* or "the absence of the intention to do harm", *sarvodaya* meaning "the welfare of all", *svadeshi/svaraj* which points to autonomy, and *tapasya* or self-suffering. These are ancient religious terms, reconceptualized by Gandhi in a way that made them suitable for sociopolitical action. As said above, their meaning has expanded even more through the work of subsequent nonviolence scholars and practitioners.⁵ Each of these elements is a complex and layered notion and in this article I cannot do justice to all of them. My focus here is on the element of *tapasya*.

2.1 *Tapasya*

Out of the five core elements of nonviolence *tapasya* is perhaps the most difficult to come to terms with, certainly in a Western context. Its most common translation in the context of nonviolence: self-suffering, brings to mind the idea that nonviolence involves accepting the violence or wrong-doings of the other without responding to them. This interpretation is linked to another common misinterpretation of nonviolence as passivity and acquiescence in the face of conflict or injustice.⁶ In this paragraph, I will try to show how both *tapasya* and nonviolence in general point to something completely different.

The Sanskrit term *tapasya* literally means "produced by heat", and goes back to the root *tapas* meaning heat, suffering, or austerity. Kathryn McClymond writes that the term is already found in the Rig Veda, one of the oldest Hindu texts, and its meaning evolved from pointing to the heat of the ritual sacrificial fire to being associated with the 'inner heat' of asceticism.

4 See for instance: Alland, A., & Alland, S., *Crisis and Commitment: the Life History of a French Social Movement* (London, Routledge 2001); Ansbro, J. J., *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Nonviolent Strategies and Tactics for Social Change* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 2000); Câmara, H., *Spiral of Violence* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1971); Lanza del Vasto, J. J., *Warriors of Peace: Writings on the Technique of Nonviolence* (New York: Knopf, 1974).

5 Not all nonviolence movements or practitioners use these terms, but the principles that they represent can be found in all works on nonviolence.

6 John Roedel, "Vulnerability Not Tolerance: How Nonviolence Works", in *Vulnerability and Tolerance* (presented at the Colloquium on violence and religion, Amsterdam, 2007).

... devotional practices that are understood to generate a kind of spiritual heat are, in effect, replicating one of the activities performed in traditional sacrifice: heating, which is, of course, simultaneously destructive and constructive. In traditional sacrifice a distinct material substance is heated on an outdoor altar. In devotional practices an internalized, subtle substance is heated by devotional practices within the body.⁷

Thus, tapasya refers to “that which is produced by the inner heat of austerity or suffering”. Over the centuries the term has also come to mean “the undertaking of personal discipline” and is also translated as self-control, (spiritual) effort, tolerance, or transformation.⁸

2.2 *Tapasya in Nonviolence*

In Gandhi's work, tapasya is one of the key aspects of a nonviolent process. Nonviolence is to Gandhi a spiritual quest as much as a sociopolitical one. In fact, he does not view those two realms as truly separate. The quest for truth, which he sees as the essence of his work, is a quest for God or Ultimate Reality. His goal is to attain enlightenment.⁹ But, Gandhi realizes, such an internal quest for truth is meaningless without living up to it in the public realm.

Because self-purification is an essential element in the attainment of enlightenment in the Hindu tradition, Gandhi takes a vow of asceticism which forms the base of his tapasya.¹⁰ However, in the course of his lifetime, his understanding of this vow changes. From the vow of celibacy and abstinence of an earnest spiritual seeker, Gandhi comes to regard it as a mode of conduct that has important sociopolitical implications. Likewise, in a more general sense, his understanding of tapasya changes from a purely personal process of purification to an essential element in a nonviolent process of social change.

In his writings, Gandhi uses the term tapasya in different ways, even though it always contains elements of its original meaning of purification through internal suffering, and of sacrifice and transformation. He subverts the ‘reasonable’ idea of eliminating suffering for oneself, and throughout his writings provides different motivations for doing so. One of the motivations is that it can easily

7 McClymond, *Beyond Sacred Violence*, 156–157.

8 See for instance Deborah Adele, *The Yamas & Niyamas Exploring Yoga's Ethical Practice* (Chicago, Ill: On-Word Bound Books, 2009).

9 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, trans. Mahadev Desai (Ahmdabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1927), 133–144.

10 This vow is called Brahmacharya in the Hindu tradition and is a vow to lead a life of religious seeking and includes restrictions on diet, conduct and possessions.

become an excuse for using violence. If eliminating suffering from one's life is a reasonable motivation for doing things, it can become a reason to inflict suffering on others. Tapasya is thus a way of directing attention away from the self.

Furthermore, Gandhi uses tapasya to refer to the process of overcoming fear, specifically the fear of suffering and death, and to the cultivation of self-discipline.¹¹ He wants practitioners of nonviolence to give up the habit to 'fight or flight', and to commit themselves to nonviolent behaviour under all circumstances, while staying put in the situation and addressing the conflict or injustice at hand. Part of that process is the firm internal struggle to overcome ill will against the opponent, and even taking this one step further by cultivating love for the adversary. This is a moral standpoint, but it also has a very practical aspect. The willingness to suffer instead of retaliating when being confronted with violence or injustice is the only attitude that breaks a cycle of violence. Justice can only be won, so states Gandhi, by a love that does not impose suffering on the (unjust) other.

Related to this understanding is tapasya as a means to "penetrate the heart" of those to whom we are appealing. Gandhi uses tapasya as a tool to make the suffering visible by undergoing it openly. Gandhi wants to demonstrate that the injustices people face are afflicted on them by other humans. By making this visible, it becomes clear that because it is perpetrated by other people it can also be corrected, the injustice can be stopped.¹² But for that to happen, the problem has to be acknowledged. He argues that appealing to reason alone sometimes is not enough to get the message across. Visible "suffering", he argues, "opened the eyes of understanding."¹³

As Gandhi sees it, tapasya is a complex and dynamic element. Separately, suffering and love are not enough. Simply loving your opponent without an attempt at change is impotent. Suffering by itself has very little value and if accompanied by hatred and anger would even be counterproductive.¹⁴ Combined they instigate action and change. One has to actively engage in tapasya and be willing to suffer for one's goal, refusing to comply with untruth

11 Joseph W. Groves, "Revisiting 'Self-suffering': From Gandhi and King to Contemporary Nonviolence", in *Nonviolence for the Third Millennium: Its Legacy and Future* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2000), 201–228.

12 Ronald J. Tercheck, "Conflict and Nonviolence", in *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi*, eds Judith M. Brown and Anthony Parel (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 117–34.

13 Manfred B. Steger, "Searching for Satya through Ahimsa: Gandhi's Challenge to Western Discourses of Power", *Constellations* 13, no. 3 (2006): 332–348 (344).

14 Bhikkhu C. Parekh, *Gandhi: a Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

and accepting the consequences.¹⁵ Thus, *tapasya* is a medium of change and transformation of oneself, the opponent, and the situation at large.

The concepts of sacrifice and suffering are also central to the work of Martin Luther King, who was deeply inspired by Gandhi, but in a much more psychological way.¹⁶ King described his nonviolent philosophy in his article “An Experiment in Love”.¹⁷ Like Gandhi, he stresses the importance of accepting suffering and giving up all inclinations to self-preservation as the essence of nonviolence:

... that [which] characterizes nonviolent resistance is a willingness to accept suffering without retaliation, to accept blows from the opponent without striking back. “Rivers of blood may have to flow before we gain our freedom, but it must be our blood”, Gandhi said to his countrymen. The nonviolent resister is willing to accept violence if necessary, but never to inflict it. He does not seek to doge jail. If going to jail is necessary, he enters it as “a bridegroom enters the bride’s chamber”.¹⁸

According to King, nonviolent resistance led people to self-respect, courage, and inner strength,¹⁹ which he called the emergence of a new kind of power. King wrote:

Humanity is waiting for something other than blind imitation of the past. If we want truly to advance a step further (...) we must begin to turn mankind away from the long and desolate night of violence. May it not be that the new man the world needs is a nonviolent man? (...) This not only will make us new men, but will give us a new kind of power (...). It will be power infused by love and justice.²⁰

How can we understand this ‘new kind of power’ as a social and psychological reality? Here I turn to Kenneth Boulding’s analysis of power, in which he

15 Judith M. Brown and Anthony Parel eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 258–262.

16 Groves, “Self-Suffering.”

17 King, M. L., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990).

18 King, *Essential Writings*, 18.

19 Groves, “Self-Suffering.”

20 King, *Autobiography*, 332.

distinguishes integrative power as the kind of power both Gandhi and King talk about.

3 Integrative Power

Power is sometimes related to the ability to make others do what we want.²¹ In a more general sense, peace scholar Kenneth Boulding states, it is the ability to “get things done.”²² According to Boulding, power can be exercised in three different ways, depending on the consequences. These three ways he calls the “faces” of power. First he discerns *threat* power, which can be paraphrased as: “You do what I want or I will do something you don’t want.”²³ It underlies all forms of punishment and retaliation.

The second form of power is *exchange* power, the power to produce and trade. This is paraphrased as: “You do something I want and I’ll do something you want.”²⁴ Together the first and the second form are often called ‘the carrot and the stick’. The third kind of power is called *integrative* power. It is the power to create relationships and bring people together. Integrative power is summarized as: “I’m going to be authentic and we’ll end up closer together.”²⁵ For Boulding, from the three ‘faces’ or ways of wielding power, integrative power is the most important. Integrative power is the power of human relationships. It is connected to everything that establishes a relationship either on a personal level or in the form of institutions or organizations. Love, respect, legitimacy and consent are all expressions of integrative power.

In everyday life most forms of exercising power consist of a combination of the three faces. But there is a difference in emphasis in various areas. Exchange power is most prominently present in anything connected to the economy, but also to anything in which incentives (the carrot) are used to get things done. Yet also legitimacy and trust, both forms of integrative power, play a huge role for instance in the stock exchange, and without regulations and the penalties

21 Max Weber, “Power”, in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 159–262.

22 Boulding, *Three Faces of Power*, 15.

23 Boulding, K. E., Nonviolence and Power in the Twentieth Century, in *Nonviolent Social Movements: A Geographical Perspective*, eds S. Zunes, L. R. Kurtz, & S. B. Asher, (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999) 9–17 (10).

24 Nagler, M. N., *The Search for a Nonviolent Future: A Promise of Peace for Ourselves, Our Families, and Our World* (Novato, Calif.: New World Library, 2004), 29.

25 Nagler, *Search for a Nonviolent Future*, 29.

to back them up production and trade cannot proceed. Threat power is present not only in the military but wherever some form of penalty is used to make things happen (the stick). The military symbolizes threat power, but cannot exist without exchange power in the form of money, nor without integrative power in the form of morale and legitimacy. Underlying all forms of power is integrative power. Systems and institutions can only function if people cooperate. Even in the most rigid dictatorship, as soon as enough people stop cooperating, the system collapses.

Since all human beings exist within relationships, integrative power is open to all, even to those who are traditionally assumed to have no power. "It is this definition of power, as a process that occurs in relationships, that gives us the possibility of empowerment."²⁶ Both Gandhi and King asserted that the kind of power used in processes of nonviolence can emerge by being authentic and truthful and by going through the inner process of shifting our sense of personhood away from our self and giving up our inclination to enhance or preserve our own interests.

For a better understanding of these ideas, it may be worthwhile to look more in-depth at René Girard's views, who connects sacrifice to violence. Furthermore, we may examine the work of Eugene Webb, who provides an alternative reading of some of Girard's sources, one that points more towards nonviolence.

4 René Girard: Mimetic Desire

René Girard is one of the leading thinkers on the role of violence and sacrifice in human society. His theory of mimetic desire describes how and why humanity is locked in an on-going cycle of violence, even though we find (temporary) ways to limit violence to a minimum. Girard claims that violence lies at the "foundation of the world" as we know it.²⁷ At the heart of Girard's theory is the concept of mimetic desire. Simply put, it is the unconscious tendency present in all human beings to imitate the desires of significant others. In other words, people desire things because important people around them (models) desire them. This leads to conflict because the model becomes a rival with whom we have to compete, or so it seems, for the object of our desire. Because mimesis happens in every person, these conflicts can become so

26 Nanette Page and Cheryll E. Czuba, "Empowerment: What Is It?", *Journal of Extension* 37, no. 5 (1999).

27 Girard, *Things Hidden*.

all-pervasive in communities that they destroy the societal structure if they are not restrained in time.

Girard states that our deepest desire is actually not for objects – our deepest desire is to *be*.²⁸ Ultimately, we are not really interested in the actual object that our models desire, but in their “being”, or as Oughourlian puts it, in their autonomy, or sense of self.²⁹ Powerful others make us feel they know “how to be”, and that the things they desire support them in their “being”. People desire what important others desire, because they feel those things will in turn support them in their own “being”.³⁰ They do not realize that the desires of the model are mimetic as well, tied to the desires of yet another model.

Early in their evolution, human beings discovered that if rising tensions and violence are diverted and laid upon a victim, they are relieved in the rest of the group. This process of victimization is called scapegoating. A person or a group, appearing to be vulnerable for some reason, gets blamed for the tensions and violence.³¹ Then, through the same process of mimesis, the blame and hatred against this scapegoat become shared feelings within the community. Former rivals become new allies by ‘ganging up’ against the common enemy. The scapegoat is driven out of the community, defeated or marginalized. His or her well-being is sacrificed to preserve the well-being of the group. This leads to a temporary relief from the violence and animosity, but since nothing has really changed (people remain mimetic beings) the process is bound to repeat itself in the future. Imperative in this process is that the people who as a group sacrifice the scapegoat are ignorant of what they are doing. For the mechanism to work it is necessary that the group is convinced that the victim is rightfully blamed. This, however, makes anyone a potential scapegoat at some point. Because ousting the scapegoat is only a temporary solution, somewhere in the future a new victim will (have to) be found to once more release the tension.

Societies have found different ways of dealing with this threat, for instance through laws, but also through ritual sacrifice. Such a ritual, in which not a real victim but a substitute is sacrificed, serves, according to Girard, as a reminder of the actual moment of scapegoating. It reminds the audience of both the initial violence and the peace that came after the scapegoat was sacrificed. Furthermore, such a ritual serves as a temporary outlet for the violence in the

28 James G. Williams, *The Girard Reader* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 227.

29 Jean-Michel Oughourlian, *The Genesis of Desire*, trans. Eugene Webb (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010).

30 Williams, *Girard Reader*; John Roedel, “The Emptiness of the Kingdom: Using Anti-colonial Theory to Re-read Girard” (presented at the Colloquium on violence and religion, University of Notre Dame South Bend, Indiana, 2010).

31 Williams, *Girard Reader*.

group, in a contained setting. But these systems of restraint, in turn, help to keep the scapegoat mechanism hidden and thus contribute to the necessary continuation of sacrifice. Whenever the system suffers from stress, or collapses, real violence may once more flare up, leading to real victims. What might work to end this cycle of violence, in Girard's vision, is the public discovery and understanding of the scapegoat mechanism. Understanding the mechanism and its consequences would provide humanity with a rational choice to act differently.

4.1 *Jesus' Sacrifice*

According to Girard, the Jewish prophetic tradition was evolving towards the discovery and disclosure of the scapegoat mechanism.³² The life of Jesus of Nazareth, in his view, is the culmination of that process. Girard states that the death of Jesus on the cross was meant to lay bare the mimetic process by providing a public example, and not as a sacrifice to appease God (as interpreted in modern Christianity).³³ Jesus' innocence is so very obvious that when he is picked as a scapegoat, "violence reveals its own game."³⁴ However, as Girard states, the revelation was "more than its recipients could bear" and, in time, the Gospels were being interpreted in a sacrificial way.³⁵ This helped to create a Christian tradition that revolved mostly around the sacrifice of Jesus who died on the cross to wash away the sins of the world. And so, instead of uncovering the scapegoat mechanism for society at large and instigating a paradigm shift, the narrative of Jesus, interpreted in a sacrificial way, actually helps to keep the process hidden. Girard sees the Epistle to the Hebrews as the main biblical text in which this misinterpretation was made. Because of this misinterpretation, even in our society today processes of scapegoating and sacrifice and the violence that accompanies them can be found everywhere. This sacrificial violence is tied, according to Girard, to a form of self-preservation in which the violence is laid on the other, a scapegoat, to get rid of it in our own society.

Interestingly enough, Eugene Webb, emeritus professor of International Studies and Comparative Religion at the University of Washington, has a very different interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and claims Girard has

32 Girard, *Things Hidden*.

33 René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

34 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 205.

35 Eugene Webb, "René Girard and the Symbolism of Religious Sacrifice", *Anthropoetics – Journal of Generative Anthropology* XI, no. 1 (2005): 1.

made an oversight.³⁶ In fact, in Webb's interpretation, the sacrifice in Hebrews points to nonviolence.

4.2 *The Epistle to the Hebrews*

The Epistle to the Hebrews, a Bible text consisting of an anonymous, early Christian homily, depicts a community of believers in the middle of a hostile environment.³⁷ The text's aim is to affirm and inspire the faith of the community in difficult times and motivate the people to remain steadfast.³⁸ It is the only book in the New Testament in which sacrificial imagery takes such a central place, and the text is often interpreted in a literal way, as pointing to the necessity of sacrificial offerings.³⁹ Eugene Webb suggests that Girard correctly states that the traditional reading of Hebrews is sacrificial. But, according to Webb, Girard himself makes the same mistake. Instead, the text should be read metaphorically. Not the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews misunderstood the story of Jesus but the medieval interpreters of the text. Webb states that in fact the author of Hebrews urged his intended audience to live a nonviolent life, and that the metaphors would have been well understood at the time.^{40,41}

To show the metaphoric meaning of the sacrifice in Hebrews, Webb starts by re-interpreting some key elements of the text. The first is the image of Jesus as the son of God. In the Jewish community of the first century, Webb claims, referring to someone as the son of God did not necessarily mean that this person was seen as divine. It referred to either a person who was living in accordance with the laws of God or a calling upon people to do so. In that latter

36 Ibidem.

37 Harold W. Attridge, *Essays on John and Hebrews* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

38 Ibidem; Christopher A Richardson, *Pioneer and Perfector of Faith Jesus' Faith as the Climax of Israel's History in the Epistle to the Hebrews*. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

39 Gabriella Gelardini, "Hebrews, an Ancient Synagogue Homily for Tisha be-Av: Its Function, its Basis, its Theological Interpretation" in: G. Gelardini ed., *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods, New Insights*, Biblical Interpretation Series v. 75 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005), 107–124.

40 Webb, "Symbolism of Sacrifice."

41 In recent years René Girard has himself come to a similar insight and mentions in an interview that his conclusions on the Epistle to the Hebrews, based on the sacrificial language alone, has been a misinterpretation. See: R. Adams and R. Girard, "Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: a Conversation with René Girard". *Religion & Literature*, 25, no. 2 (1993): 9–33. See also: M. E. Hardin, "Violence: René Girard and the Recovery of Early Christian Perspectives", in *Brethren Life and Thought* no. 37 (1992): 107–120.

sense it was also used for the people of Israel as a whole. It was a call upon the Israelites to live righteously.⁴²

To say in the first century Jewish milieu that Jesus was ‘son of God’ was to say that he truly fulfilled the calling of Israel to live in sonship to God.⁴³

Webb’s claim is substantiated by other scholars, who note that in the Semitic context of the Hebrew Bible “son” is often used to denote close affiliation, not just literal sonship.

In Semitic usage “sonship” is a conception somewhat loosely employed to denote moral rather than physical or metaphysical relationship. Thus “sons of Belial” (Jg 19:22 etc.) are wicked men, not descendants of Belial; and in the NT the “children of the bride chamber” are wedding guests. So a “son of God” is a man, or even a people, who reflect the character of God.⁴⁴

Also, the term “son of God” seems to indicate metaphorically leaders and rulers, “the first among their people”, who were thought to be exemplary and who based their authority in God.⁴⁵ Likewise, Webb states, we should regard the image of sacrifice in Hebrews in a metaphorical way. Hebrews does not portray Jesus as fulfilling a sacrifice of atonement, to appease God or to mitigate the mimetic violence. Jesus is not portrayed as fighting for his own survival but as choosing to lay bare the scapegoat mechanism by undergoing it, so that others might see it for what it is. The sacrifice consists in the surrender of his own well-being. But this is not to say that he sacrificed himself in the traditional (Girardian) sense.

Raymund Schwager, a theologian and Girardian scholar, supports this view.⁴⁶ He states that the author of Hebrews uses the notion of sacrifice metaphorically and is thus able, “through a massive hermeneutical reinterpretation”,

42 For a comprehensive outline of the Semitic use of the term “son of God” and its use in the Hebrew Bible and among the early Christians, see S. Herbert Bess, “The Term ‘Son of God’ in the Light of the Old Testament Idiom”, *Grace Journal* 6, no. 1 (1965): 16–23.

43 Webb, “Symbolism of Sacrifice”, 4.

44 James Hastings, *Hastings’ Dictionary of the Bible* ([Hendrickson, MA]: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 143.

45 Aherne, C., Son of God, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, C. G. Hebermann, E. A. Pace, C. B. Pallen, T. J. Shahan, & J. J. Wynne eds, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912).

46 Raymund Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption* (New York: Crossroad, 1999).

to give it a completely new meaning.⁴⁷ Jesus answers the call to live in sonship by not fighting his opponents and by suffering the crucifixion willingly. He sees his opponents as people who do not really know what they are doing. In Girardian terms, they act under the influence of the mimetic process and, like most people, are not aware of that. Jesus *is* aware of it and thus he is able to see them as victims along with him.⁴⁸

He himself [Jesus] was a victim insofar as he was killed and they were victims in killing, insofar as they were under the spell of an external power. For him, then, killing was an act done both to him and to them, even if in very differing ways.⁴⁹

Thus, Jesus stands no longer in opposition to his antagonists. He sides with all the victims of the mimetic mechanism and undergoes the scapegoat mechanism together with them. From that angle, the division between perpetrator and victim of violence ceases to exist. Through this action Jesus transforms the passivity that is inherent in the mimetic process. "Suffering which is affirmed becomes a new form of activity."⁵⁰ This inner transformation is what the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews metaphorically calls a sacrifice. Schwager points out that this is not a simple act of self-destruction. Jesus complies with the actions of his antagonists, but not with their motives. "Jesus' judges and his executioners wanted to punish a criminal; he himself on the other hand wanted to give himself (...) for the many."⁵¹

5 Tapasya as Non-Sacrificial Sacrifice

In their writings on nonviolence, both Gandhi and King speak of the role of sacrifice and the dedication of one's life to the well-being of all, rather than adhering to self-preservation at the expense of the other, something Girard himself calls "unanimity minus one."⁵² The sacrifice that tapasya refers to is

47 Ibidem, 183.

48 Based on Schwagers theory, Poong-In Lee (2011) comes to the conclusion that not only is a non-sacrificial reading of Hebrews possible, in fact it is one of the Bible texts that to a large extent supports Girard's theories.

49 Schwager, *the Drama of Salvation*, 187.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 259.

the creation of a situation in which the humanity of all people can rise to the surface. Schwager's example of Jesus' identification with his opponents points in this direction.⁵³ By regarding them not as opponents, but as fellow victims, their humanity is stressed and rivalry is diminished. Roedel adds to this:

Within mimetic theory, this requirement of absolute nonviolence, renouncing vengeance and even self-defense, derives from an understanding of violence as arising from rivalries that the parties involved are unable to recognize. It denies the commonly held distinction between self-defense and the violence that one initiates, because it holds that both are the product of rivalries in which all parties are responsible.⁵⁴

Moreover, Gandhi and King assert that such a shift in personhood, away from the self, leads to the emergence of a different kind of power or force, which can be harnessed to achieve tremendous results. Both Gandhi and King understand nonviolence as essentially the wielding of this force, which Boulding calls integrative power. To Gandhi and King, nonviolence is concerned with both the (internal) process of bringing out this power and the (external) process of implementing it. From this concept of integrative power we can come to an understanding of why sacrificing the self is not the same as self-sacrifice. This is a transformative process that rests on a profound understanding of the self as relational, in which hurting another person ultimately means hurting the self, and vice versa, since self and other are intertwined. The intentional aspect of *tapasya* then becomes clear. It indicates a sacrifice of the "separated" self with the intention to benefit "the whole" (*sarvodaya*). Sacrificing the self is a transformative process that leads to and rests on integrative power and includes a conception of the self as relational. The shift of focus is not towards self-negation, but rather towards relationship. A sacrifice of the self, made with the intention to benefit "the whole" with an aim to intensify the relation between the whole and the self is completely different from self-sacrifice.

Girard posits that it is possible to interpret the Gospels in either a sacrificial or non-sacrificial way. In a similar vein, I propose there can be a non-sacrificial way of looking at the concept of sacrifice itself. According to Eugene Webb, the Epistle to the Hebrews should be read as a metaphor. The sacrifice that is mentioned in the text does not point to a literal sacrifice in the Girardian sense, but to the sacrifice of "self", which happens through a process of

53 Schwager, *Drama of Salvation*.

54 Roedel, "Emptiness", 2.

(self-)transformation. I suggest that *tapasya* in nonviolence, which invokes sacrificial imagery, refers to precisely such a non-sacrificial sacrifice.

Although neither Gandhi nor King use any of the Girardian terms, the role of *tapasya* or self-suffering they describe is to expose the working of violence in specific situations so that a transformation becomes possible.⁵⁵ For this, as Gandhi has pointed out, reason alone is not enough. For the mechanism to become consciously understood it has to be made clearly visible. To become free from the imprisonment of the mimetic mechanism, one needs to develop insight into its structure and to be willing to give up all the 'normal' comforts that it brings, among which are a sense of power, a sense of 'fitting in,' and a sense of being protected from intense vulnerability. Giving up 'normalcy' can certainly feel like a sacrifice, and this is what *tapasya* refers to.⁵⁶

Girard himself remains sceptical about the practical realities of a non-violent society, but he states that it could only emerge when people continuously refuse to act in accordance with it: "Only the unconditional and, if necessary, unilateral renunciation of violence can put an end to [mimetic rivalry]."⁵⁷ He continues to state that "it means the complete and definitive elimination of every form of vengeance and every form of reprisal in relations between men."⁵⁸ I maintain that the practice of nonviolence is an attempt at the first and that *tapasya* points to the second statement.

How then can we translate the above into concrete notions for the study and practice of nonviolence today? To answer that question it might be helpful to look at a practical example of a nonviolent movement in which this dynamics has played a central role.

6 Alay Dungal

One of the problems nonviolence thinkers and practitioners are facing is the absence of a positive term for nonviolence as a practice and an attitude. There is no term in use today that captures the wielding of integrative power as well as the attitude of serving the whole rather than preserving the self.

55 John Roedel, "Sacrificial and Nonsacrificial Mass Nonviolence," *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 15, no. 1 (2008): 221–236.

56 D. Dennis Hudson, "Self-sacrifice as Truth in India", in *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion*, ed. Margaret Cormack, AAR the Religions (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 132–152.

57 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 197.

58 Ibidem.

This means that in many instances practitioners of nonviolence have come up with their own terms to describe their efforts. During the people's uprising in the Philippines against the regime of president Marcos in the 1980s, the term of choice was *alay dangal*, Tagalog for "to offer dignity".⁵⁹ The non-violent struggle of the Philippine people, aided by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) and grassroots organizations tied to the Catholic Church, came to rest on the practice of offering dignity.⁶⁰

According to the movement's organizers, the Catholic teachings held that human dignity was given to each and every individual and was unalterable and inextinguishable. In the contemporary situation of dictatorship and oppression, however, this dignity of the people was ignored. Inspired by the work of both Gandhi and King, which rests on a relational worldview in which one's dignity is tied up with that of all others, the organizers felt this also meant the oppressors ignored and diminished their own dignity. In other words, the Philippine community was in need of the restoration of its dignity. Restoring dignity through offering it to every person would become the way to resist.

The movement itself was one form of offering dignity, embodying the refusal to live under undignified circumstances any longer. The practice of *alay dangal* involved the willingness of the protesters to suffer the retaliations of the regime, forgoing their own safety, fear and anger. It also meant that the resisters kept addressing the soldiers, who were sent to contain and beat down the protests, as individuals instead of representatives of the military. In other words, they addressed them not as opponents but as fellow humans. The resisters offered gestures of friendship, such as the sharing of food, and refused to resort to any form of humiliation, violence or degradation. Eventually, this led many soldiers to desert and join the uprising, unwilling as they were to answer dignity with violence and humiliation. Desertions subsequently escalated to such an extent that the Marcos regime fled the country.⁶¹

This dynamic of dignity and humiliation forms the core of the work of Evelin Lindner, the Founding President of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies.⁶² In her view, humiliation is the essence of violence, dignity being its opposite.

59 Tagalog is one of the main languages spoken in the Philippines.

60 CORD-Mindanao, AKKAPKA and NAMFRE a.o. For more information see Stephen Zunes, "The Origins of People Power in the Philippines", in *Nonviolent Social Movements: a Geographical Perspective*, eds Stephen Zunes, Lester R Kurtz, and Sarah Beth Asher (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 129–157.

61 See for instance Eli Sasaran, "A Consistent Ethic of Dignity: The Philippines People Power Movement", *Peace Power*, winter 2006.

62 See also: www.humiliationstudies.org.

Perhaps surprisingly, Lindner ties dignity to humility and maintains that they are very closely related and, moreover, that humility and dignity provide healing for humiliation and violence.

While humiliation is painful, a closely related word, namely humility, points at healing, particularly in a normative context that is defined by human rights. Inclusive and shared humility, embedded in relationships of mutual respectful connection, can heal wounds of humiliation and prevent future mayhem. Arrogant dominators need to be met with respect and not subjected to humiliation – they need to be humbled into adopting shared humility and mutual recognition of equal dignity. Victims who feel humiliated, do not undo this humiliation by brutal arrogation of superiority over their perceived humiliators, but by inviting everybody into mutuality, into connecting in shared, wise humility.⁶³

Humility is not the same as self-humiliation. Rather, it points to a secure sense of self, self-dignity, and so being able to draw the focus away from the self. By consciously 'offering' dignity to everyone around (even to those whom we might feel do not deserve it), we cut through the vertical conceptions of humanity that are so intertwined with mechanisms of violence and scapegoating. We sacrifice our self-preserving tendencies, our habitual patterns tied to our fears of being too vulnerable and powerless. As Girard showed, these tendencies run deep and the risk of being vulnerable is real, but letting go of them leads to a transformation in the direction of a truer sense of autonomy, another way of 'being' and a different kind of power. This dynamic of sacrificing the self for the shared dignity of all people, bringing integrative power to the surface, is captured in *alay dangal*, that is to say, creating an example of nonviolence as a life stance in which *tapasya*, an attitude of humility, sacrificing the desire-self and offering dignity (and the study of how to do this) are central.

63 Evelin Lindner, *Making Enemies: Humiliation and International Conflict*, Contemporary Psychology (Westport, Conn: Praeger Security International, 2006), 173.

PART 2

Sacrifice and Ritual



Through Fire: Creative Aspects of Sacrificial Rituals in the Vedic-Hindu Continuum

Albertina Nugteren

1 Introduction

The place is Panauti, some 32 kilometres to the Southeast of Kathmandu, Nepal. The date is June 26, 2011. Standing on the *Trivenī-ghāṭ* (literally: ‘the cremation platform at the three-forked confluence’) I watch a corpse slowly burn to ashes. Situated on the extreme end of a wedge between two merging rivers this cremation platform is one of the most sacred places for Hindus in South Asia: two rivers are said to be joined by a third (‘subterranean’) invisible river, the mythic *Padmāvātī*, at precisely this point. Ashes scattered over this sacred confluence from which three rivers move forward as a single current are believed to float straight to heaven, making any further reincarnation of the deceased unnecessary.

The sheer physicality of a corpse (a person who had been alive less than 24 hours ago) being cremated on an open pyre placed directly in front of the sacred confluence of two rivers impresses itself on the senses in such a way that my mind opts out. Vivid intersensorial impressions take over my usual mental control. Such a lucid state of shock may not be to everyone’s liking, but as a direct encounter with a burning body in the heat of a summer day I have literally faced death through all my senses.

In the course of almost four decades of fieldwork I have witnessed various sacrifices, as well as various open-air cremations, but it is here, in front of a pyre auspiciously placed where three rivers are said to mingle (even if only two are visible to the human eye), that the classic name for Hindu cremation, *antyeṣṭi*, ‘final sacrifice’, acquires its full meaning. It is by giving one’s own body as a sacrificial gift into the open fire that one of the deepest secrets of the sacrificial cult is fulfilled. Hindu sacrificial logic may have its flaws when applied in hasty humdrum machinations and routine priestly practices, but at death, by this sacred confluence, the system certainly makes sense. Its logic is both poetic and dramatic. How? And why is one’s own dead body the ultimate sacrificial gift? What kind of god, what priest, what system of cosmic retribution would require such a gift?

The Hindu sacrificial complex is a many-hued fabric, an antique carpet woven with the shimmering threads of multiple myths and patterned practices.

In order to unravel some of the main narratives underlying Hindu sacrifice I have to make choices. From the sheer limitless variety of mythic imaginations and esoteric inspirations found in ancient hymns and speculative texts I select four. I am well aware that the subjectively chosen pattern presented here celebrates a challenge of choices, a poetics of possibilities, a game within a gamble of endless combinations and explanations. In a way Vedic sacrifice itself may be characterized as a gamble, as in the words of Jan Heesterman:

It is the renewal of the past and the gamble for the future (...) deciding each time anew, through endless rounds of winning, losing, and revanche, the state of human affairs here and in the hereafter.¹

In this contribution I try to make sense of Hindu sacrifice by focusing on four key narratives. Those narratives may provide clues to the enigma of sacrifice by offering an associative logic partially explaining the system. They are ancient cosmogonic stories in which, respectively, heat, dismemberment, milk and sperm figure as the key ingredients that determined sacrifice's decisive features. By picking out those four threads the fabric of the sacrificial system becomes 'readable', the pattern 'discernable'. And in the end, in order to understand why cremation ritual is still named 'the final sacrifice' today, we will return to our beginnings. But first we need a few words on the context in which the Vedic-Hindu sacrificial system unfolded over time, how the inherent violence was accounted for, and, more generally, how Vedic sacrifice became a topic in the academic study of religion.

2 "The Womb of Order"²

Western academic engagement with Vedic sacrificial ritual has been intense ever since Vedic texts were studied, translated, commented upon, and made sense of in particular frames of interpretation. Apart from the near

1 Jan C. Heesterman, *The Broken World of Sacrifice: An Essay in Ancient Indian Ritual* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1993), pp. 2–3.

2 This subtitle is derived from the much-used phrase "yajñō vai ṛtasya yonih" (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 1.3.4.16): "Sacrifice is the womb of order." There is a clear parallel to that other phrase "agnir vai yonir yajñasya" (ŚB 10.1.2.2; cp. ŚB 3.1.3.28): "Agni is the womb of sacrifice." For further sexual symbolism (womb, sperm etc.) in Vedic sacrifice, see notes 26 and 28. In particular, see Ganesh Umakant Thite, *Sacrifice in the Brāhmaṇas* (PhD dissertation University of Poona: Poona, 1975), p. 257 ff.

impossibility to extract a coherent world view from this particular genre of priestly texts, Western interpretation of Vedic sacrificial practice in a comparative perspective has often suffered from an Abrahamic preoccupation with sacrifice as atonement: for sins or at least for infelicitous conditions in need of reconciliation.³ In contrast, many Hindu debates, apart from complicated matters of a tradition-technical nature, long tended to focus on issues such as the tension between, on the one hand, the desire for worldly goods or fame in the here-and-now, and on the other hand the ultimate desire for heaven or even the end of rebirth.⁴ To borrow David Mandelbaum's formulation of two quite distinct complexes of belief and prosaic religion in South Asian religions, and apply it to sacrifice, there is an ongoing pull between the "pragmatic complex" and the "transcendental complex".⁵ Clearly, it is acknowledged that the act of sacrifice is motivated by some sort of desire,⁶ be it of the pragmatic-karmatic (this-worldly) or the transcendental-*svārgik* (heavenly) type. Whatever the intention behind a sacrifice may be, in the Hindu context any sacrificial ritual needs a stated intent (*saṃkalpa*) just as it needs a person (*yajamāna*) to whom the merits of the sacrifice would fall.

Today other preoccupations and tensions become visible. One of these is the high-Hindu abhorrence of the killing of animals in the sacrificial arena.⁷

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- 3 For a general and comparative orientation I used, among other works, Jeffrey Carter (ed.), *Understanding Religious Sacrifice: A Reader* (Continuum: London/New York, 2003); Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly (ed.), *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1987); Albert I. Baumgarten (ed.), *Sacrifice in Religious Experience* (Brill: Leiden/Boston, 2002); Ivan Strenski, *Theology and the First Theory of Sacrifice* (Brill: Leiden/Boston, 2003); Rick F. Talbott, *Sacred Sacrifice: Ritual Paradigms in Vedic Religion and Early Christianity* (P. Lang: New York, 1995).
- 4 For views from Indian authors, see, for instance, Ganesh Umakant Thite, *Sacrifice in the Brāhmaṇa-texts* (see note 2); Naama Drury, *The Sacrificial Ritual in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (Motilal Banarsidass: Delhi, 1981); Veena Das, 'Language of Sacrifice', *MAN* 18 (3) (1983), pp. 445–462; George Praseed, *Sacrifice and Cosmos: Yajña and the Eucharist in Dialogue* (Decent Books: Delhi, 2009).
- 5 David G. Mandelbaum, 'Transcendental and Pragmatic Aspects of Religion', *American Anthropologist* (New Series) 68 (5) (1966), pp. 1174–1191.
- 6 Although the word desire (*kāma*) is used here, it refers to a technical discussion about distinctions in motivations for organizing rituals, one of which is indicated as *kāmya* (connected with an explicit desire for stated results), and should not be confused with the discussion on Girard's theories on 'mimetic desire', which presents sacrifice as a substitution for some prior historic or mythic murder.
- 7 As in Herman W. Tull, 'The Killing that is not Killing: Men, Cattle, and the Origins of Non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) in the Vedic Sacrifice', *Indo-Iranian Journal* 39 (1996), pp. 223–244; J. E. M. Houben and K. R. van Kooij (eds), *Violence, Non-violence and the Rationalization*

Another is the tendency to justify Vedic sacrificial rituals in terms of contemporary scientific insights, as occurs in the fields of ecology/environmentalism and of promoting social harmony.⁸ In this ongoing discourse, Vedic sacrifice is presented as an ahistorical technology that yields practical results and promotes public health, social cohesion, and the national economy. Its supposed rainmaking powers today still refer to early textual sources, echoed by many later apologists. A third contemporary preoccupation is the widespread superimposition of the interpretation of the *Bhagavadgītā* onto the sacrificial system. This implies for many that 'true' sacrifice is any action performed without a desire for personal good (*niṣkāma-karma*); indeed, one's only desire should be for the common-cosmic good (*lokaśaṃgraha*). Even though the scope of sacrificial effects may vary, from individual to community to society at large, even including the entire cosmos, sacrifice is seen as the womb of order (*ṛtasya yonī*), then as well as now.

At the same time anti-sacrifice articulations may almost be as old and as strong. One of the first historical figures opposing Vedic sacrifice is the Buddha, but he was far from unique in this. He may have been preceded as well as succeeded by nameless others – for instance, in circles of renunciants and yogis who opted out because of either definite anti-violence sentiments or a far-reaching internalization of sacrifice.⁹ The gaze of Buddhism, Jainism, the Yoga school of philosophy, and the later devotional (*bhakti*) movements may well have been an influential factor in creating a fascinating curve in brahminic identity politics. In mid- and late Vedic times there had been some opposition against brahmin priests, who represented both the this-worldly (*saṃsārika*) technology of sacrificial merit and the killing of animals. In this light, it is striking that over the centuries the brahmins' position gradually turned into the exact opposite: they began to define themselves and their ritual activities more and more in terms of rigorous non-violence and purity. It is no coincidence that in contemporary India 'sāttvik' food, that is, 'pure' vegetarian (non-violent) food, is most closely associated with the brahmin class and high-Hindu temples and lifestyles. Although today both animal sacrifice (mainly by non-brahmin priests) and non-vegetarian food habits are much more widespread than scholars often perceive when assessing Hinduism-by-the-book,

of Violence in South Asian Cultural History (Brill: Leiden/Boston, 1999); Brian K. Smith and Wendy Doniger, "Sacrifice and Substitution", *Numen* 36 (20 (1989), pp. 189–224.

8 As in various articles in the *Times of India* in the first half of 2011, see notes 48 and 49.

9 Yael Bentor, 'Internalized Fire Rituals in India and Tibet', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120 (4) (2000), pp. 594–613.

over three millennia brahminic self-definition has undergone a radical shift in this regard.

Far from having died down, as was expected some decades ago, today public Vedic sacrifice has entered into new transnational and transcultural public spheres. Not only has it become a transnational phenomenon as a result of South Asian migration flows, also it has entered the domain of global well-being, religious environmentalism, public entertainment and the educational sector where it is presented as an archaic spectacle, an art form, and a living museum. To put things into perspective, it should be noted that sacrificial offerings are still part and parcel of lived religion in South Asia, albeit in considerably more modest forms than the grand spectacles of royal Vedic sacrifices which erroneously tend to be taken as the standard for what Vedic sacrifice in its heydays might have been.¹⁰ In this regard, it should be pointed out that traditionally there are two types of sacrifices: obligatory (*nitya*) and optional (*kāmya*). Sacrifices were obligatory for those qualified males who had established their own sacrificial fire(s) at home. Once someone had established these fires (after completion of his Veda study, after marriage, or after his father's death), they had to be maintained on a daily, monthly, and annual basis. Domestic sacrificial fires could also serve as the source for other sacrificial fires, such as the firebrand used for lighting the funeral pyre. Maintaining one or three (never two, as this would bring bad luck) domestic fires brought a life-long commitment. In a way such priests kept their fires going for the cosmic good. In contrast, optional sacrifices were performed according to individual wishes. These sacrifices were performed at the request of a ritual patron (*yajamāna*) on special calendrical occasions or when he wanted to obtain specifically stated ends such as health, wealth, or other forms of success. In such cases, the priest was merely the facilitator.

Theories on ritual sacrifice mostly derive their ideas from the Western world with its focus on sacred texts as well as from the theories of Western anthropologists based on the particular places where they had collected their field data. Some of the theorizing about the origin and function of sacrifice has indeed been applied to the South Asian situation and has been inspired by it at the same time. From Marcel Mauss to Veena Das, from René Girard to Kathryn McClymond, and from Sylvain Lévi to Jan Heesterman, Catherine Bell, Frits Staal, Wendy Doniger, Axel Michaels and Frederick Smith: there is

10 Frederick M. Smith, *The Vedic Sacrifice in Transition* (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute: Pune, 1987). See also Brian K. Smith, 'Vedic Fieldwork', *Religious Studies Review* 11 (2) (1985), pp. 136–145.

an ongoing reflection on aspects of Vedic sacrificial ritual that finds its way to global debates on ritual studies.¹¹

Varying from simple heart-felt expressions of gratefulness for a rich harvest to staggeringly complicated ritual actions of communion and communication, sacrifice in the Vedic-Hindu continuum covers the entire range from token gifts (*dāna*) to the gods to a complex world-maintaining activity (*lokasaṃgraha*). In many cases, various distinct elements are interwoven, and any attempt to reduce them to a single theory is to lose sight of the variety, the complexity, and the living reality.

3 The Enigma of Existence

We are faced with the astonishing fact that the Vedas, first sung on the Indian subcontinent around 1500–1200 BCE, but probably reflecting much earlier gestation processes, were not written down until just a few hundred years ago. The verses of the Ṛgveda had been memorized and finally codified in Vedic Sanskrit before or around 1000 BCE. The ‘proper’ performance of their sacred rites was a matter not only of an extremely and increasingly demanding technical ‘knowledge’ and performative expertise, but also of ‘understanding’ a number of riddles, enigmatic phrases, rhetorical questions, and esoteric imagery. Possible answers to such enigmas may have provided keys to the mysterious power that supposedly made sacrifice effective and held together the universe as a whole. The person who could come up with a plausible answer (known as a *brahman*) was considered worthy of performing those rituals. This

11 Examples of this are: Barbara A. Holdrege (ed.), ‘Ritual and Power; based on the Proceedings of the Santa Barbara Conference on Ritual and Power’, a thematic edition of *Journal of Ritual Studies* 4 (2) (1990); René Girard’s French publication *Le Sacrifice* (Bibliothèque nationale: Paris, 2003; English translation published as *Sacrifice* (Michigan State University Press: East Lansing, 2011), in which he explores the *Brāhmaṇas* based exclusively on Sylvain Lévi’s *La Doctrine du Sacrifice dans les Brāhmaṇas* (Ernest Leroux: Paris, 1898). As in Girard’s other work on sacrifice, he reads Vedic sacrifice in terms of violence, albeit ‘muted’ violence, as is obvious in the term for killing: *śam-*, to pacify, put to rest. Kathryn McClymond, in her book *Beyond Sacred Violence: A Comparative Study of Sacrifice* (The Johns Hopkins Press: Baltimore, 2008), argues that by going beyond this focus on ritual killing one can come to a more polythetic understanding of sacrifice. See also her earlier article, ‘The Nature and Elements of Sacrificial Ritual’, *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 16 (2004), pp. 337–366. A wide array of ritual dynamics in various fields of studies, including sacrifice, is found in Axel Michaels (gen. ed.), *Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual* 1–5 (Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 2010–2011).

'solution' or right answer indicated a deeper understanding of the link that bound all things together: the very term for this mystifying secret that made sacrificial acts effective, *brahman*, denoted a power that could be known and manipulated as a way to re-integrate and maintain the world. The performance of Vedic sacrifice thus gradually became a rite of ontological significance on which all cosmic order (*ṛta*) was believed to depend.

The visions of the Vedas were to be sung, not merely stated, as well as ritually performed. In the world of Vedic sacrifice, the agency of the priest-performer was seen as crucial. He acted as a technician of the sacred, and should painstakingly stick to the regulations, as it was believed that a botched sacrifice could tilt the entire universe.¹² Over time, Vedic ritualists construed a rational-mechanistic universe strictly contained within the ritual enclosure. Vast cosmic processes were reduced to the controlled world of the sacrificial process by setting up the identifications that anchored the macrocosm into the microcosm of all the discrete elements of the ritual process: the sacrificial field, the implements, the substances, the words, the acts, the actors. It was only later, by the time of the Upaniṣads, that some thinkers began to teach that a deeper understanding of the great *Brahman*, a term that indicates the encompassing source of any manifest sacrificial power (*brahman*), was more important than the outward performance of rituals themselves. Yet many priests went on to perform the sacred rites, with or without access to this profound underlying truth.

In a way, the ritual performance itself could be a gate to a gradually deeper understanding of the underlying forces. Imagination based on the original visions of the *ṛṣis* made Vedic ritualists design a technology of the sacred, or, as Jan van Baal calls it, "a particularly effective means of communication with the universe."¹³ Rites were understood to contribute to (and even establish or re-establish) the radiance of all creation. And by going attentively through the ritual processes, the ritual performer could win deep insights. Whether this performer was a Vedic seer, a ritualist, or a contemplative yogi, at stake, ideally, was to envision, express, and tap into a powerful wholeness, *Brahman*. Vedic sacrificial ritual, then, was a tour of the imagination around 'being' itself: *satya*, a word that connotes both 'being' and 'truth'. The original visions of the Vedic seers, the intricacies of proper performance as well as the inner attunement

12 As in Ute Hüsken (ed.), *When Rituals Go Wrong: Mistakes, Failure, and the Dynamics of Ritual* (Brill: Leiden/Boston, 2007).

13 Jan van Baal, 'Offering, Sacrifice and Gift', originally published in *Numen*, volume XXIII (1976), pp. 161–178. Reprinted in Jeffrey Carter (ed.), *Understanding Religious Sacrifice: A Reader* (Continuum: London/New York, 2003), pp. 276–291.

to satya: all three were justified. They were culture-specific attempts at reintegration and rejuvenation of a once-established truth. But why reintegration? What had happened, what had gone wrong?

From the Vedic textual perspective the world may be praised as a wonderful place – shimmering with light, rosy with dawn, bursting with fertility, and softly glowing with the tranquility of dusk when the cows come home for the night – but it is a world never to be taken for granted. It is a world constantly under threat of fraying at the edges, of getting old and tired, and of losing its coherence by forces of disintegration and dissolution. This may sound as nothing particularly dramatic; death, decay and dissipation are simply the disturbing facts of life. Such forces of contingency were not necessarily considered to come from outside, as external enemies, or as the results of atrocities or sins committed by men; rather they were part of the game, inherent in the powerful wholeness of evolution. This wholeness – the manifested world, *laukika* – however, is a second-order state of things: it is derived from an earlier original state.

There is not necessarily an evil force at work here. Rather, precisely because the world has evolved from a primordial state of non-being at the very beginning (*āgre*), the arch towards death or dissipation is a natural corollary of existence. The more visionary of early Vedic thinkers thought that by regularly returning to that first creative moment, that generative burst of singularity into multiplicity, they could rejuvenate the world.¹⁴ It was imagined, by them, that this original ‘event’, this crucial and formative moment, had been a matter of heat and fire, an explosion of cosmogonic sparks flying forth from the very first ‘body’ in this universe, that of Puruṣa-Prajāpati.¹⁵ And this may explain why heat and fire are so constitutive in the whole sacrificial complex.¹⁶

14 In a totally different context, that of contemporary civil society, I gained deeper insights into the need for regular renewal of “emotional energy” (EE) through periodic repetition of rituals from Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2004). For a creative and critical use of Collins’ model of interaction ritual and ritual chains, see, among others, Elisabeth Summers-Effler, ‘Ritual Theory’, in Jan E. Stets and Jonathan A. Turner (eds), *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions* (Springer: Dordrecht/New York, 2006), pp. 135–154, particularly pp. 138–139.

15 Puraṣ or Puruṣa is the first Person, whereas Prajāpati means Lord of Creation. As both names are used rather indiscriminately and interchangeably throughout the Rgveda and Brāhmaṇa passages studied here, I hyphenated the two.

16 Perhaps unexpectedly, there is a tight connection with water as well: it is told that Agni, before he manifested himself in the cosmic drama, had been hiding in the depths of the primeval ocean. This makes Agni a central figure in two types of cosmogonic solutions: “the separation of creative fire from chaotic water and the creation by the ritual sacrifice

3.1 *The First Narrative: Heat*

Our first sacred narrative holds that in the beginning Puruṣa-Prajāpati ('That One') existed all by himself. He was surrounded by unformed universe upon universe, splendid shimmering worlds of light and energy. But at some point he began to become conscious of himself, and to feel lonely. He was, essentially, a single being surrounded by nothing but yet-uncreated, undivided void. Upon this awareness he began to build up inner heat (*tapas*), and still more heat, so strong that finally he burst, and exploded, outward, in a tremendous blaze of sparks and glowing energy that filled the surrounding darkness of yet-unformed life.¹⁷ All those luminous parts that flew from his body correspondingly formed the various regions, elements and beings in the world.

It was by this intense heat that the world was fashioned and that the One became many.¹⁸ Unified primeval truth had disintegrated into innumerable broken parts. Although Vedic poets may have been able to trace multiple reality back to that intuited primordial oneness, from that mythic cosmogonic moment onwards life is what it is: evolving, multiplying, distancing itself from its source, and therefore: dissipating, losing its energy, and thus in need of periodic renewal. We find, in this first narrative, some of the basic images constituting the Vedic worldview: heat, fire, sweat, sparks, eruption, resulting in division of the original wholeness, and disintegration into separate life forms.

3.2 *The Second Narrative: Dismemberment*¹⁹

Our second narrative views this aspect of a shattered primeval body from a slightly different angle. The crucial passage is as follows:

When, with Puruṣa as their offering, the gods performed the [first] sacrifice, (...) they anointed that primordial being, Puruṣa, in the form of a sacrifice (...) the gods sacrificed by means of him (...) and from that [first] sacrifice, that act of total giving, (...) [all creation] (...) was

of a god"; see George M. Williams, *Handbook of Hindu Mythology* (CLIO-ABC: Santa Barbara, Calif., 2003), p. 17. Specifically on heat, see Uma Marina Vesci, *Heat and Sacrifice in the Vedas* (Motilal Banarsidass: Delhi, 1985); on heat and fire, see David Knipe, *In the Image of Fire: Vedic Experiences of Heat* (Motilal Banarsidass: Delhi, 1975).

17 The term for creation is *sṛṣṭi*: what is poured forth. *Sṛj-* means to emit.

18 Main source: Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa 2.2.9, 1–10.

19 Dismemberment of the animal victim as a craft, and as an intricate cosmogonic re-enactment, is elaborated upon in Charles Malamoud, 'Paths of the Knife: Carving up the Victim in the Vedic Sacrifice' in *Indian Ritual and its Exegesis*, ed. by Richard F. Gombrich, Oxford University Papers on India 2 (1) (Oxford University Press: Delhi, 1988), pp. 1–14.

obtained, when gods, offering sacrifice, tied up Puruṣa as the sacrificial animal. With this sacrifice the gods sacrificed with/to sacrifice.²⁰

In this additional vision, the setting in which the creative drama is played out is no longer a void. Puruṣa-Prajāpati no longer dwells strictly alone. Although shady, vague, unsubstantial, merely present at the margins, barely there, somehow other beings exist alongside him. They may be no more than his own meandering thoughts, turning into nameless assistants (or, if one wishes, opponents, henchmen even). And essentially he is still one and whole, but at the brink, in darkness, gods, seers and sages hover.²¹ Who are these gods? Are they faceless deities, nascent forces, shadows, mere figments of his own imagination? Whatever these gods are, they have some agency. They may merely have executed his will. Nevertheless, they were considered to have been instrumental in the first foundational sacrifice. Also, who are those seers mentioned here, presented as visionaries brought onto the stage as witnesses, as narrators, as poet-singers, as scribes who could record the 'events' in glowing visions to future humankind? Cosmic drama indeed, with scribes sitting ready with their writing tablets in order to record it for posterity.

Naturally, many questions remain. In our first narrative we found a mythic event in which such a fiery heat had built up in that first being that he exploded; from his shattered fragments this world came into being. This may be taken in an almost completely naturalistic vein. Creation 'happened' through a cosmogonic explosion. In our second narrative, however, there is no such linear logic. It goes around in circles, as it were. It circles around the image of a first being offering itself through the shady agency of rather insubstantial gods and under the eyes of narrators installed at the edge of the stage. Why did he make this resolve, what necessitated this drama of the first sacrifice, a self-sacrifice even? What necessitated this first sacrifice? Why this offer, this division, this distribution of matter through a conscious act of violence? The narrative, which recurs in various alternative text passages, sometimes paints a world in which there is nothing but this first being. In other passages, this being is indicated in all his vastness (*Virāj*) but already contains the main categories of the world known to us (such as gods, seers and sages). But whatever variations we may encounter, in the main phrases it is imagined that the order of the world, with all its known life forms, has come forth from this original act

20 Main source: Ṛgveda 10.90.1–16.

21 Ṛgveda 10.90.7.

of sacrifice. This dramatic act of cosmogonic self-sacrifice thus forms the beginning of multiple existence.²²

All creation originated from this initial sacrifice, whether self-willed or forced, in stages, in circles. The first being's own thoughts had served to produce the gods (and alternatively also seers, sages, and the paraphernalia for the sacrifice), and his own body subsequently served as the material from which the universe was organized through dismemberment and apportionment.²³ Other passages relate that the gods came much later (famously formulated as: "the gods are on this side of creation"). Whatever their origin, this first category of created beings – vaguely and dimly present during the original sacrifice – may well form an intermediate category, inter-beings between the One and the many. Their role, however, would later become more clear as some of those, the poet-singers, belonging to the class of the first 'witnesses', would mediate to the world the salvific institution of sacrifice. Sacrifice, on this account, was a precious gift to the world by those who remembered. Sacrifice, both ontologically and symbolically, is an imitation, a replay, a ritual re-enactment of the foundational 'event' they had been privileged to attend. When we focus on their role as mediators, suddenly the genius of the Vedic verses is revealed to us: if none had ever been present at such a literally groundbreaking event, how could we ever know? Would the world not be left alone, forever wondering, forever closed in on itself? Instead, silent witnesses, shady beings, vague presences at the margins of the cosmic stage are only indicated, as mere footnotes to the drama. Their vital importance, bridging the chasm between mythic time and present time, becomes clear only later: as divinely inspired poets they not only bear witness to the cosmogonic event, they also transmit the salvific tool to posterity: the institution of sacrifice.

3.3 *The Third Narrative: Milk*

Vedic sacrifice requires fire. In our third narrative, in a direct association with the first myth, in which heat had built up in that first being, we find the

22 On self-sacrifice, see Jan C. Heesterman, 'Self-sacrifice in Vedic Ritual', in *Gilgul: Essays on Transformation, Revolution, and Permanence in the history of religion*, ed. by Sha'ul Shaked and David Shulman (Brill: Leiden/Boston, 1987), pp. 91–106.

23 I have gratefully used Kathryn McClymond's emphasis on apportionment as one more parallel between the cosmogonic and the re-enacted sacrifice, in her book *Beyond Sacred Violence* (see note 11). It is telling that the chapter entitled "Liquid Sacrificial Offerings" is the largest in this book. She not only provides a corrective to the preoccupation previous scholars had with killing the animal victim, she delves deeper into the less spectacular liquid oblations such as vegetal juices and dairy offerings.

centrality of fire. In the beginning he/it existed alone. He felt the urge to create, to multiply himself. In the process of heating up, he generated Agni (Cosmic Fire) from his mouth. And since Agni was generated from his mouth, Fire, eternally hungry, needs food. Predictably, this first creature, the ravenous Fire, turns towards Prajāpati as food. Preventing that he himself, Prajāpati, would become the first victim ever (as he actually was in the second narrative!) he inventively and creatively rubs his hands – and milk is produced. Ravenous Agni should have been happy with this (just as Vedic sacrificial fire is now very happy with milk oblations), but since Prajāpati had rubbed his hands in order to produce the first oblation, the milk was full of hair. Agni declined. Prajāpati could do nothing but throw away the milk-with-hair, and lo! This became the plants and trees on earth.²⁴ When he rubbed his hands a second time, again milk was produced, but without hair this time, since he had rubbed his palms together, and human palms are without hair.²⁵ Ever since, milk or its ‘essence’, clarified butter, has been one of the main oblations.²⁶

After having created Agni, and having found a way to satisfy Fire’s raving hunger, Prajāpati could continue with his creation-sacrifice. Sacrifice, in this version, was instituted by Prajāpati when threatened by his own offspring. In order to ward off being eaten alive by his own firstborn, he produced a nourishing liquid offering by rubbing his hands. So after he had used his own mind to create Fire, he used his own body to create milk and used it as *dravya*, the first and foremost sacrificial substance to be offered into the fire until today.

In South Asian narratives, we see that the motif of ‘rubbing in order to create’ is found in various contexts covering three millennia of storytelling and ritual practice. Not only is rubbing or friction one of the traditional ways to

24 On cosmogonies in relation to trees, see Chapter 1 in Albertina Nugteren, *Belief, Bounty, and Beauty: Rituals around Sacred Trees in India* (Brill: Leiden/Boston, 2005).

25 Main source: Śatapathabrāhmaṇa 2.2.4.1–8.

26 Surprisingly enough, milk or butter symbolism in the Vedic-Hindu continuum is hardly ever treated as a subject in its own right, whereas cattle are, such as in Deryck Lodrick, ‘Symbol and Sustenance: Cattle in South Asian Culture’ *Dialectical Anthropology* 29 (2005), pp. 61–84. Instead we find milk or butter listed as one of the main ritual substances (“tongue of the gods”, “navel of immortality”) in the Ṛgveda, or as auspicious food, such as in R. S. Khare, *The Eternal Food: Gastronomic Ideas and Experiences of Hindus and Buddhists* (SUNY Press: Albany, 1992) or in Arjun Appadurai, ‘Gastro-Politics in Hindu South Asia’ *American Ethnologist* 8 (3) (1981), pp. 494–511. For the sexual connotations of milk, butter and *ghī*, see Wendy Doniger, *Tales of Sex and Violence: Folklore, Sacrifice, and Danger in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1985). For a general treatment of milk as a vital substance in religious meaning-making practices in early civilizations, see Finbar McCormick, ‘Cows, Milk and Religion: The Use of Dairy Products in Early Societies’, *Anthropozoologica* 47 (2) (2012), pp. 101–113.

produce sparks for the sacrificial fire (as by rubbing two pieces of dry wood together), the act of rubbing is considered to be generative par excellence. One example often retold in this regard is provided by the popular tale of the goddess Pārvatī, who for some reason could not entice her divine husband Śiva to let her conceive in the natural way through completed sexual intercourse. In desperation, after having rubbed the skin of her arms, she created her famous and beloved son Gaṇeśa from the oily rub-offs produced from her own radiant skin.

As on a stage, we now have various characters: a first being, heat/sweat/fire, the various officiants and their utensils, the great sacrifice, the basic order of existence, and sacrificial food. The last actor, the last requirement in this list, may not come as a surprise to us, because what/who is missing, at least in this selective combination of narratives, is a female. Remember it was not a gendered universe yet. What had evolved from Puruṣa-Prajāpati, in a two-step process, was essentially a non-gendered world. The first being had created by using his/its own imagination and body form as building material. This could well have worked out disastrously once Agni posed a serious threat: the first-born turned against his progenitor to devour him. Ingeniously, this was averted by offering the ravenous Fire sacrificial milk (and creating the green world in the process, as a by-product; this is why one should not cry over spilled milk...). But in yet another version Prajāpati took the gendered route: our fourth narrative.

3.4 *The Fourth Narrative: Sperm*

Picture this first being, gradually turning into a person now, a male: he felt lonely, and desired a second being: “He looked around and saw nothing other than himself.” He divided himself by falling (*pat*) into two pieces (the eternal dualism). In this way, from him, as *pati* (meaning lord as well as husband), a wife (*patnī*) was born. Inflamed with love and desire, he wanted to unite with her. But how could this be right when she was, in effect, his own daughter? Wanting to conceal herself from her father, this first woman fled. In the process of trying to escape her father, she disguised herself in various forms. When she fled as a doe, he became a stag and hunted her down. As he was on the point of mounting her, one of the gods, the fierce Rūdra, took his bow and shot an arrow to prevent the incestuous and violent act. This interruption caused Prajāpati’s seed to be spilled prematurely. It fell on the ground and formed a milky lake. What happened to the ravaged lady is not told here.²⁷ The other gods deliberated that this precious first seed should not get lost. They threw it into the fire

²⁷ In fact her name is Uṣas, Dawn. She re-emerges in other stories and came to fame as the first rosy shimmer over the horizon, to be greeted with reverence every morning.

(literally: “surrounded it with Agni”), in a reverent act of sacrifice. And from this first sacrificial gift, this first oblation, sperm, all beings came forth.²⁸

The first female had gracefully entered the stage, and yet it was a failed attempt. She had been evoked by Prajāpati’s loneliness, but her role had been merely to raise his desire and elicit his sperm. Creation, in this narrative, once more took place through a sacrificial gift (sperm, a milk-like lake) thrown into the sacrificial fire as the first oblation. This first woman had proved no success so far, or putting it mildly, had merely been instrumental, whereas sacrifice, once again, had been successful. Exit woman, for now. Remaining, on that stage, as main characters: an all-male gathering around the sacrificial fire. And truly, this is what Vedic sacrifice looks like until today: an all-male gathering around the sacrificial fire, a collection of technicians of the sacred, busy repeating and re-enacting those first cosmogonic events.

4 A Blueprint

After having introduced a selection of text passages – selected by my own associative thinking rather than by text-historical and text-inherent boundaries – I have patched together a minimum of a founding narrative. It may serve as a possible explanation of the institution of sacrifice as a generative act as well as offer a clue to the institution of sacrifice as a repetitive act.

Not only was sacrifice considered the very source of things, sacrifice must be repeated over and over again as an act of maintenance and rejuvenation. This needs some explanation. One of the reasons why the original cosmogonic sacrifice had to be regularly repeated in the human realm is found in the Vedic struggle with the passage of time, and subsequently with dissipation and death. Why was it that sacrifice became the overriding concern of Vedic ritualists? Even if Prajāpati’s self-sacrifice may have gloriously been considered the source of all creation, in the mundane world this established order of things was found to be in continuous need of sustenance, as a parallel to Agni who was found to be continuously hungry.²⁹

28 Main sources: Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.4.1–6; Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 3.33–34; Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 1.7.4.1–8. On the symbolism of sperm, sperm as a sacrificial gift, sexual unification as sacrifice, and the eating contests during weddings when young men have to eat loads of clarified butter as some kind of fertility ritual, see various works by Wendy Doniger.

29 For parallels in later narratives and sacrificial practices, especially in South India, see David Shulman, *The Hungry God: Hindu Tales of Filicide and Devotion* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago/London, 1993).

Just as the phenomenal world was seen to depend on food, the greater order of things was considered to need some form of sustenance. From today's vantage point, it could be stated that the purpose behind the Vedic sacrificial system as a whole was to maintain the established order, *rta*. The early texts, however, are not only wayward, contradictory and obscure, they are also full of riddles, enigmas and contests that could not be resolved. One of these is the contest in which Prajāpati, the Creator, defeated his rival, Death (Mṛtyu). In some extremely dense passages, it is narrated how the deadlock of the long-lasting struggle between Creator and Death was broken only by the revelatory vision of the law of equivalence (*saṃpad, saṃkhyāna*). In other words, the moment when that first being, who had engineered creation by cleverly using both his mind and his body, had to stave off this most formidable adversary – the threat of time, death and decay, and eventually nothingness – he found that there was a secret key to this universe: the circularity of time. Not acceptance of a mono-linear reality ending in death was the answer to this riddle, but, instead, a deeper insight into time as an endless cycle. Consequently, the key to ongoing existence would be repetition, repetition of the initial sacrifice, rhythmic periodic replenishment. And the basic rule would be the application of the hermetic law of equivalences: “as above, so below”, or rather “as once, so now”.³⁰

When this principle of correspondence had provided the master key, the ancient ritualists could break up the contest with Time-Death as an adversary and establish a system to fend off death by closely following time's rhythm with its daily, bi-monthly, seasonal and yearly recurrence. It is exactly on those 'joints' of time that sacrifice is the remedy against the dissipation of energy. Vedic sacrifice is regulated and made effective by equating all ritual acts, all parts, all utensils, all persons, all words, all substances to their original cosmic counterparts, the shattered bits and pieces of the First Being. Those mystically gifted persons who grasped this intricately layered law of correspondences intuited that the same meaningful substance as in the beginning (*āgre*), in that first cosmogonic act of sacrifice, should be offered into the sacrificial fire at precisely those precarious 'joints' of time. In doing so, repeatedly, painstakingly, they could prevent the inherent threat of depletion that was most real at moments of transition.

This associative logic provided the prescribed rhythm of brahminic sacrifices through days, phases of the moon, seasons and years. It also resulted in the subjection of sacrifice to the exacting rules of ritual. And gradually the institution of sacrifice, *yajña*, proliferated and came to dominate social life.

30 For a particularly poetic rendering of this passage, see William K. Mahony, *The Artful Universe: An Introduction to the Vedic Religious Imagination* (SUNY Press: Albany, 1997).

Ideally, it accompanied not only the calendrical 'joints' of time, but also the transitions from one phase on the axis of individual life to another. This is how, in the domestic domain, crucial life cycle events such as birth, initiation, marriage and death also became occasions for which sacrifices were ordained. Other great transitions, such as the start of a king's rule, were to be similarly marked with sacrifice, although the relationship of king and brahmin was necessarily a contradictory one, based on the opposition between the temporal and the transcendent.³¹

In taking the body of Prajāpati – who had first been central in the cosmogonic process, and then in his conquest of death by the visionary insight into the secret law of correspondence and equivalence – as the grid and basic outline of the year (of which the joints indicated the axial moments in which an act of sacrifice was needed), Vedic ritualists had established a system of extraordinary logic.³² This system required the performer not merely to perform well, but also to know and understand. This esoteric 'understanding' later began to have a value of its own, as became manifest in the Upaniṣadic interiorization of sacrifice and in the Mīmāṃsā theory of ritual. The Vedic passages referred to above, thus served, in various ways, as a charter of as well as a blueprint for sacrifice. And they still do so today.

5 The Pyre

In order to understand cremation as an individual's final (*antya*) sacrifice (*iṣṭi*), we should keep in mind two crucial insights from the selection of myths and narratives given above: the circularity of time and the centrality of fire.

Agni, Prajāpati's first-born, is likened to a womb (*yonī*). It is fire into which the sacrificial gift (*dravya*) is offered. It is fire around which the gods gather to partake in the sacrificial meal. It is fire that transports the sacrificial substances to the gods in the form of smoke (thus starting the naturalistic cycle of smoke-heaven-clouds-rain-new life forms). And it is from fire that all creation once sprung. But Agni may also bring death and destruction, as we saw in the second narrative. Ravenous Fire, once born, turned towards its creator and wished to devour him. Agni was kept at bay by being fed with milk, just as he is now being fed with milk, or another substance derived from milk such

31 Jan C. Heesterman. *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1985).

32 Jan Gonda, *Prajāpati and the Year* (Noord-hollandse Uitgeversmaatschappij: Amsterdam/Oxford/New York, 1984).

as clarified butter, being poured into the sacrificial fire by the priests. Today this practice of offering libations of milk or butter continues in the frequent *homas* and *havans* (simple fire sacrifices) and likewise in the ubiquitous Hindu *pūjā*, a devotional service in which fire has taken the form of a burning light, such as an oil lamp or clay saucer with a wick drenched in oil.

At the end of the second narrative we found a new dimension: the threat of death. This topic entered the chain of narratives foremost in the sense of the potential threat posed by fire, as fire is eternally hungry and ready to devour anything. On a further note, fire is an efficient way to dispose of discarded matter. This is the point where I zoom in on a particular practice of disposal through fire, the general practice of burning the dead on a pyre. Not only is the habit of consigning a deceased's body to the flames of the funeral pyre one of the most conspicuous uses of fire in the Vedic-Hindu continuum, it is tellingly termed *antyeṣṭi*, the final and ultimate sacrifice.³³

It is no coincidence that the most common word for a person's final rite of passage indicates a sacrifice. This final rite was traditionally staged as an actual sacrifice, especially in the case when an *āhitāgni* (a priest who committed himself to tend his three sacred fires daily) had died. He was consumed by flames generated by embers from his own sacrificial fire, along with all his ritual paraphernalia. His fires thus literally died with him. And his eldest son could only succeed him by setting up his own fires. But not only in the case of an *āhitāgni* were cremation rites called the final sacrifice; *antyeṣṭi* became the general term for that last rite, and it still is, worldwide.

One of the texts says: "And whenever one dies and is placed in the fire, one is reborn from the fire just as he is born from his mother and father (...)."³⁴ One underlying idea was found earlier in our second narrative: burning the body in the cremation fire makes rebirth possible. Fire is creative, and so is the cremation fire. In order to proceed to the next stage, the deceased has to leave his body behind. Fire facilitates the body's disintegration and return to the elements. Already Chāndogya Upaniṣad 3.17.5 considers death a sacrifice, even the culmination of all sacrifice: it is the final self-sacrifice feeding the funeral fire. Often at this point in a cremation ritual, the *locus classicus*

33 The *antyeṣṭi* is most probably the only rite which involves both a *yajña* (sacrifice) and a *saṃskāra* (rite of passage). It should be noted, however, that in death rites it is not the *vedī* or *vihāra* where the offering is being made, but the pyre. See also Hertha Krick, *Das Ritual der Feuergründung (Agnýādheya)* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1982), p. 5.

34 Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 2.2.4.8.

on the body's return to the elements is quoted literally.³⁵ In this way, not only is the cosmogonic sacrificial dispersal of Puruṣa-Prajāpati's body repeated in the final self-sacrifice of a person on the pyre, the elements of the human body are said to return to their respective elements, thus becoming sacrificially reintegrated into the cosmos.³⁶ Fire is both destructive and creative. Fire destroys and turns into ashes what was once a living being, but in doing so it reintegrates the singular body into the cosmos by returning the various body parts to their corresponding cosmic elements. Fire, therefore, is a womb: it gestates. Subsequent rituals should turn the deceased into an established ancestor, and guide him onwards to a new cycle anticipating rebirth, that is, re-creation in some new form.

Death rites should be executed correctly.³⁷ They last at least twelve days and theoretically even an entire year. The cremation ritual itself involves all or most of the familiar elements of a sacrifice: fires, purification rites, circumambulation, offerings of gold, clarified butter and other purificatory and alimentary substances, fasting, mantras, gifts, and the services of various officiants. There is no apportionment of the sacrificial substance here, although there are some indications that in the past a cow (or merely its hide) was burned together with the deceased.³⁸ Today, in cow-venerating India, a living cow (or its substitute, a piece of gold) may still be given to the officiating brahmin priest.

35 Atharvaveda 17.2. It needs further textual as well as empirical investigation to ascertain that in actual practice the formula for a person's cremation is (supposed to be) the same as that uttered for the sacrificial animal. If so, this would be one more substantiation of cremation as a sacrifice with the body of the deceased as the sacrificial gift. The correspondence between a human body and the elements to which it returns at death evoke the first cosmogonic sacrifice, that of Prajāpati's body from the scattered fragments of which all elements and entities had evolved. The ensuing system of correspondences is based on this rudimentary associative logic: the organ of speech (*vāk*) is supposed to return to fire, the organ of sight/the eye (*cakṣus*) to the sun, the vital force (*prāṇa*) to the air, and mind (*manas*) to the moon.

36 Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.2.13.

37 The most foundational text on ritual practices of dying, death and disposal is the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*. Many priests today use their own manuals. See Jonathan Parry, *Death in Banares* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1994); For death rituals in Nepal, especially in Bhaktapur, see Niels Gutschow, Axel Michaels a.o., *Handling Death: The Dynamics of Death and Ancestor Rituals among the Newars of Bhaktapur, Nepal* (Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 2005).

38 The practice of co-cremation, known as *sati* (or, in colonial spelling, *suttee*), in which a wife either chose or was forced to accompany her deceased husband in death, followed a completely different line of reasoning too complicated to introduce within the central theme of sacrifice or self-sacrifice.

Behind the alchemistic notion of a new life rising from the ashes, there is a culture-specific notion prompting elaborate post-funerary rituals. They are considered essential to help the spirit of the deceased to turn from the inauspicious status of a wandering disembodied ghost (*preta*) into that of an ancestor (*pitṛ*). The funeral fire consumes the body – it not only resembles but *is* a sacrifice – and transports its essence to the gods or the world of the ancestors. It is imagined that it is in the interest of the entire family – its various generations now alive as well as those ancestors waiting to be reborn – that such rites be performed properly.³⁹ In these post-pyre rites we see the ‘creative’ dimension of sacrifice in greater detail. Ashes are normally gathered and kept in a clay pot as long as the ritual impurity lasts. Afterwards the ashes may be scattered over flowing waters or buried beneath a sacred tree. As such even the ashes become part of the re-creative process, literally so.

But there is more. If we take the institution of sacrifice to be the ritual re-enactment of the cosmogonic event in which Puruṣa-Prajāpati had offered himself as the prototypical victim, then, in the light of the adagium “as above so below/as once, so now” a human person would be obliged to do the same and offer himself as *puruṣāhuti* (‘man himself as the sacrificial gift’) in his own sacrificial fire. If sacrifice is to be an echo or a mirror of that primordial sacrifice, then, to the discerning sacrificer, all other substances given in a lifetime of offerings must be no more than substitutes, postponing the ultimate and ‘full’ sacrifice (*pūrṇāhuti*), the act of offering one’s self at the moment of death. In an ancient line of thinking, the body was considered a loan from the gods, especially from Yama, the god of the dead. This debt was to be paid back at the moment of death.⁴⁰ This may have caused the term *antyeṣṭi*, ultimate sacrifice, to linger in much wider circles than those privileged to perform sacrifices. Death is democratic: it happens to all. In fact, *antyeṣṭi* may well be considered the most wide-spread and democratic instance of the continued salience of Vedic sacrifice.

39 For instance, David M. Knipe, ‘Sapiṇḍikaraṇa: The Hindu Rite of Entry into Heaven’, in *Religious Encounters with Death: Insights from the History and Anthropology of Religions*, ed. by E. Reynolds and E. H. Waugh (State University Press: London/University Park Pennsylvania, 1997), pp. 112–124.

40 Mark Elmore, ‘Contemporary Hindu Approaches to Death: Living With the Dead’, in Kathleen Garces-Foley, *Death and Religion in a Changing World* (Amonk/London: M. E. Sharpe 2006), pp. 23–44.

6 Sacrifice in the Vedic-Hindu Cultural Continuum

The selected narratives provide a speculative clue to the central position of sacrifice in the Vedic-Hindu cultural continuum. Although the actual practice of Vedic sacrifice has declined, it is still alive, and may even undergo a modest form of comeback and rejuvenation. But from very early onwards it did not go uncontested, such as in Buddhist, Jain, and other heterodox milieus, in which especially killing of the animal victim was opposed. In addition to this, as early as the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads there were tendencies to prefer a more internalized performance. The tendency to transcend the complicated, contested, and costly material aspects of sacrifice continued and fully emerged in the spread of Hindu theism, *bhakti*, and vegetarianism.⁴¹ Moreover, the institution of full-blown ostentatious Vedic practices such as extended Soma-yajña, Atirātra-Agnicayana, Rājasūya, and especially the year-long royal horse sacrifice, the Aśvamedha, may have been regarded by emancipating other classes and castes in Indian society as a clear case of brahmin self-aggrandisement.

In the second half of the twentieth century there was a scholarly tendency to maintain that all such grand sacrifices were dying out, as was also expressed by Frits Staal, in 1975, when he was instrumental in organizing and recording an extensive Agnicayana in Panjal, Kerala.⁴² It was claimed that this venture was unique, being performed by those few Nambudiri brahmin families who had kept an unbroken 3,000-year-old tradition. Its full recording (funded by various American academic associations), including preparation and rehearsals, was regarded justified as a way to keep the minutiae of this particular

41 Such as expressed by Frederick M. Smith, 'A Brief History of Indian Religious Ritual and Resource Consumption: Was there an Environmental Ethic?' (*Asian Ethnology* 70 (2011), pp. 163–179). One of my own motives for researching cremation rituals in India, Nepal and Bhutan, in that summer of 2011, was a critique of the so-called Religious Environmentalist Paradigm (REP): if indeed South Asian religions and cultures had been (and still is) so environmentally friendly as is often maintained, how could the staggering quantities of dry wood needed for the open pyre be defended in the light of disastrous deforestation today? Albertina Nugteren, 'Wood, Water, and Waste: Mortuary Practices in India and Nepal' (in *Roots of Wisdom, Branches of Devotion: Plant Life in South Asian Religions and Culture*, ed. by Fabrizio M. Ferrari and Thomas Dähnhardt, in press).

42 The film recording the Agnicayana performance has been released as R. Gardner and J. F. Staal, *Altar of Fire* (University of California Extension Media Center and Harvard University Film Study Center: Berkeley/Harvard, 1976). The two-volume book was published as Frits Staal et al., *Agni: The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1983). See also the Dutch NOS documentary *Het vuuraltaar* (broadcast on September 8, 1987).

ritual for posterity before it would become extinct forever. Its documents (an encyclopedic book in two volumes, a film, and audio recordings) presented the Atirātra-Agnicayana of 1975 as perhaps having been “performed for the very last time”. But this has been proven wrong. Not only has there been a repetition by the same community of Nambudiri priests in 1990, 2006, and 2011, other grand sacrifices were held in other places. We now assume that comparable grand – scale Vedic sacrifices have been going on in isolated pockets in India at irregular intervals over three millennia, most of them unknown to Western academics and to most Indian priestly scholars as well, for the simple reason that they remained mostly unrecorded.

In a fascinating article, ‘Veda on Parade: Revivalist Ritual as Civic Spectacle’, Timothy Lubin relates how he – more or less accidentally – became one of the celebrities in a many-days long Vedic sacrifice in rural Maharashtra, in 1992. One of the article’s insights is supported by attention the author pays to what goes on in the margins. He thus confirms earlier observations in fieldwork done by colleagues that contemporary Vedic sacrifice may still be done ‘by the book’, but simultaneously, especially in off-center ritual activities, becomes a form of Hindu pūjā. By shifting his gaze occasionally to non-ritualized or peripheral ritual activities taking place at the margins, such as devotion shown in front of additional shrines for deities and gurus, museum-like displays including plaques mentioning the technical name of each item in the sacrifice, printed publicity, and open proselytizing, Lubin shows how both continuity and change become obvious.⁴³

Likewise, Frederick M. Smith, in a contribution titled ‘Indra Goes West: Report on a Vedic Soma Sacrifice in London’, comments on an elaborate Vedic sacrifice performed in Roundwood Park, London, in 1996.⁴⁴ Silke Bechler refers to a 1,008-hour sacrifice in Bad Meinberg, Germany, held in 2008, and even more could be mentioned.⁴⁵ These cases not only illustrate that ritual knowledge is stored in texts as well as in bodies, oral transmissions, and collective

43 Timothy Lubin, ‘Veda on Parade: Revivalist Ritual as Civic Spectacle’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69 (2) (2001), pp. 377–408.

44 Frederick M. Smith, ‘Indra Goes West: Report on a Vedic Soma Sacrifice in London’, *History of Religions* 36 (3) (2000), pp. 247–267.

45 Silke Bechler, “Globalized Religion: The Vedic Sacrifice (Yajña) in Transcultural Public Spheres”, *Asia Journal of Global Studies* 4 (1) (2010/2011), pp. 21–34, as well as in Derrick Nault et al. (eds), *Experiencing Globalizations: Religion in Contemporary Contexts* (Anthem Press: London, 2013), pp. 59–77. See also of the same author, ‘The Performance of Contemporary Vedic Sacrifices in Private and Public Spheres of India’, in Axel Michaels and Christoph Wulf (eds), *Emotions in Rituals and Performances* (Routledge: New Delhi, 2012), pp. 250–256.

memories, but also that the need for certain rituals may rise and wane, and reappear with slightly different metanarratives. What was once expressed as a need to reinforce elementary powers for the rejuvenation of the cosmos, or to build up an immortal body for the sacrificer, may now also be expressed in terms of scholarly, didactic, artistic, and touristic purposes.

But this focus on the more spectacular and grand Vedic sacrifices, which almost vanished from the ritual arena with the arrival of temple worship and the Āgamic pūjā, may obscure that a considerable number of Hindus still practice the five great daily sacrifices (*pañca-mahāyajñas*) in a simplified form, discretely, devotedly, without any spectacle, at home.⁴⁶

7 Perspectives

Ethnographic accounts of actual sacrifices in contemporary South Asia or even diasporic contexts throw new light on the diversity, ritual dynamics, and shifts in underlying motives for the continued performance of sacrifices. Some aspects of South Asian sacrificial traditions have even selectively been appropriated by a new type of global entrepreneurs in the spiritual supermarket or integrated into art projects by artists such as Wolfgang Laib.⁴⁷

Vedas and Vedic ritual have, theoretically, a high status, although the actual practice of full-fledged Vedic ritual has long been marginal. Ongoing Vedic practice in several rural areas had remained largely undetected and below the radar screen of (Western) scholars. Today we even notice a modest comeback: no one could have foreseen the recent emergence of energetic sponsorship among brahmin traditionalists, vigorous patriots, and even diasporic communities such as in New York after '9/11'. Vedic sacrifices are now typically promoted as at once eternal and modern-scientific.⁴⁸ Their supposed rain-producing effects

46 This fivefold daily sacrifice consists of the following: *devayajña* (an offering to the gods), *pitryajña* (offering to the ancestors), *bhūtajajña* (offering to the spirits), *nṛyajña* (offering to humans, i.e., generosity), and *brahmayajña* (offering to Brahma, i.e., study). The most ancient source for this is probably Śatapata Brāhmaṇa 11.5.6.1–3.

47 Wolfgang Laib's exhibition in the Fondazione Merz, Turin, Italy, in 2009, started with a Vedic fire ritual in South India, and closed with a second fire ritual in Turin, "celebrated by 45 Brahmin priests from one of the most important temples in South India (...) It is about creation, sustenance and destruction and renewal (...) This is a unique cultural event that can rarely be witnessed in a Western country (...)." Source: <http://fondazionemerz.org/en/eventi/rito-del-fuoco/>, accessed October 14, 2011.

48 Typically phrased by one of the Brahmin scientist-priests, head of the research team for the twelve-day Atirātra sacrifice in the village of Panjal, Kerala, April 2011: "The essence

are applied to the domains of public health and environmental well-being. It goes without saying that many oppose this trend, for various reasons.⁴⁹

Apart from the slightly frivolous recent developments, there is another reason why the Vedic sacrificial system continues to fascinate. In the words of life-long Vedic scholar Jan Gonda: “No other nation of antiquity has left us so detailed, considered, and systematic descriptions of their ritual and ceremonial as the Vedic specialists.”⁵⁰ Indeed, Vedic sacrifice continues to offer much food for thought. And the open cremation fire, with which this article started, is one of the most obvious and ubiquitous illustrations of this.

of the ritual is pure science. It is a way of celebrating the big bang or the creation of the universe which began with a ball of fire.” (‘Age-old Kerala Fire Ritual a Natural Purifier?’ *Times of India*, May 12, 2011).

49 See also *Times of India* January 18, 2011 (‘Stoking a Vedic Fire’); June 13, 2011 (‘Rekindling a Vedic Fire Ritual’); and July 16, 2011 (‘Trial by Fire’), and www.parihara.com on April 15, 2011 (‘Rain Lashes Kerala Village as Fire Ritual Ends’) posted by Madhusree Chatterjee. Accessed October 14, 2011.

50 Jan Gonda, *The Ritual Sūtras* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977), p. 470.

Sacrifice in Early Christianity: The Social Dimensions of a Metaphor

Gerard Rouwhorst

1 Introduction

For centuries, the use of the word ‘sacrifice’ in relation to Christianity has sparked off fierce debates among both Christians and scholars who studied Christianity. As is often the case with much discussed terms, the word ‘sacrifice’ has given rise to misunderstandings and confusion. This is for one part due to the complexity of the ritual practices to which the term primarily refers.¹ It may refer to blood sacrifices, in particular to the ritual slaughter of animals – upon which most research and discussions have concentrated – but also to vegetal offerings. Further, sacrifices can involve a variety of ritual activities and elements: The preparation of the sacrificial substance or animal, the killing (when the sacrifice that will be offered is an animal), the offering itself, the apportionment and the consumption. Moreover, just like all other rituals, sacrifices can be studied from various angles.² One may focus on the details of the ritual performance, on the religious meanings that are attributed to the sacrificial actions by the participants, and on the social or psychological functions they fulfill. One of the major pitfalls of the study of sacrificial practices consists in thinking in terms of a typical, more or less universal type of sacrificial ritual – for instance, the ritual slaughter of animals – and, on that basis, drawing conclusions about ‘sacrifice’ as a universal human activity.

A further source of confusion with respect to the word ‘sacrifice’ in the Christian tradition lies in the fact that originally the term sacrifice was used in a metaphorical way as referring to non-ritual activities and realities. The key

1 See for the variety of sacrificial rituals and the elements they involve especially: Kathryn McClymond, *Beyond Sacred Violence. A Comparative Study of Sacrifice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

2 See for an overview of the various scientific approaches to sacrifice and the major theories: McClymond, *Beyond Sacred Violence*, 3–17. See further Maria-Zoe Petropolou, *Animal Sacrifice in Ancient Greek Religion, Judaism, and Christianity, 100 BC to AD 200* (Oxford Classical Monographs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1–31, and Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple. Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 17–48.

to this metaphorical interpretation is to be found in the life and the death of Jesus Christ, which are understood as a self-offering and constitute the model of the Christian way of life. All sacrifices described in the Hebrew Bible, both the animal sacrifices and the vegetal offerings, were viewed through this metaphorical lens.

Of course the word sacrifice and sacrificial terminology were soon used to designate new Christian rituals that were considered sacrifices and offerings – in particular, the Eucharist. Yet the Christian metaphorical interpretation of the pre-Christian sacrificial rituals has left its mark on those Christian rituals as well; and it should not be overlooked that, in spite of the frequent use of sacrificial metaphors and of terms derived from sacrificial cults, they were essentially different from the sacrifices known from Greek and Roman religion as well as from the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.³

2 Social Structures of Early Christian Communities

Although the Christian concept of sacrifice has played a crucial role throughout the history of Christianity and has always been one of the leitmotifs of Christian theology and liturgy, it has simultaneously undergone continual metamorphoses. The term ‘sacrifice’ and related terms have been used to designate a great variety of theological ideas, moral virtues, and ritual practices. Various factors have played a role in the transformations of the metaphor of sacrifice throughout the centuries and in the disputes to which it has given rise. These transformations were of course closely connected with the history of Christian theological doctrine and were profoundly affected by it. Still, one should not overlook the importance of non-theological aspects. Especially, the social structures of Christian communities, which throughout the history of Christianity have continuously been changing, deserve attention. In fact, if sacrifice is associated with the notion of giving or offering oneself – as it is the case in Christianity – the question arises who is supposed to give himself or herself to whom and for what purpose. Is the individual Christian supposed to sacrifice him- or herself for the sake of the community, or should s/he rather do so in order to achieve a higher spiritual goal? Much will depend on the

3 Cf. for the origins and history of the Christian concept of sacrifice Robert Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled. The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice*, (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2009). See also Frances Young, *The Use of Sacrificial Ideas in Greek Christian Writers from the New Testament to John Chrysostom* (Patristic Monograph Series 5; The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, Ltd, 1979); Idem, *Sacrifice and the Death of Christ* (London: SPCK, 1975).

relationship between the individual and society and more specifically on the group cohesiveness. To what extent does a Christian community offer a sense of security and the feeling of having a home? And what claims does that community have on someone?

There is a second reason why insight in the structures of Christian communities is important for understanding the role of the concept of sacrifice in the history of Christianity. We have already alluded to the complicated process of de-ritualizing and ritualizing which was instigated by the Christian concept of sacrifice. Initially, the ritual practice to which the term 'sacrifice' primarily referred was rejected as being tied up with the Temple cult and with paganism. However, the concept of sacrifice rather soon became applied to Christian rituals and began influencing Christian processes of ritualizing.

Rituals have a markedly social dimension and fulfill social functions. More specifically, they may serve to mark what the British anthropologist Mary Douglas has called the *group* and the *grid* dimension of communities, that is to say, respectively, the external boundaries which separate the members of a community from those who do not belong to it, and the internal boundaries: The social roles to which the members are supposed to conform and the hierarchical divisions they are asked to respect.⁴ Conversely, the importance which is given to rituals and the way they function, is strongly dependent on those internal and external boundaries.

In the following, I will try to illustrate the interrelatedness between the development of the Christian concept of sacrifice and the changing social structures of Christian communities, making use of the group and grid distinction. I will focus on the period of early Christianity when the contours of the Christian concept of sacrifice started becoming visible and the social structures of the Christian communities began taking shape.

4 See for the concepts of *group* and *grid* as developed by Mary Douglas especially the following books of this anthropologist: *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) *Natural Symbols* (London: Barrie and Rockliff/Cresset Press, 1970; new edition with new introduction: New York: Pantheon Books, 1982); *Cultural Bias* (London: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. Occasional paper 35, 1978); reprinted in *In the Active Voice* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 183–254. See further various articles collected in *Implicit Meanings. Selected Essays in Anthropology* (London & New York: Routledge, Second Edition, 1999). See for the person and the work of Mary Douglas: Richard Fardon, *Mary Douglas: An Intellectual Biography* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

3 Three Types of Early Christian Communities

While studying early Christian communities, one is at first sight confronted with a confusing plurality of social structures. However, at closer inspection, it turns out that this variety can be reduced to three major types of communities.⁵ Two of them we mainly, though not exclusively, encounter in the three centuries before Constantine when Christians constituted a small minority in the Roman Empire. The third type appears in the fourth century when Christianity gradually grows into the public majority religion of the Empire.

3.1 *The First Communal Structures*

The first type of community is characterized by the combination of its small-size and well-demarcated external boundaries on the one hand and rather loosely organized structures on the other hand. Speaking in sociological terms, they exhibited the features of 'sects', small communities which find themselves in a high state of tension with their environment.⁶ The members of those communities met in private houses (house churches) and were highly critical of the morals, principles and beliefs as generally accepted by the (Greco-Roman) society in which they were living. They refused to participate in the rituals and feasts which fulfilled both religious and social functions in that society. Christians belonging to these small churches considered their communities holy. Their emphasis on the holiness of the community was clearly reflected in their rituals. The rules for partaking in their communal meals – often called 'Eucharists' – were strict.⁷ To be admitted to them, one needed to have been purified by baptism. Compared to the group dimension, the internal boundaries ('grid') were less clearly demarcated. The roles and the tasks of the community leaders and of those who were presiding the liturgical meetings were often not very clearly defined. Finally, apart from baptism and communal meals, there were rather few rituals. The liturgical year, for instance, was in an embryonic stage of development.

5 Cf. for the following my article "Christian Initiation in Early Christianity," *Questions liturgiques* 87 (2006): 100–119 (= *Initiation chrétienne et la liturgie. Hommage au Prof. Em. Dr. Jozef Lamberts* (Textes et études liturgiques XXII) (ed. L. Leijssen; Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 104–123.

6 Thus Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), 25.

7 Cf. Wayne Meeks' characterization of the Lord's Supper in the Pauline letters as a 'ritual of solidarity'. Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians. The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 157–162. See also my article "Table Community in Early Christianity," in *A Holy People. Jewish and Christian Perspectives on Religious Communal Identity* (eds M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 69–84.

3.2 *“Spiritual Searchers”*

The second community model I want to distinguish is that of the “spiritual searchers”, who emphasized the importance of individual religious and spiritual growth. To this category the great variety of movements belonged which are commonly labeled as Gnostic. Using Douglas’ group-grid model, one may characterize them as a “weak group” and a “weak grid”. Christians belonging to this category had in common with members of the first type of Christian community that they were very critical of the society in which they were living. They rejected its way of life as well as its institutions. What made them different was that they stressed the importance of the soul’s spiritual journey rather than the fact of belonging to a church. These Christians formed communities, but the type of community they were looking for consisted of like-minded spiritually advanced searchers. At least some of these Christians were highly critical of ecclesiastical institutions and hierarchical structures. When not rejected outright, the importance of collective rituals was at best minimized. In any case, emphasis was laid on the spiritual meaning and the spiritual attitude of the individual who participated in the rituals rather than on the objective performance of the rituals.

3.3 *Post-Fourth-Century Church Communities*

From the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century, the number of Christians increased considerably, and, what is even more important, the relationship between Christianity and its environment changed (especially so after the conversion of Constantine). This development resulted in the third, more stratified church model. The Christian communities of the fourth century included various categories of faithful that may be distinguished on the basis of their participation in church life. Thus there were 1) catechumens who had enrolled themselves as candidate Christians, but had not yet been baptized; 2) Christians who had been initiated and were full members of the Christian communities; 3) penitents, people who had been baptized, but by committing a grave sin had temporarily been regressed to the status of catechumens, and finally 4) men and women who were leading a monastic life and strived for a more radical Christian life than the rest of the baptized Christians. Apart from this differentiation, the fact that the number of Christians increased necessitated a further structuring of the leadership of the Church: The roles and the tasks of the ordained leaders (bishops, presbyters, deacons) and their position vis-à-vis the lay people became more precisely defined and demarcated. In terms of group and grid, the group boundaries became more differentiated and the grid became stronger. More or less simultaneously with this process of differentiation and stratification, a rather spectacular increase

and elaboration of Christian rituals took place. It will suffice to mention the elaborated rituals of Christian initiation, the development of the ritual of the Eucharist, and the evolution of the Christian calendar.⁸

4 Metaphors of Sacrifice

Obviously, this subdivision of early Christian communities into three major types involves a certain simplification. Still, it may be helpful in providing insight in many aspects of early Christianity, especially the various ways in which the metaphor of sacrifice was used and ritualized.

4.1 *Sacrificial Metaphors in Small-Scale Early Christian Communities*

In sources derived from small-scale, mostly egalitarian, tightly cohesive Christian communities from the period before Constantine, sacrificial motifs, ideas and terms appear frequently and play an important role. On the one hand, they are to be found in numerous anti-sacrifice polemics that are directed against both pagan and Jewish sacrifices, for example, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the writings of Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen.⁹ At the same time, both the New Testament itself and numerous writings dating from the second and third centuries testify to the tendency to 'spiritualize' motifs that are related to the Jewish sacrificial cult. That is, instead of being rejected outright, these motifs are considered to be referring to the self-giving of Christ and the way of life Christians are supposed to lead. In this way, they are used to develop the Christian concept of sacrifice I have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Even if this is hardly surprising and fits in with the overall character of early Christianity, one may note some tendencies which appear typical of the first three centuries of Christianity.

Firstly, sacrificial terminology is rarely used in texts dealing with the liturgical traditions of early Christians. In so far as sacrificial concepts and metaphors from the Hebrew Bible are used to indicate Christian rituals, this often seems to be done with a supersessionist purpose, namely with the intention to emphasize that (Jewish) sacrifices are no longer of any use and have been replaced with alternative Christian 'sacrifices'. These texts do not explicitly deal with the question what these alternative rituals might have in common

8 See in this connection John F. Baldwin, "The Empire Baptized," in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* (eds G. Wainwright and K. B. Westerfield; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 77–132.

9 See for references to the relevant sources Young, *The Use of Sacrificial Ideas*, 79–96.

with sacrifices and might justify their description in sacrificial terms. The most telling case in point is the use of sacrificial terminology with regard to the early Christian Eucharist.¹⁰ It often appears in the context of anti-sacrificial polemics in which the Eucharist is contrasted with the sacrifices of the Hebrew Bible. It does not always become clear, however, to what degree and in what respect the Eucharist itself is considered a sacrifice. Furthermore, it should be noted that *when* the Eucharist is described in sacrificial terms, reference is exclusively or primarily made to the (offering of) prayers, especially the giving of thanks, not to the bread and wine. Also how this sacrifice of prayer did relate to the self-offering of Christ, which is at the center of the New Testament institution narratives, remains somewhat unclear. It seems that theological reflection on this question developed and crystallized only gradually. Moreover, this process appears to have run parallel to the elaboration of the ritual of the Eucharist, in particular to the incorporation of the institution narrative in the Eucharistic prayer, which, according to recent liturgical scholarship, is nowhere evidenced before the middle of the third century and in several places even occurred much later.¹¹

Secondly, at least as remarkable as the relatively scarce evidence of the use of sacrificial concepts in the description of early Christian rituals is the prominent role these concepts play in some early Christian texts dealing with martyrdom. First of all, there is Ignatius of Antioch's Letter to the Romans in which the author, longing to become a martyr, asks that it he be granted to be poured out as a libation on an altar (2,2) and to become a sacrifice (2,4).¹² Further, the idea that martyrdom is the ultimate sacrifice also appears in the Martyrdom of

10 See in particular Kenneth Stevenson, *Eucharist and Offering* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1986), 10–37. Cf. Young, *The Use of Sacrificial Ideas*, 256–266.

11 See Robert Taft, “Mass without the Consecration? The Historic Agreement on the Eucharist between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East Promulgated 26 October 2001,” *Centro pro Unione. Semi-annual Bulletin*, 63 (Spring 2003): 15–27 = *Worship* 77 (2003): 482–509; Paul Bradshaw, “Did Jesus institute the Eucharist at the Last Supper?,” in *Issues in Eucharistic Praying in East and West. Essays in Liturgical and Theological Analysis* (ed. M. E. Johnson; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010), 1–19 (published also in: Paul Bradshaw, *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship* (London: SPCK, 2009), 3–19. The question arises whether other aspects of the Early Christian Eucharist, especially the breaking of the bread, may have involved a sacrificial connotation. Cf. my article « Faire mémoire par un geste: la fraction du pain » in « *Faire mémoire. Lanamnèse dans la liturgie* », Conférences Saint Serge LVI^e Semaine d'Études Liturgiques Paris, 29 juin–2 juillet 2009” (eds A. Lossky and M. Sodi; Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011), 75–86.

12 Edition of the Greek text: Karl Bihlmeyer, Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *Die apostolischen Väter* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1956²), 98–99.

Polycarp.¹³ When Polycarp is on the brink of being burnt alive, he is compared with a ram taken from a flock for sacrifice and he is called a well-prepared burnt offering (ch. 14). Moreover, he asked to be received by God as a rich and acceptable sacrifice and when he is surrounded by the flames, he is said to have spread an overwhelming fragrance like that of frankincense (ch. 15).¹⁴

In order to assess the historical significance of these passages, it is important to realize that these stories – and more in particular the Martyr Passions – did not just give accounts, historically correct or not, of the events described, but were primarily meant to be read in Christian communities. The heroes who suffered martyrdom functioned as examples of endurance and courage for the members of those communities.

4.2 *Anti-Sacrificial Polemics in Gnosticism*

In some respects, the attitude towards sacrifices displayed by early Christian communities belonging to the second model – in particular, Gnostic groups – is comparable to the one predominant in the small-scale churches dealt with in the preceding section. Both categories had at least two things in common: a) A rejection of sacrifices, especially bloody animal sacrifices, as they were practiced in Judaism prior to the destruction of the Second Temple and continued to be practiced in pagan temples; and b) the notion of a spiritual sacrifice which is offered by the (Gnostic) Christian who offers himself to the Highest God, in particular by addressing prayers of thanksgiving to Him.¹⁵ However, there are also some striking differences.

Firstly, the rejection of the Hebrew Bible sacrifices is more radical in so far as, according to Gnostic beliefs, those sacrifices were not offered to the Highest God, but to powers (*archons*) or demons who tried to get human beings imprisoned and enslaved in a world created by an inferior god.¹⁶

Secondly, in some Gnostic sources critique of sacrifices is combined with polemic against non-Gnostic Christians, especially their leaders, who are

13 Edition and English translation: Herbert Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 2–21.

14 The idea that the martyr's death is a sacrifice is also found in the writings of Origen, especially in his *Exhortation to Martyrdom*. Cf. for this passage as well as for references to other texts of Origen: Young, *The Use of Sacrificial Ideas*, 228–230.

15 See *Discourse on the Eighth and the Ninth* (NH VI, 6), ch. 59–60 and *Melchizedek* (NH IX, 1), ch. 16. English translation: *The Nag Hammadi Library*. Translated into English under the editorship of James M. Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 295–296 and 402.

16 See *On the Origin of the World*, 123 (NH II, 5 and XIII, 2). English translation: *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 156–157. Cf. *Gospel of Philip* (NH II, 3), 54–55 and 63 (*Nag Hammadi Library*, 133 and 138); *Melchizedek* (NH IX, 1), ch. 6–7 (*Nag Hammadi Library*, 401).

blamed for continuing “the detestable sacrificial practices” of the Jewish Temple. A clear example of this polemic is to be found in the recently discovered Gospel of Judas. The text contains a passage in which the disciples of Jesus tell him that they had a vision of the Temple and of twelve priests who were standing at an altar and were offering animal sacrifices.¹⁷ The interpretation of the passage concerned gives rise to several difficulties,¹⁸ but it is clear that the sacrificial cult is rejected as being highly immoral and abhorrent. Even more remarkable is the way in which the vision of the disciples is explained by Jesus: The priests offering the sacrifices turn out to be none other than the disciples themselves. There can be no doubt that these disciples, for their part, symbolize the leaders of the (second century) orthodox Church which is attacked by the author of the Gospel of Judas. The passage certainly implies a severe criticism of some ritual practices that must have been current in that Church (although it remains hard to establish which Christian practices the author precisely had in mind).¹⁹

Thirdly, it is striking that, in Gnostic writings, the Hebrew Bible sacrifices are only exceptionally associated with the death of Christ, while this death is not described in sacrificial terms nor interpreted as a sacrifice brought for the redemption of the Christians.

And finally, in Gnostic literature, one encounters astonishingly diverse and even opposite attitudes towards martyrdom. Whereas some Gnostic texts hold martyrs in high esteem,²⁰ in other Gnostic sources the ideal of martyrdom is

17 *Gospel of Judas*, 38–41. Edition of the Coptic text and English translation: *The Gospel of Judas together with the Letter of Peter to Philip, James, and a Book of Allogenes from Codex Tchacos. Critical Edition* (eds R. Kasser, M. Meyer, G. Wurst, and F. Gaudard; Washington DC: National Geographic, 2007), 195–201.

18 Cf. for the interpretation of this passage my article “The Gospel of Judas and the Early Christian Eucharist,” in *In Search of Truth: Augustine, Manichaeism and other Gnosticism. Studies for Johannes van Oort at Sixty* (eds J. van den Berg, A. Kotzé, T. Nicklas, M. Scopello; Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, 74; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 611–626.

19 It has been argued that the Gospel would be attacking a sort of early Christian Eucharist which was primarily considered as a commemoration of the sacrificial death of Christ and, moreover, was closely connected with a high esteem of the ideal of martyrdom. See in particular Elaine Pagels/Karen King, *Reading Judas. The Gospel of Judas and the Shaping of Christianity* (London: Penguin books, 2007), 51–52. Elsewhere, I have argued that this theory is based upon an anachronistic view of the development of the Eucharist in the first two or three centuries of the history of Christianity (Rouwhorst, “The Gospel of Judas”).

20 See *Apocryphon of James* (NH 1,2), 4–6 (*Nag Hammadi Library*, 31–32). Cf. for the interpretation of this passage the footnotes added by Donald Rouleau to his French translation of the *Apocryphon of James* published in *Ecrits gnostiques. La bibliothèque de Nag*

put into perspective.²¹ Thus, the Valentinian Gnostic Heracleon minimizes the importance of confessing Christ before the magistrates, arguing that such a confession can be only outward and even hypocritical and that the real thing asked from Christians is to confess Christ by their faith and their everyday conduct.²² Some Gnostics even went so far as to straightforwardly criticize the propaganda for martyrdom and reject martyrdom itself. In the Gnostic writing which is known as the *Testimony of Truth*, martyrs are explicitly denounced and even ridiculed. They are called “foolish people” who “surrender themselves to ignorance without knowing where they are going and without knowing Christ” and as people who “do not bear witness to nobody but themselves” and who mistakenly believe that they will be saved by surrendering themselves to death because of the Name (of God).²³ The fierce rejection of martyrdom recalls a passage of Irenaeus’ *Adversus haereses* in which Gnostic opponents (Valentinians) are accused of scorning and despising the martyrs (III, 18, 5).²⁴ All in all, although it remains difficult to obtain an exact idea of the various Gnostic positions, there can be no doubt that the ideal of martyrdom was considered with suspicion by many Gnostics. And at least to some of them, martyrdom must have been as repugnant as sacrificial rituals were to all Gnostics.

4.3 *Excursus: The Writings of Cyprian of Carthago*

Before we will turn to the third community model, which begins developing in the fourth century and is characterized by an increasing internal stratification, some remarks are in order about the writings of Cyprian, which date from the mid-third century. Although Cyprian is often considered to be a typical representative of (orthodox or mainstream) Christianity of the first three centuries,

Hammadi. Édition publiée sous la direction de Jean-Pierre Mahé et de Paul-Hubert Poirier (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade; Gallimard: Paris, 2007), 29, 31 and 39.

- 21 See for the following Annie and Jean-Pierre Mahé, *Le témoignage véritable* (NH IX, 3). *Gnose et martyre* (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, Section «Textes» 23; Les Presses de l’université; Québec/Louvain: Laval/Peeters, 1996), 53–59.
- 22 See Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* IV, 9 (*Patrologia Graeca* 8, 1281B). Cf. fragment 50 of Heracleon (A. Brooke, *The Fragments of Heracleon*, Cambridge 1891), 102.
- 23 *Testimony of Truth* (NH IX, 3), 31–34; (*Nag Hammadi Library*), 407–408.
- 24 Irenaeus, “Adversus haereses III,” in *Sources chrétiennes* 211 (eds A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2002), 358–359. See also Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* IV, 4 where Clement makes mention of heretics (Heracleon?) who claim that the “true martyrdom is the knowledge of the only true God . . . and that the man is a self-murderer and a suicide who makes confession by death” (1229B).

his ideas about sacrifice appear to be unique for that period and do not easily fit in with either of the community models we have distinguished.²⁵

To begin with, there are probably no other writings dating from this period in which sacrificial metaphors occur more frequently than those of Cyprian. Even more striking is, however, the important role those metaphors play in his theological views on the Eucharist. According to Cyprian, the Eucharist is a sacrifice offered by the Church and this is the case because it is the commemoration of the voluntary Passion of the Lord, which was the acme of true sacrifice. Furthermore, the commemoration and the offering of this sacrifice by the Church – which is carried out by the bishop who imitates Christ – should be actualized in the Christian way of life which in specific cases may lead to martyrdom.

How to account for the emphasis which Cyprian places on the sacrificial character of the Eucharist? At first sight, one might argue that this is due to the persecutions of Christians in the middle of the third century – during the reigns of the emperors Decian and Valerian – when Cyprian was active as a bishop and was confronted with Christians who tried to escape from martyrdom. There can be no doubt that Cyprian held martyrs in high esteem – he exhorted Christians to stand firm during persecutions – and that he died as a martyr himself (in 258 CE). Still, contrary to what we found in the writings of Ignatius and some of the Martyr Passions martyrdom is rarely described as a sacrifice by Cyprian. There must be a more important reason why the sacrificial character of the Eucharist is so detailed and stressed in Cyprian's writings. The explanation is the authoritative character ascribed to the Last Supper tradition which serves as the model and archetype of the Eucharist. Tellingly, the mere fact that Christ had mixed water with wine is used by Cyprian as an argument in his refutation of Christians who defend the custom – apparently existing in North Africa – of drinking only water during the Eucharist.²⁶ For the rest, it can be no coincidence that Cyprian is the first early Christian author to unambiguously attest the recitation of the institution narrative during the Eucharist! The increasing emphasis on the tradition of the Last Supper and the insertion of the institution narrative in the Eucharistic

25 Cf. for the following Cyprian, *Epistula* 63 (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 3, 2; Vienna, 1871), 4, 372–389. See also Raymond Johanny, “Cyprien de Carthage,” in *Leucharistie des premiers chrétiens* (ed. R. Johanny; Paris: Beauchesne, 1976), 151–175; David Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery. Revitalizing the Tradition* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1992), 107–108; Enrico Mazza, *L'action eucharistique. Origine, développement, interprétation* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1999), 141–154.

26 See *Epistula*, 63.

prayer are primarily the result of a process of ritualizing which began to manifest itself in the third century and would gain momentum in the fourth century when the stratified church model developed and became prominent.

4.4 *The Stratified Church Model and Christian Ritualizing of the Sacrifice Metaphor*

It is impossible to chart the use of sacrificial motifs in fourth century Christian literature, which is much more extensive than that of the first three centuries. I shall limit myself to two developments which reveal a marked difference with the preceding period.

In the first place, although persecutions of Christians had become past events, the stories about martyrs and their heroic deeds remained an important part of the collective Christian memory. Accounts of martyrdom proliferated.²⁷ The endurance and the courage of the martyrs, the often gruesome tortures and the excruciating pains they underwent, as well as the savagery of their persecutors, continued to supply material for sermons and to stimulate the imagination of the preachers and their audience. Apart from the huge production of narrative sources, mention should be made of another phenomenon in connection with it: The rapid development of the cult of the martyrs from the middle of the fourth century onward. This involved the veneration of their dead bodies and their tombs, the transportation of their bones and other relics to churches, the foundation of special shrines which attracted large groups of people, and the institution of yearly commemorations.²⁸

At the same time, traditions about martyrs and martyrdoms began fulfilling other functions than in the first three centuries. As long as there was a serious risk of persecution, one of the effects of the passion narratives was that they confronted the Christians with the possibility of martyrdom and encouraged them to stand firm. Once that risk was over and the distance from the historical events grew, martyrs continued to serve as role models for Christians, but they did so in different ways. Their heroic lives and the intrepidity with which

27 See Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Martyr Passions and Hagiography," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (ed. S. Ashbrook Harvey and D. Hunter; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 602–627 (604–607).

28 Cf. H. Delehaye, *Les origines du culte des martyrs* (Subsidia hagiographica 20; Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1933²); Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981). Cf. further Johan Leemans, "General Introduction," in *Let us die that we may live. Greek Homilies on Christian Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria (c. AD 35–AD 450)* (eds J. Leemans, W. Mayer, P. Allen, and B. Dehandschutter; London/New York: Routledge, 2003), 3–52 (5–14).

they had faced tortures and death were exploited by numerous homilists²⁹ to warn fourth-century Christians against the risk of taking Christianity and its demands too easily. Essential to the transformation the narrative traditions concerning the martyrs underwent in the fourth century was a tendency to 'spiritualize' the ideal of martyrdom. Martyrs were for instance viewed as models for ascetics, who were fighting against the passions and the temptations of demons.³⁰ But they also could serve as examples for the 'ordinary' Christians who were exhorted by the homilists to lead virtuous lives and to train themselves for the battles they had to wage in their lives.³¹ The transformation of the ideal of martyrdom naturally had implications for the ways in which sacrificial motifs were interpreted in sources dealing with martyrs.³² In so far as sacrificial themes were considered as metaphors of martyrdom, they were indirectly affected by the spiritualizing tendencies the ideal of martyrdom itself underwent. They became metaphors of the virtues with which this ideal was associated.

A second and even more remarkable phenomenon which should be mentioned in this connection is the growing impact that the sacrificial metaphor had on the interpretation and especially on the gradual ritualizing of the Eucharist. Two ritual developments are of crucial importance: On the one hand the ritualizing of the preparation of bread and wine and, on the other, the tendency to consider the Last Supper as the model and archetype of the Eucharist

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- 29 See for selections of interesting homilies and other sources connected with the cult of the martyrs and dating from the middle of the fourth century: Leemans et al., *Let us die*; see also *St. John Chrysostom. The Cult of the Saints. Select homilies and letters introduced, translated, and annotated by Wendy Mayer with Brown Neil* (Popular Patristic Series; New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006).
- 30 See Edward Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr: The Monk as the Successor of the Martyr* (Catholic University of America Studies in Christian Antiquity 12; Washington DC.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1950).
- 31 Cf. the article I have written about three homilies (of Gregorius of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, and Augustine) dealing with the Maccabean Martyrs: "The Emergence of the Cult of the Maccabean Martyrs in Late Antique Christianity" in *More than a Memory. The Discourse of Martyrdom and the Construction of Christian Identity in the History of Christianity* (ed. J. Leemans; Leuven-Paris-Dudley: Peeters, 2005), 81–96. Cf. also: Raphaëlle Ziadé, *Les martyrs Maccabées: de l'histoire juive au culte chrétien* (Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 80; Leiden-Boston: Brill 2007), 258–288.
- 32 Sacrificial themes appear in several fourth- and fifth-century martyr homilies. I limit myself to some examples: Basil of Caesarea's *Homily on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste*, ch. 6 (PG 31, 508–526; Leemans, *Let us die*, 68–76 (73); Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily 15 on the Maccabean Martyrs* (PG 35, 912–933; French translation: Ziadé, *Les martyrs Maccabées*, 301–311).

(a phenomenon which we also encountered in the writings of Cyprian). The preparation of bread and wine at the beginning of the Eucharist is more and more explicitly considered to be an offering (brought by the faithful or the deacons) and often takes the character of an (offering) procession.³³ Almost everywhere, the growing emphasis on the commemoration of the sacrificial death of Christ resulted in – and at the same time was further strengthened by – the insertion of the institution narrative.³⁴ As a result of both developments greater prominence was given to the sacrificial character of the Eucharist.

5 Conclusion

Let me take stock of the foregoing observations about the function of the sacrificial metaphor in the three types of community in relation to the social structures that were characteristic of these communities, especially their group and grid dimensions. My overall impression is that there exists a notable congruence between these two factors.

1. The first two groups have a negative attitude in common towards the sacrificial rituals of both Judaism and the Roman Hellenistic world. Moreover, insofar as they were familiar with Christian rituals, these were rarely described in sacrificial terms. Obviously, there is a relationship between the rejection of the sacrificial rituals, especially those of the Jewish Temple, and the fact that early Christian communities tried to distinguish themselves from Judaism. Moreover, sacrificial motifs were only rarely associated with early Christian rituals because these rituals had hardly come into development. Still, the rejection of the Temple cult and of rituals fits in remarkably well with the ways in which the communities were structured, in particular with the weakness of the grid dimension in both types. The reason why the Gnostic groups in general were more fiercely anti-ritualistic than most other communities may

33 See for the Byzantine tradition, Robert Taft, *The Great Entrance. A History of the Transfer of Gifts and other Pre-anaphoral Rites of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 200; Roma: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1978); see for the Roman tradition: Josef Jungmann, *Missarum sollemnia*, II, (Wien: Verlag Herder, 1952³), 3–125 (3–34). Cf. for a comparison between Eastern and Western liturgical traditions: Gerard Rouwhorst, “The preparation of the gifts in the eucharistic liturgy,” *Jaarboek voor liturgie-onderzoek*, 17 (2001), 213–236 (221–227).

34 See for instance Baldovin, “The Empire baptized,” 98–105.

be that not only the grid, but also the group dimension was weakly developed here, whereas it was very strong in the other communities.

2. The first two types differ most explicitly with regard to their attitude towards martyrdom, in spite of the fact that both were faced with it. I would suggest that this difference is closely connected with the strength of the group dimension in the first category and the weakness of it in the second. In case of external threat and persecution, strong group solidarity may strengthen the willingness to sacrifice one's life for God or a higher purpose (and also for the sake of the 'holy' community), whereas a loosely knit community of spiritual searchers, which emphasizes the importance of finding one's own spiritual path, will question the relevance of this ideal, or even ridicule it.

3. The spiritualizing of the ideal of martyrdom, which appears to be typical of stratified fourth-century churches, accords well with a community which is no longer threatened by persecution and begins feeling more at ease in society.

4. The fact that in these increasingly large-scale and stratified churches sacrificial notions are more frequently and explicitly applied to Christian rituals is first of all due to the spectacular growth of rituals in the fourth century, which stimulated the use of ritual terminology in general and sacrificial terminology in particular. This phenomenon, for its part, is closely related to the fact that fourth-century church communities became larger and were forced to strengthen their grid dimension.

Ritual Slaughter, Religious Plurality and the Secularization of Dutch Society (1919–2011)

Bart Wallet

1 Introduction

In most religious traditions food plays a significant role, both in the sacral and profane spheres of life. On the one hand, culinary traditions are interwoven with the celebration of religious festivals, while on the other hand dietary laws impact daily considerations concerning food. Throughout the centuries, food has functioned as an important identity marker for religious traditions, defining the borders between those who adhere to a certain tradition and those who do not.¹ What people eat and drink, and how they do so, functions as an expression of their identity. As Feuerbach has pointedly summarized this insight: „*Der Mensch ist, was er ißt*“.²

The practices of ritual slaughter in Judaism and Islam, as part of their respective dietary laws, can likewise be considered expressions of religious identity.³ Both textual and oral traditions, or, more specifically, mimetic traditions, have defined how animals should be slaughtered so as to be acceptable for human consumption. The detailed ways in which religious sources have addressed the slaughter of animals is an indication of how these two religious traditions intercede in daily life. One should be wary of reducing religion to a doctrine about the relation between God (or gods) and the world, or to a specific type of spirituality, for such reductions risk overlooking the importance of rituals and practices performed by the faithful. Religious practices, well-defined and precisely fulfilled, are expressions of the system of symbols that a particular religious tradition defines.⁴

1 David M. Freidenreich, *Foreigners and Their Food. Constructing Otherness in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

2 Ludwig Feuerbach, „Das Geheimnis des Opfers oder Der Mensch ist, was er ißt (1862),“ in *Gesammelte Werke* 11 (ed. C. H. Beck; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1972), 26–52.

3 Jordan D. Rosenblum, *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 77–84, 154–157.

4 Michael L. Satlow, “Defining Judaism. Accounting for ‘Religions’ in the Study of Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74 (2006): 837–860.

These religious practices are especially challenged by modernity. They were thought to represent the supposed irrational alterity and were thus considered expressions of the anachronistic grounding of certain religious traditions. Many progressive eighteenth- and nineteenth-century intellectuals held Judaism in particular to be an anachronism in the modern era.⁵ Judaism's associated practices, not least ritual slaughter, were consequently considered outdated and overdue for dissolution. Moreover, the social implications of Jewish dietary laws became increasingly debated and contested, especially provisions and restrictions which, in making it all but impossible for practicing Jews to eat with non-Jews, resulted in partial social segregation.⁶

Ritual slaughter thus became both a test case for how modern societies contend with what are often considered socially deviant religious practices, and a challenge for the accepted range of tolerance. As I will demonstrate in this article, the ways in which ritual slaughter was or was not tolerated were an expression of the arrangement of religion in society. Changing ideological and political views of the role of religion, and consequently of attitudes towards religious minorities, immediately influenced the status of ritual slaughter. I will concentrate on one case study: The treatment of ritual slaughter in Dutch society from the start of the twentieth century until the more recent debates in 2011.

2 Growing Regulation and a Concern for Hygiene

From the sixteenth century onward, the Dutch Republic became home to two distinct Jewish communities. Sephardim, known as Portuguese Jews, came and settled primarily in the cities of the province of Holland. They were joined somewhat later by Ashkenazim, from the German countries and from Poland. Both communities displayed a strongly urbanized settlement pattern, but the Ashkenazim were present in more cities and towns than were the Sephardim. For all of them, however, the practice of *shechita* was of crucial importance, as without *kosher* food it would have been impossible to settle. The settlement history of Dutch Jewry thus followed a recognizable pattern until well into the nineteenth century: First, a kosher butcher, who functioned also as a *shochet*

5 Victor Kal, *De joodse religie in de modern wijsbegeerte. Van Spinoza tot Derrida* (Kampen: Agora, 2000).

6 Michael L. Satlow, *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice* (New York etc.: Columbia University Press, 2006), 168–170.

(ritual slaughterer), would settle in a particular place; other Jewish immigrants would join him there.

There existed no national regulation for ritual slaughter until the first half of the twentieth century. Local authorities, in having to regulate Jewish obligations of shechita, realized that without such permission Jews would be unable to be part of Dutch society. Jewish communities in the larger cities were therefore permitted to have their own 'meat halls', where they could slaughter animals according to *halakhic* requirements. In Amsterdam, there were two Jewish 'meat halls' – one for the Sephardim, another for the Ashkenazim – each performing sheḥita according to the relevant tradition.⁷ In other cities, Jews were allowed to rent part of the general 'meat hall'; in smaller towns and villages Jewish butchers slaughtered at their own properties.

Two developments in society and national politics caused the subject of ritual slaughter to appear on the agenda of politicians and intellectuals. The first development stemmed from a growing regularization of society during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As an expanding and increasingly effective bureaucracy extended its reach over society, it came to include domains which had previously been unregulated or were dealt with locally.⁸ The meat industry, ranging from butchers to abattoirs, was one of the many domains that became subjected to governmental regulations for the first time.

Second, a growing concern for hygiene stimulated political debate about the status of ritual slaughter. Especially after Pasteur's discoveries relating to bacteria, authorities began to realize the importance of regulations that would prevent the spread of diseases, promote hygiene and educate citizens about healthier lifestyles. Measures ranging from the construction of sanitary sewers and water supply systems to the creation of public parks were undertaken. A number of regulations were issued to guarantee the quality of the citizens' daily food. In Amsterdam, the Portuguese Jew and medical doctor Samuel Sarphati played a major role in the growing attention for hygiene.⁹

Under influence of these two developments, a discussion rose about the practice of shechita and other slaughter methods. Initially, the Jewish method, in which an artery of an unstunned animal is cut in a single continuous

7 Arend H. Huussen, "The Legal Position of the Jews in the Dutch Republic c. 1590–1796," in *Dutch Jewry: Its History and Secular Culture (1500–2000)* (eds J. Israel and R. Salverda; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 25–42.

8 Hans Knippenberg and Ben de Pater, *De eenwording van Nederland. Schaalvergroting en integratie sinds 1800* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1988).

9 Eduard S. Houwaart, *De hygiënisten. Artsen, staat & volksgezondheid in Nederland 1840–1890* (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 1991).

movement with a sharp, unserrated knife, could reckon on a sizable degree of general sympathy, even beyond the Jewish community. It was considered to be more hygienic than other methods, and in 1896 the Minister of War ordered that the Jewish method be used in all military abattoirs. The decision was reconfirmed in 1905.¹⁰ The decree may have been partially inspired by a desire for convenience, as it would permit all soldiers – Christians and Jews alike – to eat the same kinds of meat, but undoubtedly it expressed also the idea that the shechita was a sound method of slaughter.

However, the generally accepted position of ritual slaughter became complicated by the rise of animal rights movements. Activists argued that shechita was a practice which unnecessarily harmed animals, a complaint that gained power by the introduction of new methods for stunning animals during slaughter. Such opposition was reinforced by the new status of science in society. Scientific discoveries had a huge impact on people's outlook upon the world and were considered a demonstration of the gradual progression of Western civilization.¹¹ Hegelian philosophies further strengthened these common ideas. Moreover, scientific research and practices were commonly placed in opposition to traditional practices. Ritual slaughter, for example, was labeled a traditional, pre-scientific practice, which, like other pre-modern slaughtering methods, should be forbidden. The rise of modern anti-Semitism complemented the series of arguments against shechita: Jews were described as alien elements and 'dangerous bacteria' infecting the body of society, and their slaughtering method was held to be clear evidence of this. The language with which ritual slaughter was attacked – it was branded 'medieval', 'barbaric' and 'bloody' – bears witness to anti-Semitic images of Judaism.

3 Ritual Slaughter in a Religiously Segmented Society, 1919–1945

Despite criticism from animal rights movements and the new role of science in society, shechita was not forbidden by the first Dutch law to regulate slaughtering practices. In 1919, the parliament voted in favor of a Meat Inspection Act, which was effectuated by Royal Decree in 1920. This law is a clear manifestation of the growing tendencies towards increased regulation and concern for

10 S. L. v. d. Geest, "Ritueele slachtwijze of bij den Christen-slager de halssnede," *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad*, October 7, 1910.

11 Solange Leibovici, "Zuiverheid als utopie. De foute kinderen van Pasteur," in *De hang naar zuiverheid. De cultuur van het moderne Europa* (eds R. van der Laarse, A. Labrie, and W. Melching; Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1998), 85–122.

hygiene. Indeed, the objective of the Meat Inspection Act was not the well-being of animals, as the then marginal animal rights movements would have wished, but the health of Dutch consumers. The act contained a number of measures to improve quality standards, and introduced control mechanisms to guarantee Dutch consumers the best meat possible.

Ritual slaughter was permitted under the Meat Inspection Act, but only as an exception. As the prescribed standard method of slaughter included stunning – which, according to the rabbinic experts, was halakhically unacceptable – the Act included three possible exceptions: Home slaughter, emergency slaughter and Jewish ritual slaughter. The shechita nonetheless was still regulated, and only butchers and *shokhatim* who were accepted by the Dutch rabbinic authorities were allowed to perform ritual slaughters. The Dutch law thus accepted rabbinic authority on this particular subject and integrated it into the system of regulation and control. The Dutch state, inspectors and abattoir directors were given control over the general aspects of competence, hygiene and quality of Jewish butchers, but had to abstain from official opinions on the act of ritual slaughter itself. The liberal principle which states that the government is not knowledgeable *in sacra* was thus upheld.¹²

The Jewish community was somewhat disappointed by the 1919 act. Spokesmen declared that they would have preferred an equal status of standard and ritual slaughter, as they considered a well-performed *shechita* at least just as good as stunned slaughter. However, the acceptance of Jewish ritual slaughter in the Netherlands, in a period of history when other countries were putting an end to it, should be interpreted from the broader perspective of how Dutch society dealt with religious diversity. After the introduction of universal suffrage in 1917, a development that had begun in the last half of the nineteenth century now became unmistakably clear: The Netherlands, rather than being an enlightened Protestant nation, as leading intellectuals and politicians in the nineteenth century had preferred to see the Netherlands, was in fact deeply segmented into various minority groups. No group, whether Catholics, Reformed Protestants, liberals or socialists, had a demographic and political majority. The only way in which Dutch politics and society could function was by cooperation between various minority groups.

The specific program for dealing with religious and ideological diversity in Dutch society until the 1960s has become known as the ‘pillarization model’.¹³

12 *Vleeschkeuringswet* (1919); “Het ritueele slachten. De praktijk van de Rijkswet,” *Het Vaderland*, December 14, 1922.

13 Arend Lijphart, *Verzuiling, pacificatie en kentering in de Nederlandse politiek* (Amsterdam: De Bussy, 1968).

Recent debate has rightly questioned various aspects of the standard interpretation of this model, and modified the thesis in such a way that we are able to better distinguish between weak and strong communities.¹⁴ Yet it is clear that the rationale behind much of Dutch politics during this era was directed by the idea that society consisted of various communities, each of which should be given freedom to express itself publicly. Thus, the Jewish community, although in many aspects a weak community without a large, extended 'pillarized' infrastructure, was permitted to maintain religious practices that were crucial to it. The acceptance of shechita, from the broader perspective of Dutch religion policies, was but one example of the state accommodating religious diversity within society.

However, the Meat Inspection Act did not prevent increasing criticism being directed at shechita in Dutch society from the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s. Such criticism came from two parties, both of which were small in number and not in a position of notable political and societal influence. The first group of critics were freethinkers who, from an anti-religious agenda, objected to religious rites in general, and thus fiercely attacked ritual slaughter.¹⁵ The second group were animal rights movements, whose criticism of shechita was a continuation in their struggle for better treatment of animals.¹⁶

The protests were stimulated in part by new methods of stunned slaughtering, such as electric stunning, that had been proposed by scientists. Opponents of ritual slaughter sought to convince rabbinic authorities to accept this new method as halakhically viable.¹⁷ International politics also empowered Dutch opponents of shechita: As part of dissimulation politics throughout Central and Eastern Europe, ritual slaughter was targeted as being barbaric, bloody and obsolete. With the Nazis' rise to power in Germany, Jewish ritual slaughter was soon forbidden, in a move that garnered political support even from non-Nazi parties, such as the social democrats.

The influence of the German situation was easily discernible in the Dutch debate. For example, Dutch animal rights activists sent a letter of support

14 Peter van Dam, *Staat van verzuiling. Over een Nederlandse mythe* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2011).

15 "Een geconcentreerde aanval, *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad*, May 18, 1928.

16 Such as *Amor et Justitia, Sofiavereeniging tot bescherming van dieren*.

17 W. H. Boomgaard, "Nieuwe bedwelmingswijze voor slachtvee," ("New method of stunning"; article reprinted from *Correspondentieblad van de Geldersche vereeniging voor dierenbescherming. Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad*, July 26, 1929).

to Hitler, congratulating the Nazi Führer on his animal-friendly policies.¹⁸ In marked contrast, the liberal Jewish politician I. H. J. Vos at one point tried to woo Jewish voters by placing an advertisement in a Jewish weekly that stated that Jewish interests, such as ritual slaughter, were apparently not safe with social democrats.¹⁹ The main Jewish social democrat, however, Henri Polak, was outraged by Dutch animal rights activists and their attempts to garner domestic political leverage from the German situation. Polak argued that Germany had in fact become one great torture room for Hitler's political opponents and for Jews, and that animal rights activists, rather than protesting against these criminal acts against humans, were lauding Hitler for his love for animals instead.²⁰

As long as Dutch politics were organized according to the 'pillarization model', prohibition of shechita stood no chance of being enacted. In this respect, the World War II was in fact an interruption of Dutch policies towards ritual slaughter. After the German occupation of the Netherlands, the second anti-Jewish measure – issued on July 31, 1940 – was a ban on unstunned slaughter practices.²¹ Given the exceptional circumstances, the Dutch chief rabbis opted to make a temporary exception and accept electric stunning as part of the shechita. This lenient decision may have been inspired by concerns for the health of Dutch Jews, the wish to secure jobs in the kosher food industry, the impossibility of importing unstunned kosher meat, and by fear that Dutch Jews might otherwise start using non-kosher meat.

4 Ritual Slaughter in Post-War Netherlands, 1945–1970

Immediately after the war there were discussions among those involved in reconstructing Jewish community life about whether the authorities should be explicitly asked for permission for resuming unstunned shechita.²² It was decided not to make such a request, however, as it was feared that the

18 J. van Hessen, "Een telegram aan den Duitschen Rijkskanselier," *Het Vaderland*, August 23, 1933; "Het telegram aan den Rijkskanselier," August 30, 1933.

19 Advertisement in *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* April 21, 1933.

20 Henri Polak, "De groote folterkamer," (article reprinted from *Het Volk. Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* September 20, 1933).

21 *Leeuwarder Courant* August 27, 1940; September 4, 1940.

22 The next paragraphs are chiefly based on: Bart Wallet, "In het land van dierenvrienden. Kleine geschiedenis van de rituele slacht," ("In the land of animal friends; a small history of ritual slaughter") *Letter & Geest, Trouw*, May 14, 2011.

authorities would not grant permission.²³ In line with the general policy of the Dutch government-in-exile, those working to rebuild the Jewish community considered the anti-Jewish measures, like all other German laws imposed during the occupation, to have been revoked. The Netherlands, in general, returned to its juridical status of May 10, 1940.²⁴ Ritual slaughter resumed, first in Amsterdam and later elsewhere.

The war years, however, left traces. The animal rights movement soon demanded that the German measure relating to ritual slaughter not be lifted, and some local politicians – like the mayor of Winterswijk – refused to sanction shechita. As research has shown, Nazi propaganda caused a rise in anti-Semitic opinions in Dutch society in the immediate post-war period, and this was apparent when the issue of ritual slaughter was addressed again. In Dutch politics, however, those who wished to return to pre-war ‘pillarization’ policies prevailed over those who now advocated a new, united and more uniform society. This also meant that the practice of ritual slaughter was permitted again, as it was accepted as a religious act of an acknowledged religious community in Dutch society.

Other things changed, however. Dutch politicians, seemingly indifferent to the exceptional causes underlying the Jewish community’s decline, noted that the community had become significantly smaller than it had been before the war. Therefore, they reasoned, the law permitting shechita needed to be adapted to the new situation, and they introduced two new elements into the Meat Inspection Act. First, from January 1, 1949, *shechita* was no longer permitted everywhere in the Netherlands, but only in official abattoirs in a few selected places: Almelo, Amersfoort, Amsterdam, Arnhem, Deventer, Eindhoven, Enschede, The Hague, ’s-Hertogenbosch, Utrecht, Winterswijk and Zwolle. Jewish butchers in smaller places, like Steenwijk, who had only recently resumed business, were hurt by this decision and now had to choose either to quit the business entirely or to become non-kosher. The second new element was the introduction of a criterion of need. Whereas before the war the Jewish butchers had also served a sizable non-Jewish clientele, from now on ritual slaughter would only be permitted per the need of the local Jewish

23 Bart Wallet, “Kosjer Amsterdam. Voedsel, identiteit en samenleving,” in *Sjehechejanoe. Die ons heeft laten leven. Geschiedenis van de Joodse Gemeente Amsterdam [NIHS] van 1945 tot 2010* (eds B. Wallet, P. van Trigt, and H. Polak; Amsterdam: NIHS, 2011), 142–166.

24 More detailed in *Koninklijk Besluit Bezettingsmaatregelen van den 17 Sept. 1944* (Goes: Gebr. Siepman, 1944).

community. The number of Jews in a given area thus dictated the local quota for kosher meat.²⁵

While ritual slaughter was thus again permitted, albeit only for consumption by the Jewish community, a completely new phenomenon now elicited renewed public debate on the issue: Ritual slaughtering for export purposes. From the middle of the twentieth century, the kosher food market had become increasingly international, thanks to new methods for preserving food for longer periods.²⁶ Dutch firms, wishing to profit from this development, now sought to export kosher meat to other countries. After the State of Israel was recognized by the Dutch government, in 1949, immediately the question arose whether exports of kosher meat to the new Jewish state were permitted. In Israel there was a tremendous need for kosher meat, which the country's domestic meat production could not meet. The Dutch Ministry of Agriculture initially took a negative position on the issue, and objected to permitting ritual slaughtering for export purposes; the Foreign Ministry, however, was much in favor. After intense debate, economic motives emerged as the decisive factor. Export of kosher meat was permitted to two categories of countries: First, to countries where local production could not answer demand (read: Israel); and second, to countries where ritual slaughter was forbidden (the primary such country being Switzerland).

In post-war Netherlands, most political parties were willing to accept the Jewish minority and its religious practices, albeit within a new, smaller domain. Such willingness was generally based on the view that in the Netherlands Jews, just as Protestants and Catholics, enjoyed freedom of religion and should be permitted to express their faith publicly. Opposition in parliament was voiced only by the small, radical and conservative Reformed Protestant SGP party, which rejected the 'pillarization model' on the grounds that it legitimized religious plurality. The SGP strived for a theocracy, in which the Netherlands would have a Reformed Protestant character. In their opinion, ritual slaughter should therefore no longer be tolerated, and in 1966, SGP Member of Parliament C. N. van Dis demanded that the "horrible suffering of these animals" should end. Moreover, according to Van Dis, ritual slaughter was not prescribed in

25 *Kamerstuk Eerste Kamer 1948-1949, nr. 1000 XII, ondernummer 1000, Rijksbegroting 1949 (Sociale Zaken).*

26 Etan Diamond, *And I Will Dwell in Their Midst. Orthodox Jews in Suburbia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 114, 138-139.

biblical Mosaic law, and thus must have been from later Jewish tradition – which he, from his own religious perspective, did not accept as authoritative.²⁷

5 Ritual Slaughter and Multiculturalism, 1970–2000

The increasing number of Islamic migrant workers, who later became ‘new Dutchmen’, altered the debate on ritual slaughter in Dutch society significantly. The Dutch law, thus far, had only permitted ritual slaughter according to the ‘Israelite rites’ – as defined and controlled by the rabbinate. Ritual slaughter performed according to Islamic rites, so as to obtain *halal* meat, was still prohibited. In a debate on a measure to advocate the rights of the migrant workers in 1966, Member of Parliament for the social democrats (PvdA), S. van der Ploeg, demanded to know from State Secretary Bartels if there was need to include ‘Islamic rites’ in the law as well.²⁸ After consulting representatives of the Islamic community, Bartels assured Van der Ploeg that it was unnecessary to change the law. What Bartels did not realize, however, was that he had spoken with leaders of the small and relatively progressive Ahmadiyya Muslims, who in no way represented the vast majority of Muslims who had settled in the Netherlands.²⁹

Many Muslims, despite the prohibition, chose to slaughter clandestinely, especially on the occasion of Eid al-Adha’ (Festival of Sacrifice). This generated problems in society and resulted in police interventions. For instance, in 1969, police had to rescue three Moroccan migrant workers after they were attacked by local residents who were outraged at their wish to ritually slaughter a goat. Politicians and employers realized that they had to take some action³⁰ and that, in order to create an attractive employment atmosphere for the much

27 *Aanhangsel Tweede Kamer 1965–1966 nummer 512*, 973; C. N. van Dis, “Vragen inzake ritueel slachten,” *De Banier*, June 9, 1966; C. N. van Dis, “Beantwoording van de vragen inzake het rituele slachten,” *De Banier*, June 16, 1966.

28 *Aanhangsel Tweede Kamer 1965–1966 nr. 419, vragen heer Van der Ploeg (PvdA) in verband met bezwaren Marokkanen tegen nuttigen vlees slachtdieren*, January 25, 1965; *Antwoord staatssecretaris Bartels*, April 26, 1966.

29 W. A. Shadid and Pieter S. van Koningsveld, “Legal Adjustments for Religious Minorities. The Case of the Ritual Slaughtering of Animals,” in *Islam in Dutch Society: Current Developments and Future Prospects* (eds Wasif A. Shadid and P. S. van Koningsveld; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992), 2–25.

30 “Ritueel slachten wekt woede Haagse woonwijk,” *Leeuwarder Courant*, December 8, 1969.

needed migrant workers, rituals dear to them should be accepted.³¹ In 1975, the Minister of Culture, Recreation and Social Work gave a special dispensation for Islamic ritual slaughter, especially when it was intended for Eid al-Adha.³²

In order to end continuing clandestine slaughtering, and because of the juridical inequality as compared to the Jewish community, slaughtering according to the "Islamic rites" was finally legally accepted in 1977. Regulations for the Islamic rites were copied from the Jewish example, although comparable organizational structures, skilled professionals and detailed regulations were still lacking.³³ Since 1977, Jewish and Islamic ritual slaughter in the Netherlands have been closely connected. Despite considerable differences between the practices, together they constitute legal 'ritual slaughter' in Dutch society. The demographic growth of the Islamic minority has resulted in continuing attention to ritual slaughter in the public debate.³⁴

The cultural revolution of the 1960s had meanwhile changed the political climate significantly. The 'pillarized' ideology became discredited, and was replaced by a progressive understanding of the Netherlands as a guiding nation, where discrimination such as had been seen during the war years would never happen again. According to this perspective, ethnic and religious minorities (like the Jewish and Islamic communities) should be accepted and allowed to develop according to their own cultural codes and convictions. Thus the idea of the multicultural society was born. Progressive parties in particular, like the social democratic PvdA, D66, and PPR, used multiculturalism as their main prism in approaching the topic of ritual slaughter. From the beginning of the 1980s until the mid-1990s expansion of European institutions and regulations made it necessary to debate the topic in parliament. For the PvdA, ritual slaughter became the test case for the new multicultural society. In 1984, Member of Parliament Flip Buurmeijer advocated the view that integration meant a process of mutual adjustment and therefore Dutch society had to give minorities ample opportunity "to experience their own identity".³⁵

31 *Kamerstuk Tweede Kamer 1969–1970, nr. 10504, ondernummer 4, Nota buitenlandse werknemers.*

32 "Moslims in ons land mogen ritueel slachten," *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, November 29, 1975.

33 *Kamerstuk Tweede Kamer 1982–1983, nr. 17011, ondernummer 9, Europees Verdrag inzake slachtdieren; Memorie van Antwoord*, July 18, 1983.

34 Iz.M. de Klerk, "Ritueel slachten. Niet alleen gevoelig voor de dieren," typoscript, January 19, 1985.

35 *Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1983–1984, Bijzondere Commissie voor het Minderhedenbeleid, Minderhedennota*, February 6, 1984.

The prevailing political opinion on ritual slaughter was voiced by Prime Minister Wim Kok during a political debate in parliament in 1999: “These are changes that render justice to the developing multicultural society. Rules are adjusted to do justice the normative convictions of newcomers”. The Dutch regulated approach to ritual slaughter, in abattoirs and with strict rules, was even regarded as an export product by the “guiding nation”.³⁶ The Second Chamber demanded, in 1993, that the Minister defend the Dutch approach within the EU. Although the Ministry of Agriculture, while for the moment not addressing ritual slaughter for domestic purposes, sought several times to end the allowance for export, a parliamentary majority did not agree: The liberty of religion should be defended, especially towards countries that defied it, such as Switzerland.³⁷

During this period, criticisms of ritual slaughter were voiced especially by those political parties that rejected the idea of multiculturalism. ‘Boer’ Koekoek, Member of Parliament for the right-wing populist Farmers’ Party, in 1976 decried “murdering animals with knives, axes, hammers and sledges without any stunning”. The Secretary of State rejected this description of ritual slaughter and made clear that the Dutch government guaranteed minorities’ rights.³⁸ The small Protestant parties – SGP, GPV, and RPF – also voiced a critical viewpoint towards ritual slaughter. For them, multiculturalism entailed a further step away from their vision of a Protestant nation, and they therefore tended to be critical of any measure that appeared to further anchor Islam in Dutch society.³⁹

36 Cited after: Tetty Havinga, “Ritueel slachten. Spanning tussen religieuze tolerantie en dierenbescherming,” in *Migratierecht en rechtssociologie, gebundeld in Kees’ studies* (eds A. Böcker et al.; Nijmegen: Centrum voor Migratierecht en Instituut voor Rechts-sociologie Radboud Universiteit, 2008), 211–220.

37 See e.g. *Aanhangsel Eerste Kamer 1984–1985 nr. 40, vragen van de heren Van Bommel (VVD) en Hofman (VVD) inzake ontheffingsbeleid voor export van vlees van ritueel geslachte dieren*, April 15, 1985; *Antwoord staatssecretaris Van der Ploeg*, May 17, 1985.

38 *Aanhangsel Tweede Kamer 1976–1977 nr. 714, vragen van de heer Koekoek (BP) inzake ritueel slachten*, December 30, 1976; *Antwoord staatssecretaris Hendriks (Volksgezondheid en Milieuhygiëne) mede namens de Minister van Landbouw en Visserij*, February 25, 1977.

39 *Aanhangsel Tweede Kamer 1980–1981 nr. 352, vragen van de heer Van Rossum (SGP) inzake ritueel slachten* (October 14, 1980); *Antwoord minister Ginjaar (Volksgezondheid en Milieuhygiëne)* (December 11, 1980); *Handelingen Tweede Kamer 9–10 Februari 1983*; *Aanhangsel Tweede Kamer 1982–1983 nr. 1181, vragen van de heren Leerling (RPF) en Wagenaar (RPF) over ritueel slachten*, June 17, 1983; *Antwoord staatssecretaris Van*

Their critical approach was, however, paled in comparison to the consistent campaign against ritual slaughter waged by the extreme right-wing Centrumpartij. Their representative in parliament, Hans Janmaat, protested often against the “medieval torturing practices”. But his struggle was a lonely one, for, according to him, “[t]he politicians lie about so-called xenophobia, anti-Semitism, racism and, for new voters, are willing to cry with the most medieval torturers”.⁴⁰ While progressive Dutch people considered ritual slaughter to be a crown jewel of the new multicultural society, Janmaat regarded it as a symbol of the decline of Dutch society. Janmaat argued that a genuinely developed, industrialized country would forbid these primitive religious practices.⁴¹

6 Ritual Slaughter and the Search for a Secular Dutch Identity

During the twentieth century criticism against ritual slaughter in the Netherlands had nearly always come from relatively marginal groups in society. This changed rapidly, however, after 2000, when Dutch society was impacted by ‘9/11’ and the so-called Fortuyn revolt. While 9/11 placed Islam on the international agenda, Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn connected the subject of Islam to social conditions in impoverished city neighborhoods. He demanded uncompromising integration policies and qualified multiculturalism as a total failure. After Fortuyn was murdered, in 2002, major elements of his ideas were integrated into the programs of the main political parties, in an effort to resume control of the debate. Due to this intense debate, support for ritual slaughter quickly waned and the practice became for the first time seriously endangered.

In Dutch society there have been two continuous opponents of the practice of unstunned ritual slaughter. First, the animal rights movement, which has since the end of the nineteenth century consistently opposed ritual slaughter. In 2006, the movement booked a huge success with the entry into parliament of their Party of the Animals. For the first time the animal rights movement had a direct say in parliament and could thus influence political debates.

der Reijden (WVZ) mede namens staatssecretaris Van Zeijl (Landbouw & Visserij), September 15, 1983.

40 “Medewerker Janmaat zoekt steun bij leden Ekologische Beweging,” (“Parliament member Janmaat goes for Ecological Movement members’ support”) *Leeuwarder Courant*, February 11, 1983.

41 *Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1983–1984, Bijzondere Commissie voor het Minderhedenbeleid. Minderhedennota* (February 27, 1984).

The Party of the Animals (PvdD) was successful in making animal rights a political issue in The Hague and made ritual slaughter the theme of its first private members' bill.⁴²

Second, small parties on the right side of the political spectrum had also been critical since 1945, mainly as an explicit rejection of the ideal of multiculturalism. After 2000, this position was carried on by the Fortuyn party (LPF) and the rightist populist PVV of Geert Wilders. Both parties, however, were significantly larger than the smaller right-wing parties that had preceded them. Moreover, both parties succeeded in entering the center of power, either within government or associated to the government via special construction. The critical stance towards ritual slaughter was no longer voiced only at the margins of Dutch politics, but was for the first time expressed in governmental circles.

The main question, however, concerns the position of the other Dutch political parties. What made these parties, at least in the debates in the Dutch Second Chamber, change their positions? Once again, the broader political stance towards religion in society provides a central clue. The debate on ritual slaughter became redefined, this time along religious versus secular lines. Until the 1990s, ritual slaughter was primarily considered a cultural expression of ethnic minorities. In the twenty-first century, however, ritual slaughter became increasingly regarded as a religious rite, as had been the situation before 1970. This resulted in a regrouping of Dutch politics. The small Christian parties, Christian Union and SGP, together with the larger Christian democrats (CDA) party, now became fierce defendants of ritual slaughter. These parties regarded the public and political debate over ritual slaughter to be a new attack by secular parties on religious practices and they feared that this would develop into subsequent anti-religious policies. Their position was partly instigated by the fact that the Christian parties for the first time in post-war Dutch history held no more than 28 seats in parliament.

Progressive parties regrouped as well. After multiculturalism was abandoned, even by most left and liberal parties, Dutch society began to question itself about what Dutch identity actually meant. If newcomers needed to integrate into Dutch society, what values would they have to accept? Progressive parties answered the question by advocating a new, secular Dutch identity, whose core values were achievements of the 1960s, namely, rights for women and homosexuals as well as animal rights. Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, is that in Dutch politics a broad consensus could be recognized over this

42 "PvdD wil af van onverdoofde slacht," ("PvdD want to get rid of unstunned slaughter") *Leeuwarder Courant*, March 20, 2008.

theme – from populist PVV to socialist SP. Ritual slaughter, from this perspective, was a strange and abhorrent religious practice, which did not belong in Dutch society.⁴³

The private members' bill presented by the Party of Animals' representative Marianne Thieme passed the Second Chamber of Dutch parliament with an overwhelming secular majority, but failed to convince the Dutch Senate (or First Chamber). However, in this debate it was clear that multiculturalism was no longer the prism through which ritual slaughter was approached; the prism had become the reach of religious freedom in a predominantly secular society. Whereas the Second Chamber deemed ritual slaughter an outdated religious rite that could no longer be tolerated, the Senate decided that such an infringement of religious freedom – and thus citizens' constitutional rights – could not be sanctioned.

7 Conclusion

The debate surrounding ritual slaughter in Dutch society is not just about a certain number – some thousands per year – of slaughtered animals, but is in fact tightly intertwined with the political debate about the place of religion in society. The history of this debate over the last hundred years thus offers a prism through which changing convictions can be traced. Three main conclusions can be drawn from this debate.

First, the debate on ritual slaughter emerged in the context of concern about the hygiene of consumers, but gradually shifted to a context of animal rights and of changing moral convictions. Whereas in the first instance the consumers – Jewish and non-Jewish – had been pivotal, animals now became the central point of the debate. The first approach made it possible, for the sake of consumers, to make exceptions to the relevant laws; the second one complicates such exceptions significantly. Indeed, as some politicians argued, there should no longer be discrimination of animals with respect to how they are slaughtered, with some receiving a more 'humane' slaughter than others. Although juridically impossible, in the public debate animals changed from objects into subjects of lawmaking.

Second, the two subsequent arrangements of 'pillarization' and multiculturalism enabled politicians to accommodate religious and cultural diversity

43 A detailed analysis of the argumentation used by proponents and opponents of the practice of ritual slaughter is given in Bart Wallet, "Ritueel slachten en godsdienstvrijheid in een seculiere samenleving," *Religie & Samenleving* 7 (2012): 166–183.

in society. Both models considered Dutch society to be fundamentally diverse and to include various minority groups, which had to cooperate and reciprocate in order to live together. While ‘pillarization’ had a predominantly religious approach – replaced by a cultural approach in the model of multiculturalism – ritual slaughter was accepted in both models as a crucial rite for Jews and Muslims. This insight raises the question whether multiculturalism in Dutch society was effectively nothing more than a transformation of the ‘pillarization’ model. The abandonment of multiculturalism in the twenty-first century left Dutch society without a new model for accommodating diversity. The search for a new, secular Dutch majority identity, with the explicit goal of integrating minority groups and assimilating them into the majority Dutch social group, jeopardized the status of ritual slaughter. As a religious rite it was opposed by most of the secular majority, and only a fundamental debate in the Senate on the limits and extents of the constitutional freedom of religion could save ritual slaughter from being banned.

Third, ritual slaughter obtained various shifting symbolic functions in the respective arrangements of politics and religion. During ‘pillarization’ it was a symbol of acceptance of the Jewish minority, even though a small group rejected it as a supposed threat to the Protestant nature of the Dutch State. During multiculturalism supporters of ritual slaughter considered tolerance for the ritual to be a preeminent example of the acceptance of moral diversity in a multi-ethnic society, whereas opponents considered ritual slaughter to be a telling example of the failures of multiculturalism. In their opinion, multiculturalism was a form of cultural relativism, and they considered “Western civilization” to be more highly evolved than Islamic and Jewish traditions. Ritual slaughter has recently become a symbol in the confrontation between religious and secular articulations of Dutch identity. The first considers ritual slaughter to be a test case for the acceptance of religious rites in a secular society; the latter regards it as a symbol of religious ‘medievalism’. In terms of Kathryn McClymond’s analysis, one could state that various interpretations of ritual slaughter as sacrificial rite clashed: A reductionist one, in which ritual slaughter is essentially considered to be killing an animal, and a polythetic approach that recognizes the religious meanings attributed to the various stages of the slaughtering ritual.⁴⁴

The Netherlands have not been the only country to debate ritual slaughter. Similar debates have been waged in various European countries, including in countries that have maintained their pre-war bans on ritual slaughter, such

44 Kathryn McClymond, *Beyond Sacred Violence. A Comparative Study of Sacrifice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008) esp. the second chapter.

as Switzerland, Sweden, Norway and Liechtenstein.⁴⁵ Further research should establish in what respects the Dutch debate has been typical of the country and what elements were part of wider European developments. It is nevertheless clear that clashing Enlightenment conceptions – constitutional freedom of religion on the one hand versus qualification of religious rites as anachronistic on the other – have left a legacy with which European politicians and other community leaders are still struggling in their efforts to address the issue of ritual slaughter.

45 Pablo Lerner and Alfredo Mordechai Rabello, “The Prohibition of Ritual Slaughtering (Kosher Sheḥita and Halal) and Freedom of Religion of Minorities,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 22 (2006–2007): 1–62.

Towards a Grown-Up Faith: Love as the Basis for Harry Potter's Self-Sacrifice

Sigrid Coenradie

1 Introduction

“Is it love again?”, said Voldemort, his snake’s face jeering. “Dumbledore’s favourite solution, *love*, which he claimed conquered death, though love did not stop him falling from the Tower and breaking like an old waxwork. *Love*, which did not prevent me stamping out your Mudblood mother like a cockroach, Potter – and nobody seems to love you enough to run forwards this time, and take my curse”.¹

In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, sacrifice is a predominant theme. Although there are differences – Harry Potter is but a fictive character, his sacrifice functions in a mythical, but not a religious setting – Joanne Rowling’s story has some striking similarities to the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, and the Quranic story of Ibrahim and his son. The parallels between Harry’s sacrifice and the Passion cannot be missed either. The sacrifice *of* a son even turns into the sacrifice *by* a son in many re-readings of the Abraham-story. All are stories about the sacrifice of a son, and thereby shaping the identity of a community. Harry’s sacrifice will enable us to look into this theme more profoundly.

The main question of this article is: Is Harry’s action to be interpreted as a sacrifice, a self-sacrifice or as a gift? This, however, raises new questions, for example about the autonomy of the one being sacrificed, the necessity of violence commonly involved in sacrificial practices, and finally questions about the nature of self-sacrifice in a profane context. This article is structured accordingly and will consider 1. Harry being sacrificed; 2. Harry’s self-sacrifice; and a strangely combining variant I propose, 3. Harry’s life being given. I will compare the above-mentioned biblical sacrifices to the one Harry makes.

The meaning of the term ‘sacrifice’ is ambiguous. Claudia Welz differentiates between a religious and a secularized meaning of the word sacrifice.²

1 Joanne K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 36.

2 Claudia Welz, “Love as Gift and Self-Sacrifice,” in *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 50 (Bd., 2008): 238–266.

In its religious meaning it is an act of giving to God, which is motivated by the anticipation of receiving in return, as a successful communication with God. In its secularized meaning sacrifice implies deliberate loss and destruction, the renouncing or giving up of something valuable for the sake of a greater good. I define 'self-sacrifice' as the practice of offering one's life to gain something more valuable, e.g. an eternal life in heaven. I will argue that, although Harry Potter at the close of the final book is prepared to give his life for his friends, in the process he paradoxically receives his life as a gift. Furthermore, I claim this gift has nothing to do with magic, but can be regarded as old-fashioned religious grace. Therefore, I define 'gift' used in the context of 'sacrifice' as the receiving back of the life that has been offered in self-sacrifice.

In this article no specific literary method is applied. I do not search for causal connections or inter-textual relations. According to Paul Ricoeur narratives offer a possible world and an opportunity for identification. In the following, the novels on Harry Potter are placed in a context of religious studies on sacrifice and its meanings. The question is if, and if so, how, an analysis of Harry Potter's sacrifice can contribute to a philosophical-theological reflection on (self)sacrifice.

From the start it is clear that Harry Potter is in a privileged position, comparable to Abraham, who is called out of Ur, and Jesus who was announced by John the Baptist as a very special person. Harry is "the Chosen One", who survived an assassination attempt by the evil wizard Voldemort. Therefore, Harry is destined to fight Voldemort and save the Hogwarts school community. Throughout the seven volumes of the Potter series, however, the reader gradually becomes aware that Harry cannot defeat Voldemort without laying down his own life. When, in the second part of the last book, Harry discovers this dilemma, he feels betrayed and used by the school's headmaster Dumbledore. I will argue that the free choice Harry has to make regarding his being sacrificed, forms a necessary condition for all acts of self-sacrifice. Furthermore, one wonders how Harry's sacrifice can be interpreted. Is Harry's self-sacrifice an act of violence against self in order to prevent violence against others, as Derrida states? Can Harry's self-sacrifice be interpreted as an altruistic sacrifice instead of an egoistic one, in line with the difference Schiller suggested? I will argue: Neither. Harry's self-sacrifice does not seem to be understandable adequately in terms of a sacrifice. Its meaning has to be re-phrased in terms of a gift.

1.1 *Summary*

For those who did not read the series: The main character, Harry Potter, is an orphan. His parents were killed by the evil wizard Tom Riddle, whose nickname is Lord Voldemort. One-year-old Harry survived the attack. Harry is left to stay

with his only remaining family: His uncle and aunt and their spoiled son. This family of *muggles* (non-wizards) mistreats the young Harry. The series starts when Harry is eleven years old and is invited to enter Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, the setting for most of the books. In each volume, Harry is one year older and the author J. K. Rowling introduces issues consistent with Harry's age at the time. During his first trip on the train to Hogwarts, Harry meets Ron and Hermione. They develop a strong friendship and then fight Voldemort, who is a constant threat to the happy Hogwarts society, together. The last volume, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, is completely devoted to the accomplishment of Harry's mission to conquer Voldemort, through his self-sacrifice. As will be argued, Harry's self-sacrifice is not motivated by fear, duty or a higher principle. Harry relinquishes his life out of love and with the help of the Hogwarts community.

1.2 *A Life Based on Sacrifice Out of Love*

Harry's very existence is based on sacrifice, as his mother Lily was protecting him with her life when she was killed by the evil wizard Voldemort. Harry survived the attack. He is the "Boy who lived", the "Chosen One". The scar on his forehead, which he received the night his parents died, reminds him, and everyone who meets him, of his destiny. That destiny is to conquer Voldemort, who is still after Harry and wants to conquer the wizard world, out of revenge. Not until the fifth volume does the reader learn what motivated Voldemort to try and kill Harry. It is a prophecy, which states that neither Harry nor Voldemort could live while the other survived:

The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches (...) and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not (...) and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives (...).³

The prophecy functions as a meta-narrative that seems to justify the violence against Harry. However, Nikolaus Wandinger, who compares the sacrifices of Harry Potter, of the school's headmaster Dumbledore, of teacher Snape and of other characters in the books, has pointed out that this prophecy ironically

3 Joanne K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the order of the Phoenix* (London: Barnes & Noble, 2003), 37, 74f.

became self-fulfilling only after Voldemort's evil action.⁴ The prophecy was no inescapable fate. It had no power of its own.⁵ By acting out of fear,⁶ moreover, by transferring the ability of talking Parsletongue (snake language) and establishing a mind connection, Voldemort himself created his opponent. In the end his down-fall is a self-judgment.⁷

1.3 *Horcruxes*

There is yet more to the relationship between Lord Voldemort and Harry Potter. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that Harry is one of seven Horcruxes created by Lord Voldemort. Horcruxes are fragments of his soul. As is clear from his name, *vol-de-mort* (fleeing death), Voldemort's aim is to become immortal. Dividing his soul among the Horcruxes is a way of spreading the risk of death. However, creating a Horcrux has its prize, as it requires a murder to split the soul, and a spell to encase it. Furthermore, the creation of a Horcrux dehumanizes the murderer by mutilating his soul.⁸

The night Harry Potter received his scar Voldemort gave Lily the choice to save herself, for it was the baby he wanted. *She* did not have to die. Yet, she *chose* to die for Harry. This sacrifice of his mother protected Harry.⁹ During the assassination assault on Harry, the deathly curse used by Voldemort, "Avada Kedavra!" backfired on himself, thanks to the protection formed by the love of Lily Potter. Consequently two things happened: Voldemort was heavily injured.

4 Nikolaus Wandering, "Sacrifice in the Harry Potter Series from a Girardian Perspective," *Contagion – Journal of Violence, Mimesis and Culture* 17 (2010), 27–51. In this article I draw heavily from Wandering's work. In his article Wandering reflects on the different kinds of sacrifices of the main characters in the series, in line with René Girard, who distinguishes between a pre-Biblical and a post-Biblical concept of sacrifice. Yet, while Wandering's article focuses on the mimesis theory in comparing the sacrifices of the main characters in the series, this article concentrates on the question whether Harry has a free choice in sacrificing himself.

5 Cf. Hetty Zock, "Cultural Anxieties in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*: Evil and the Magic of Human Abilities," in *At the Crossroads of Art and Religion: Imagination, Commitment, Transcendence*, (ed. Hetty Zock; Leuven: Peeters, Paris: Walpole, 2008); Groningen Studies in Cultural Exchange, vol. 34, 101–115.

6 Hetty Zock, "Cultural Anxieties," 52.

7 Cf. Nikolaus Wandering, "Girardian Perspective," 7.

8 Joanne K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 469.

9 Dumbledore explains to Harry: "... your mother died to save you. She gave you a lingering protection he never expected, a protection that flows in your veins to this day. I put my trust, therefore, in your mother's blood (...). Your mother's sacrifice made the bond of blood the strongest shield I could give you." Rowling, *The Order of the Phoenix*, 37, 736–737.

Having no bodily form of his own, he becomes dependant on his servant Peter Pettigrew and his army of Death Eaters until the end of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, in which Pettigrew helps Voldemort to regain his body. The other consequence of the assassination gone wrong is that Lily's death accidentally created a seventh Horcrux. A piece of Lord Voldemort's soul lives within Harry, without Voldemort knowing it. It seems that, according to Rowling, good and evil are intrinsically connected. Good carries evil within it and evil can be transformed into good.

2 Harry Being Sacrificed?

At the end of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Harry is in the finals of the Tri-Wizard Tournament, which takes place in a labyrinth. This setting provides an opportunity for Lord Voldemort to isolate Harry and to order his servant Pettigrew to take a bone from his father's grave, give his own hand voluntarily and take Harry's blood by force, to recreate a body for himself.¹⁰

After this event, through the blood-connection between Harry and Voldemort, Harry is able to 'read' Voldemort's mind and feel his emotions via his scar more clearly than before. Now that he has a body again, the power of Lord Voldemort increases. Harry prepares the school by forming a group of pupils which he trains in witchcraft to be able to defend Hogwarts, in case the Death Eaters attack. This group is called after the school's headmaster: Dumbledore's army. When the Ministry of Magic finds out about the existence of Dumbledore's army, the headmaster is fired and has to leave Hogwarts. At the end of volume six, however, Dumbledore confides his secret mission to Harry: He informs him that he is chasing the Horcruxes, although he hides the most important piece of information: His presumption that Harry is a Horcrux himself. On one of these secret missions Dumbledore gets poisoned, which indirectly causes his death. Only in the last volume does Harry, with the help

10 As Wandering points out, this scene shows a perfect primordial sacrifice, for the Death Eaters, summoned up by Voldemort to attend the humiliation and torture of Harry, function as a mob, encircling and threatening one lonely individual, intending to kill him. Even the blood is there. Nikolaus Wandering, "Harry Potter and the Art of Theology: A Theological Perspective on J. K. Rowling's novels – Part Two: Sacrifice and Mission," in *Milltown Studies* 53 (Summer 2004), 31–153. Wandering furthermore distinguishes between the sacrifice (or better: self-mutilation) of Peter Pettigrew's hand, which is a sacrifice out of fear and the sacrifice of Harry, which is a sacrifice out of love.

of his friends Ron and Hermione, try to destroy some of the Horcruxes himself. Considering his lack of success, the prophecy and the scar hurting Harry while contacting Voldemort, we get the impression that Harry has been called to a mission impossible.

Gradually, Harry begins to presume he cannot defeat his enemy by fighting. By recollecting the memories of the late Severus Snape, teacher of the dark arts, from the 'Pensieve', Harry learns the only way to conquer Voldemort is through his own death. Finally, the idea that he has to surrender to Voldemort without defending himself enters his mind.

2.1 *Sacrificed*

From the Pensieve,¹¹ Harry learns that Dumbledore seemed to be willing to sacrifice Harry. Dumbledore himself gave up his own life deliberately in a calculated attempt to prevent Voldemort from laying his hands on the Elder Wand, which actually failed. The Elder Wand is the 'master' of all other wands and therefore the most desirable thing for Voldemort to possess. According to Wandinger, Dumbledore thinks along the logic of Caiaphas, who rather let one man, Jesus, die, than have the whole nation destroyed.¹² At the end of the series, Severus Snape accuses Dumbledore of using Harry as a means to reach a higher goal: "We only kept him alive to let him die at the proper moment".¹³ Dumbledore replies, however, that keeping one's life is not the essential value.¹⁴

11 *A Pensieve* is a bowl in which one can read the thoughts of a person given voluntarily. It is first mentioned in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*.

12 Wandinger, "Sacrifice in Harry Potter from a Girardian Perspective," 35. The bible passage is John 11, 50.

13 When, at the end of the last volume, Harry walks into the Forbidden Forest to surrender himself to Lord Voldemort, his thoughts are most cynical: "Now he saw that his lifespan had always been determined by how long it took to eliminate all the Horcruxes. Dumbledore had passed the job of destroying them to him, and obediently he had continued to chip away at the bonds tying not only Voldemort, but himself, to life! How neat, how elegant, not to waste any more lives, but to give the dangerous task to the boy who had already been marked for slaughter, and whose death would not be a calamity, but another blow against Voldemort." Rowling, *The Deathly Hallows*, 34, 555. This reaction shows that Harry's motive and goal of his love is life, not death.

14 Lord Voldemort tries to flee death because he cannot imagine anything "worse than death", as Dumbledore says to him: "Your failure to understand that there are things much worse than death has always been your greatest weakness" Rowling, *The Order of the Phoenix*, 895. Dumbledore's advice to Harry is: "Do not pity the dead, Harry. Pity the living, and above all, those who live without love". Rowling, *The Deathly Hallows*, 578.

As Dumbledore says in *Chamber of Secrets*, death is not the worst fate that can befall someone. Loyalty and friendship are valued more highly than life. In line with this principle, Dumbledore seemed to have been prepared to sacrifice Harry for the sake of the Hogwarts community.

2.2 *The Necessity of Choice*

Yet, as Ismael in the Ibrahim-story, Harry is almost grown up.¹⁵ He has a choice of whether to comply. One's autonomy, in the sense of the freedom and the necessity of making choices of your own, is stressed throughout the series. Tom Riddle (Voldemort) has a choice as well. Rowling describes the similarities between the boys. Both their mothers died at a young age. Their wands contain the phoenix feather from Fawkes, Dumbledore's bird. Their witchcraft is of the same strength.¹⁶ Like Voldemort, Harry must also come to terms with his disappointment in his father and the father-figures in his life. By stressing the resemblance between the boys, Rowling seems to point out that the difference between good and evil is not absolute. It is not the circumstances that determine who they are. The dividing difference between Harry and Tom is their moral behaviour.¹⁷ Whereas Voldemort is sacrificing others to the good of his own self, in his striving to obtain immortality, Harry chooses differently, being prepared to sacrifice his life for his friends. Harry's choices are all life-giving: Harry shows mercy to Peter Pettigrew, who betrayed his parents and saves the life of his opponent Draco Malfoy. He even makes an attempt to persuade Voldemort: "Try for some remorse, Riddle (...) It's your last chance".¹⁸

2.3 *Hallows or Horcruxes?*

As the number of followers of Voldemort increases rapidly, the school is not a safe place anymore. Harry is on the run, envy separates him from his best friend Ron, who temporarily breaks up with him. Harry is on the verge of despair, not knowing what to do or who can be trusted. In the second half of the book Harry must decide where his loyalty lies. Friendship is tested heavily. Basically,

15 Over the books, each book covering a school-year and consequently a year in Harry's existence, Harry becomes an adult.

16 Therefore, the Sorting Hat hesitates before putting Harry in Gryffindor, instead of Slytherin House, the house of Voldemort. Here again it is by Harry's own choice that he enters Gryffindor. See Joanne K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 91.

17 "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities", says Dumbledore. Joanne K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), 245.

18 Rowling, *The Deathly Hallows*, 594.

Harry has two choices: Collecting Hallows or chasing Horcruxes. Dumbledore has left a testament in which he donates a copy of the old fairy tale of the three Deathly Hallows to Hermione. The Deathly Hallows consist of the Elder wand, which makes one invincible, the Resurrection Stone, which brings back the dead and an Invisibility Cloak that hides one even from death. Together these three things defy death. As events unfold, the fairy tale appears to be reality: The three things do exist. By collecting them, Harry would become all-mighty and could easily beat Voldemort. Like Jesus tempted by the devil in the desert, Harry is attracted to the idea of becoming popular and powerful himself for a good part of the book. Eventually, however, he chooses to hunt the Horcruxes. As a Jesus-like figure, Harry abstains from the seduction of power and chooses a vulnerable way of life that involves suffering and self-sacrifice, but eventually results in a permanent defeat of evil.

2.4 *Crisis*

Apart from the free choice Harry has, there is also the aspect of autonomy. For Harry to make his own choices, eventually even against his school headmaster, he has to be grown-up. Dumbledore seeming unreliable, Harry has no higher authority to fall back upon. At the end of the series, Harry has to make decisions on his own, without any help. In the beginning of his career at Hogwarts, Harry has full trust in the school and its headmaster, who is like a father to him. That changes in the last volume. After Dumbledore's death Harry is disappointed to hear that Dumbledore did not tell the truth and withheld the essential information of Harry being a Horcrux. It was Dumbledore who told Harry that his ability of love and friendship could make the significant difference in defeating the enemy.¹⁹ However, it is the same Dumbledore, who keeps Harry unaware of the depth of the relationship between Harry and Voldemort and of the events, known or orchestrated by Dumbledore, involving the battle against Voldemort. As a consequence, Harry's firm trust in a set of values like loyalty and friendship and love evaporates. At this point, Harry's situation can be compared to that of Isaac in Genesis 22. Both seem to have unreliable fathers. In various literary works about Isaac, the boy never recovers from the shock of his father being prepared to sacrifice him. Harry feels equally abandoned and at a loss. In this sense, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* can be read as a metaphor about man's struggle to have faith, while living in a de-sacralised world. If one cannot count on God's fidelity, how can one count on God at all? Harry's 'god' has fallen from his pedestal, leaving him to his own devices. This

19 Indeed, as the story unfolds, Harry develops a strong friendship with Ron and Hermione, allowing them to accomplish what neither of them could have done alone.

represents a common human experience after the 'death' of God: God remains silent and seems to be indifferent to the suffering of people.

2.5 *The Death of God*

Nietzsche called this experience the 'death' of God. People killed the gods without being aware of the consequence: Their loneliness. What people find after this very last stage of sacrificing is not a sacred place; it is an empty place, a fall into an abyss. In this emptiness one can only 'meet' the absence of God. One stays behind in a de-sacralised world. In accordance with Nietzsche, Bataille interprets the death of God as the ultimate sacrifice modern culture can make. Bataille, however, goes further and considers the consequences by asking questions, e.g. which God has been sacrificed here? Is it the 'old' God? Is it – to be more specific – a certain image of God that got lost? Does one have to become one's own God? Bataille starts his theory with the last question, by stating that one has misused God, by making Him into an object that can be appropriated. Instead of sacrificing to God to maintain one's life one must sacrifice one's life. In the process, one's autonomy, in the sense of making free choices, was sacrificed. Therefore, Bataille's version of the death of God is that people must voluntarily sacrifice themselves. However, in giving up their lives, they paradoxically will find they can keep their lives.

In comparison to the clerical practice, through the loss of a priest in the course of secularisation, one has to bring a sacrifice oneself, without the help of somebody who performs the act on your behalf. According to René Girard, in line with the Greek drama, a sacrifice can be understood as the internal aggression of a community directed at an innocent victim. A priest was symbolically inflicting human violence of many against one to re-establish order and peace within the community, thus presenting and legitimizing sacrifice as a divine necessity in religion. However, in a post-modern world re-establishing a community's relationship with the divine by killing or removing a scapegoat is problematic. Sacrificial violence commonly involves the unwilling participation of the victim and a sovereign Other, who, behaving in an authoritarian manner, forces people to comply. Victims have to be duped or brainwashed to accept their place in the ritual.

Here, the difference between Voldemort forcing his servant Pettigrew to donate his hand and Dumbledore refraining from demanding Harry to sacrifice his life, is illustrative. A sacrifice out of love will not demand anything in return. The renunciation of a reward, in the form of gratitude, other's approval and admiration, is part of the sacrifice. Besides, an authority asking someone to give up his or her life for a greater goal or moral principle, places an unacceptable claim on that person. In the case of the under-age Harry, that

would mean psychic violence.²⁰ Harry can only surrender himself by free choice, that is as a moral agent. The term *agent*, however, does not accord with Harry's actions, which may look like obedience, but are nevertheless done freely. Harry is free to follow the ethical principles of his own reasoning. The term autonomy, however, fails to take into account the community, while in Harry's case the values of the Hogwarts community are crucial for his decision to surrender himself. The external values imposed on Harry by Dumbledore and internalized by Harry during his youth at Hogwarts, play a decisive role. A community can have a huge impact on shaping understandings and enactments of individual morality. Therefore, Bucar introduces the term *dianomy*, which recognizes that both the individual and the community are important in moral decision-making.²¹ In relation to God, one needs to be *dianomous*, no matter how unequal the relationship is. Secularisation, therefore, is seen by Frits de Lange not only as a process of decreasing metaphysical religiosity, but as an increasing awareness of the sacrificial character of religion as well.²² Since the death of God, through a phase of nihilism and secularisation, a new idea is given to us in art, film and literature. It is the idea that responsibility lies with each and everyone.

3 Harry's Self-Sacrifice?

Sacrifice differs from self-sacrifice with regard to its goal. By means of sacrifice one tries to connect to the gods, to enter a sacred place. The secret of the sacrifice lies within the identification of becoming sacred. Self-sacrifice is an exception to this practice. By self-sacrifice the life of the sacrificer ends, and with it the need to sacrifice. Derrida points to this paradox of sacrifice, stating that religion both requires and excludes sacrifice.²³ One uses violence in the name of non-violence to avoid violating others. Even if the use of violence is

20 In this respect, Dumbledore is morally wrong forcing Snape to kill him, as the latter is well aware: "And my soul Dumbledore? Mine?" Rowling, *The Deathly Hallows*, 548. Cf. Wandinger, "Sacrifice in Harry Potter from a Girardian Perspective," 31.

21 Cf. Elizabeth M. Bucar, "Dianomy: Understanding Religious Women's Moral Agency as Creative Conformity," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 78 (2010): 662–686 (665).

22 Frits de Lange, "Kenotic Ethics," in *Letting go: Rethinking Kenosis* (ed. Onno Zijlstra; Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), 59.

23 Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," in *Religion* (eds Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 1–78 (52).

unavoidable, in religions it is unacceptable to subject other life to this kind of violence. Therefore, “absolute respect” requires self-sacrifice. The ambivalence of self-sacrifice, however, is that one must use violence against oneself in order not to subject others to violence. By self-sacrifice one extinguishes not only one’s life, but also the connection to the sacred. What motive is left for self-sacrifice?

3.1 *Egoistic and Altruistic Self-Sacrifice*

In his comment on Derrida, Dalferth, reflecting on a dialogue in Schiller’s *Theosophie des Julius*, introduces the difference between egoistic and altruistic self-sacrifice.²⁴ Schiller makes a distinction between egoistic self-sacrifice, which is carried out in hope of an eternal remuneration, and an altruistic self-sacrifice, which is carried out for the well-being of all others. In a discussion between Julius and his friend Raphael in Schiller’s text, the question arises how one can benefit from self-sacrifice. A possible answer may be found in immortality. But that would exclude the possibility of a truly altruistic self-sacrifice. Desire for immortality, and using self-sacrifice to reach this goal, would destroy the pure orientation on the other. Consequently, Dalferth states that “the decisive difference is not between sacrifice and self-sacrifice, but between *egoistic and altruistic self-sacrifice*, on the one hand, and between *an act of violence and an act of love* on the other”.²⁵ In his view, love is greater than both. Love overcomes both sacrifice and self-sacrifice by refraining from violence even at the cost of losing one’s life. Therefore, loss of life out of love is not an intentional gift for others, whether given out of selfish or unselfish motives. Harry accepts the consequences of his love without awareness of the outcome. He “loves the others to death”.

3.2 *Harry’s Voluntary Self-Sacrifice*

As we have seen, Harry Potter is not aiming at immortality. Consequently, his self-sacrifice must be an altruistic self-sacrifice, voluntary undertaken. For Harry’s sacrifice to be a self-sacrifice he has to be a grown-up for the sacrifice to be a free choice and to have its full meaning. Like Abraham in Genesis 22, Harry is tested in the school-contest in volume four. What is being tested? Not

24 Fr. Schiller, “Philosophisch-Ästhetische Schriften, Theosophie des Julius,” in *Sämtliche Werke* 5 (1975): 344–358. Cited in I. U. Dalferth, “Self-sacrifice: from the act of violence to the violence of love,” *International journal for philosophy of religion* 68 (2010), 77–94.

25 Dalferth, “Self-sacrifice,” 80.

his witchcraft. His loyalty to the community is tested.²⁶ In the contest Harry appears to be willing to share information with his opponents, helping them, warning others and saving others from drowning. Here Harry learns to make choices of his own. By not fulfilling his destiny to win the contest and consequently become popular, but by refusing to fight the others, Harry will save lives and gain in the end.

Basically, he discovers: Destiny is not fate, identity is not destiny. One's autonomous choices make the difference between good and evil. In his interpretation of the Koran's Sura 37:100–110, (see the essay: *Sacrifice and Islamic identity* further on), Abdelilah Ljamai states that it is essential that the son volunteers for the sacrifice. So the true sacrifice is self-sacrifice. It is only by giving up his life, that one could keep it. The same goes for Harry. In contrast to the sacrifice of Isaac/Ismael there is no substitute. Like Jesus in the New Testament, Harry dies and after a kind of afterlife scene, in which he meets Dumbledore again, he is 'risen'. Nevertheless, Harry, like Jesus, is in great despair at the time of his self-sacrifice. The former unquestioned trust has vanished after Dumbledore died – as if God remains silent. Doubt is fundamental. Harry wonders whether Dumbledore had ever cared about him.

Look what he asked from me, Hermione! Risk your life, Harry! And again!
And again! And don't expect me to explain everything, just trust me

26 In this article, Dalferth states that Abraham, placed into the dilemma whether obeying a God, whose behavior contradicts itself, remains silent. As God has become incomprehensible and inaccessible as a dialogue partner, the conflict cannot be solved by reasoning. Therefore, Abraham is putting God to the test. He challenges God to be either reliable or to take leave of his people and cease to be their God. Ibid, 86 and 87, see also note 24. Cf. *The Silence of God*, in which the authors also interpret Abraham's silence as Abraham testing God's trustworthiness. Marjo Korpel and Johannes de Moor, *The Silence of God* (Leiden: Brill Academic Pub, 2011), 39. Cf. Adele Wiseman, *The Sacrifice*, (Toronto: McClelland, 1956, 2001). In this Canadian novel the main character Abraham interprets the moment when the biblical Abraham lifts his knife to slay Isaac, as follows: "In that moment lay the future of our people, and even more than that. In that moment lay the secrets of life and death, in that closed circle with just the three of them, with Abraham offering the whole of the past and the future, and Isaac lying very still, so as not to spoil the sacrifice (. . .). And God himself is bound at that moment, for it is the point of mutual surrender, the one thing He cannot resist, a faith so absolute (. . .). That was the moment that even God could not resist, and so He gave us the future." (199). This novel suggests that God responds to absolute faith by keeping his promise.

blindly, trust that I know what I'm doing, trust me even though I don't trust you! Never the whole truth! Never!²⁷

Self-sacrifice is not easily made, but accompanied by despair and doubt. Shall I be loved? Can this fundamental doubt be avoided?

As Marcel Poorthuis stresses in his article on Gertrud von le Fort further on, "a sacrifice brought willingly and without hesitation runs the risk of being no sacrifice at all". Had Harry been certain of the outcome, known that his death would bring victory, his sacrifice would not truly have been a sacrifice.

We run into a paradox here. In the Potter story, self-sacrifice is a free and conscious decision, made by a responsible, autonomous individual. If the one being sacrificed has full knowledge and trust, there is no need to sacrifice in the first place. Then, what motivates the doubting, unaware and disappointed Harry to continue at the end?

3.3 *Harry's Sacrifice Forming the School-Identity*

So far, we have seen that Harry's sacrifice is not demanded by an authority, not the outcome of calculation, nor motivated by fear or duty or even love as a higher principle. It is a voluntary self-sacrifice out of love for the community and supported by that community. Therefore, Harry needs to come to terms with his beloved ones, even when they are dead, despite his anger and disappointment. Before he can surrender himself to Voldemort, Harry has had to confront and forgive Dumbledore's faults and selfishness. For his self-sacrifice it is vital that Harry understands and accepts his fallibility, and by extension his own. The underlying question Rowling raises, is whether Harry can pity Voldemort who wants to kill him in the end.

Here the role of witnesses arises: The self-sacrifice out of love must to some extent be deliberately and publicly undertaken. Harry cannot do this alone. He needs and gets all the moral and practical support at Hogwarts, because the community is in essence the source, as well as the aim, of his love. Rowling's story shows the importance of the role of the public and the importance of the sacrifice being a ceremony. At the final moment, when he is about to lose control, which is a necessary part of any sacrifice, the Resurrection Stone opens. Walking through the Forbidden Forest, about to surrender himself, Harry is accompanied by the spirits of his beloved ones: His parents and his godfather Sirius and the mentor Lupin, all representing the community, its members

²⁷ Rowling, *The Deathly Hallows*, 295. The resemblance to the desperation of Jesus Christ in Gethsemane is striking. Cf. Wandinger, "Sacrifice in Harry Potter from a Girardian Perspective," 47.

willing to fight next to him. His father assures Harry they will stay with him “until the very end”.²⁸ Rowling presents Harry’s sacrifice as an answer to the love he received, as an antidote to the selfish love of Voldemort, who only loves himself at the expense of his family and the Hogwarts community.

4 Harry’s Life Being Given

Seen in this light, Harry’s sacrifice is an answer to the sacrifices made by his mother, his stepfather Sirius, his teacher Snape and his mentor Lupin. Harry undertakes his sacrifice as a willed and intentional act. He can do so because he is grown up. The sacrifice transforms him and finally allows him to become a subject. Still, Harry’s sacrifice is not to be reconstructed as an experience ‘of’ the subject. Without defending himself, Harry exposes himself to Voldemort, who does not hesitate to cast the Death Curse. Because of Harry’s blood in Voldemort, however, it turns out the latter’s death curse cannot be effective. The next moment Harry finds himself in a kind of after-life scene on a heavenly railway station: King’s Cross. Here Harry meets Dumbledore, who repents and explains his motives to Harry. Then Harry wonders whether he still has a choice, which Dumbledore confirms. Harry can either take a train, or return to finish the job.

4.1 *The Voluntary Offer Refused*

Harry returns. From this moment on the outcome is no surprise. In the big entrance hall of the school, Harry’s final victory, for all to see, will take place. Voldemort is trying to demoralize the school population: “Harry Potter is dead! Do you understand now, deluded ones? He was nothing, ever, but a boy who relied on others to sacrifice themselves for him!”.²⁹ It is of note that Voldemort accuses Harry of what he himself has done all his life.³⁰ However, the community reacts furiously. In contrast to the book, the film shows us a very biblical reaction at this point. Neville Longbottom steps forward to oppose Voldemort. “Harry is dead”, he shouts for everyone to hear, “so many have died in this battle, but they now live in here [points], in our hearts. We will go on”. The following final Battle of Hogwarts is rich with examples of smaller and greater sacrifices, which motivate Harry to confront Voldemort. When Voldemort casts the

28 Rowling, *The Deathly Hallows*, 561.

29 Rowling, *The Deathly Hallows*, 36; 585.

30 Cf. Wandinger, “Sacrifice in Harry Potter,” 57.

killing curse on Harry, the Elder Wand knows its true master and it re-bounds the curse on Voldemort, who now is unprotected by Horcruxes.

Voluntary substitution occurs in contexts of a generous offer by someone to take the place of someone under threat. Biblical examples are Judah, who offers himself for this youngest brother, Benjamin (Gen. 44, 33). Moses, as intercessor on behalf of his sinful nation, is willing to have his name excised from God's book if God will accept him as a substitute for the nation (Ex. 32, 30–32) and Paul expresses a similar wish (Rom. 9,3). However, these sacrifices are not accepted. Neither is Harry's. Therefore, these sacrifices out of unrestricted love are no sacrifices at all. In the end, these 'prophets' give nothing; on the contrary, they receive life. As Girard and Bataille state in reaction to Nietzsche, sacrifices relate humanity to the Divine. Sacrificing demands repetition in a ritual. Perhaps it is not a coincidence we see sacrificing elements in successful books and films of the last two decades, like *The Matrix*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Narnia Chronicles*. In the Potter series, Rowling shows a community surviving through sacrifices made by their moral leaders. In contrast to the 'old' concept of sacrifice, no violence is committed against the victims to force them. On the contrary: Harry happens to re-establish the Hogwarts society by withdrawing from action, in relinquishing revenge, in laying down his life without defending it. His rescue is a gift. It breaks with the calculation of the *ut des* principle.³¹ In the very act of laying down his life, Harry remarkably receives his life at the same moment. In a religious perspective and compared to the sacrifice of Jesus: One could state that God gives, and his gift transcends that of the sacrificer. Likewise, God had given the ram in the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, He gives Himself in the sacrifice as a *sacrifié*. So, when Genesis 22 is compared with the Harry Potter story, we see that in a post-religious context:

- Sacrifices are needed to restore relationships between a community and its tradition, the tradition in Harry's case being a wizard world;
- one has to bring a sacrifice oneself, since a God is lacking and consequently no substitution is available;
- one can only sacrifice oneself voluntarily;
- one cannot sacrifice oneself without help from a community.

4.2 *Final Remarks*

Compared to Dalferth's concept of self-sacrifice out of love, Harry's self-sacrifice has one unique feature: Harry does not die, or, if you wish, he receives

³¹ This is the principle that you give a sacrifice to the gods, to receive prosperity, good health and a long life in return.

his life back. During the series, Harry never kills; Voldemort is killed by his own rebounding curse. In this respect, Harry's self-sacrifice differs from the suicide of e.g. bombing terrorists. Both could be altruistic sacrifices, motivated by religious ends and love. However, the love of a self-sacrificing terrorist is limited to a certain group and damaging another group. In contrast, Harry's love is extended to all others, even to Voldemort. By choosing not to defend himself, Harry submits himself to death. However, his surrender is not a death wish. His intention is to carry out a life-bringing mission. What is sacrificial about Harry's death is not his willingness to die, but his determined commitment to let others live. He voluntarily relinquishes his life in accepting his destiny as an *amor fati* (Nietzsche). His offer does not cause killing, not even of himself. The giving rather than taking of life forms a fundamental reorientation. It is remarkable that the context of Harry's self-sacrifice is a secular one, although Rowling has modelled Harry Potter after the example of Jesus.

4.3 *The End*

In line with the others volumes, *Deathly Hallows* ends with a Great Banquet. Unlike other volumes, however, in this communion there is no distinction between the houses, symbolizing the re-unification of the Hogwarts community: "Nobody was sitting according to house any more: All were jumbled together, teachers and pupils, ghosts and parents, centaurs and house-elves".³² Selfish love (Voldemort) victimizes others, while self-giving love (Harry) eliminates boundaries.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say Harry's sacrifice is modern, after the "death of God" (Nietzsche). Analogous with the descriptions of the son of Abraham in the Jewish comments and Ismael in the Qur'an, Harry voluntarily relinquishes his life. He has to be an adult to be able to choose. Up to the very end, to the moment of sacrifice and of surrendering himself, Harry never loses *dianomy*. As in the religious stories, in the Harry Potter series love does not 'require' a sacrifice. De facto it ends up to be a self-offering out of love. While Isaac can be seen as pre-figuring Christ, Harry can be looked upon as post-figuring Christ. In line with the sacrifice of Jesus, Harry's sacrifice brings life, not death. In this sense, his sacrifice can be seen as a religious sacrifice performed in a modern, secular context, although on a narrative level.

³² Rowling, *The Deathly Hallows*, 596.

This article shows that Harry voluntarily relinquishes his life, without fighting the enemy, whose history and position is very similar to Harry's. Their choices make all the difference. While sacrificial violence commonly involves the unwilling participation of the victim, Harry is not being sacrificed, but sacrifices his life willingly and without violence. Help from his beloved ones, and above all, pity for Voldemort, enable Harry to save both his world and his life, which he receives back as a gift. This gift seems to lead to a surplus rather than a loss. As Levinas has stated, self-sacrifice is one's being sacrificed rather than sacrificing oneself.³³ In line with this passive attitude, in which a sacrifice is 'imposed' on a subject, who is unable to dissociate himself or herself from the vulnerability and suffering of another, one could argue Harry is sacrificed. In this sense, Harry's sacrifice is an answer to his mother's sacrifice.³⁴ Usually, the idea of love as self-sacrifice suggests self-diminishment or even self-destruction. Applied to Harry Potter's sacrifice the idea of love as *gift* is more appropriate, which suggests that the self receives in giving itself. While giving himself, Harry is receiving a gift of selfhood. His sacrifice has to be rephrased as "self-giving", in the sense of "gift of self", for his giving away turns into gain. (Self)sacrifice in this sense does not require a victim, not even Harry having victimized himself. So, in a strict sense, 'self-sacrifice' in this context is a contradiction in terms.

33 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (*Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, tr. by Alphonso Lingis; Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 50.

34 It is of note that Levinas speaks of self-sacrifice in relation to maternity. The responsibility for the other is depicted as a kind of maternity, for one suffers like a mother who gives her life-blood for her child in "the complete being 'for the other' which characterizes it". Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 108. Cf. Welz, "Love as Gift and Self-Sacrifice," 245.

Sacrificial Scripts, Blood Values and Gender in the Twilight Vampire Narrative

Grietje Dresen

1 Introduction

I'd never given much thought to how I would die. But dying in the place of someone I love seems like a good way to go.

These sentences, pronounced by protagonist Bella Swan in the overture to the first Twilight film, are a forecast of things to come. Above all, they forecast the role Bella is going to play throughout the Twilight Saga, willingly sacrificing (or at least risking) her life for the ones she loves: For her mother, her beloved vampire fiancé Edward, and her unborn, half-vampire child. The sentences in the overture echo the Preface in the first Twilight novel, where the same thoughts are expressed in the context of a mysterious scene in which the 'T'-figure (appearing to be Bella) is being threatened by a 'hunter'. In the prologue to the film, this impression of being hunted is symbolized by the accompanying imagery, showing a defenceless deer chased through a dark wood.

In this chapter, I intend to analyse the sacrificial scripts that underlie the storyline in the Twilight Saga, an immensely popular vampire narrative devoured by millions of mainly female adolescents all over the world. From the moment I saw the first Twilight screenplay together with my daughter, I was struck by Bella's unhesitating willingness to sacrifice her life, announced (in Bella's voice) in the prologue. Of course my view is affected by the fact that I am a scholar of religion, and a gender scholar too. From that perspective, the gender scripts in the Twilight book series and film versions seem astonishingly conventional at first sight. Bella is presented as an average, rather clumsy high school student, alternately submissive and self-conscious to her male counterparts, and eager to sacrifice herself at crucial moments in the series. By contrast, the main male characters are depicted as supermen, strong, fast and brave (in fact superhuman), and utterly in control. Nevertheless, millions of teen-aged girls throughout the world adore the story and its characters.

Is their adoration to be explained as a longing to return to traditional gender roles, as a correction to both outdated feminism and post-feminism? Does the Saga appeal to an everlasting desire in (young) women to be safeguarded by a hero against the evils that come with adulthood? Many feminist reviewers

criticized the romantic idealization of Bella's awkwardness in *Twilight*, namely her constant need of male protection – protection from her own sexual desires, to begin with. Still, we should assume the countless fans to be modern, emancipated young adults, not victims of false consciousness. So, what is it that fascinates them?

2 The Twilight Phenomenon

Before I continue outlining my questions, let me briefly introduce the Twilight phenomenon. Speaking of 'Twilight' in general, I refer to the four-book series, the screen adaptations, and an online partial draft (see below). The first volume and film were also called *Twilight*. I refer to this first volume in italics. *Twilight* was published in 2005.¹ Three volumes followed quickly, *New Moon* (2006), *Eclipse* (2007) and *Breaking Dawn* (2008).² On her website, the Twilight creator, Stephenie Meyer, published what she called "my original character development exercise, Edward's version of Bella's [story]"³ – Twilight is written from Bella's perspective.⁴ This version in Edward's voice, picturing his harsh inner conflicts and ordeal, is titled *Midnight Sun*.

Up to now,⁵ four Twilight screen adaptations have been released, in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011 respectively. These films added a lot to the world-wide hype; the actors cast for the main characters⁶ are worshipped as if they were the godlike creatures they play. The last novel is filmed in two parts; part II of this *Breaking Dawn* adaptations will be released on November 16, 2012.

The plot of the Twilight vampire narrative is basically romantic: A common high school student, Bella Swan, falls in love with a gorgeous fellow student, who appears to be a vampire, and a 'good' vampire too. He and his family (all

1 I refer to the British Atom paperback editions. *Twilight* was first published in the U.S. by Little, Brown. In, *Twilight* (ed. S. Meyer; London: Atom, 2007), the page numbers differ slightly from the original Little, Brown edition. In the other volumes I quote, page numbers do not differ from the original editions.

2 Stephenie Meyer, *New Moon* (London: Atom, 2006; 2007); Stephenie Meyer, *Eclipse* (London: Atom, 2007; 2008); Stephenie Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* (London: Atom, 2008).

3 See www.stepheniemeyer.com, *Midnight Sun*, Partial Draft 4 (2008) and Meyer's comments. She published this draft (retelling the first half of *Twilight*) in response to illegal distribution.

4 The Epilogue in *Eclipse* and the middle part in *Breaking Dawn* are written from the perspective of Bella's werewolf friend Jacob.

5 November 2011.

6 Kristen Stewart (Bella Swan), Robert Pattinson (Edward Cullen) and Taylor Lautner (Jacob Black). The Twilight franchise successfully exploits their immense popularity.

bitten to vampire-existence by the compassionate ‘father’, Dr Cullen, because they were dying of some other cause) are self-declared ‘vegetarians’ who do not consume human blood. They live on a diet of animal blood, gathered during periodic hunts, although this blood tastes to them like “tofu and soy milk” to humans.⁷ Abstaining from human blood is a never-ending ordeal they suffer deliberately, because they don’t want to be ‘monsters’. Their rigorous moral choice sets them apart from their kind by creating unique reciprocal ‘blood’ relations, unknown amongst cold ones, namely bonds of *love*. The Cullen family is a living (or rather, undead) example of how a family should be, headed by a father, described by Edward as “a leader who deserved following”, a mother who “made that following into an act of love”, and linked together by everlasting ties of love and mutual care.⁸

Bella and Edward meet after Bella has moved from sunny Phoenix, where she lived with her mother, to her father living in misty Forks in the northwest of Washington State. Edward and his vampire brothers and sisters attend high school in Forks. Bella immediately attracts Edward’s attention because he cannot read her mind, as he can with all other humans and vampires. Bella appears to have another attractive, but alarming quality: The scent of her skin, her blood drives Edward mad with bloodlust. Nevertheless they fall in love, and this causes many problems, especially for Edward; how to hide his vampire state, and above all, how to control his burning bloodlust? As the plot of *Twilight* unfolds, the first problem is solved by Bella’s attentiveness. The latter problem, though, underpins the *Twilight* scenario till at least the end of the second volume. The solution to all Edward’s external problems and inner conflicts would be to transform Bella into a vampire, and this is what she herself desperately wants, from the moment she is aware of Edward’s condition. Edward considers it to be selfish to transform Bella, however, since he knows the consequences – excruciating, unendurable inner burning during the transformation process, and endless existence “without soul”, as a ‘monster’. He refuses to transform her, up to the moment Bella is dying in childbirth, in the last volume. By becoming a vampire, Bella changes from the clumsy girl she was into a creature she senses to be her true self, her true nature. She becomes an undead supergirl, “a carving of a goddess”,⁹ outdoing her new family as to

7 Meyer, *Twilight*, 164.

8 Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 78. Cf. Carrie A. Platt, “Cullen Family Values: Gender and Sexual Politics in the *Twilight* Series,” in *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, & the Vampire Franchise* (eds M. A. Click, J. Stevens Aubrey, and E. Behm-Morawitz; New York (etc.): Peter Lang, 2010), 71–86.

9 Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 403.

self-control. Her characteristic unselfishness, though, she takes with her into immortality.

3 Sacrificial Scripts, Blood Values and the Twilight Attraction

Engaging with the main questions in this book, I focus on the sacrificial scripts in the Twilight Saga.¹⁰ As I noted – and I am not the only critic to do so – the scripts in this atypical vampire narrative are highly gendered. In the following sections, I will display the features of these gender dynamics within the staging of (self-)sacrifice in Twilight. I will subsequently clarify what I mean by “blood values”, a notion I make use of in another sense than the usual one, applied in medical blood test results. I will use the term in line with Julia Kristeva’s psycho-semiotic analysis of the dynamics of ‘abjection’ in horror,¹¹ Nancy Jay’s anthropological studies on the function of blood sacrifice as “birth done better”,¹² and religious studies analyses of the ambivalent, gendered valuation of blood in ritual contexts.¹³

3.1 *Self-Sacrifice: Bella’s Part*

All feminist critics point to the worrying glorification of Bella’s selfless character in the Twilight narrative. This selflessness (also noticed by Edward, and fiercely admired by him¹⁴) shows in several ways. First of all, there is Bella’s readiness to sacrifice her life for the sake of those she loves. Her resolute but jeopardizing bravery determines the plot in all four volumes. The two male protagonists are brave too, of course; but Bella’s bravery is defined within a

10 Meyer herself pointed out that sacrifice is a main topic in Twilight: “Unconsciously I put a lot of my beliefs into the story. Free agency is a big theme, as is sacrifice” (quoted in A. J. Grant, “Focus on the Family: Good and Evil Vampires in the *Twilight* Saga,” in *Vader, Voldemort and other Villains: Essays on Evil in popular Media* (ed. J. Heit; Jefferson N. C.: McFarland, 2011), 64–79 (67). Meyer is an active member of the Mormon Church.

11 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

12 Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion and Paternity* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

13 See e.g. K. de Troyer, J. A. Herbert, J. A. Johnson, and A.-M. Korte, eds, *Wholly Woman, Holy Blood: A Feminist Critique of Purity and Impurity* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003) and bibliography therein.

14 Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 92–93.

format of female martyrdom, defenceless but unyielding, and thus powerful.¹⁵ Aside from this outspoken disposition to actually and vicariously sacrifice herself, there is the day-to-day unselfishness that Edward considers to be Bella's ultimate attraction, but feminist critics deplore above all. To quote just one of them, namely Bonnie Mann, stating in an article in which she confronts Bella's character with Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*:

What is disheartening about Meyer's book is her reinstatement of this old promise: Assume your status as prey, as object, and you will gain your freedom as subject (...). Bella (...) is literally torn to shreds by the needs and desires of others. (...) But how does one open the door of the feminine imagination for young women so that they might trace paths to themselves that don't pass through traditional feminine annihilation? (...) [I]n her insistence on resurrecting the promise that a meaningful life comes *through* self-annihilation in the interests of others, [Meyer] promises our daughters the same things our mothers were promised. In that sense, the wild success of *Twilight* might be cause for despair.¹⁶

This concern can be heard throughout most gender-critical reviews of the series. Against this emphasis on Bella's selflessness, though, should also be pointed to her confidence and self-protection, which are present from the first pages of *Twilight* onwards in the form of the fictional 'shield' that protects her consciousness, not only from Edward, but from other vampire intruders too (as becomes apparent later on in the series). Missing this aspect in Bella's character results in missing her most powerful gift, the one that will bring the final battle to a close. I come back to Bella's fictional "mind shield" later.

3.2 *Self-Sacrifice: Edward's Part*

Self-sacrifice is not an all-female part in the *Twilight* drama, though. All along the series is being emphasized and repeated that the Cullen's 'vegetarian' lifestyle is a life of "sacrifice and denial". In the most penetrating way this denial and its torments are depicted in Edward's report of his first encounter with Bella when she unavoidably has to sit next to him in the biology classroom:

15 Cf. L. Stephanie Cobb, *Dying to be men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

16 Bonnie Mann, "Vampire Love: The Second Sex negotiates the Twenty-First Century," in *Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, vegetarians and the Pursuit of Immortality* (eds R. Housel and J. J. Wisniewski; Hoboken, N. J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 131–145 (143–144).

Her scent hit me like [a] wrecking ball, like a battering ram. There was no image violent enough to encapsulate the force of what happened to me in that moment. In that instant, I was nothing close to the human I'd once been; no trace of the shreds of humanity I'd managed to cloak myself in remained. I was a predator. She was my prey. There was nothing else in the whole world but that truth. (...) Thirst burned through my throat like fire. My mouth was baked and desiccated. The fresh flow of venom did nothing to dispel that sensation. (...) The face of the monster in me – the face I'd beaten back with decades of effort and uncompromising discipline.¹⁷

The description of this inner torture continues for pages and pages, not least to highlight the ultimate control Edward finally manages to find, for a moment. Being near to Bella continues to be a temptation, but once he comes to love her, he accepts his being tempted as the price he must pay:

I burnt. The burning was acceptable, though. (...) [H]ere she was, still willingly at my side. I owed something in return for that. A sacrifice. A burnt offering.¹⁸

Throughout the series there is no doubt left as to the extreme self-control Edward needs to be close to Bella, let alone to touch her, or kiss her, or (decently married) make love to her.

The attraction of the series for teenage girls has been explained by pointing to this Jane Austen-like, restrained sexuality, termed as an “erotics of abstinence”,¹⁹ and regarded as a relief in a culture obsessed with sex. Several critics asserted that the way Edward manages to control his impulses (in order not to kill Bella, but also because he is old school, being born in 1901) makes room for Bella's own dreams and desires. Within this room for Bella's palpitating desires, described in length to the readers, *Twilight's* adorers may well enjoy theirs, without being hindered by reality.²⁰

17 Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 9–10.

18 Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 194.

19 Marc E. Shaw, “For the Strength of Bella? Meyer, Vampires, and Mormonism,” in *Twilight and Philosophy* (eds R. Housel et al.), 227–236 (233). He borrows the term ‘erotics of abstinence’ from Lev Grossman (*Time*, April 24, 2008: “Stephenie Meyer, A New J. K. Rowling?”).

20 So Joyce A. Mercer, “Vampires, Desire, Girls and God: *Twilight* and the Spiritualities of Adolescent Girls,” *Pastoral Psychology* 60 (2011): 263–278 (272; 276).

Occasionally Edward's self-discipline is tested to the absolute limit. This is the case, for example, at the end of *Twilight*, when he has to suck the venom of an evil vampire out of Bella's hand (venom of the 'hunter' from the Preface, who lured Bella by falsely suggesting he had got hold of her mother and trapped her with the intention of killing and draining her). Faced with this ordeal, Edward hesitates, his face "twisted into a mask of indecision and pain".²¹ He fears that he will not be able to stop sucking Bella's alluring blood, yet, encouraged by his father who is giving medical care to Bella, "the doubt was suddenly replaced with a blazing determination".²² Actually Bella regrets his awesome self-control; she had rather had the venom spread, so she could have become his equal. For Edward, however, loving Bella means he cannot possibly let that happen. The asceticism of the Cullens might make them less monstrous, but that does not mean vampire existence should be thought of as good, he keeps stating. "We [the Cullen family] would trade anything to be human".²³

The sacrificial scenarios in the Cullen's "life of sacrifice",²⁴ and particularly in Edward's blazing determination, differ from the 'feminine', selfless, defenceless-but-uncompromising martyrdom that characterizes those of Bella.²⁵ One could say that Edward's self-sacrificial love for Bella in a way suffers from *too much* self, too much determination, too much "mind over matter",²⁶ in short, too much control. This control is not only exerted on his own vampire urges, but is directed at Bella too, in the name of her alleged "devastating vulnerability".²⁷

Occasionally, Bella protests against this constant control, but her protest is far from adequate, according to most critics of the series. Several critics even stress that Edward's protective, intrusive kind of love is just the kind against which young women should be warned.²⁸

21 Meyer, *Twilight*, 397.

22 Meyer, *Twilight*, 397.

23 Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 363.

24 Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 718.

25 Bella "wasn't [even] the average martyr – she didn't want an audience to her pain." Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 44.

26 Title of chapter 14 in *Twilight* (cf. 262; 263).

27 Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 212 ("Silk over glass . . . frighteningly breakable").

28 Edward's criticized dominance shows in such sentences as, "What Bella wanted and what was best for Bella, were two very separate things." Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 219. Cf. Rebecca Housel, "The 'Real' Danger: Fact vs. Fiction for the Girl Audience," in *Twilight and Philosophy* (eds R. Housel et al.), 177–190: "In any world other than the fantastical one created by Meyer, Edward would be jailed" (188).

3.3 *Self-Sacrifice: Christian Subtext*

Both Bella's willingness to vicariously sacrifice herself and Edward's love-inspired but self-punitive, ascetic determination display a Christian subtext. These (here gendered, but related) self-sacrificial scenarios owe their format to a Christian tradition in which both the expiatory and the unifying aspects of sacrifice, traditionally performed by offering sacrificial objects to the gods, have been reformed on the model of Christ's sacrifice, that is, on the model of Christ offering *himself* vicariously for atonement. In the Christian tradition this format of self-sacrifice resulted in an archetype of ideal moral conduct, based on the idea of the *imitatio Christi*.

For several decades now, gender-critical scholars in religion have been demonstrating how this seemingly gender-neutral model of ideal Christian conduct worked out to be gender specific from the early centuries onwards. The standards of female virtue and martyrdom did certainly have a lot in common with the ideal Christian virtues held out to men (in fact, philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche judge all Christian virtues to be 'feminine'), but in fact ideal female virtue has been disclosed to be more submissive and, above all, more chaste and 'immaculate' than men's.²⁹

These gendered differences regarding the actual practice of ideal, self-sacrificial moral conduct can also be noticed in *Twilight*. Edward admires above all his beloved's kindness: "Bella was *good*. (...) – kind and self-effacing and unselfish and loving and brave – she was good through and through".³⁰ His own morality, however, is not warm-hearted but tight-lipped, resulting from the willpower he and his family must use to overcome their bloodlust and which, in Edward's case, is being tested to the extreme because of Bella's hyper-attractive blood.

Two other male characters in the *Twilight* narrative, however, display a less stringent kind of self-sacrificial morality: Edward's compassionate vampire father, Carlisle Cullen, and Bella's werewolf friend, Jacob Black. There is no room here to elaborate on the first character's 'super-compassion',³¹ but I want to spend a few words on the latter character. Jacob Black is portrayed as an adolescent of the Quileute tribe, a (genuine) Native American clan living

29 See Cobb, *Dying to be men*; Glenda McLeod, *Catalogs of Women from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1991); and bibliography in Grietje Dresen, *Is dit mijn lichaam? Visioenen van het volmaakte lichaam in katholieke moraal en mystiek* (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 1998).

30 Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 93.

31 Andrew Terjesen and Jenny Terjesen, "Carlisle: More Compassionate Than a Speeding Bullet?" in *Twilight and Philosophy* (eds R. Housel et al.), 49–60 (59).

in a reservation near Forks, Washington. In folklore, the Quileute are said to be descended from wolves. This folklore tale is assimilated into the Twilight depiction of (part of) them as a human-werewolf shape-shifting pack, changing shape as soon as they sense menace, especially vampire menace. Jacob's character develops into a rival to Edward for Bella's love. Although throughout the series Bella prefers Edward, Jacob proves to be a genuine, loyal friend by the way he supports and empowers Bella during the numerous complications that go with human-vampire love. Actually, a "Team Jacob" has formed within the worldwide Twilight fandom, uniting fans that prefer Jacob's soft looks and his 'yielding'³² kind of love to Edward's cold, 'white'³³ self-discipline. One could say that Jacob's caring love (not only for Bella but, in the last volume, for her half-vampire daughter too) is characterized by a more 'feminine' format of self-sacrifice, despite his werewolf appearances.

4 "Blood Values": On the Gendered Valuation of Sex-Specific Dealings with Blood

In recent decades, several gender-sensitive scholars of religion have highlighted the distinctive, gendered valuation of the way men and women have dealings with blood, especially in religious or ritualizing contexts. In these contexts, the intentional *shedding* of blood (not only in sacrifice but also, for instance, in defloration or blood-brother rituals, or in medical and military contexts) is associated with a hallowed, masculine connoted kind of power. The unintentional blood loss that is part of female fertility, however, is generally looked upon as impure. Both anthropological and psychoanalytical scholars have sought an explanation for the common abhorrence of female blood and, on the other hand, for the privileged position of men in blood ritual and other intentional bloodshed. Because a similar, gendered way of dealing with blood features prominently in Twilight, I will outline here the theses of two of these scholars, the French philosopher and psychoanalyst, Julia Kristeva, and the American scholar of religion, Nancy Jay.

32 Cf. Rebecca Housel, "The Tao of Jacob," in *Twilight and Philosophy* (eds R. Housel et al.), 237–246.

33 Cf. Natalie Wilson, "Civilized Vampires Versus Savage Werewolves: Race and Ethnicity in the Twilight Series" in *Bitten by Twilight* (eds Click et al.), 55–70.

4.1 *Julia Kristeva: Abjection and the Horror of Female Blood*

According to Julia Kristeva, the aversion to female blood loss might originate in the ambiguous reactions summoned by what she names the “maternal body”. Sensory experiences that reactivate the sense of fusion associated with the maternal body tend to evoke defence, because they pose a threat to self-consciousness and to the capacity to distinguish oneself as a separate and unique individual. As such, these sensations evoke ‘abjection’, which, according to Kristeva, is:

That state of uncertainty between subject and object that consciousness conceives as abject – state of uncertainty regarding the identity of the self and the other.³⁴

Blood, and especially the blood women lose unintentionally, functions as a “matter out of place”, as interpreted by Mary Douglas, that is, as a material marker of disorder and lack of control. “Matter out of place” may even symbolize the dangers threatening the boundaries of the social body, especially in times of social instability. Following on from Douglas’ hypotheses, Kristeva states:

Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: The ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death. Menstrual blood, on the contrary, stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference.³⁵

According to Kristeva, the horror provoked by female blood is thus related to the abjection evoked by sensations recalling the maternal body. However, we may assume that the taboos surrounding menstrual blood will also be mingled with awe at the mysterious generative power to which women’s “bleeding

34 Bibliographical sources and details on ‘abjection’ with respect to female blood in Grietje Dresen, “The Better Blood: On Sacrifice and the Churching of New Mothers in the Roman Catholic Tradition,” in *Wholly Woman, Holy Blood* (eds De Troyer et al.), 143–164 (158).

35 Kristeva, *Powers of horror*, 71.

without dying” testifies.³⁶ That at least is the hypothesis underlying the work of Nancy Jay.

4.2 Nancy Jay: *Blood Sacrifice as “Birth Done Better”*

Nancy Jay has been investigating the gendered features of blood sacrifice from the late 1970s until her untimely death in 1991. Her main study on the topic, *Throughout Your Generations Forever*, was published shortly after her death. Her initial interest in the subject started with the observation that in many societies blood both purifies and pollutes, and that this ambiguity seems to be linked to sex-specific dealings with blood. The voluntary and respected shedding of blood, generally reserved to men, is set against the involuntary blood loss of menstruation and childbirth, which was commonly considered unclean and disqualified women as sacrificial performers. Jay was struck by the way gender had been ignored in most of the anthropological literature on blood sacrificial cults, which is all the more astonishing as most of these cults were accompanied by strict gender-related rules.

After having investigated the function of blood sacrificial rituals within several patrilineal organized kinship structures, Jay concludes that it appears to be a strategy of patrilineal societies to outdo the procreative power of women by incorporating women’s mortal children into a spiritual and eternal community bound by the superior, intentional shedding of blood in sacrificial ritual: “The only action that is as serious as giving birth, which can act as a counterbalance to it, is killing”.³⁷ To interpret and summarize the gendered, both expiatory and communal, transcendental function of blood sacrifice, she introduces the oft-quoted description of blood sacrifice as “birth done better”.³⁸

Sacrificially constituted descent, incorporating women’s mortal children into an ‘eternal’ (enduring through generations) kin group, in which membership is recognized by participation in sacrificial ritual, not merely by birth, enables a patrilineal descent group to transcend mortality in the

36 Cf. Dresen, “The Better Blood” and other items in *Wholly Woman, Holy Blood* (eds De Troyer et al.).

37 Nancy Jay, “Sacrifice as Remedy for Having Been Born of Woman,” in *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality* (eds C. W. Atkinson et al.; Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 283–309.

38 Jay, “Sacrifice as Remedy for Having Been Born of Woman,” passim. Also passim in Jay, *Throughout Your Generations*.

same process in which it transcends birth. In this sense, sacrifice is doubly a remedy for having been born of woman.³⁹

Jay's interpretations regarding the mortality-transcending functions of blood sacrifice have often been modified or even criticized. She would have agreed to that, however, because she considered the concepts she used to be "lenses that will bring into focus analogous aspects of differing traditions", and compared the continuing process of interpretation with women's work, "never done but not consequently invalid".⁴⁰ I will make grateful use of her lenses in my analysis of the "blood values" in *Twilight*, focusing on the protagonists' gendered dealings with blood.

4.3 "It was a God Complex": Edward's Bloodlust as Control Over Life and Death

One of the first things that strikes Bella in the overall intriguing appearance of Edward is the colour of his eyes, changing from black to amber, and back. When she later learns he is a vampire, she hears the cause: Normal vampires, living on human blood, have fiery red eyes, but the Cullens' eyes change to a warm-golden amber when they have consumed their diet of animal blood. Little by little this amber discolours to black again, indicating they urgently need a fresh input of blood. The animal blood diet does not still their thirst for human blood, yet it makes that thirst bearable. Throughout the series, the golden colour of the Cullens' eyes is used to symbolize their unique vampire morality and bloodlust control; it serves as a marker, "a reflection of a mutual choice".⁴¹ No doubt is left, however, about the constant threat of their razor-sharp teeth and the venom behind. When Edward first meets Bella, in the biology classroom, this threat is articulated, in his voice, as being one of the two faces in his head:

One was mine, or rather had been: The red-eyed monster that had killed so many people (...). It was a god complex, I acknowledged that – deciding who deserved a death sentence. (...) The other face was Carlisle's. There was no resemblance between the two faces. They were bright day and blackest night.⁴²

39 Jay, *Throughout Your Generations*, 40.

40 Jay, *Throughout Your Generations*, 13; 23.

41 Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 13.

42 Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 12.

But there is no doubt left either about the face that ‘wins’: Carlisle’s face, with the soft golden eyes. The relationship between the protagonists changes from that of a ‘predator’ being attracted to his ‘prey’,⁴³ into a mutual crush between ‘lion’ and ‘lamb’. This still seems a threatening situation, but the thrill is willingly accepted from both sides.⁴⁴

The thrill of this gendered human-vampire crush is evoked again and again throughout the series, and highlighted in lengthy descriptions (or film sequences) of Edward’s lips lingering above Bella’s silky throat. Several critics pointed to the close connection between bloodlust, sexual desire and death in *Twilight*. Of course this connection characterizes all vampire stories (which, in their turn, borrow the associative causality between lust, sex and death from the Christian tradition), but in modern, atypical vampire narratives such as *Twilight* the principal undead figures are not the creepy, bloodsucking intruders any more. In *Twilight*, the vampire-classical, masculine-gendered association between bloody violence, sexual transgression and (im)mortality has been stretched to make room for civilized, literally shiny⁴⁵ creatures like the Cullens (while the antagonist vampires continue to be creeps, in varying degrees). Edward even manages not only to control his lust for Bella’s alluring blood but also to distinguish this lust from his being sexually attracted to her (“A new kind of desire was growing in me, working to override my self-control”)⁴⁶ and then to control this latter temptation too. The urge of his instincts makes him perceive Bella as utterly fragile, “silk over glass”:

You don’t realize how incredibly *breakable* you are. I can never, never afford to lose any kind of control when I’m with you.⁴⁷

However, after being married, old school Edward gives in to their sexual desires, and even succeeds in controlling his bloodlust through the passion of their first night (though leaving Bella covered with bruises).

43 Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 10.

44 Meyer, *Twilight*, 240: “And so the lion fell in love with the lamb’ . . . he murmured. I looked away, hiding my eyes as I thrilled to the word. ‘What a stupid lamb’, I sighed. ‘What a sick, masochistic lion.’” *Twilight* merchandising has gratefully exploited the first sentence quoted.

45 The *Twilight* vampires tolerate sunlight, but in the sun their marble like skin sparkles as if it were covered with diamonds.

46 Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 250.

47 Meyer, *Twilight*, 271 (emphasis in original).

Over against the classical vampire as a symbol of transgression, sacrificing innocent life on the altar of his lust, Edward's control over his bloodlust and his sexual lust symbolizes the high values that come with it. By his utter control, the sequence of lust, transgression and death (a sequence related to what Augustine termed original sin) is temporarily suspended. Edward may not have a soul, as he does not cease to emphasize, his continence is truly superhuman, or in fact heavenly, in the Augustinian sense.⁴⁸ When finally he does have to transform Bella because she is dying in childbirth, covered in blood, he does so in an extremely controlled performance, both clinical and sensual, by first injecting his venom into her heart with a silver syringe, then carefully biting her all over her body, sealing the wounds with his tongue to keep the venom inside. By this solemn, ritual-like enactment, the transformation that was postponed throughout the narrative, is executed. That is to say, it is started, for Bella will have to burn on her 'pyre'⁴⁹ for three days, suffering unbearable inner pain, before the transformational process from human into vampire will be finished and the creation of new substance completed – comparable to the transformational process by burnt offering in Vedic sacrifice. The values that come along with Edward's control of his bloodlust are most clearly depicted in the scene in which new born vampire Bella goes out for her first hunt with him. Bella makes a mess of herself, with animal blood all over her, but Edward manages to kill and drain a deer without spilling a drop of blood:

[N]ot a hair ruffled, not a spot on his white shirt. (...) I watched carefully to see how he was able to hunt so neatly.⁵⁰

So Bella's sacrificial executor is a godlike decider of life and death, a vegetarian ascetic inspired by humanist, not to say Christian, values, and a blinding white, neatly hunting bloodsucker (and a good lover, too!). His sacrificial power is closely connected to his planned shedding of blood, or refraining from doing so, in performances that display his superhuman control. As a result of this control, Bella can be incorporated into the loving, everlasting communion of the Cullens.

48 Cf. Michael Müller, *Die Lehre des Hl. Augustinus von der Paradiesesehe und ihre Auswirkung in der Sexualethik des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts bis Thomas von Aquin* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1954). Augustine's anthropology is central to the theology of Meyer's Mormon Church.

49 Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 389. The process of inner burning and the excruciating pain accompanying it is depicted from p. 375 onwards.

50 Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 424.

4.4 *Bella's Blood: Temptation, Danger and Distress*

The covers of the Twilight book series all have a simple, symbolic image in red and white against a black background. In the context of the respective imagery, the distinct red always refers to Bella's blood and its pivotal meaning in the narrative, particularly to her dangerous attraction for Edward and her fragility both human and feminine.⁵¹ In *Twilight* (and especially in Edward's version of the story, *Midnight Sun*), mention of Bella's blood always implies lust, and thus danger. There is notable progress as to the acuteness of that danger, though; the scent of her blood first hit Edward like a "wrecking ball", but later on he manages to "appreciate the bouquet", even though he will not drink the wine⁵² and calls it "exactly my brand of heroin".⁵³ Apart from the scent, it is the substance, "hot, wet and pulsing",⁵⁴ behind the rosininess of Bella's skin that continues to tantalize Edward. He is not the only vampire to notice her extraordinary attraction, however; most of the complications in the storyline evolve, one way or another, out of this fictional fact. The attraction of her blood for vampires is a given that goes beyond Bella's will. Within the narrative, it is associated with her utter fragility and vulnerability: In the first three volumes, being an attractive 'snack'⁵⁵ poses constant threats to her. Even during her visits to the well-controlled Cullens, a paper cut in her finger or a broken glass bowl are enough to cause general panic.

So the key connotations of Bella's blood in the Twilight Saga are temptation (from a vampire's perspective) and thrill, danger or distress, from the reader's or viewer's perspective, which is connected to Bella's view, as she is the main narrator. Sometimes it is Bella herself who mentions her own blood as a metaphor for desire running out of control. For example during the lovers' first, tentative touch:

My blood was racing, and I wished I could slow it, sensing that this must make everything so much more difficult – the thudding of my pulse in my veins.⁵⁶

51 On the cover of *Twilight*, a red apple evokes the symbolism of the Fall. On the *New Moon* cover, a withering white and red tulip (losing a feather-like red petal) represents ephemeral beauty and Bella's mourning. On the *Eclipse* cover, an almost torn red ribbon symbolises Bella trying to break away from her human life. On the final volume, a little red pawn, standing behind a tall white chess queen, represents the human shape Bella left behind.

52 Meyer, *Twilight*, 267.

53 Meyer, *Twilight*, 235.

54 Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 14.

55 Meyer, *Twilight*, 331.

56 Meyer, *Twilight*, 241.

At their first kiss, 'racing' even turns into 'boiling':

Edward hesitated to test himself (...), to make sure he was still in control of his need. And then his cold, marble lips pressed very softly against mine. What neither of us was prepared for was my response. Blood boiled under my skin, burned in my lips. (...) Immediately I felt him turn to unresponsive stone beneath my lips. (...) "Oops", I breathed. "That's an understatement." His eyes were wild, his jaw clenched in acute restraint, yet he didn't lapse from his perfect articulation. (...) "Wait for a moment, please." His voice was polite, controlled.⁵⁷

In contrast to Edward's control, Bella's racing and boiling blood emerges as a mark of wild, unruly desire.

As to Bella's own intentional dealing with blood, her character shows a striking development, going from fainting in class at the mere sight of a drop of blood in *Twilight*,⁵⁸ to deliberately cutting her arm in order to distract hostile vampires from killing Edward at the end of *Eclipse*, to drinking human blood (provided by Carlisle from his medical blood bank) to prevent her unborn half-vampire baby from draining her from within in *Breaking Dawn*. The final step in this sequence of Bella's dealing with blood is the aforementioned first hunt with Edward, during which she ruins her clothes with blood, but shows unprecedented self-control when they inadvertently stumble on human passers-by. Newborn vampires are known for not being able to resist human blood, but Bella just runs the other way to prevent herself from pouncing on them. This unseen newborn control also enables her to nurture her hybrid daughter, who combines a blood circulation with vampire features.

4.5 *Female Sexuality and Bella's Unintended and Intentional Dealings with Blood*

There is another semantic field (associated with that of temptation and danger) that is attached to the mention of Bella's blood. The passages referring to her racing and boiling blood also denote this field. It is the field of female sexuality, here presented in terms of its traditional Christian valuation as a threat to male rationality – and as such paralleling the references to Edward's ideal continence. Thanks to Edward's control, Bella can unleash her desires, which are being depicted at length throughout the series. In the final volume, these desires and their consumption 'materialize' in Bella's becoming pregnant with

⁵⁷ Meyer, *Twilight*, 247.

⁵⁸ In chapter 5: "Blood type".

a child that threatens to kill her, because of its rapid growth. The beginning of this pregnancy, which is also the starting point of her transformation, is marked by Bella noticing that her menstruation (the 'curse') has stopped.⁵⁹ The rapid growth of the foetus will eventually break her ribs and even her spine, forcing Edward to cut the baby out. The child is born in a fountain of blood, leaving Bella as a Christ taken from the cross, a "broken, bled out, mangled corpse".⁶⁰ After being bitten into vampire existence, however, all her fatal injuries vanish; all her human and female weaknesses are gone. Her vampire appearances make her look like "a carving of a goddess"; her new, 'bloodless' sovereignty is symbolized on the cover of *Breaking Dawn* by the white chess queen. As a vampire, Bella thus transcends the frailties, flaws and pains that come along with Eve's curse. Her sex appeal is obviously not reduced, though; but both lovers are finally equal in beauty, strength and erotic agency.

Summarizing the values that Bella's blood and her dealing with blood stand for, we must distinguish not just between the period before and that after her transformation, but in particular between the blood Bella involuntarily displays through her fragrance and alluring skin or loses because of her female fertility, and her more or less intentional dealing with blood. The blood loss that is women's part of the Fall (and that, within Bella's part in *Twilight*, is enlarged to the ridiculous) comes to an end with her transformation. Thereafter, she is as strong, closed, controlled and marble-white as her new vampire family. In sharp contrast to this new looks, her alluring blood and unintended blood loss during delivery (described in details through Jacob's eyes) evoke abjection, in the sense that Julia Kristeva has given to that term.

As for Bella's intentional dealing with blood, her change is gigantic. It could be summed up in her own words, as in the Preface of the third book, *Breaking Dawn*): "The panic changed to bloodlust".⁶¹ As such, her transformation reflects quite literally the dynamics of "rebounding violence" that the British scholar of ritual, Maurice Bloch, has described in his study on the function of blood sacrifice, *Prey into hunter*.⁶² In a similar dynamic of "prey into hunter",

59 Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 123.

60 Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 355.

61 Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 368.

62 Maurice Bloch, *Prey into hunter: The politics of religious experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Bloch uses the symbolism of prey and hunter to explain the symbolic violence enacted in sacrificial ritual. By this ritually re-enacted violence (named as 'rebounding violence'), the participants in sacrifice are transformed and their mortal transience is converted into being a participant in a transcendent entity. Clearly, this symbolism and Bloch's explanation resemble Jay's description of blood sacrifice as 'birth done better'. However, Bloch does not reflect upon the fact that the role of women in sacrifice

post-transformation Bella is included into the Cullens' communion of mortality-transcending vegetarian hunters.

5 Bella's Transformation, or: Becoming Who You Are

I return to the question in my introduction: What captivates the countless fans in this romantic vampire story that apparently represents such traditional values? There is no doubt that this fascination exists, first of all, in the "erotics of abstinence" that are expressed throughout the *Twilight* Saga. Nevertheless many critics have lamented the glorification of the female protagonist's dependent character. Why are the devotees (many of whom suffer from self-diagnosed "Obsessive *Twilight* Disorder")⁶³ not irritated by this dependency?

I suggest that the answer to this question must not only be sought in Edward's (and Jacob's) thrilling beauty, strength and composure, but also in characteristics of Bella with which fans can identify. Apart from the space for female (heterosexual) desire that is created through Edward's continence, an appealing feature of Bella's role appears to be her uniqueness, being chosen for eternity and, within this election, Edward's very serious recognition of her vulnerability and fragility. Critics may deplore this ascription, but I think they must have forgotten how it feels to be a teenager. Being an adolescent (and a female adolescent, in particular) in a culture in which beauty and decisive agency are being overrated can make you feel very insecure if you do not yet know your own qualities. Bella is such a teenager not yet knowing her qualities. She is just a plain, unselfish girl. A girl that is initially noticed by Edward because of her "mind shield" that prevents him from reading her thoughts. Despite that mind shield, he recognizes her uncertainty and 'vulnerability'. I suppose that this outward recognition of Bella's vulnerability is reassuring, especially for fans who sense themselves to be just as vulnerable. It makes Bella's election even more special. A godlike lover that notices and respects your vulnerability: What teenager would not want that?

is usually strictly limited (although he mentions this fact, e.g. on p. 69: "[W]omen who are not virgins, especially menstruating women, are excluded from many aspects of the cults.") Also he ignores the fact that in many cultures (e.g. in Christianity) women (here: as Eve's daughters) are held responsible for mortal transience. An obliviousness that Jay showed to be common in studies on blood sacrifice.

63 Steven D. Greydanus, "*Twilight* Appeal: The cult of Edward Cullen and vampire love in Stephenie Meyer's novels and the new film" (2008), on www.decentfilms.com/articles/twilight (visited October 29, 2011).

After her transformation, it is exactly her mind shield that proves to be Bella's 'gift'. Most of the vampires in *Twilight* have a special gift; Edward's gift is his mind-reading, for example. These gifts tend to be an enlargement of the most characteristic quality they had when they were still human. Despite Bella's apparent clumsiness as a human teenager, her mind shield appears to be interrelated with her capacity for self-control: "Then I realized what that might mean, if my 'superpower' was no more than exceptional self-control".⁶⁴

This capacity for self-control was being symbolized and fictionally 'materialized' in the shield enabling Bella to protect her mind against the invasive gift of Edward and other vampires. She takes this protective shield with her into eternity. As the Saga runs toward the final battle (a battle with the reigning vampires, the Volturi, who want to kill her hybrid child) it turns out that Bella can externalize her shield and wrap it around those she loves as a protective cloak. So the quality Bella was unaware of when a teenager was her unusual capacity to protect her own mind; and she can use this same, now literally extended, capacity after her transformation to protect those she loves from unwanted intrusion. Externalizing and stretching her shield requires a lot of her self-control, but once she succeeds she operates on the battleground as a Madonna of the protective cloak.⁶⁵ Or, indeed, as the cloaked chess queen on the final cover, being a symbol of idealized female power. Bella even succeeds in temporarily lifting her mind shield for Edward, which appears to be even harder than wrapping it around those she loves. She gives him a glimpse of her thoughts, lingering on their most exciting moments up till then:

I knew my shield better now. I understood the part that fought against separation from me, the automatic instinct to preserve self above all else. It still wasn't anywhere as easy as shielding other people along with myself. I felt the elastic recoil again as my shield fought to protect me. (...) I concentrated even harder, dredging up the specific memories I'd saved for this moment.⁶⁶

Many critics deplored the unrealistic romanticism of this vampire fantasy ("Unlike Bella, we don't have the option of awakening to an eternal life or

64 Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 466.

65 On Mary as a 'bloodless', yet empowering symbol of ideal female power (similar to Bella's post-transformation figure), see Cleo McNelly Kearns, *The Virgin Mary, Monotheism, and Sacrifice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

66 Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 752–753.

experiencing undying romance")⁶⁷ and saw this as an escape from our human condition. Fans, however, are well aware that *Twilight*'s characters are fictional, as is shown by their comments and narrative revisions on fan blogs.⁶⁸ Reading *Twilight* might indeed imply a temporary escape from reality, as reading fiction always does. Yet I trust that while enjoying this escape, fans do not appreciate Bella Swan as a model of second-sex compliance, but rather as an example of Nietzsche's "becoming who you are" or as a duckling proving to be a swan (as her name already indicates). Certainly, *Twilight* readers cannot become immortals themselves, but the good news is that they know this perfectly well.

Julia Kristeva aptly described adolescence as a "syndrome of ideality" (referring to processes of idealization as understood by Melanie Klein): "The adolescent believes that the Great Other exists and is pleasure itself."⁶⁹ *Twilight* undeniably reflects such Great Others. However, experiencing pleasure from fictional Great Others is less harmful than believing they really exist.

67 Jennifer L. McMahon, "Twilight of an Idol: Our Fatal Attraction to Vampires," in *Twilight and Philosophy* (eds Housel et al.), 193–208 (2006).

68 Cf. *Bitten by Twilight* (eds Click et al), Part II: "Biting into the Twilight Fandom," 137–222 (5 chapters).

69 Julia Kristeva, "Adolescence, a syndrome of ideality," in *Psychoanalytic Review* 94 (2007): 715–725 (719). Cf. Julia Kristeva, "The Adolescent Novel," in *Abjection, Melancholia, and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva* (eds J. Fletcher and A. Benjamin; London & New York: Routledge, 1990), 8–23.

Sacrificing Judith

Anne-Mareike Wetter

1 Introduction

“Judith . . . Isn’t she the one who cut off that general’s head?” is a common reaction when the name of this intriguing woman is mentioned. In order to save her hometown Bethulia, Jerusalem, and ultimately Israel as a whole from the threat of the advancing Assyrian army, the widow Judith enters the enemy camp, beguiles all the men present – including the captain, Holofernes – and eventually decapitates the latter as he lies on his bed, completely intoxicated. Back in Bethulia, she orders the Israelites to rout the stunned Assyrians and loot their camp. The final scene depicts Judith as the leader of a triumphal procession towards Jerusalem, where she and the people dedicate the spoils to God. Judith then returns to her former life as a chaste and pious widow.

So much for the plot of this apocryphal book, which is usually dated to the second half of the second century BCE. Although it is presented as ‘history’, the reader immediately notices the many anachronisms strewn throughout the text. These aberrations from ‘real’ history account for much of the book’s ironic quality. Moreover, they suggest that something other than historiography was the main concern of its author.

One feature that strikes even the casual reader, is the preoccupation with ritual in the book. Sacrificial acts seem to mark the key points of the narrative. Virtually every action of Judith or other Israelites is accompanied by ritual performance. In addition to the conventional rites she engages in, Judith repeatedly takes an action out of its original context and, through verbal or other means, assigns it an added ritual and religious significance. It is this process of ‘ritualization’, rather than the conventional sacrifices that gives religion in the Book of Judith its intriguing and versatile quality.

2 New Skins for Old Wine – Recent Advances in Sacrificial Theory

Until recently, scholars’ knowledge of ritual in general and of sacrifice in particular leaned heavily on a limited number of universal theories about these phenomena. All aimed at explaining ritual and sacrificial acts regardless of their particular geographical, religious, or social contexts. Unsurprisingly, over the past decades scrapes have appeared on the smooth surface of monolithic

theories of ritual and sacrifice. Their designers were criticized for wanting too much and too little at the same time – too much, because they presented their concepts as theoretical panacea for widely disparate phenomena, and too little, because their definitions of ritual and sacrifice proved too narrow to analyze anything that fell outside their immediate scope.¹ Eventually, new paradigms replaced those that had thus far determined most research in these areas: 1) universality was abandoned in favor of contextualization; 2) the assumed priority of myth over ritual made room for an interest in ritual on its own terms; 3) the notion of *ritualization* entered the discussion, bringing with it a new appreciation of the creative potential of ritual acts; and 4) definitions of sacrifice, which until that time had been rather static and had almost always included violence of some kind, made room for new, polythetic approaches to sacrifice.

The first point does not require much elaboration – instead of approaching ritual in general and sacrifice in particular as universal notions, scholars began to appreciate their unique quality and function in different cultural and social contexts.

The second and third point can both be linked to the work of Catherine Bell, although others certainly contributed to this paradigm shift as well. In *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Bell advocates an alternative, more action-oriented approach to those acts usually described as rituals. She insists that ritual not so much integrates separate or even opposing forces – for example, the beliefs held by society and the individual who has to conform to them – but rather creates a separation itself, namely between the sacred and the profane:

Viewed as practice, ritualization involves the very drawing, in and through the activity itself, of a privileged distinction between ways of acting, specifically between those acts being performed and those being contrasted, mimed, or implicated somehow. (...) Ritualization gives rise to (or creates) the sacred as such by virtue of its sheer differentiation from the profane.²

1 For a critical account of the development of ritual theory in general, see Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992). For the criticism voiced against at least some of the theories on sacrifice enumerated above, see David Janzen, *The Social Meanings of Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible. A Study of Four Writings* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), 78–81.

2 Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 90–91.

This focus on ritualization as a creative process, not bound to pre-defined rules, opens up perspectives for a much broader notion of what qualifies as ritual(ization). For Bell, ritual is not a specific type of activity directed towards what an underlying myth or belief system defines as sacred. It is the act of ritualization itself that creates a sacred sphere or space and, even more importantly, imbues ordinary objects and events with new meaning and significance when placed within a specific context. This notion seems to illuminate many of Judith's actions, especially if we take some recent advances in the theory of sacrifice into account.

A relevant example of creative reconsideration of the nature and function of sacrifice can be found in the work of Kathryn McClymond. One of her contributions to the field is the insight that violence, bloodshed and actually killing may be significantly less central to many sacrificial practices than the dominant theories presuppose.

McClymond argues for the inclusion of a variety of other practices and substances, such as milk, oil anointments, and flowers. She states:

‘[S]acrifice’ as an authoritative concept is often appropriated within streams of religious communities to authorize practices other than traditional sacrifice. Sacrifice becomes a metaphor for other activity.³

This mechanism of ‘metaphorization’ contributes both to the “persistence of sacrifice as an authoritative category”⁴ even in the absence of the means to perform traditional sacrificial acts, and to the legitimation of the alternative practices.

Often the process at work here can be described as the “interiorization of ritual”, a term for which McClymond refers to the Israeli religion scientist Yael Bentor. Sacrifice along this line,

may pertain to a mental performance of the ritual; to the replacement of the ritual with a continuous process of life, such as breathing or eating; to a particular way of life, such as renunciation; to an actual performance with an inner interpretation; to the replacement of the external ritual with an internal one, and so forth.⁵

3 Kathryn McClymond, *Beyond Sacred Violence. A Comparative Study of Sacrifice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2008), 3.

4 McClymond, *Beyond Sacred Violence*, 155.

5 Yael Bentor, “Interiorized Fire Rituals in India and Tibet”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 120 (2000): 594–613 (594).

McClymond mentions prayer and asceticism as examples of practices falling into this category of metaphorical, or interiorized, sacrifice – two examples that will turn out to be highly significant for the study of Judith.

Turning to Judith, within the framework of ritualization, many actions and attitudes in at least three different areas can be construed as sacrificial: first of all, in Judith's general lifestyle before she even comes into action on behalf of her community; second, in the prayers Judith offers both before and after the execution of her plans; and third, in the actions Judith undertakes to rescue the Israelites, which can be read as an appropriation of the biblical concept of 'War of YHWH'.

3 Sacrifice and the Character of Judith – A Matter of 'Lifestyle'?

In the Book of Judith, the omnipresence of ritual is striking. Some of the ritual acts fall within the scope of conventional Temple sacrifice. Facing the threat of annihilation, the Israelites engage in what looks like an overkill of prayer, mourning rituals, and sacrifices (4:8–15), adorning even their livestock with sackcloth (4:10). Interestingly, the rituals in this case come *after* the more practical preparations against the Assyrian threat, like fortifying the border villages, laying up provisions and devising a defense strategy (4:4–7). God's response is ambiguous – he "heard their voices and looked on their misery" (4:13), but does not take action. If *do ut des* is the rationale behind these sacrifices, something has clearly gone awry.

Unlike the religious rulers and the rest of the people, who plunge into official ritual and sacrificial acts but nonetheless seem to uphold the maxim "*erst das Fressen, dann die Moral*,"⁶ Judith has organized her entire life as a continuous sequence of ritual performances. She prefers a tent on the roof of her house to the comforts of the house itself; she wears her widow's attire far beyond the regular period of mourning, and she fasts almost continually (8:5–6). Bendor's words about the different shapes of interiorized sacrifice – especially a lifestyle marked by renunciation – come to mind.⁷

The text appears ambiguous about the rationale underlying Judith's ascetic lifestyle. On the one hand, her widowhood is stressed ("Judith had been widowed in her house for three years and four months", 8:4; "she fasted all the days of her widowhood", 8:5), implying that her lifestyle is an expression of prolonged mourning. On the other hand, verse 8 emphasizes her piety: "There

6 German saying based on a line by Bertold Brecht's *Dreigroschenoper*.

7 Bendor, *Fire rituals*, 594.

was none who spoke evil of her, for she feared God greatly.” This evaluation suggests that Judith has devoted her life to the service of God, and that widowhood has little to do with her choice of lifestyle. I suggest that the ambiguity concerning Judith’s motivations serves a purpose. The text seems to imply that Judith presents the perfect candidate for the role she is about to take on. In order for her to do what she does – leave the village on her own, engage in close contact with male adversaries, and maintain a reputation that is above all reproach – she *must* be a widow, that is, no longer bound by the restraints applying to virgins or married women, yet still visibly attached to her deceased husband. At the same time, it has to be clear that her first priority is to serve God. Through her ascetic lifestyle, she removes herself from the mundane concerns occupying the rest of the people, and instead maintains close contact with a more spiritual reality. Consequently, she can speak with authority about God’s purposes with Israel.

Initially, Judith seems to be so absorbed in her religious duties that the distress of her people hardly touches her. It is only when the people confront their leaders with an ultimatum – “if God does not deliver us within five days, we will submit to the Assyrians” – that she enters the narrative. Her first action consists of a rebuke of the elders that almost takes the shape of a sermon. Judith has her own ideas about how the history of Israel should be interpreted, and knows that the plans of the God she so “greatly fears” (8:8) cannot be fathomed, nor can he himself be put to the test. Intriguingly, she herself seems to know exactly what God is planning to do: without any hesitation, she promises the elders divine deliverance through her hand (8:32–34).

Once the elders have left, Judith starts to pray – not quite coincidentally, one may assume, at the same time as the “incense offers were being brought to the house of God in Jerusalem” (9:1). According to the biblical record, these incense offers were installed as part of the worship of Israel during its foundational period as the people of God: the desert wanderings.⁸ Judith 9:1 suggests that there is a continuous line from the divine command spoken to Moses in Exodus to the practice in Judith’s time, interrupted only by the catastrophe of the Exile. The timing of Judith’s prayer thus functions to place her words in the context of the ritual routine of Israel. More specifically, it suggests that Judith’s words are not just a spontaneous expression of her own individual thoughts and feelings, but must be interpreted within the framework of official worship. What perhaps would not have counted as official worship by itself (after all, a prayer composed and uttered by a widow on the roof of her private home hardly qualifies as such), is legitimized and ritualized by means of the crucial

8 Exod. 30:1–8; 40:26–27.

side remark about its timing. And by extension, Judith, the ritual actor, effectively joins the ranks of the priests as they address God in their daily prayers. I suggest that we see at work here the mechanism McClymond describes as ‘metaphorization of sacrifice’. Based on the official regulations regarding incense offerings, Judith is the wrong person (neither a Levite nor a man) in the wrong place (on a roof in a border city, not in the Temple of Jerusalem). Conventional sacrifice, therefore, is not an option available to her. However, metaphorized or interiorized sacrifice *is*. Through this process, Judith as the sacrificial actor and her prayer as the object offered are legitimized, while simultaneously the legitimacy of the official sacrificial cult is affirmed.⁹

3.1 ‘Holy’ War and ‘Holy’ Warrior

Judith’s prayer is intriguing, not just as a ritual per se, but also because it contains several instances of ritualization on the level of content. Initially, quite mundane actions and events are imbued with religious significance through the way in which Judith connects them with each other and with her own situation. Taking the rape of Dinah and the subsequent revenge of her brother Simeon on the Shechemites as a paradigm for her own planned actions, Judith construes both Simeon’s and her own deed as instances of ‘Wars of YHWH’, which are acts of aggression that God not only condones but actually instigates. According to Judith, and in deviation from the *genotext* in Genesis 34, it is God who puts the sword in Simeon’s hand (Jth. 9:3; Gen. 34:25) and ultimately causes the downfall of the Shechemites (Jth. 9:4; Gen. 34:26–29). Besides, Judith considers the threat of the Assyrians primarily a threat against the Temple: “They plan to disgrace the temple where you are worshiped and to chop off the corners of your altar with swords” (Jth. 9:8) She thereby takes a military invasion out of its original context (an attempt to subdue the population of a rebellious province) and inserts it into the context of God’s struggles with his human challengers.

Judith has often been seen as a female warrior,¹⁰ and in some cases, a holy warrior as well. I will develop the characterization as holy warrior based not

9 Interestingly, Judith is not the only one whose prayer is to be counted as incense offering. In a psalm attributed to David, we read: “Let my prayer be established as incense before you, the lifting of my hands as the evening sacrifice” (Psalm 141:2/140:2, LXX). Apparently, the substitution of sacrifice by prayer was no new invention – what is new in *Judith*, perhaps, is the application of this concept to a woman.

10 Thus, e.g., Craghan: “The beauty process in 10:2–4 is really a disguise. Judith is actually the female warrior (...) who has mapped out her military strategy and concealed her weapon, viz., her beauty. Thus the female sets out to rescue the male, using the most

only on Judith's actions in the Assyrian camp, but also on the prayers and practices framing them. The concept of 'holy war' is well-attested in other biblical sources, notably the beginning of the Deuteronomistic history. Perhaps a more appropriate and less suggestive term is 'War of YHWH', for God is consistently portrayed as the instigator of, and main actor during, these battles. Patrick Miller, for example, describes warfare in early Israel as a synergism of divine and human efforts.¹¹ Consequently, a War of YHWH was a matter of ritual as well as warfare: it was preceded by oracle inquiry, conducted either by a priest or the military leader prior to battle in order to assess the chances of victory, and the ritual purification of the camp and the warriors. Miller goes on to claim: "Most important of all, however, was the practice of *herem*, the devotion of the spoils – both men and property – to Yahweh."¹² Israel was not to fight for its own economic advancement, but exclusively for the honor of God.¹³

All of this suggests that those participating in a War of God were expected to engage in their martial activities as a religious service. And perhaps the notion of (self-)sacrifice is not too far-fetched in this context. Susan Thistlethwaite, in any case, summarizes the requirements for a holy warrior as follows:

Warriors who had not a singleness of heart were sent home (Deut. 20:5–9). Only warriors who looked on war making as sacrifice, who 'offered themselves willingly' (Judg. 5:2), could go. The full support of the priests and cult was behind the war (Deut. 20:2; 1 Sam. 10:1) and the warrior became a kind of holy person, a priest, in the war (1 Sam. 21:14; Isa 13:3). Ritual taboos regarding contact with a woman *prior* to battle apply (1 Sam. 21:4; 2 Sam. 11:11).¹⁴

Of course, in the original setting of pre-monarchic and monarchic Israel Thistlethwaite refers to, the confrontation with the enemy on the battlefield

effective weapon – beauty." See John F. Craghan, "Esther, Judith and Ruth: Paradigms for Human Liberation," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 12 (1988): 11–19. Similarly, C. A. Moore argues: "Just as a soldier facing battle takes much care preparing himself and his arms, so our Female Warrior dressed herself with much deliberateness." See Carey A. Moore, *Judith*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 40 (New York: Garden City, 1985), 200.

11 Patrick D. Miller Jr., *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 156.

12 Miller, *Divine Warrior*, 157.

13 See also N. Lohfink, "hrm", in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* (eds G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1982), vol. III, 192–213.

14 Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, "You May Enjoy the Spoil of Your Enemies. Rape as a Biblical Metaphor for War," *Semeia* 61 (1993): 67.

would have been a male prerogative.¹⁵ Nevertheless, I suggest that Judith's performance of her rescue mission bears many resemblances to the practices and attitudes Miller and Thistlethwaite describe. Except from her sex, Judith qualifies as the ideal participant in a War of YHWH. She is not bound to her home by husband or children. Her sexual purity is unquestioned. She casts her own deeds within the framework of Israel's cultic life, taking on the double role of priest and warrior. And last but not least, her actions can be interpreted as a sacrifice on behalf of her people: she is willing to risk the integrity of her body and ultimately her life for the greater good.

The preparations Judith undertakes after having finished praying underline the ritual character of her actions. She takes off her sackcloth, bathes, anoints herself with oil, and puts on jewelry and festive clothes. Of course, the most common-sense reasoning behind this is the wish to "beguile every man who sets eyes on her" (10:4) – one of the most crucial conditions for her plan to succeed. Claudia Rakel, however, sees a religious significance too:

Stärker als die Tatsache, dass Judit sich schön macht und damit in der Tradition vieler biblischer Frauengestalten steht, stechen die Parallelen zwischen ihrer Kleidung und der priesterlichen Garderobe ins Auge.¹⁶

André LaCocque, on the other hand, suggests that Judith

adorns herself as a sacrificial victim. From now on the enemy's attention will be forced upon her instead of on the whole of Bethulia. She makes of herself a substitutive offering.¹⁷

Rakel and LaCocque obviously handle different approaches to Judith's preparations. Rakel casts her in the role of the priest, who enjoys the special protection of the deity, while LaCocque perceives in her the sacrificial victim, consciously leaving behind any kind of protection. But these two approaches may not be

15 The Hebrew Bible does record the deeds of some individual women who contributed decisively to the outcome of an armed conflict, e.g., Hagar (Josh. 6), and Deborah and Jael (Judg. 4).

16 Claudia Rakel, *Judit – über Schönheit, Macht und Widerstand im Krieg. Eine feministisch-intertextuelle Lektüre* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 131. (Translation: "Stronger than by the fact that Judith adorns herself and doing so ranges herself into the tradition of many outstanding women in the Bible, we are struck by the analogy between her clothing and the priestly attire").

17 André LaCocque, *The Feminine Unconventional. Four Subversive Figures in Israel* (Nottingham: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 47.

mutually exclusive, if we read Judith's mission as part of a War of God, and accept Thistlethwaite's claim that warriors "became a kind of holy person, a priest", and were simultaneously expected to "offer themselves willingly."¹⁸

It is clear that Judith is setting the actions she is about to take apart from her everyday life. She changes her location and her outfit, and in the next verse prepares a number of food items, which sharply contrast with her habit of fasting almost continually. This raises the question how the ritual-like demarcation between ordinary life and rescue mission can be interpreted. If ritualization is about the creation of a (religious) context that is set apart from more ordinary actions,¹⁹ then what, in this case, is the 'religious context', and what the 'ordinary'? What, if anything, can be read as 'sacrifice'? Is Judith indeed engaging in the ritual purification required of a holy warrior before entering battle? Or do her preparations, quite to the contrary, signify a departure from an everyday life that is characterized by a rigorous ritual routine – a routine that could be construed as the internalization of sacrificial practice – which she is willing to exchange for a worldlier lifestyle for the duration of her mission? Or would such a strict separation between 'ordinary' and 'religious' be based on false assumptions in the case of Judith's mission? Would it not be more fitting to speak of different, but nonetheless connected domains, in which Judith gives shape to her religious life with respect to the notion of sacrifice, albeit in different ways in both domains?

I suggest that the latter is the case. It is true that Judith's mission into the Assyrian camp is a temporary departure from her customary life of austerity and seclusion into a world of luxury, sensuality, and violence. Judith's life is acknowledged to be marked by great piety – it consists, as it were, of a continuous sequence of ritualizing, even sacrificial acts, and these acts create the overarching context within which all Judith's actions must be understood. This includes the excursion into the enemy camp, which is neither a sharp break from her normal life of piety, nor a ritual act which, through its *extraordinary* quality, would somehow devalue this life as *ordinary* in the sense of mundane. It is, rather, quite literally "out of the ordinary" – exceptional, but firmly rooted in Judith's daily practice of faith. Additionally, Judith's mission bears witness to how she persistently gives shape to her own ritual reality, a reality that is embedded in the myths and rituals of Israel, but reinvented in both a creative and autonomous way.

18 Thistlethwaite, *Enjoy*, 67.

19 Bell, *Ritual*, e.g. 90.

3.2 *In the Enemy's Camp*

At least part of Judith's creativity is rooted in the many *double entendres* that will characterize the narrative from now on: acts and words which are perfectly comprehensible on a profane level gain a different or added significance if placed within the ritual context Judith creates wherever she goes.

A first incident worth noting is the encounter between Judith and the town elders and guardsmen at the city gate of Bethulia: "When they saw her, and how her face was changed, and how different her clothing was, they marveled greatly at her beauty . . ." (Jth. 10:7). At first sight, it is Judith's physical attractiveness that is at stake here. But the change in Judith's appearance can be appreciated on another level too. Several readers have noted the parallels between Judith and Moses.²⁰

I suggest that Jth. 10:7 contains another subtle allusion to the famous first leader of the Israelites. After all, Moses' appearance, too, was changed due to an encounter with God (Exod. 34:30, 35). And even though the vocabulary describing the reaction of the onlookers differs (*thaumazō* in the case of Judith, *phobeō* / *eggizō* in the case of Moses), I would claim that the parallel is at least implied: the change that has come over Judith is something more than dress and make-up can accomplish. As was the case with Moses, some of the glory of God seems to have rubbed off on her.²¹

Naturally, the Assyrians see only the extremely attractive woman approaching them. Even though they do not strictly need her assistance to triumph over the Israelites – after all, Bethulia is on the verge of surrender – they are eager to oblige when she demands to speak to their captain. Holofernes, too, is immediately taken in by Judith's looks and promises. And quite contrary to his scornful treatment of the religion of the other peoples he has subdued, he shows an almost touching concern for Judith's ritual purity, wondering what she will eat once her own provisions have run out (12:2). Judith, however, promises him victory before that will be the case. On a profane level, then, the food Judith had brought to the Assyrian camp with her is part of her performance, underlining how swiftly she will lead Holofernes to victory. On another level, however, it spans a bridge between her pious life in Bethulia and her mission in

20 Jan Willem van Henten, "Judith as a Female Moses: Judith 7–13 in the Light of Exodus 17, Numbers 20 and Deuteronomy 33:8–11," in *Reflections on Theology and Gender* (eds Athalya Brenner and Fokkeli van Dijk-Hemmes, Kampen: Kok-Pharos, 1994), 33–48.

21 Of course, whereas appearance in the sense of attractiveness never seems to have played a role for Moses' acceptance as divinely ordained leader, the 'radiance' of Judith's looks is more ambiguous. She is always in the first place a beautiful woman, and only those with very sharp eyes will see more in her than seductive curves and appealing facial features.

the Assyrian camp. Her dress and location may change, but no Assyrian food, and certainly no Assyrian man will enter her body. Judith keeps herself apart – sacred – from anything that could dilute the sharp border between her body and the bodies of the Assyrians.

Judith's nightly excursions from the camp also serve a double purpose. On a practical level, they create a precedent, so that her flight with Holofernes' head in her bag is not immediately noticed as such. But they also serve to underline the separation between Judith and the Assyrians – Judith uses her outings to wash herself clean from any traces of contact with the enemy – and to frame her actions within the ritual context that has determined her entire life up to this point.

Even during the fatal drinking bout, Judith sticks to her own provisions, underlining the boundary between her and the men surrounding her. Once Judith is alone with Holofernes, the most (in-)famous scene of the narrative unfolds. Compared to the elaborate and lengthy preparations of the circumstances that have led up to this event, the scene is surprisingly short. In only eight verses, Judith prays for strength (13:4–5), grasps Holofernes' sword (13:6), prays again (13:7), severs his head (13:8), takes the head and the canopy of the bed to her maidservant (13:9), and, together with her maidservant, returns to Bethulia to announce that “with us, God, our God, has worked power again in Israel, and might against the enemies” (13:11). The visual arts seem to glory in this scene – apparently, the perceived paradox between the beautiful, pious widow and the truculence of Holofernes' assassination speaks to the imagination. In some of the paintings, a sacrificial interpretation seems to suggest itself.²² Holofernes lies on his bed as though it were an altar, and the streams of blood from his neck remind one of the blood of the animal victims so central for Temple sacrifice. Is it possible, then, to read Judith's murder of Holofernes as related to the animal sacrifices offered to God on a regular basis? Does Holofernes, for example, perform the function of a Girardian scapegoat, who has to die in order for peace to be restored? Perhaps. Nevertheless, the wording of the Greek text suggests otherwise. Judith 13:8 reads:

And she struck his neck twice with (all) her strength, and took his head from him.

The keywords in this verse – *patassō* (strike), *trachèlon* (neck), and perhaps also *ischus* (strength) are not at all reminiscent of cultic sacrifice. Rather, they seem to point again to the concept of the War of God and of God's dealings

²² See, e.g., the works by Caravaggio and Artemisia Gentileschi.

with those who do not submit to his rule. The neck, especially when accompanied by the attribute *sklèros* (stiff, stubborn) or the verbal form *sklèrunō* (make stubborn, harden) is the body part that symbolizes precisely this refusal to bow to God's authority.²³ More than once, God's response is to strike (*patassō*) the offender (Israelite or otherwise) with hunger, disease, or just straightforward death.²⁴ Of course, the one who strikes does not have to be divine; the verb often describes inter-human aggression as well.²⁵ An interesting example is the struggle between David and Goliath, where the same word as in Judith 13:8 is used to describe David's attack on the giant. Last but not least, in some cases, God explicitly commands his people to strike, as in Deut. 7:1–2:

And the Lord your God brings you into the land, into which you go to possess it, and removes great nations before you [. . .], and when the Lord delivers them into your hands, then you must strike them; you must destroy them completely: you must not enter into a covenant with them or have compassion on them.

I would suggest that the context provided here and in similar verses offers a more plausible parallel for the scene in Judith 13. Holofernes is no lamb being led to ritual slaughter, but an enemy whom God has given into Judith's hands. This is not to say that there is no ritual or even sacrificial undercurrent to this scene. It is the most decisive moment of Judith's mission as God's warrior. As such, it partakes in the sacrificial character of every one of God's wars. True to his command in Deut. 7:2, Judith makes sure that her enemy is destroyed completely.

3.3 *The Offering of the Cursed Thing*

A final hint that it is the context of 'Holy War' that imparts meaning to Judith's actions can be found in the concluding scenes of the narrative. Having arrived at Jerusalem, the first thing the people and Judith do is offer their "whole burnt offering, and their voluntary offerings, and their gifts" (Jth. 16:18). In addition, in verse 19,

Judith dedicated (*anethèken*) all the equipment of Holofernes, which the people had given her, and the canopy, which she herself had taken from his bed, she gave to God as a cursed thing (*anathèma*).

²³ See, e.g., Deut. 10:16; 31:27; 2 Chron. 30:8; 36:13; Neh. 9:16–17.

²⁴ E.g., Exod. 3:20; 9:15; Deut. 28:22, 27, 35.

²⁵ E.g., Deut. 19:4, 6, 11; Josh. 13:12, 21; 19:47; Judg. 1:5, 8, 10, 12, 25; 1 Sam. 17:49; 18:7.

Here, another detail that I had tentatively interpreted as hinting in the direction of a War of God, is confirmed by the text itself. In most cases, the Hebrew equivalent of *anathèma* is *herem* (devoted thing, devotion or ban), a *terminus technicus* from the semantic field of the War of YHWH.²⁶ The precise meaning of the term is debated, ranging from violent interpretations ('destroy completely') to more moderate proposals ('devote to God', 'separate from society').²⁷ What counts here is that by using the specific term *anathèma*, the author places Judith's actions within the context of Holy War, known to him from the literary conventions of other biblical sources.

If Judith's role as holy warrior had not yet been firmly established before, this is established now. Moreover, her motivations for taking the canopy of Holofernes' bed (Jth. 13:9) become clear. At the time, this action had seemed rather nonsensical – in any case, carrying a large piece of cloth would have increased the risk of being detected. It does, however, fit in perfectly with Judith's self-understanding as a warrior of God. Killing the enemy was not enough – he, or some object symbolizing him, had to be devoted – → *anathèma* – to God, in order to really complete her mission.

3.4 *The LORD Almighty Resisted him with Feminine Hands . . .*

Of course, before Judith dedicates the spoils of her victory to God, she functions as the leader of a procession towards Jerusalem. In the psalm (Jth. 16:1–17) she proclaims during this procession, some of the tentative interpretations that had only been based on implications in the text (such as the sacrificial nature of Judith's prayer, or the self-identification of Judith as warrior of God) are now confirmed.

To greet the victorious soldiers with songs of praise had always been a traditional task for the women of Israel.²⁸ In that sense, Judith seems to return here to the conventional female sphere, and to leave the role of 'holy warrior' behind. There are, however, several details that suggest otherwise: the peculiar identification of Judith's own body with the land of Israel (Jth. 16:4), and her reference to sacrifices and burnt offerings (Jth. 16:16). The first seems to suggest a more literal approach to sacrifice, with Judith as both priest and sacrificial

26 See, e.g., Lev. 27:28; Num. 21:2; Deut. 13:16–17; 20:17; Josh. 6:18, 21; Judg. 1:17; 1 Sam. 15:3, 8–9.

27 See, e.g., W. K. van der Molen, *Een ban om te mijden. Bouwstenen voor een bijbels-theologische verkenning* (PhD diss, University of Groningen, 2008).

28 Examples range from Miriam (Exod. 15:20–21) to Deborah (Judg. 5) and Jephtha's daughter (Judg. 11:34) to the women expressing their admiration for David and contempt for Saul in their songs (1 Sam. 18:6–7).

victim mediating between God and his people, while the latter advocates a more interiorized form of sacrifice.

Judith 16:4 reads:

He [Assur] said to light my borders on fire,
and to kill my young men with the sword,
and my nursing women he put to the ground,
and my little ones he gave up for plunder,
and my virgins he despoiled.

There is some uncertainty about the referent of the first person pronouns in this verse. Since Judith is the speaking subject of these words, grammatically, they must refer to her. However, to understand the verse in this way would mean to construe Judith as the 'proprietor' of the borders, young men, nursing women, little ones, and virgins mentioned here. The question then arises who 'owns' all of these individuals. Whose borders are being lit on fire, whose young men killed with the sword? Israel's? Judith's? Judith-as-Israel's? God's? Judith-as-God's? The ambiguity remains unresolved. There are certainly instances in which Judith is identified or identifies herself with the people of Bethulia or even Israel as a whole. At other times, however, the text emphasizes the discrepancy between Judith on the one hand and the population of Israel/Bethulia on the other. Put very briefly, the people are the passive object of Judith's active salvific actions. Perhaps, then, the identification must be sought in a different direction. In fact, Judith seems to occasionally identify herself with the God of Israel, or at least to occupy a middle position between the people and the deity: she feels competent to speak in God's name without having received any explicit instructions from him (for example, Jth. 8:15–37), and she ascribes her actions to him, although he is not otherwise mentioned in the text (for example, Jth. 13:11). I would suggest that the psalm is another instance of Judith identifying herself, at least to some extent, with Israel's God.

Perhaps Judith's self-characterization through her psalm can be construed as an instance of ritualization in the extreme. Through the roles she takes on – priest, self-sacrificing holy warrior, savior of her people, and ultimately representative of God – Judith herself gains a sacred quality. One might say that she is an example of what Mauss and Hubert see as the function of sacrifice in general: communication between the profane world of the worshipper and the sacred world of the divine.²⁹ Offering her body for the sake of the community,

29 H. Hubert and M. Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

Judith becomes this means of communication between God and his people. In the process, she herself is made holy – at least for as long as her sacrificial role lasts, and perhaps even for the rest of her life. After all, her spatial removal from the rest of the community (Jth. 8:5; 16:21) and her refusal to enter into a new marriage (16:22) underline how far removed Judith is from the mundane reality surrounding her.

3.5 *Every Sacrifice is too Small...*

Towards the end of the psalm, Judith makes another noteworthy remark, this time in the direction of a metaphorical or interiorized understanding of sacrifice:

For every sacrifice is (too) small for a sweet fragrance, and every bit of fat falls short as a burnt offering for you; but whoever fears the Lord is great through them all (Jth. 16:16).

What was only implied in the beginning is now put into so many words: sacrifice *per se* is legitimate, but not enough. It is all about the interiorization of ‘fear of the Lord’ – a mind-set that Judith personifies. The reader is reminded of passages like 1 Sam 15:22,³⁰ where Samuel rebukes Saul for wanting to sacrifice the plunder of the Amalekites instead of destroying it, or Micah 6:6–8,³¹ where Micah confronts the people for their tendency to offer impressive sacrifices instead of obeying God. Protestant theologians have been tempted to read a dismissal of all cultic service in(to) these verses. However, this conclusion seems unwarranted. Neither Judith nor the prophets condemn sacrifice as such. Rather, they insist that it must be accompanied by obedience to God.

4 Conclusions

It seems safe to say that through her prayers and the dedication of her acts to God, Judith consistently transfers her sometimes highly dubitable behavior

30 Samuel inquires of Saul: “Does God delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying God? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:22).

31 Micah wonders: “Will God be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, o mortal, what is good. And what does God require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:7–8).

(risking her sexual purity, seduction, duplicity, and ultimately murder) into a ritual/religious context. In the Book of Judith as a whole, we find conventional ritual and sacrificial acts side by side with instances of ritualization and internalized or metaphorical sacrifice. The sacrificial practice at the Temple continues despite – and in part because of – the Assyrian threat, and is still observed at the very end of the narrative (Jth. 16:18–19). Simultaneously, Judith engages in, or even invents, alternative practices. Some of these, such as Judith's asceticism and prayers, could be categorized as internalizations of traditional practices appropriate for a woman who, after all, was not allowed to participate in traditional Temple sacrifice. In all cases of alternative sacrifice throughout the book, then, one deviation from conventional practice is the change of the person who performs the sacrifice. In addition, the nature of the object to be offered is altered (fasting and praying come in the place of animal or plant offerings) as well as the location (Judith's roof and the enemy camp instead of the Temple). Perhaps the most radical change is connected with Judith's self-identification as 'warrior of God', which implies the double role of priest and sacrificial victim.

Considering these alterations in virtually all areas pertaining to the notion of sacrifice, what I have construed as sacrifice in the Book of Judith seems so far removed from the standard practice at the Jerusalem Temple – which was still fully functional at the time *Judith* was written – that the legitimacy of my reading may well be questioned. Is not the whole notion of 'interiorization' or 'metaphorization' of sacrifice a (post-)modern one, far removed from the ancient author's intellectual horizon? Certainly, this author would not have put the same labels on the actions and attitudes of his protagonist. Nevertheless, in the absence of the Temple, rabbinic Judaism would develop a metaphorized approach to sacrifice, substituting it with elements like prayer, Torah study and fasting. Is it really so far-fetched to detect a similar tendency in the Book of Judith? Perhaps discontented with the standard procedure of Temple sacrifice, the author of Judith may have started looking for alternatives. This is not to imply that the Book of Judith discredits the sacrificial practice at the Temple in general. Throughout the book, much emphasis has been put on the centrality of the holy city and the sanctuary; in fact, it is the "sanctuary and the Temple and the altar" that Judith sets out to rescue (Jth. 8:24).

Nevertheless, there are a few indications that conventional sacrifice was seen as 'necessary but insufficient condition' for proper worship of God. In response to the extensive sacrifices the Israelites offer upon hearing of the Assyrian threat, the narrator recounts that "God heard their [the Israelites'] voices and looked on their misery" (Jth. 4:13). God does not, however, come into action at this point in the narrative – *do ut des* does not work in this instance,

perhaps due to the mind-set of the people, which Judith describes as “testing (or blackmailing?) God” (Jth. 11:8). Judith’s attitude and actions form a positive contrast: she leads a life of interiorized sacrifice, but does not expect anything in return. She asks God to reveal his power through her, but only in order to “make all your peoples and all the tribes know the knowledge that you are God, the God of all power and might, and that there is no other shielding the people of Israel but you” (Jth. 9:14).³² And last but not least, she is willing to become the sacrificial victim herself – an attitude which, perhaps, the author of *Judith* would find fitting for the people of Israel as a whole.

32 Perhaps it is also significant that Judith is a woman, and therefore excluded from regular Temple sacrifice. It would lead much too far to characterize the author of *Judith* as a feminist *avant la lettre*, but he does seem to handle a rather broad definition of who and what qualifies as legitimate sacrificant and sacrifice.

PART 3

Sacrifice and Identity



Sacrifice and Islamic Identity

Abdelilah Ljamai

1 Introduction

In recent years, representatives of the monotheistic religions in the Netherlands have debated the subject of sacrifice. These discussions took place against the background of a more general debate on religious discourse and identity. For Jews, Christians and Muslims the position of religion within modern society poses both a challenge and a problem. For Jews and Muslims, this culminated in the issue of ritual slaughter being branded as a primitive habit that should be forbidden.

Ritual slaughter constitutes an essential element of the religious identity of both Jews and Muslims. The story of Abraham/Ibrahim sacrificing his son plays an important role. Each religious group tries to interpret the story of this 'nearly-sacrifice' according to its own holy book and in line with centuries of interpretation. From the point of view of Jewish and Christian traditions, Isaac was Abraham's son intended to be sacrificed. The Muslims generally believe that Ismail was the son that was meant to be sacrificed, although Islamic tradition knows of other opinions too.

This article is not about the differences in views between the Muslims, Jews and Christians on who was the son to be sacrificed. I shall limit myself to the discussion of the story of this sacrifice from Islamic perspective in order to highlight the connection between sacrifice and religious identity. In Islamic tradition, this sacrifice is associated with two issues. The first issue relates to the qur'anic story of Ibrahim and his son. The second concerns the Festival of Sacrifice (*id al-adha*).¹ According to Sura 37, Ibrahim, known in the three monotheistic religions as the close friend of God (*khalil al-Rahman*²), receives in a dream the command from God to sacrifice his son. According to common

1 This festival is considered the most important religious festival in Islam. It takes place annually on the 10th of Muharram, which is the first month of the Muslim year. See e.g. C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Het Mekkaansche Feest* (Leiden: diss. Universiteit Leiden, 1880). More information about the festival of sacrifice in Islam can be found in E. Gräf, *Jagdbeute und Schlachtvieh in islamischen Recht* (Bonn: Selbstverlag des Orientalischen Seminars, 1959).

2 In Isaiah 41:8, Ibrahim is described as a friend of God. See "Ibrahim" in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), vol. III, 980–81.

Islamic interpretation, this command constitutes a divine test for Ibrahim. The major question in this article is: What are the different views of Muslim scholars regarding the story of this sacrifice and how is this discussion related to the question of Muslim religious identity?

Here is the story of Ibrahim's sacrifice in Sura 37:100–113:

My Lord, grant me [a child] from among the righteous.

So We gave him good tidings of a forbearing boy.

And when he reached with him [the age of] exertion, he said, "O my son, indeed I have seen in a dream that I [must] sacrifice you, so see what you think." He said, "O my father, do as you are commanded. You will find me, if Allah wills, of the steadfast."

And when they had both submitted and he put him down upon his forehead,

We called to him, "O Abraham,

You have fulfilled the vision." Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good.

Indeed, this was the clear trial.

And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice,

And We left for him [favorable mention] among later generations:

"Peace upon Abraham."

Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good.

Indeed, he was of Our believing servants.

And We gave him good tidings of Isaac, a prophet from among the righteous.

And We blessed him and Isaac. But among their descendants is the doer of good and the clearly unjust to himself.

2 Interpretations by Muslim Scholars of the Story of the Sacrifice

In the story of the sacrifice, the question whether the son who should be sacrificed is identified with Ismail or Ishaq remains open.³ Because both persons, Ishaq and Ismail, play an important role in the interpretation of this story, it is relevant to pay attention to these two names in the Qur'an. Ishaq⁴ is mentioned

3 See "Isma'il" in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. IV, 184.

4 About the biblical Isaac, see E. Noort and E. Tigchelaar, *The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and its Interpretations* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

in sixteen passages in the Qur'an.⁵ Six of these⁶ refer to him together with Ismail, while he is mentioned without Ismail in ten passages.⁷ Ismail⁸ is mentioned in twelve passages of the Qur'an: Six times without Ishaq,⁹ and the aforementioned six times together with him.¹⁰

It is remarkable that Ishaq is mentioned twice together with his father Ibrahim in the *Meccan* Sura 12:6 and 12:38, which reads respectively:

And thus will your Lord choose you and teach you the interpretation of narratives and complete His favor upon you and upon the family of Jacob, as He completed it upon your fathers before, Abraham and Isaac. Indeed, your Lord is Knowing and Wise.

And I have followed the religion of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The same fact is true for Ismail, who is also mentioned twice with his father. This was, however, in a *Medinan* Sura, 2:125 and 2:127:¹¹

And We charged Abraham and Ishmael, [saying], "Purify My House for those who perform Tawaf¹² and those who are staying [there] for worship and those who bow and prostrate [in prayer]".

And [mention] when Abraham was raising the foundations of the House and [with him] Ishmael, [saying], "Our Lord, accept [this] from us."

5 W. Montgomery Watt refers in his article "Ishaq" only to fifteen qur'anic passages, see *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. IV, 109.

6 These are the following Suras: 2:133; 2:136; 2:140; 3:84; 4:163 and 14:39.

7 Namely 6:84; 11:71; 12:6; 12:38; 19:49; 21:72; 29:27; 37:112; 37:113 and 38:48.

8 See M. Hayek, *Le Mystère d'Ishmael* (Paris: Mame, 1964).

9 In the Suras 2:125; 2:127; 6:86; 19:54; 21:85 and 38:48.

10 See note 6 for the Suras where Ishaq and Ismail are mentioned together.

11 The Meccan Qur'an was revealed before the emigration of the Prophet to Medina in the year 622, even though its revelation did not take place in Mecca. The Medinan Qur'an was revealed after the emigration of Mohammed to Medina, even though its revelation did not take place in Medina. Compare A. Ljamai, *Introduction to the Study of the Koran: Legislative history and methods of the Quran exegesis* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2005), 61–63.

12 Circumambulation of pilgrims around the Ka'bah; a ritual during the pilgrimage to Mecca.

3 Al-Tabari on Ishaq as the Son to be Sacrificed

For a proper understanding of the subject, it is very important to notice that the debate among Muslim scholars about the identity of Abraham's son is related to the fact that the name of the sacrificed son is not mentioned in Sura 37:100–110, the verses referring to Ibrahim's intended sacrifice of his son. Actually, there has been a strong controversy among Muslim scholars about the identity of the sacrificed son.¹³ In classical Islam, there have been two opposite opinions in relation to the question which of the two sons of Ibrahim – Ismail or Ishaq – was to be sacrificed.

The first opinion is of the Persian founder of the *Tafsir bi'l-ma'thur* (religious exegeses), Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (who died in 923). In his qur'anic commentary *Jami'al-bayan*¹⁴ and in his book *The History of al-Tabari*,¹⁵ he declared that Ibrahim received the command from God to sacrifice his son Ishaq. To buttress his view, he refers to various statements by the companions of the Prophet and his followers. For example, in his interpretation of 37:101: "So We gave him the good news of a boy ready to suffer and forbear", he emphasizes that in this text the Qur'an speaks about Ishaq.¹⁶ He supports this interpretation with the following statement by Qatada (who died in 735): "No one is complimented as forbear, except Ibrahim and Ishaq." Furthermore, al-Tabari relies on a statement by Suddi that Ibrahim, when he received the good news that his wife Sara was going to have a baby, promised God that he would sacrifice his newborn child. Years after the birth of Ishaq, Ibrahim saw in his vision an angel telling him that he had to fulfill his promise to God, according to Sura 37:102:

Then, when (the son) reached (the age of) (serious) work with him, he said: "O my son! I see in vision that I offer thee in sacrifice: Now see what is thy view!" (The son) said: "O my father! Do as thou art commanded: Thou will find me, if God so wills, one practicing Patience and Constancy!"

Al-Tabari uses this story as an argument to show that the son who was obedient to his father was Ishaq.¹⁷

13 Compare *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. IV, 109.

14 See Jarir al-Tabari, *Jami' al-bayan fi-ta'wil al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Salam, 2009), in particular his exegesis of Suras 12:6 and 37:107, see vol. 6, 4466 and vol. 8, 6916–6920.

15 Titled *Tarikh al-Tabari, Tarikh al-umam wa-'l-muluk* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1991), vol. 1, 164–165.

16 *Jami' al-Bayan*, vol. 8, 6911.

17 *Jami' al-Bayan*, vol. 8, 6911, and *Tarikh*, vol. 1, 164.

In his interpretation of this story, al-Tabari was aware of the different views of Muslim exegetes on the theme of the sacrificed son. But he believed, as an exegete and a historian, that Ishaq was the *dhabih* (the one who should be sacrificed) and not Ismail. To enforce his statement, he referred to al-‘Abbas Ibn ‘Abd al-Muttaleb (died in 653), the uncle of the Prophet of Islam, who also declared that Ishaq is the one to be sacrificed. According to al-Tabari, this explanation was enforced by the interpretations of Abu Ishaq Ka‘b al-Ahbar (died in 653), Masruq (died in 682) and Jabir (died in 697), who said that the Qur’an speaks in Sura 37:102 about Ishaq and not about Ismail.¹⁸

Al-Tabari was not the first Muslim scholar to connect the identity of the sacrificed son with the person of Ishaq. The famous Islamic scholar of Persian origin, Abu Muhammad Ibn Qutayba (died in 885) had already chosen for Ishaq as the *dhabih* in his book *al-Ma‘arif*. Likewise, he referred to the statement of al-‘Abbas Ibn ‘Abd al-Muttaleb that Ishaq, and not Ismail, was Abraham’s sacrificed son.¹⁹ Even after the period of al-Tabari, it became clear that some authors of the stories of the prophets (*Qisas al-anbiya’*) also opted for this interpretation. For example, there is the relatively unknown author of the stories of the prophets, al-Kisai (eleventh century), and the more elaborate work of al-Tha‘labi (died in 1038). They both mention the two options. Al-Tha‘labi eventually decides for Ismail, al-Kisai seems to opt for Ishaq.²⁰

Likewise, al-Tabari continues quoting the views of others who believe that in Sura 37:102 the Qur’an speaks about Ismail. People who have opted for this interpretation were Ibn ‘Abbas (died in 687) and Abdullah Ibn ‘Umar (died in 693), companions of the Prophet. Ibn ‘Abbas said: “The one who had to be sacrificed was Ismail. The Jews claimed that it was Ishaq, but they lie!”²¹ After quoting both views, al-Tabari declares that the argument of those who say that it was Ishaq is much stronger, because the Qur’an said: “And We ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice” (Sura 37:107). Ibrahim received the good news about Ishaq and not about Ismail, because he said in Sura 37:100: “O my Lord! Grant me a righteous (son)!” The son who should be sacrificed is the same as the one mentioned by the Qur’an, about whom Ibrahim will receive the good news. This means that the son was Ishaq rather than Ismail.²²

18 *Jami‘ al-Bayan*, vol. 8, 6916–6918.

19 See *Al-Ma‘arif*, edition al-‘Amira al-Sharqiyya, 1883, vol. 1, 13. See in this framework I. Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* (Leiden: Brill, 1920), 79–81.

20 Compare. M. I. A. A. al-Kisa‘i, *Kisas al-anbiya’* (ed. Eisenberg; Leiden: 1922), 150–153, and M. al-Tha‘labi, *Kisas al-anbiya’* (Cairo: 1894), 40–60.

21 See *Jami‘ al-bayan*, vol. 8, 6919.

22 Ibidem, 6916–6920.

4 The Majority of Muslim Scholars Claim Ismail was the Sacrificed Son

In contrast to the opinion of Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, the majority of Muslim scholars, including the exegetes, determine that the sacrificed son was Ismail and not Ishaq. The supporters of this interpretation use several arguments to buttress their views.

An example of this is Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya in his book *Zad ma'ad*. He believes that the Jews are erroneously stating that the son was Ishaq. He refers to a verse from the Torah, in which God was said to have given the command to Ibrahim "to sacrifice his *elder* son",²³ that is, Ismail, while in another verse He said: "Your *only* son" (Genesis 22:2). Ibn Qayyim concludes that a consensus exists among Muslims and Jews that Ismail was the elder son of Ibrahim. Indeed, he emphasizes that the biblical text, "Sacrifice your son Isaac", must be wrong, because this text is in conflict with another verse from the Torah, "Slaughter your elder and only son." Next to this exegetical argument he uses what he calls a "rational argument", which goes as follows. How is it possible that Ibrahim and his wife Sara received from God the good news about Ishaq and later about Jacob, but that God nevertheless commands him to sacrifice his son Ishaq? Ibn Qayyim considers this a contradiction and not rationally possible. He bases his arguments on the Qur'an and gives his own interpretation of Sura 37. He says the good news about Ishaq was in fact a reward for Ibrahim, because he had not protested against the divine test: In this context, the sacrifice of his elder son. Indeed, the so-called *al-dhabih* was in Mecca and that points to Ismail and his mother Hagar.²⁴ Furthermore, the time of the sacrifice was also attached to the place of sacrifice which was Mecca. If the sacrifice would have been in Syria, the sacrifice of the Muslims now should take place in Syria and not in the holy house in Mecca.²⁵ We see here how the issue of the sacrifice is connected to that of religious identity, *in casu* to the holy places of Islam. Religious identity is intrinsically connected to not only the exegesis of holy texts but also to holy places.

23 This text is not mentioned in the Bible!

24 The expulsion of Hagar and her child Ismail is described in accordance with Jewish tradition, based on Genesis 21. For the Islamic tradition about this expulsion compare R. Paret, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. IV, 184–185. See also "Zamzam" in *Encyclopedia of Islam* vol. XI (2004), 440–42; cp. M. Poorthuis, 'Hagar's Wanderings: between Judaism and Islam', *Der Islam* 90, 2 (2013), 213–237.

25 See Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah *Zad al-ma'ad fi hadyi khayr al-'ibad* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Rajab, 2006), vol. 1, 49–53.

4.1 *The Connection to the Holy Places of Islam*

The same argument is used by the historian and commentator Ibn Kathir (died in 1373), in his book *Stories of the Prophets*, to show that the son that had to be sacrificed was Ismail. His opinion is that al-Tabari used *ʿIsraʿilliyyāt*, that is, stories of Jewish origin, in his interpretation of Sura 37 about the story of the sacrifice.²⁶ These stories cannot be adopted without critical examination, according to Ibn Kathir.

Another argument to reinforce the view that the sacrificed person was Ismail and not Ishaq, is offered by the Muʿtazilite exegete Abuʿl-Qasim al-Zamakhshari (died in 1143).²⁷ In order to clarify his position, he refers to the words of the Prophet saying about himself: “*Ana Ibn al-dhabihayn*: I am the son of the two *dhabihayn* (sacrificed)”.²⁸ This means: I am the son of the first *dhabih*, ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abd al-Muttaleb (his father), and the son of the second *dhabih*, Ismail, the forefather of the Arabs.

Still, it is important to note here that this prophetic statement is described by experts of the *hadith* as a non-correct (that is, not very reliably transmitted) *hadith*.²⁹ Next to the use of this prophetic tradition, al-Zamakhshari points out that the person described in the Qurʿan as full of constancy and patience (*sabir*) had to be Ismail, for the Qurʿan says: “And (remember) Ismail, Idris and dhu al-Kifl, all (men) of constancy and patience”. Ismail’s obedience to his father Ibrahim who wished to sacrifice him is undoubtedly a form of patience.³⁰ With this interpretation al-Zamakhshari tries to prove that the sacrificed son was Ismail and not Ishaq.

4.2 *Ishaq, the Son Who Never was in Mecca*

The same intention becomes clear in the way Al-Alusi (died in 1854), a supporter of symbolic exegesis, wants to prove that Ismail was the sacrificed son. In his exegesis *Ruh al-maʿani*, he buttresses this opinion stating that Muslims and Jews agree that Ismail lived in Mecca and that Ishaq had never been there.

26 See Ibn al Kathir, *Qisas al-anbiyaʿ* (Riyadh: Dar Ibn Khuzayma, 1998), vol. 1, 261–269.

27 The Muʿtazilite school originated in the eighth century; its adherents made a plea for a rational interpretation of the Qurʿan. Compare A. Ljamai, “Relationship between Islam and humanism,” *Journal of the Dutch-Flemish Levinas Society* 16 (2011): 7–13.

28 See Abuʿl-Qasim al Zamakhshari, *Al-Kashshaf ʿan haqaʿiq ghawamid al-tanzil wa-ʿuyun al-aqawil fi-wudjuh al-taʿwil*. Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1995, vol. 4, 54.

29 M.A. al-Albani, *Silsilat al-ahadith al-daʿifa wa-l-mawduʿa wa-atharuha al-sayyiʿ fi-al-umma*. Riyadh: Maktabat al-Maʿarif, 2001, vol. 1, 500 (hadith number: 331).

30 See al-Zamakhshari, *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 54.

Because the sacrifice scene had taken place in Mecca, it is impossible, according to al-Alusi, that the dhabih would be Ishaq.³¹

The Imam Ahmed al-Thaqafi (died in 1308) tries in his *tafsir* book of exegesis of the Qur'an to find a link between the two verses 101 en 102 from Sura 37, where is spoken about "(a) boy ready to suffer and forbear" and also "one practicing patience and constancy!", and verse 28 from Sura 51 where is spoken about "(a) learned boy". The first description refers to the dhabih Ismail, whereas the second description surely refers to Ishaq, who is known in the Qur'an as "learned boy". Al-Thaqafi elaborates his interpretation and emphasizes that Ibrahim has received "good news" twice: The news of his son the dhabih, and the news of his newborn son, described as "learned boy". Besides, al-Thaqafi states, Muslim, Jewish and Christian scholars all agree that Ismail had been in Mecca, whereas Ishaq never was in Mecca.³²

We came across this argument by al-Thaqafi in the interpretation of al-Zamakhshari as well. This indicates how important the location of the sacrifice in Mecca is for Muslim scholars who want to defend the idea that the sacrificed son was Ismail. We have seen that, to declare Ismail as the dhabih, many interpreters, like Ibn Qayyim, Ibn Kathir, al-Zamakhshari, al-Alusi and al-Thaqafi, use the Qur'an, the prophetic traditions, Qur'anic commentaries, and work of their predecessors, and, in addition, draw upon the so-called rational argumentation. Without doubt, this interpretation is significant for Muslim scholars at a theological and polemical level, in particular when it comes to the dialogue between Muslims, Jews, and Christians. The Muslim scholars want to prove that the sacrifice concerns their own forefather Ismail, whereas Jews and Christians defend the idea that the sacrifice is about Isaac, since in the book of Genesis it is explicitly mentioned that the dhabih was Isaac. In terms of religious identity, the story of the sacrifice displays yet another dimension: Not only the relevance of sacred places but also the question which Scriptures are sacred and how to interpret them.

31 See Shihab al-Din al-Alusi, *Ruh al-ma'ani fi-tafsir al-Qur'an al-'azim wa-'l-sab' al-mathani* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1997), vol. 13, 196–197.

32 See A. Al Thaqafi, *Milak al-ta'wil al-Qati' bi-dhawi al-ilhad wa-'l-ta'til fi-tawdjih al-mutashabih al-lafzi min ay al-tanzil* (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1983), vol. 2, 960–961.

5 The Importance of Ismail for Arab Identity

Apart from the theological discussion among Muslims, Jews, and Christians, the following question comes up: Why is it so important for these Muslim scholars to connect the sacrifice story to the person of Ismail? Furthermore, why does al-Tabari, the famous exegete and historian, have different thoughts on this story?

From the sources we learn that the majority of the Muslim exegetes defend the idea that the person that had to be sacrificed was Ismail, probably because Ismail was considered the forefather of the Arabs. Muslim scholars usually rely on the statement of the Prophet of Islam: "I am the son of the two *dhabihayn*". Because of this genealogical connection, the story of the sacrifice is intrinsically connected to Islamic religious identity. Many Islamic scholars emphasize that the story concerns Ismail and not Ishaq, because this interpretation is an essential element of their religious identity.

At Islamic and Jewish schools, Jewish children will get more information about Isaac, who is viewed in a positive light, whereas Muslim children will hear more about Ismail, likewise viewed in a positive light. It is important, however, to keep in mind that there are also common points between Muslims, Jews, and Christians regarding the story of sacrifice. All three agree on the fact that it was a divine test for the father of monotheism, Ibrahim. To return once more to the difference of opinion among Muslim scholars on the story of sacrifice, the attitude of al-Tabari towards the story can be explained by the fact that in his interpretation he refers to the qur'anic passages and statements of the companions of Mohammed. His defence of the idea that Ishaq was the only *dhabih* does not mean that Islamic identity is not important to him. Al-Tabari asserts, as I see it, that from Islamic perspective all prophets are equal. Both sons of Ibrahim can be considered as prophets. Hence, whether the person to be sacrificed is Ismail or Isaac is not relevant to al-Tabari. His concern is to transmit as many arguments and interpretations of the texts as possible. His religious identity allows him to admit a wealth of different interpretations. We may even conclude that the different opinions themselves are an important element of the Muslim religious identity.

To summarize, we have seen that the story of Ibrahim and his son relates to religious identity at several levels: The performance of the ritual of sacrifice as a religious obligation for Muslims today; the attachment of the story to the holy places of Islam; the orientation towards sacred scriptures and the acceptance of different opinions as a legitimate aspect of religious tradition.

Sacrifice – Action within a Relationship: A Phenomenology of Sacrifice

Claudia Mariéle Wulf

1 Introduction

A young woman had become entangled in drug culture. Nothing had warned her about the consequences of drug abuse for the rest of her life, nor about the effects it was to have on her parents and younger sister. She had closed herself off from her family and friends, so her mother had no longer any access to her. Her mother prayed. This, however, was not enough. Slowly but surely, the mother began to change. First, she stopped eating what she most enjoyed. It was a silent offering for her daughter, who failed to understand. Instead, the girl replied: “It doesn’t affect me whether you eat what you like or not!”. Then her mother started copying her daughter’s way of dressing. She roamed the streets in old and shabby shoes, she dyed her hair black like her daughter had done, something which was quite alien to herself. Initially, her daughter just laughed at her. Then she fell silent. She knew what it meant to her mother to be a laughing stock for the people, because of her shoddy appearance. When she fully realized that her mother had made these sacrifices in order to show her how close she was to her, her mother’s love touched her and she returned home.

Is this the sort of sacrifice we are talking about here? Does sacrifice mean giving up yourself in order to save somebody else? Does it mean offering yourself as a sacrifice to God? Does God want – or even ask for – such sacrifice? The example shows that in order to be meaningful, a sacrifice has to be related to someone: To God, or to another human being. It can also be related to creation, if creation is seen as a responsibility given to us by God. To make a sacrifice means giving up something important, something we like or love, in order to reach a higher goal.

Sacrifices abound in everyday life. We find them in ecological groups, for example, where members decide to save energy and consciously refrain from enjoying some pleasures in order to save the environment. We find another kind of sacrifice in a movement of young people who seriously try to postpone intimate relationships until they meet the right partner, someone with whom they want to share intimacies for the rest of their lives.¹ We also find it in sport

¹ See <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/true-love-waits>. Consulted on October 31, 2011.

and profession, where people give up everything in order to reach their goal. We often forget that parents live lives filled with sacrifice, in order to bring up their children in the best possible way. It is not uncommon for parents to give up professional advancement, if this can positively affect the development of their children.

1.1 *Sacrifice – An All-Embracing Concept*

A gift can entail sacrifice. A person can sacrifice himself or herself in freedom.² However, if someone is being sacrificed without consenting to it, that person does not act voluntarily and hence becomes a victim. If a thing (or in some cults an animal) is sacrificed, we call it an oblation. To sacrifice means *consciously* letting go of something that is important, valuable or pleasurable, because it is meaningful to do so. It is essential, therefore, that there are good reasons for making a sacrifice – it is a means to an end. What one gets or attains is not part of what one gives or gives up; it is not a sacrifice if we give up something or someone we wanted to get rid of anyway. It should be done for the sake of a higher goal, just as the mother in our example gave up food and nice clothing as well as her social reputation, in order to restore her daughter's health. When somebody makes a sacrifice in this way, it is voluntary. Life may often require sacrifices from us. If we cannot accept such a sacrifice as part of our life, if we cannot make the sacrifice freely, we may become a victim ourselves. A sacrifice, in order to be a true sacrifice, has to be made in freedom.³

A sacrifice is part of an interpersonal relationship – someone sacrifices something for the sake of another person. This can be done, and often is done, without the knowledge of the person concerned. It can take place in the context of reconciliation: If the guilty party is unable to make amends, someone else can do this on his or her behalf and thus bring about reconciliation. This happens in a religious, social, or political context.

The opposite attitude to the readiness to make a sacrifice is *consumerism*.⁴ This attitude presupposes that everything has to be available here and now,

2 In new myths, like Harry Potter (J. K. Rowlings) and Lord of the Rings (J. R. R. Tolkien), the protagonist offers himself as a sacrifice, but survives. See Almuth Hammer, "Dein Leben ist das meine wert. Erlösungsmythen in der Fantasy," in *Erlösung ohne Opfer?* (ed. Werner H. Ritter; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 157–192. See also the contribution by Sigrid Coenradie on Harry Potter in this volume.

3 See Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girards mimetische Theorie. Im Kontext kulturtheoretischer und gesellschaftspolitischer Fragen* (Münster-Hamburg-London: LIT, 2004), 293.

4 See Claudia Mariéle Wulf, *Der Mensch – ein Phänomen. Eine phänomenologische, theologische und ethische Anthropologie* (Vallendar: Patris, 2011), 402.

and preferably should cost very little. It means finding our bearings solely with a view to our own wishes and ideas. This is the basic attitude of many in our present-day society, but life is impossible without sacrifices, as we shall see later.

2 Part 1. Four Core Values of Sacrifice as an Action within Relationship

Before I deal with the view of Edith Stein on sacrifice (part 2), I will offer a short phenomenology of sacrifice as an action within a relationship from four points of view.

1. A sacrifice is a free act. This is the philosophical and psychological aspect.
2. Sacrifice has a social function. Hence it can be seen in sociological terms. This aspect has been developed among others by René Girard,⁵ and has been developed further by Raymund Schwager SJ into his *Dramatic Theology*.⁶
3. Sacrifice may include the dimension of creation.
4. Finally, there is a theological element to sacrifice.

2.1 *Ad 1. Sacrifice from a Psychological Perspective: A Free Act*

First I would like to describe some psychological aspects of sacrifice. A sacrifice is an action, that is, the expression of free choice. In comparison with other actions, it is an expression of greater freedom. In the normal course of events, our actions are motivated by some value we want to attain or protect. This value is directly connected with the action or the object of an action. Sacrifice is also orientated to a *value*, but it is not immediately contained in it, or attainable at the moment. Sometimes we cannot be sure that we will attain the object of the action. The mother in the example could not know whether her daughter would be brought back from the way she had chosen. The value that is aimed at is only indirectly related to the sacrificial action; it is often just

5 See René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*. (tr. P. Gregory; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977) and René Girard, *Le sacrifice* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 2003).

6 See Raymund Schwager s.j. and Józef Niewiadomski, eds, "Dramatische Theologie als Forschungsprogramm," in *Religion erzeugt Gewalt; Einspruch!* Innsbrucker Forschungsprojekt Religion-Gewalt-Kommunikation-Weltordnung (Beiträge zur mimetischen Theorie, Band 15; Münster-Hamburg-London: LIT, 2003), 39–77, 57; Raymund Schwager SJ, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption* (New York: Crossroad, 1999).

the expression of hope. It follows that a sacrifice is a greater expression of freedom, because it means detaching ourselves from the good being aimed at, and from the possible satisfaction of what is desired. If we make the sacrifice, we give up something in order to attain a higher goal, although we can only hope that we will attain it.

In a certain sense, when we bring a sacrifice we become the victim of our own sacrifice. We deprive ourselves of something. This can even go so far that we do not just sacrifice something, but our very self. The sacrifices made by the mother in our opening example come close to the self-sacrifice meant here. If we become a victim of our own sacrifice, it means we have accepted sacrificing our very self. Such a sacrifice may not be undertaken without that acceptance. This is because if we give up ourselves without realizing it, we abuse ourselves for an external goal. We may then lose ourselves, because by giving up ourselves and our freedom our soul is wounded. We may later feel that we have become ourselves the victim of the cause for which we had initially sacrificed ourselves. If the daughter in the example had not come home again, her mother could have felt she was her daughter's victim; she could then have accused her daughter of ingratitude and hardness of heart. This shows clearly that an action, which should actually have been undertaken freely and willingly, runs the risk of becoming no longer the expression of something freely willed; instead it is perceived as having been forced upon oneself by another person. Any relationship to a personal decision has then been lost.

Making a sacrifice does not guarantee that we will actually attain the higher goal. If we decide to make a sacrifice, to give up something, we must be aware of this. To sacrifice means giving up something of value, to let go of something one has possessed, and hence to give up the security connected with it. Since we can never be sure that the higher value will be achieved, sacrifice includes giving up a temporary, sometimes only supposed security, in order to attain a higher goal, a greater or even ultimate security.

If we freely and willingly make a sacrifice, we remain in relationship with ourselves, with our own will. However, if on the contrary a sacrifice is demanded of us, it can destroy our relationship to our self. The only possibility that remains is to agree to and accept the sacrifice *afterwards*, and to assimilate it as part of our own life. In this way the sacrifice remains part of our own freedom, and we remain in relationship to ourselves. This is one of the highest possibilities of human freedom. This act of freedom restores our relationship to ourselves in view of an action that is demanded of us. So if I feel that I am the victim, because a sacrifice has been demanded of me, and then decide freely and willingly to give, or give up what is demanded of me, I can experience that such a sacrifice liberates me from a situation of bondage.

2.2 *Ad 2. Sociological Aspect of Sacrifice – Our Relationship to Others*

Until now sacrifice has been considered in relation to the self. Let us take a second step and examine it in relation to others. I will mention two forms of sacrifice in this regard: A synchronic sacrifice for someone who is present at the same time and place, and a diachronic sacrifice that benefits those who lived in the past, or will live in the future, and/or at another place.

2.3 *A Synchronic and Local Sacrifice*

Our daily sacrifices are usually synchronic with the people who live around us, or at least at the same time. For example, we can sacrifice something for someone we love.

The fundamental attitude of consumerism, which demands that everything is here, now, immediately and completely available, destroys human relationships: The other person is not here in reality, he or she is usually somewhere else. This means that I have to give up my 'here' in order to meet the other person. The other person is not immediately at my disposal, he or she does things differently, so I have to give up my idea of 'now' in order to give the other person time and space to act. With children, for example, we have to scale back our own pace of doing things. The other person is not perfect, never quite in accord with our criteria – he or she is always different from what we expect. We have to give up our own picture of that person, or we will never discover the richness of his or her personality. In relationships nothing is free, we have to make some sacrifices in order to be unexpectedly enriched.

In human relationships, it is impossible to maintain the attitude of consumerism, which is antithetical to sacrifice – we have to give up something, even if we might have considered it valuable, if we really want to encounter the other person. We see that such a sacrifice is usually required when we encounter someone directly – our partner, our children, our friends, the significant people around us. It is a sacrifice that takes place simultaneously with an encounter, and often at the same place. Its aim is the sense of well-being of the people in our vicinity.

2.4 *A Diachronic and Global Sacrifice*

However, a sacrifice can also be important with reference to other times, that is, diachronically. It can play an important role in historical relationships; for example, if we need to be reconciled with our past. It is possible today to contribute through a symbolic act to a reconciliation that has not yet taken place. The need of reconciliation arises from a crime or misdeed in the past; however, it is ultimately directed to a reconciliation in the future, so it is directed

towards the future. Hans Jonas mentions the duty to live in such a way today – to make sacrifices today – that a future generation can exist:

Existenz der Menschheit heißt einfach: Dass Menschen leben; dass sie gut leben, ist das nächste Gebot. Das nackte ontische Faktum, dass es sie überhaupt gibt, wird für die darin vorher nicht Befragten zum ontologischen Gebot: Dass es sie weiter geben soll. Dies an sich namenlos bleibende “erste Gebot” ist ungesagt in allen weiteren enthalten (wenn diese nicht das Nichtsein zu ihrer Sache gemacht haben).⁷

In this sense sacrifice is orientated to something that might not even happen, so it is borne from hope. The past plays no role (unless we have to work off inherited issues in the present, in order to make the future possible); the goal of sacrifice is to be found in the future.

This form of sacrifice can be global in nature. We do today, here and now, what could bear fruit tomorrow or somewhere else. It is possible to have the whole world in view, for example, if we sacrifice our freedom of movement in order to reduce the emission of greenhouse gas. In addition, by acting in this way we can offer others a good example, and thus perhaps change a situation for the better.

2.5 *Ad 3. Sacrifice Seen Ecologically – in Relation to Creation*

The example quoted above shows clearly that sacrifice is not only directed to people, it can also be related to creation. Let me again refer to an idea of Hans Jonas: The duty to make it possible for future generations to live includes the duty to ensure that a world exists in which people can live. We have to give up something that we might wish to wrest from creation – also here we have to give up the attitude of consumerism – so that other people who come after us can live. We cannot expect that the goods we require are always ‘here’ – they have to be transported long distances in order to be available. We need an ancient virtue that requires sacrifice of us: *Temperance*. It is impossible for

⁷ See Hans Jonas, *Das Prinzip Verantwortung. Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilisation* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 186–87: “The human existence simply means: that people live; that they live righteously, is a commandment which comes next. The pure ontological fact that they exist at all, becomes an ontological commandment for those who were never questioned beforehand: that they must go on existing. This, in itself nameless, ‘first commandment’ is silently taken up in all that follows (as long as it does not make non-being its aim”.

everything to be at our disposal all the time; not every fruit grows in every season. Instead of organizing things to be conveyed around the world, so that we can enjoy fruits that are out of season, we should practice *patience*, another virtue that requires sacrifice of us. It is not possible for everything to be available all the time – we must again become *modest* and frugal in our wants, which, again, requires sacrifice of us. Things are not always exactly the way we want them to be – some of our wishes have to be given up; *flexibility* is required. Finally, it is not possible for everything to be as cheap as we would wish if the regulations to protect the environment (and social justice) are to be observed – through our own *diligence* we have to purchase the things that do not just fall into our laps. The subject of sacrifice, therefore, is very topical when we look at the whole problem of the environment.

2.6 *Philosophical Sacrifice*

Does philosophy require sacrifice? It is probably a provocative idea. Philosophy seems to be the field in which we have full scope for our thinking without observing any limits. Are our thoughts not free? Yes and no! Capriciousness in thinking, which does not include practical consequences, is dangerous. (A well-known example is Peter Singer, who became famous because of his provocative anthropology and his ideas on animal liberation,⁸ in fact ignoring practical implications. Are we allowed to express such ideas and confuse those people who are unable to expose the philosophical lapses? Has someone like Singer thought about the fact that as a result of his ideas someone could harm another person, or that the disabled could be insulted and harmed by his theories – what actually happened? We have to take responsibility for our thoughts and ideas.)

The sacrifice of the intellectual is the sacrifice of a self-created truth. The intellectual or academic has to orientate his or her search to the objective truth, and this sometimes requires them to sacrifice their own ideas, because they are too far removed from the truth – no matter how evocative their ideas may be or how much fame they could bring. What is demanded here is the sacrifice of capriciousness and intellectual vanity.

In general, knowledge has always to distance itself from what could still be done in order to gain power, prestige and riches. The pressure exerted on science by those providing the funding often enough counters the actual goal of science. Precisely in the field of science sacrifice may be totally ‘un-modern’, but it is sometimes necessary in order to protect the truth and the world from intellectual hubris and the delusion of feasibility.

8 See Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: University Press, 2011).

In this regard, Edith Stein offers an interesting thought. She speaks about the “sacrifice of one’s own intellect”, which has to be made in order to understand a greater truth. Her insight was that human beings can only understand the world and themselves to a certain degree; what transcends the human intellect and touches the divine can only be given to human beings as a gift.⁹

2.7 *Sacrifice Seen Theologically – A Gift to God*

The fourth and last element related to sacrifice is the theological context of sacrifice when it is offered to God. From a phenomenological viewpoint, religions see sacrifice as offering something to God. In ancient and in natural religions, it is taken for granted that the godhead demands sacrifice. In a magical-mystical context, a sacrifice becomes a gift that prevails upon the godhead, even forcing that godhead to grant what the human being requires of it. In the monotheistic religions, sacrifice is understood as a free gift to God, which cannot force God to do anything, but is nevertheless an expression of an urgent request, or else – and this is often forgotten – an expression of gratitude or praise. Sacrifice should not make people enslaved to God, but no more may it be misinterpreted as the price by which they can extract something from God, or force God to do something, in the sense of a *quid pro quo*. God remains free in this regard too.

In the context of religion, sacrifice is a free gift to God and an expression of human self-surrender to God. In this sense sacrifice is a conscious and free gift, and even an expression of human freedom in relation to a transcendent power.

3 Part II. Edith Stein on Sacrifice and Mediation

The phenomenologist Edith Stein situated sacrifice within the context of mediation between God and man. The Mediator, the Redeemer, stands between God and human beings, making himself the victim in order to redeem us. This sacrifice was the outflow of Jesus Christ’s free decision; he obeyed God’s will in freedom and as an expression of freedom.¹⁰

Stein also wanted to see her own sacrifice in the sense of mediation. She saw herself as a mediator between God and the Chosen People, which had

9 See Edith Stein, *Der Intellekt und die Intellektuellen*. In: *Bildung und Entfaltung der Individualität*. (Edith Stein ESGA 16. Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder, 2001), 116–117, 143–156.

10 See Edith Stein, *Natur, Freiheit und Gnade*. Published as: “Die ontische Struktur der Person und ihre erkenntnistheoretische Problematik,” in *Welt und Person. Beitrag zum christlichen Wahrheitsstreben* (ESW VI; Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder, 1962), 137–198 (160–162).

not yet found their Messiah.¹¹ According to Stein's understanding, her people had become partakers in the sufferings of Christ, without realizing whose cross they were carrying at that moment.¹² They didn't know that their suffering already included their future redemption. Edith Stein stated that she wanted to bear the cross on behalf of her people, because, blessed by that cross (*Benedicta a Cruce*), she knew about the redemptive power of suffering and about the reconciliation needed.¹³

3.1 *God's Sacrifice*

In the context of religion, it is often overlooked that God personally offers sacrifice.¹⁴ God is both the Sacrificer and the Sacrifice,¹⁵ a sacrifice in which Jesus Christ himself became the Victim as a result of his own free decision.¹⁶ That is the unique quality of sacrifice in Christianity: God is present on both sides of the sacrifice. God is the redemptive Sacrifice and the One who accepts the sacrifice.

11 See Edith Stein, *Testament* (Edith Stein Archiv Köln, A55).

12 See Maria Amata Neyer and Andreas Uwe Müller, *Edith Stein – das Leben einer ungewöhnlichen Frau* (Düsseldorf: Benziger, 1998), 264–268 and 278–280, footnote 21.

13 See Waltraud Herbstrith, *Edith Stein; ein neues Lebensbild in Zeugnissen und Selbstzeugnissen* (Mainz: Topos, 1983), 153–154: "Ihr geistlicher Begleiter Johannes Hirschmann fragte sie: 'Wer sühnt für das, was am jüdischen Volk im Rahmen des deutschen Volkes geschieht? [...] Wer wendet die entsetzliche Schuld zum Segen für beide Völker?' Und sie antwortet damals: 'Die, die die Wunden, die hier der Hass schlägt, nicht neuen Hass gebären lassen, sondern die, obwohl sie mit Opfer des Hasses sind, das Leid unter den Gehassten und das Leid der Hassenden auf sich nehmen.'"

14 See Wolfgang Schoberth, "Schlachtopfer gefallen dir nicht (Ps 40:7) Der Kreuzestod Jesu: Ein Opfer?," in *Erlösung ohne Opfer?* (ed. Werner H. Ritter; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 83–112 (90).

15 See Joseph Ratzinger, „*Einführung in das Christentum. Vorlesungen über das Apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis*. (München: Kösel, 1968), 232: *Nicht der Mensch ist es, der zu Gott geht und ihm eine ausgleichende Gabe bringt, sondern Gott kommt zum Menschen. (...) Das Neue Testament sagt nicht, dass die Menschen Gott versöhnen, wie wir es eigentlich erwarten müssten, da ja sie gefehlt haben, nicht Gott. Es sagt vielmehr, dass Gott in Christus die Welt mit sich versöhnt hat (2 Kor 5:19)*“. See Claudia Mariéle Wulf, *Begegnung, die befreit. Christliche Erlösung als Beziehungsgeschehen*. (Vallendar: Patris, 2009), 212 and 238–240.

16 See Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girards mimetische Theorie*, 294. This is the difference with the scapegoat sacrifice on which Girard's theory is based. Girard later changed from « La violence et le sacré » to « De la violence à la divinité ». René Girard, *De la violence à la divinité* (Paris: Grasset, 2007).

Through the Incarnation and Redemption, God, in a certain sense, sacrifices his own Godhead – a greater abasement cannot be imagined – because he renounces being seen as he really is: As God.

Through his human life, God took part in the everyday sacrifices of humanity.¹⁷ Through his death on the cross he did more than is possible for a human being: He took all human suffering upon himself, assimilating it into his sacrifice; He is the Victim that bears within himself every sacrifice throughout time and nails it to the cross, so that in the resurrection he could redeem everyone definitively and forever from suffering. Sacrificial gifting – not sacrificial being – is the condition for creating an identity.

3.2 *Self-Unfolding and Sacrifice*

Some readers may have been taken aback by Edith Stein's idea of sacrificing the intellect. Is it possible to sacrifice one's intellect without losing oneself? A human being is a complex entity that is able to unfold or develop mind and body and emotions, both on an individual level and on a social and moral level (in freedom and responsibility), herewith even transcending his or her limitations.

Nevertheless, in actual life our humanity is limited: If one ability is developed, another has to be in abeyance. If we want to gain something, we necessarily have to give up something else. This is because we cannot do everything, limited as we are by space and time, even if we have the mental and physical endowment to do so. Even in order to develop our abilities in a chosen field, we have to sacrifice our strength and time. Unless we make these sacrifices, we will not make the best use of our possibilities.

3.3 *Integration of Personal Sacrifice*

The second task in view of sacrifice and identity is the integration of necessary sacrifices into our existence. This includes not just the self-chosen sacrifices, but even more so the sacrifices demanded of us and that we do not really want to make. Allowing ourselves to become a victim can alienate us from ourselves and our own personality. A clear example of this is being victimized: If someone becomes a victim to such an extent that he or she is no longer able to remember being anything else, and if this person interiorizes the fundamental attitude of being a victim so that he or she is unable to escape powerlessness, such a person will lose contact with his or her true self.

17 See Reinhard Feldmeier, "Gottes Torheit? Deutungen des Todes Jesu im Neuen Testament," in *Erlösung ohne Opfer?* (ed. Werner H. Ritter; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 38.

The positive integration of the status of a victim into one's existence can take place by accepting the sacrifice as described above; however, this free acceptance does not mean that the trauma resulting from victimization is overcome. Trauma is an obstacle to freedom, and can only be integrated into the personality once freedom is restored.

3.4 *No Life without Sacrifice – No Sacrifice of Life? Or Could it Be?*

No one who lives can escape sacrifice – sacrifice is an everyday reality. In Jesus Christ we encounter the highest form of sacrifice: To sacrifice oneself in freedom, and to accept the sacrifice even before it happens, which may be seen as the ultimate act of human freedom.

Edith Stein followed Christ along this way. She mirrored her own fate in that of Queen Esther, who was prevailed upon by her people to sacrifice herself. She approached the king of Persia as representative of her people to plead for its freedom. Just as Esther expected to be killed by entering the presence of the King without being commanded, so did Edith Stein expect her own death.¹⁸ Esther was allowed to live – Edith Stein was not. The free decision to act even when there is no choice has already been described as the highest form of freedom and sacrifice. In the face of death it is the highest and most perfect sacrifice we can make. By reinterpreting one's fate of an imposed sacrifice, and making it into a freely willed sacrifice, we can follow Christ and make meaningful what is senseless; we can experience resurrection in death. The last written note from Edith Stein, written on her way to Auschwitz, contains only a single sentence: "On the way *ad orientem*. Teresia Benedicta a Cruce. Edith Stein".¹⁹

Ad orientem – to the East. This liturgical concept alludes to the resurrection, the coming of the Messiah. By consciously choosing this Latin formula, she gave a final, impressive profession of faith. It is the expression of a freely willed sacrifice in the face of imminent death, which helps us to intuit that the deeper meaning of this sacrifice is the resurrection in messianic salvation.

18 See Edith Stein, *Selbstbildnis in Briefen II, 1934–1942*. *ESWIX* (eds L. Gelber and R. Leuven; Druten: De Maas & Waler/Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 1977), letter nr. 281, 121.

19 "Unterwegs ad orientem. Teresia Benedicta a Cruce. Edith Stein." Witness of this last note was Sr. Placida Laubhardt (1904–1998); I interviewed her on this subject in January 1996. See further documentation: <http://www.kloster-st-lioba.de/assets/sr-placida-dokumentation.pdf>, consulted October 31, 2011.

Self-Sacrifice between Constraint and Redemption: Gertrud von Le Fort's *The Song at the Scaffold*

Marcel J. H. M. Poorthuis

1 Introduction

Converts to Catholicism cherish certain books in which a passionate religious fervor goes along with a highly individual orientation. At first glance this personal experience seems to be characterized by a thoroughly orthodox orientation, but on closer scrutiny the borders of institutionalized Catholic religion are often transcended from the very moment of entering into the holy Mother Church. Next to the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine, *Die Letzte am Schafott* [*The song at the scaffold*], by Gertrud von le Fort (1876–1971), a convert herself, belongs to the favorite conversion literature.

It would be easy to dismiss the theme of this book, *Die Letzte am Schafott*, as no more than an expression of a Catholic triumphant attitude. During the French revolution, possessions of convents were confiscated and whoever resisted was sentenced to death and executed under the guillotine. The French Revolution would be no more than a demonstration of the barbarous attitude of the idolatry of Reason over against the devotion to true faith. The story, however, goes far deeper than that. This becomes clear when we focus on two of the main characters: Two young girls, strongly differing in temperament and background; and two spiritual leaders in the convent diametrically opposed to one another. We will note that the story contains a sharp criticism of traditional Catholic ideas about self-sacrifice and martyrdom. Simultaneously, the story offers a passionate picture of true martyrdom, which can only be reached by acknowledging existential fear and a deep love of life.

1.1 *Bringing a Sacrifice Willingly and without Struggle is not a Sacrifice*

First I want to clarify in which way the story of the Carmelites can be connected to the story of Abraham called upon to sacrifice his own son, as told in Qur'an and Bible, with or without elaboration in the *midrash*, the Jewish interpretations of the Bible. The primary message of the story is that the sacrifice of the son is initially commanded, but should not be executed eventually. God demands surrender from Abraham, but not at the expense of his own son. Full humanity can go together with full surrender to God, as the story could be

summarized. Abraham's awakening conscience during the story would convey precisely this insight.

It is, however, vital to realize the paradoxical character of the sacrificial act. Some interpretations depict Abraham as a real paragon of obedience, to such an extent that it almost seems as if it were his only wish to sacrifice his son. This would totally rob the sacrifice of its dynamism! Suppose Abraham was secretly thinking: "Thank heavens, I cannot wait to sacrifice my son".¹ This would give us a shudder of abhorrence. Apparently, a sacrifice can only retain its significance as sacrifice when it is actually too precious to be made. The willingness to sacrifice to God might nearly obscure this essential fact. Only when the sacrifice is as precious as one's own life – or even more – devotion to God can have a meaning. This implies that no sacrifice made out of hatred of life and out of contempt of oneself can be regarded as a sacrifice.

Hence, the sacrifice affirms in a paradoxical way the very human desire to retain the sacrifice. Asceticism, fasting, and other transformations of sacrifice retain their significance only as affirmation of love for life, of enjoyment of human existence, expressed in eating and drinking and in sexuality. The rest is nothing but self-mutilation and a not outgrown asceticism. Even celibacy and sexual abstinence need to affirm bodily affections as of great value, or rather they would serve as a foil for the hatred of life and the body.

Let us now turn to the story of the Carmelites. Although it has a historical kernel, it became famous as a novel, as a film script by George Bernanos, and as an opera by Francis Poulenc, *Dialogues des Carmélites*.

2 Die Letzte am Schafott²

This is historical: Carmelite sisters resist the confiscation of their convent during the French revolution. Sixteen sisters are condemned to death. In 1906, these sisters have been beatified. Gertrud von le Fort wrote her novel, *Die Letzte*

1 A variety of sources such as the well-known painting by Rembrandt of Abraham sacrificing Isaac (in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg) as well as a Syriac dialogue poem about Genesis 22 allude to a certain cruelty in Abraham without, however, pushing it so far as to rob the sacrifice of its meaning. See S. Brock, "Two Syriac Verse Homilies on the Binding of Isaac," in *Le Muséon* 99 (1986), 61–129. A psychoanalytical interpretation of the story as the struggle between father and son also tends to assume a certain willingness in Abraham to sacrifice.

2 Gertrud von le Fort, *Die Letzte am Schafott* (München: Ehrenwirth Verlag, 1931). I use a 1953 version. English translations are mine. See as well Gertrud von Le Fort, *The Song at the Scaffold*, translated by Olga Marx, New York 1933.

am Schafott, in 1931 when she felt how the rise of the totalitarian regime of Nazism threatened human existence as well as the integrity of the Church. She was shocked to see the nazi pamphlets against the Jews in München, which gave her an inkling of impending disaster. It was Von le Fort's conviction that the Church should resist.³ She was herself persecuted by the nazis. Georges Bernanos (1888–1948) wrote the script after the war, in a climate of existentialism in which people were torn between meaning and absurdity. He grappled with the question how humankind in its tragic condition could acquire God's grace.⁴

The composer Francis Poulenc (1899–1963) was moved by a religious experience and wrote his opera based upon Bernanos' text, but with important modifications.⁵ The music, the text and the theatrical scenery all contribute to make it into a work of art in its own right. Because of the multiple meanings the qualification 'dialogue' is aptly chosen. The focus of the opera is the entanglement of fear and religion on a neurotic and existential level, embodied in the different protagonists.⁶

I limit myself to the novel of Gertrud von le Fort, who relates the story from the vantage point of a contemporary witness of the events. Only here and there I point out differences with the other versions in so far as these differences shed a new light upon the meaning of sacrifice.

2.1 *The Story of the Carmelite Nuns*

The story tells about two girls who differ strongly in character: The lively and happy Constance and the aristocratic Blanche filled with fear and depression. Blanche's mother was harassed by a mob when heavily pregnant. She died shortly after she gave birth to Blanche, because of which Blanche's life is under a bad omen. Several objects in her house imbue her with fear, such as an old staircase. Her governess tries to combat these fears by religious education. Praying to the "little King with the crown", that is, to Christ, should guarantee protection. Blanche wonders what would happen if the crown fell of his head.

3 See Gail Elisabeth Lowther, *A Historical, Literary, and Musical Analysis of Francis Poulenc's "Dialogues des Carmélites"* (PhD diss., University of Ohio, 2010), 14.

4 Georges Bernanos, « Dialogues des Carmélites, » in *Oeuvres Romanesques* (eds G. and M. Estève; Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 1567–1719.

5 Francis Poulenc, *Oeuvres lyriques*, EMI classics, Edition du Centenaire 1899–1963.

6 See the excellent article by Hans Alma and Hetty Zock, "The Mercy of Anxiety. A Relational-Psychological Study of *Dialogues des Carmélites*," in *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 4 (2002): 175–192. Cf. Sister Meredith Murray, *La genèse du Dialogue des Carmélites* (Parijs: Editions du Seuil, 1963).

The governess gets confused and assures that the staircase is really safe when you have said your prayers. At that moment, a bar breaks in Blanche's hands.

In marked contrast, Constance is so cheerful and merry – a genuine child of God – that she seems to know no fear of death at all. Sometimes she alludes to an early death in order to be with God sooner. It is hard to conceive of a greater contrast than between the characters of these two girls. Still, in a mysterious way their lives seem to coincide. To put it in Jungian terms, they seem to be two split figures of one and the same original or the polar manifestation of tensions existing in each individual.

Blanche's father, who is a freethinker, does not understand his daughter's choice for the convent. He regards it as merely an attempt to escape fear. In spite of that, he continues to support his daughter morally. Although Blanche indeed tries to escape her fears, it becomes clear that entering the convent is hardly a way to avoid anguish. She is received by the prioress who dies shortly afterwards suffering severe pains, a sure indication that life in the convent cannot shut out reality and even less fear. Blanche wonders how God can allow such suffering and because of that her profession of faith is initially met with strong suspicion by the mistress of novices, Sister Mary of the Incarnation. The latter even tries to postpone Blanche's profession. However, an impending new law prohibits the entrance into the convent for new candidates and Blanche is accepted very quickly. This brings great joy to the little sister Constance, who exclaims that the two of them might reach the age of hundred years, "even when it is hard to enter heaven after such a long time". Because of the difficult circumstances, Blanche's religious name will be Sister *Blanche of the Agony of Christ*.⁷

It is told about sister Mary of the Incarnation that after the execution of some of her fellow-sisters, she would be marked with a red line around her neck. When the narrator meets her, he notes that no such line is visible. The narrator inquires after Blanche and the mistress of novices mutters: "Why should fear and shudder be something bad? Cannot they sometimes probe far deeper than mere courage?". Initially, she doubts Blanche's aptitude to face the perils of religious life, but she secretly offers herself in devotion to God in order to strengthen Blanche.

The commissioner of the Jacobins regards the convent as a hotbed of exploiters and traitors. During his inspection of the convent, Blanche utters a desperate cry. The commissioner is convinced that Blanche would prefer to leave the convent. Sister Mary of the Incarnation intervenes, arguing that the commissioner has no authority to judge these matters. In a grim inquiry,

⁷ In Bernanos and Poulenc, Blanche chooses that name herself. See Lowther, *Analysis*, 33.

the commissioner expresses the hope that the heads of the sisters will one day be put on the stake. Instead of frightening Sister Mary with it, she feels glorified. A glowing fervor burns in her veins, an indication of her longing for martyrdom. She prays for Blanche's martyrdom as well, but without telling her, in order not to burden her with it. Meanwhile, she indicates unmistakably that martyrdom would be the highest ideal for the whole of the community.

Because of the prohibition of the eternal vow, Blanche and Constance are the only two novice sisters. The mistress of novices, Sister Mary, tries to bring the two of them to the eternal vow in secret, with martyrdom as the crowning event. The prioress, however, strongly objects to that idea.

There is a cherished tradition to pass the statue of the Little King along the cells of the sisters during Christmas. This year things will be different: The scepter and the crown have already been confiscated. Blanche is in the grip of fear so intensely that she drops the statue. The head breaks off. Upon the advice of the mistress of novices, the prioress intends to send Blanche away from the convent because of her excessive fear. In a conversation with Blanche, however, the prioress gets the impression that Blanche has devoted her fear of death to God in a religious act, mindful of her religious name: Sister *Blanche of the Agony of Christ*. The prioress decides that Blanche may stay under her personal supervision. This marks the beginning of a bitter antagonism between the prioress and the mistress of novices. The latter fears that Blanche's weakness and fear would be a good reason for the prioress to avoid martyrdom altogether for all sisters.⁸

2.2 *The Mistress of Novices*

When the prioress leaves for a journey, the mistress of novices takes over the authority over the convent. She announces the assault of the convent. The little Constance starts to cry. Still, she is not afraid, but she, being the youngest, does not want to be the last on the scaffold. Sister Mary, the mistress of the novices, is painfully hurt: "In the order of the convent, the eldest one will be the last", she says, "and besides, you are not the youngest, but Blanche is". She looks at Blanche while emphasizing that no one will be forced to martyrdom. "Whoever is not prepared to give her life to Christ may step aside." She hopes that Blanche will understand this as a kind of invitation, but Blanche remains silent. Later on, Blanche is asked again to step aside and then she remarks: "I want to remain loyal to my fear". During the act of consecration in the chapel,

8 In Bernanos, Sister Constance pretends to belong to the weaker sisters, this in order to protect Blanche. "I do love life so much", she says.

Constance notes that Blanche kneels next to her. When she looks up again during communion, Blanche has disappeared.

Blanche is taken prisoner by the mob, her father is killed and she is offered a cup of blood in a blasphemous gesture. As both an aristocratic and a religious person, the anger of the mob doubles against her. Market women, “mothers of the revolution, drag her through the streets of Paris”. Meanwhile, the prioress has returned from her journey and is leading a second act of devotion. This time, it is no longer an act for “God, king and fatherland”, as sister Mary of the Incarnation, herself of royal blood, had wished, but a “sacrifice without hope, a sacrifice for God only, a sacrifice of pure love”. Mary of the Incarnation had been convinced that the departure of the weak Blanche would be a blessing for the convent, but this idea does not play any role with the prioress. Then something curious happens. When both the prioress and the mistress of the novices are in Paris, they watch a spectacle of prisoners being carried on carts to the guillotine. Sister Mary exclaims: “O Jesus Christ, now I understand your agony”, and she disappears in the crowd. The next day we hear that sister Mary was under the impression that Sister Blanche had been on the cart.

Sister Mary wants to travel back to the convent in Compiègne to be together with the other sisters, but all the roads have been blocked. The sisters are taken prisoner and are deported to Paris. The crowd is searching for Sister Mary because of her royal descent. She, however, brings the “sacrifice of the sacrifice”, which means that she renounces martyrdom by hiding. The expression “the sacrifice of the sacrifice” might denote something truly spiritual and even heroic: By renouncing the glory of martyrdom, she would overcome the last traces of egoism. The writer, Gertrud von le Fort, however, appears not to intend this, but adds in a rather ironical vein: “Less noble people might think that she trembled for her life”. “The more pious people” – without stating it explicitly, Gertrud von le Fort considers them naïve – thought that this was the greatest sacrifice to renounce the crown of glorious martyrdom. There is a clear suggestion that Sister Mary has eventually chosen for the easiest road, namely, to safety.

Still, later on she is persuaded that the sisters will chant a hymn on their last way and she wants to join them together with the priest who was connected to the convent. The priest forbids this and says that she should sacrifice her voice as well. “Think of the loneliness of Christ in the Garden of Olives. And think of mother Mary’s silence.”⁹ The novel continues: “From that moment on, Sister

9 In Bernanos and in the opera of Poulenc, Sister Mary says: “Their last glance will search me in vain!”, whereupon the priest retorts: “Think of another glance to which you may direct yours.”

Mary of the Incarnation remained utterly silent. Her voice was transferred to someone else”.

2.3 *The Hymns*

Indeed the sisters sing a hymn, the *Salve Regina*, to mother Mary. After that, the *Veni Creator Spiritus* is heard, the hymn to the creative Holy Spirit. It is as if the destruction and chaos caused by the machinery of the guillotine is checked by the creative force of the Spirit. The sound of the choir of the sisters becomes thinner during the operation of the guillotine. In the end, only one voice remains, that of Sister Constance. When her voice is muted as well, another voice can be heard out of the crowd. The voice of Sister Mary has indeed been transferred to someone else. The voice sings without any trembling and rather exultingly until the end of the last strophe:

Deo Patri sit gloria
Et Filio, qui a mortuis
Surrexit ac Paraclito
In saeculorum saecula!¹⁰

The ‘Amen’ could not be heard any more. Blanche was beaten to death by the raging mob.¹¹ The narrator was a witness of this execution and relates the whole history in a letter to a friend. He comments that it is not the high value of human nature which has come to light in this story, but the decline of humanity giving way to chaos. Blanche was not a heroine, but demonstrates the fragility of our force and dignity.

2.4 *The Narrative Lines in the Story*

Blanche is tormented by fears. Her religious education has taught her to pray to Jesus, who will offer protection in exchange. However, in many smaller details – the broken bar of the stairs, the crown of the little King falling on the ground – it becomes clear that this religious bargain does not hold. Prayer in exchange for safety does not constitute the essence of Christian spirituality. Blanche’s way to the convent is by no means an escape from fear, but will

Then both leave the stage. Is a liaison between both suggested here? In that case, the ultimate degradation of Sister Mary would be complete!

10 Glory be to God the Father,/ And to the Son, who has risen from the dead,/ And to the Spirit who consoles,/ For ever and ever!

11 Bernanos describes how Blanche is pushed to the scaffold among a group of women, after which her voice remains silent. Poulenc, however, describes how she climbs the scaffold.

rather intensify fear. This becomes clear when the old prioress is not spared pains by God. The religious name of Blanche of the agony of Christ, indicates that Blanche, with all her excruciating fears, is closer to Christ than the self-assured Sister Mary of the Incarnation.¹² Sister Mary has no sympathy at all for Blanche – she can hardly be called a “mother Mary” – and she accuses her of having small faith. Her own steadfastness, however, is ‘cheap’, because it lacks a basis in a genuine experience of anxiety as will become clear in the sequel of the story.

When the commissioner threatens the sisters with death, Sister Mary glows with an inner desire for martyrdom. Blanche remains loyal to her own anxiety and does not opt for the heroism of martyrdom. Sister Mary’s longing for heroism is mingled with pride of her royal descent and her affiliation with the royal house of France, which renders her willingness somewhat insincere. She attempts to remove Blanche from the community as a weak element which eventually undermines her own willingness to sacrifice. Sister Mary is unable to identify with her community of sisters, but her pursuit is a private glory and salvation. In this respect, she is diametrically opposed to the new prioress who rejects the imposed act of devotion to martyrdom and takes Blanche under her personal protection.

It is highly symbolic that Blanche admires the statue of the little King of Glory because of its smallness and fragility, whereas Sister Mary reproaches her for not calling the little King powerful. Blanche rejects this ‘correct’ Christian qualification and says: “The little King is dead. What remains is the Lamb of God”. She may refer to a victory over death, but only through fragility, suffering and death. Blanche’s fellow sisters have to appear in the revolutionary court because they “do not recognize” the authority of the law. Blanche is absent. However, Sister Mary is nowhere to be found either. The sisters are condemned to the guillotine because of “counterrevolutionary statements that constitute a danger to the state”. When the verdict is executed, the sisters start to sing. At the moment it would have been Sister Mary’s turn, suddenly Blanche’s voice is heard in the crowd. In spite of her anxieties, Blanche raises her voice in the midst of the crowd and is killed.

12 In Bernanos and Poulenc, there is an elaborate debate about how it could be that Christ felt a profound fear of death, while many saints faced death without any fear.

3 Perspectives on Self-Sacrifice

The story contains quite a few antagonistic movements, which can all be explained as ways to clarify the essence of self-sacrifice. Sister Mary is utterly convinced of the importance of self-sacrifice and wants to promote that among the sisters as their vocation. Self-sacrifice appears not as a personal choice in life, but as a collective ideology imposed “from the outside” by Sister Mary with considerable constraint. Sister Mary does not feel any motherly love, in spite of her name, but demands self-sacrifice of her ‘children’, in marked contrast with the prioress who rejects the collective act of devotion to martyrdom and would rather save her ‘children’. According to the prioress, martyrdom is a gift from God, not something that can be achieved by humans out of free will if there are other options as well.¹³ Blanche cannot surmount her fear and disappears. Her disappearance marks the beginning of her *Via Dolorosa*. Eventually sister Mary also discovers what anxiety really is and then it is her turn to disappear. Her later attempt to join the other sisters does not succeed either. In Bernanos and Poulenc, Sister Mary and the aforementioned priest disappear simultaneously, so that a connection – or rather a *liaison* – between them is suggested. This would mean a total desertion. Sister Mary’s initial willingness to sacrifice herself cannot be explained as a victory over her fears, but constitutes their denial. Hence this sacrifice is not a genuine sacrifice, but arises out of lack of love of life. Her refusal to bring the sacrifice constitutes a first positive discovery of that love of life, after which she recoils from the genuine sacrifice which presupposes it. Sister Mary betrays her own ideology, in spite of the fact that she constantly reproached Blanche for not embracing martyrdom.

No doubt this denouement constitutes a sharp criticism of martyrdom as a collective Catholic ideology, imposed as it were “from the outside” instead of being a free choice “from the inside”.¹⁴ Gertrud von le Fort does not shrink back from a highly critical stand on outward morality and a legalistic sense of duty, in which personal feelings of individuals do not count. The novel is by no means a *paean* of traditional Catholic triumphant devotion.

Religious substitution interpreted as the responsibility of each individual for the whole of humankind is an essential theme in the literary works of Gertrud von le Fort. Sacrificial death is regarded as participation in the redemption

13 Poulenc emphasizes this element.

14 This seems to me a striking parallel with Levinas’ philosophy, which does not offer a perspective of sacrifice and martyrdom as generally valid, but radically rejects any martyrdom in so far as it is preached to someone else. See E. Levinas, *Humanism of the other* (Chicago: Urbana, 2003), 31.

by Christ. Although Protestantism emphasizes that humankind cannot add anything to Christ's redemptive suffering, Catholic theologians such as Erich Przywara (1889–1972) have emphasized the significance of vicarious suffering for all believers “in Christ”.¹⁵ In French literature around 1900, there is a remarkable flood of Catholic literature on vicarious suffering, which has sometimes been branded as a “reactionary revolution”.¹⁶

Gertrud von le Fort can be interpreted as both a continuation and a critical reassessment of this theological tradition. In her works, the danger of a stereotypical view of woman as particularly called to vicarious sacrifice is never far off. Nevertheless the strong differences between the female characters in *Die Letzte am Schafott* prevent an essentialist approach and do not allow for an easy feminist disqualification. The chasm between an essentialist labeling “from the outside” leading to oppression, and a genuine discovery of one's vocation “from the inside” leading to redemption forms a crucial theme in her writings.

4 Christian Conceptions of Martyrdom

The theme of martyrdom as formulated in *Die Letzte am Schafott* is quite untraditional and even exceptional in comparison with the most important Christian documents from the formative period of Christianity. In a passionate discourse, *Ad martyres* (198 CE), Tertullian exhorts the Christians who have been taken prisoner to face martyrdom without fear and with total equanimity. Fleeing is no option for Tertullian and feigning obedience to the emperor he rejects full of contempt. Tertullian admires the Stoic ideal of equanimity and a dispassionate attitude, even with pagan heroes such as Lucretia, Mucius Scaevola and Empedocles, and demands no less from his fellow Christians.

The Christian writer Origen, who lived somewhat later than Tertullian, had to be prevented from martyrdom as a child, when his father had been taken prisoner and he himself wanted to achieve the crown of martyrdom. In his *Exhortation to Martyrdom* (235 CE), he also sketches equanimity as the highest ideal, embodied in the Jewish seven Maccabean martyrs. Remarkably, Origen discusses the problem that Christ might have felt a strong fear of death, as the

15 Helena Saward, “A Literature of Substitution: Vicarious Sacrifice in the Writing of Gertrud von le Fort,” *German Life and Letters* 53:2 (2000): 178–200. Incidentally, both Przywara and Gertrud von le Fort were in contact with Edith Stein.

16 Richard Griffiths, *The Reactionary Revolution. The Catholic Revival in French Literature 1870–1914* (London: Constable 1966), esp. 149–222.

prayer testifies: “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Matt. 26:39). It is telling that Origen tries to explain this away (§29). We have to wait until Cyprian (200–258 CE) for the argument that martyrdom, although the highest good, should not be searched, but – if possible without denying the Christian faith – should be avoided. This was to become the guiding principle for the Church afterwards. Incidentally, Cyprian died as a martyr.

4.1 *Rejection of a Stoic Attitude*

Die Letzte am Schafott can be read as a consistent major critique upon the Stoic ideal of equanimity towards martyrdom. Christ’s fear of death is not a reason for embarrassment to the writer of the novel, as it was for Origen, but points the way to a genuine experience of one’s own fear of death that has to be lived through. The prioress alludes to martyrdom not as an achievement but as a gift from God; this against Sister Mary who deliberately wants to search martyrdom, hereby suppressing her own fears.

In contrast, Blanche chooses for her own feelings and for her love of life, which she feels in spite of (or thanks to) her fears. Her continuous fear of death coincides with a strong desire to live. Again we see in the story an antagonistic movement. The first movement was that of Sister Mary towards heroic martyrdom, combated by the prioress, while the second is that of Blanche herself, fleeing for martyrdom, but nonetheless gently connected to Sister Constance. The anxious Blanche will eventually choose martyrdom out of her own free will and without anybody counting upon it – except Sister Constance. Blanche’s choice is not motivated by a morbid love of death – she has proven that by her flight – but out of loyalty to her vocation to be a nun and a bride of Christ. She does not want to abjure her habit and her community of fellow sisters. In that respect, her deed might be comparable to that of the other sisters, but in the novel we do not get more information about their motives.¹⁷

As modern human beings, we might shiver by this story of martyrdom of the sisters, convinced as we are that religious choices must be reduced to social pressures, gender differences, unconscious motives due to childhood experiences, hatred of life or a secret ambition to heroism. That this martyrdom could be understood out of genuine love of life and as a testimony to Christian faith is hard for us to accept. We might even propose a religious frenzy in order to rob this religious gesture of its authenticity. Blanche’s history seems to forestall all this by anticipating these objections. In first instance, as we all would do spontaneously, she avoids her fate. The childhood experiences, the social

17 Bermanos introduces extensively other sisters with name and background, who all have their own perspectives upon the events.

pressure and even the unconscious craving for glory are all given their due. This confers to Blanche's deed precisely that hallmark of authenticity: A personal wrestling with her vocation, the loving embrace of life itself which makes her surrender of her life to God the most precious gift.

Her anxieties and fears, which initially seemed a weakness and a hereditary curse, turn out to be so essential to her choice that without them her choice would lack humane traits. Hence, the self-sacrifice in martyrdom is no longer an automatic step, but a long way of growth and defeat of one's own fears. Existential fear and the search for identity are closely intertwined here. Not by neglecting fear, but by integrating it into the love of life as a gift from God, Blanche affirms her own identity and honors her own name Blanche – in reference to her white habit. Her deed turns out to be pure freedom and pure devotion to God, a combination rarely achieved. This is her great strength, referred to in her name as well: Blanche de la Force, simultaneously reference to the author's name, Von le Fort. The irony of the story is that all ideals of Sister Mary of the Incarnation were based upon her own strength, whereas Blanche realizes these ideals based upon God's grace. This is symbolized by the voice of Sister Mary being taken over by Blanche.

Next to Sister Mary, Blanche and the prioress, there is the young and cheerful Sister Constance. It is as if she is not antagonistic to any person and manages to live without conflict. Her entrance into the convent is motivated by love of God and humankind, whereas Blanche is motivated by fear of life. Together they form a mysterious couple. Both are novices, both wonder whether they will be the last ones on the scaffold.¹⁸ Constance is convinced that Blanche will return in one way or another, although she puts no pressure at all upon Blanche as Sister Mary did. We noted earlier that a dream had told Constance that the two of them would die together. With an inner joy Constance enters the scaffold, without being forced by an ideology imposed upon her by a tradition or a superior. Pure love of God and humankind motivates her behavior. Her face radiates joy. It is that joy which Blanche has to conquer, but which will eventually be her share as well.¹⁹ Constance has always encouraged Blanche, stating that she would be able to overcome her fears. In the end the two of them are together, united in death before God.

18 Poulenc intensifies the intertwined fates of Blanche and Constance by introducing Constance relating laughingly a dream in which Blanche and herself will die together.

19 Poulenc describes how Constance and Blanche exchange a last eye contact before Constance's execution.

5 The Complex Relation Between Sacrifice and Freedom of Will

We might wonder what prompted Blanche to raise her voice in the midst of the crowd. At first glance death could have been avoided, in contrast to the fate of the other sisters. It is significant that Blanche does not decide to choose martyrdom *before* she sees her fellow sisters, but *precisely at that moment*. This may indicate that she felt her personal vocation to be intrinsically connected with them. At the moment she sees the other sisters being carried off to the scaffold, she realizes that she is on the brink of deserting her vocation. Her choice is free but not individualistic: Her identity is intrinsically connected to the community, yet this does not imply that she is consciously pressed by that community. Here we might adduce the philosophy of René Girard, who points out that our desires have an element of imitation.²⁰ We desire when and what we see others desire. Blanche has probably no desire of martyrdom, until she sees her fellow sisters on the way to the guillotine. Then she manages to overcome her fear of death.

Should we conclude that her martyrdom is after all not a free decision but rather a form of *mimesis*, of imitation of what others do in order to acquire the same status? It is important to look once more at her situation.

She does not distance herself explicitly and visibly from the vocation of her fellow sisters. At that moment she is hidden in the crowd, be it in the hands of a revolutionary mob.²¹ In whatever way, she is now invisible to the eyes of the other sisters. Neither the crowd nor her fellow sisters did have occasion to put any pressure upon her final choice. Therefore her release from the crowd by following her vocation should be understood as an act of pure freedom, “from the inside”. It is a self-sacrifice without being sacrificed. As the example of her fellow sisters has brought her to this step, it is preferable to speak about following in their footsteps rather than copying their fate. Even if it is the fate of the others that induces her to take up martyrdom, she is not forced by the conscious will of the others. Hence it is neither slavish *mimesis* nor imposed force or collective obligation, but a choice for martyrdom which she – and she only – recognizes in her fellow sisters and which ultimately only she can choose for herself. Seen in this perspective, she realizes the highest freedom and the deepest identity by choosing self-sacrifice, after having lived through all the fears and sufferings as well as the feelings of attachment to life. We may regard her self-sacrifice as a genuine sacrifice, in the sense of sacrifice with

²⁰ See Saskia van Goelst Meijer's contribution in this volume.

²¹ In Gertrud von le Fort's novel. Bernanos and Poulenc put a stronger emphasis upon Blanche's freedom by introducing the mob only after her singing.

which this chapter opened: Self-sacrifice presupposes love of life, or else it is no sacrifice. Fear does not appear as a disturbance of psychic life that should be removed. Fear leads Blanche to the deepest kernel of her life and to the highest consciousness of her vocation.²²

And yet, we have to leave the paradox unresolved that Blanche's attitude cannot be turned into a general ideal to be recommended to all mankind. Expecting the self-sacrifice from others amounts to immorality.²³ Blanche's resistance to such a generalized ideal, embodied in Sister Mary of the Incarnation, remains valid until the very end. Even the notion of divine reward for martyrdom should be challenged, to avoid the reduction of an unselfish act into an 'economic' choice for what would be most beneficial.²⁴

Poulenc ends his opera with a female choir that is considered the most heart-rending music ever written. The music, a Latin hymn sung by the women and accompanied by the orchestra is repeatedly interrupted by the brutal thwack of the guillotine, after which the choir has one voice less. At the end we only hear the voice of Constance, who ends up being murdered as well. Then there is Blanche's solo voice, singing the final lines of the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* while entering the scaffold.²⁵ She does not sing the final word 'Amen', however. At that moment the guillotine falls down on her too.

22 Cf. the existential meaning of fear in Kierkegaard and Heidegger. See J. Calsius, *Ruimte voor angst. Het vermogen tot existentiële bewustwording doorheen angst in relatie tot lichaam en authenticiteit (Room for Fear. The Ability to Existential Consciousness through Fear in Relation to the Body and to Authenticity)*, (PhD diss., University of Utrecht, 2011).

23 In that respect, the philosophy of Levinas does not contain a general sacrificial philosophy, but rather stresses the impossibility to expect self-sacrifice from someone else but me. A different position in: Peter Jonkers, "Justifying Sacrifice," *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religions-philosophie*, 50 (2008): 313–329.

24 This does not imply an atheistic stand as the only morally possible position, as John Milbank seems to believe. ("The Midwinter Sacrifice: a Sequel to *Can Morality be Christian?*" *Angelaki* 6, 2 (2001): 49–65. Those who act unselfishly without the motivation of heavenly reward are the most deserving that reward. This seems to be the lesson of the question of the righteous to the heavenly Son of Man (Matt 25:37).

25 In the novel Blanche is killed by a furious mob, by which her fate and her mother's fate coincide. Bernanos, and even more Poulenc, have chosen to establish a stronger connection between Blanche's fate and that of her fellow sisters.

Religion, Suffering and Female Heroism: Transformations in the Meaning of Sacrifice in a Catholic Conversion Movement

Marjet Derks

1 Introduction

We are an international movement and community of women of different cultures, social backgrounds and generations. We trust in the Spirit of God, Mystery and Source of Life. We are called to create a sustainable world, transforming our planet into a place of peace and justice. We acknowledge that we are part of the whole of creation, striving to live simply and to nurture a culture of care for all the earth. We are determined to look for signs of hope in a complex world. We are strengthened by the compassionate energy and creative action of women.¹

Anyone visiting the website of the International Grail comes across these words encapsulating the current vision of this women's movement. The Grail is a spiritual, social and cultural movement "grounded in Christian faith" that through working in different cultures seeks to work for justice and peace and to enable women to develop their full potential. It is active in eighteen countries and is recognized by the United Nations as a Non-Governmental Organization with a special consultative status in relation to women within the UN Economic and Social Council. The Dutch branch – the movement's first one, established in 1921 – explicitly states that its common ground is:

[T]o find meaningful ways of expressing our spirituality in action. The Grail movement in the Netherlands has grown into a community where a lively and exciting exploration is taking place in feminist theology, Christianity and Zen Buddhism.²

1 "The vision of the Grail," see www.thegrail.org. The women's movement of the Grail should be distinguished from another movement of the same name. The latter is a so-called new religious movement that originated in Germany in the late 1940s and is inspired by the work of Oskar Ernst Bernhardt (see www.grailmessage.com).

2 www.degraalbeweging.nl.

The Grail websites present an international movement of modern women who, inspired by a range of both religious and secular thinkers, want to play an active role in today's world. If anything, the visual culture of the Grail is dominated by words and images that, in addition to female bonding, reflect self-awareness, confidence and autonomy. Nothing could be further removed from concepts of sacrifice and suffering.

Nevertheless, a sacrificial culture originally lay at the core of the movement and for decades was fundamental to its spirituality. This fact has been erased from memory and, consequently, from history. Instead of regarding this as a mere historical error, I argue that it is rather an indication of the basically *historical* nature of the concept of sacrifice. By this I mean that its societal, cultural and spiritual-theological qualifications are related to specific historical contexts. The meaning and the assessment of the concepts of sacrifice and, consequently, of personal suffering change throughout history and are therefore variable concepts. While certain sacrificial acts were highly valued in a specific time and age, the same acts could be perceived as degrading in another. Whereas different cultural understandings of sacrifice are usually taken into account, historical ones often are not. Consequently, it remains unacknowledged that what once was regarded as an outstanding virtue could later become an unwanted – and eventually even purposely forgotten or denounced – heritage. So, instead of looking at sacrifice from an anthropological or psychological perspective, I perceive sacrifice as an object of cultural history and try to grasp its meaning in a specific historical context.³

Furthermore, I take gender into account. My analysis starts from the assumption that, culturally and socially, different sacrificial roles are attached to, and expected from, men and women. This versatile attitude towards sacrifice seems particularly present when women are concerned, because concepts of both gender and sacrifice appear to have changed considerably over time. It is vital to acknowledge the complex historical importance of sacrifice for women in the religious realm, because it is here that both the attractive and repressive sides of religious movements align. This means that in order to understand the current emphasis on female autonomy mentioned above, we have to look at the enforced, yet willing submission of these women in the past.

3 For another historical, yet essentially psychological approach of the meaning of sacrifice in a Catholic context see Emke Bosgraaf, *Gebroken wil, verstorven vlees. Een historisch-psychologische studie over versterving in het Nederlandse kloosterleven, 1950–1970* (Groningen: Facilitair Bedrijf/Grafimedia, 2009).

This article elaborates on the rise of the Grail's sacrificial culture in the pre-war period and its gradual disappearance from the 1960s onwards. Firstly, the rise of the Women of Nazareth will be typified: A group of intellectual lay women that became the leadership of the Grail movement. An ambiguous sacrificial culture was essential for this movement: Although it was intended as a means of individual submission and of shaping a community with a collective purpose, sacrifice actually functioned as an instrument creating individual excellence and non-vocalized group hierarchy. Self-imposed penances and acts of mortification were not only identity markers, but through these practices the women aimed at becoming co-saviors, contributing to diminishing the sins of the world. Their being co-saviors was meaningful on an individual as well as a collective level.

And last but not least, these practices served on various levels as a disciplinary instrument. They enabled the Jesuit leader to keep control over the women, allowed individual women mastery of themselves, and they installed hierarchical cliques within the group. Yet it was only through excellence in sacrifice that women could engage in religious heroism. Thus, sacrifice became a source of repression and of mutual competition. All this should be understood against the historical background of the aftermath of World War I in general, and the position of women in the religious realm in particular. The second part of the article focuses on the process within which this heritage has been erased from the collective memory of the Grail since the 1960s.

2 "Woman's Natural Capacity for Sacrifice and Suffering." The Origins of the Grail Movement

The aftermath of World War I initiated moral concern amongst an internationally oriented group of Catholic intellectuals, writers and artists in the transatlantic area. Among those were a considerable number of converts, such as the French thinkers Léon Bloy, Jacques Maritain and his wife Raïssa, and the English writer G. K. Chesterton. They evaluated the cultural and moral dismantling of the western world as basically a religious problem caused by modernity, and aimed at a Catholic revival by placing the Mother Church once again at the centre of western intellectual life.⁴ Inspiration was sought and found not

4 Paul Luykx, *"Daar is nog, poëzie, nog kleur, nog warmte."* *Katholieke bekeerlingen en moderniteit in Nederland, 1880–1960* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2007); Patrick Allitt, *Catholic converts. British and American intellectuals turn to Rome* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1997).

only in the writings of another famous convert, namely the English Cardinal John Henry Newman, but also in Catholic tradition. Although a diverse group of cultural critics, many of these intellectuals idealized the vigor of early Christianity and the mysticism of the Middle Ages. They were especially fascinated by monastic traditions of asceticism and physical penances. Because of the allure that suffering had for them, they often cultivated such practices themselves, regarding them as the articulation of a counter-pressure against secularization and a way of participating in the suffering of Jesus.⁵

2.1 *Victim Spirituality*

In fact, the whole period of the interwar years showed a remarkable rise in the popularity of a phenomenon that had made a first re-appearance in nineteenth-century France: The so-called 'victim-souls'. These were people who, in their own perception or that of others, were specially chosen by God to suffer more than most people during their lifetime. They generously and willingly accepted the suffering because it signified a union with their Savior: Their actions were inspired by Christ's own Passion and death. Behind this willful embrace of sacrifice and suffering lay a desire to make reparation for the sins of mankind. Being deprived of other social, cultural or religious means to participate in the history of salvation – since this was the exclusive prerogative of the ordained priesthood – women particularly identified with these practices of spiritual repair. These practices provided the desired participation in salvation, albeit in a complex manner, in which submission and feelings of exclusivism became intertwined.⁶ "A self-appointed religious elite", the historian Richard Burton has aptly typified them.⁷ This elite felt re-enforced and approved by Church politics of canonization, since both Jeanne d'Arc and Anna Maria Taigi were canonized in 1920. The former was a symbol of female pious persistency

5 For the French susceptibility to this cultural and religious climate see Brenna Moore, *Sacred Dread: Raïssa Maritain, the Allure of Suffering, and the French Catholic Revival (1905–1945)* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013); Stephen Schloesser, *Jazz-Age Catholicism. Mystic Modernism in Post-war Paris, 1919–1933* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

6 Nancy Jay, "Sacrifice as Remedy for Having Been Born of Woman," in *The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality* (ed. Clarissa Atkinson; Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 283–309 (297–304).

7 Richard Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood. Women, Catholicism and the Culture of Suffering in France, 1840–1970* (London: Cornell University Press, 2004). Also: Moore, *Sacred Dread*; Paula M. Kane, "She offered herself up. The Victim Soul and Victim Spirituality in Catholicism," *Church History* 71:1 (2002): 80–119; Steffen Lösel, "Prayer, Pain, and Priestly Privilege: Claude Langlois' New Perspective on Thérèse of Lisieux," in *Journal of Religion* 88, 3 (2008): 273–306; Ida Magli, *Women and Self-Sacrifice in the Christian Church. A Cultural History from the First to the Nineteenth Century* (Jefferson, London: MacFarland & Company, 2003).

through trials and tribulations, while the latter, a nineteenth-century Italian housewife and mother, was known to have been “a true victim-soul” by leading a life full of prayer, mortification and self-denial.⁸ The canonization of another female apostle of suffering in union with Christ, Gemma Galgani, followed in 1940.⁹

Against this historical background, a Dutch Jesuit, the internationally renowned linguist Jacques van Ginneken, came to develop his own ideal of a profound, vigorous and mythical Catholicism and saw an all-embracing conversion as a countermovement against the growing secularization. In line with other radical Catholics, with whom he held close contact, Van Ginneken constructed his view upon an idealization of early Christianity, the era of the martyrs. He thought that practice of the faith should be passionate and militant. The ascetic movements of the Middle Ages also inspired him because they displayed devotion and suffering for a religious cause. Contrary to his contemporaries, Van Ginneken believed that women, as both militant combatants and devoted sufferers, were most suited for such a new golden age of Catholicism. Women would be ‘naturally’ enabled to give themselves totally to a higher ideal, and in addition possessed a superior capacity to engage in a “spirituality of the Cross”, in which sacrifice and suffering held a special place. He underlined this theory by pointing to several strong women from the history of Christianity, notably in early Christianity and the Middle Ages. By constructing a female genealogy, Van Ginneken provided the means of identification and legitimization for the women that he wanted to gather to save the world. Furthermore, it was not women religious but *lay* women who should take up this role, because the strict rules and regulations that the Church laid upon convents prevented nuns from carrying out a militant task in the world.¹⁰

2.2 *Militant Sacrificers: The Women of Nazareth*

To support his cause, the visionary Van Ginneken established two associations of Catholic laywomen: The Ladies of Bethany and the Women of Nazareth. Ahead of what later would become widely known as Catholic Action, they were to become a “quasi-religious nucleus of the lay apostolate”. Both groups aimed to convert on a global scale. From a social perspective, the members

8 *Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant*, 27-04-1920.

9 Lucietta Scaraffia, “Christianity has liberated her and placed her alongside man in the family: from 1850 to 1988,” in *Women and Faith: Catholic Religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Present* (eds Lucietta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri; Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 249–280.

10 The following paragraph is based on Marjet Derks, *Heilig moeten. Radicaal-katholiek en retro-modern in de jaren twintig en dertig* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2007), 188–324.

were representative of a first generation of highly educated Catholic women who had no desire to take on the accepted ideals of either motherhood or convent life. However, they were very willing to follow a social and religious calling and Van Ginneken's lay associations held a strong appeal.

The Women of Nazareth's goal was the conversion of adolescent city girls, as a starting point for the conversion of this target group in other countries too. After a few years, however, the bishop of the Haarlem diocese, where the group was centered, demanded that they take up responsibility for the ailing Catholic girls' movement. After rigorous deliberation, Van Ginneken and the women decided to comply, making this "sacrifice of obedience", as they referred to it amongst each other. In 1928, they started the so-called Grail movement, and due to its modern approach and appropriation of methods from the youth movement this soon became the largest and most successful youth movement in the Netherlands. Tens of thousands of girls joined, engaging in outdoor activities, taking part in gatherings in special clubhouses, marching the streets in colorful uniforms and performing large scale theatrical religious plays in stadiums. From 1932 onward, the movement began to spread to other countries, first in Western Europe (Germany, England, Scotland and Ireland) and after a while to Australia and the United States.

The movement seemed modern, straightforward and very artistic. The internal dynamics, however, resembled an inverted family-like group, with features of what sociologist Erving Goffman has described as a "total institution".¹¹ Becoming a genuine member, and thus justifying the choice of this way of living, involved a process of "mortification of the self", the sacrifice of one's own personality. Grail women remained lay women. Therefore, while working "in the world" they would have to be immune to worldly temptations. This called for subjection to degrading and humiliating treatment, both self-inflicted and imposed by Van Ginneken. In addition, he demanded a regular and detailed update of what had been practiced. To get this, he kept in close contact with the women who led the movement. Without any supervision or control from the outside, these practices were more far-reaching than the penances and acts of mortification that were being practiced in religious orders. In fact, the daily life of the Women of Nazareth was dominated by a much cultivated – yet hidden – sacrificial culture of severe physical and mental penances: Practices of joyous suffering within the group. A true member would excel at sacrifice. These practices also served the movement's aim: By becoming a *holocaustum* (which means "fire sacrifice" and was the term Van Ginneken used),

11 Erving Goffman, *Asylums. Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and other Inmates* (New York: Doubleday, 1961).

the women would stand out as purifiers. They would repair the world's wrongdoings and encourage conversion. Through the sacralization of sacrifice, suffering and loss were turned into a source of spiritual power.

3 Reinventing the Grail in the 1960s

After World War II, things changed on a large scale and at a fast pace. The war years had left the Grail shattered, its houses confiscated by the German occupying force, the girls' movement forbidden, and the leadership dispersed. Contact had been difficult during the war, especially with those Women of Nazareth who lived and worked outside the Netherlands. Lacking in financial means, many Women of Nazareth were forced to take up jobs in totally different fields from the ones they were used to. A relatively large group became nurses, while others found employment in offices or schools. Communal meetings and spiritual retreats became rare, although Van Ginneken, who was forced to go into hiding, did manage to meet with a small group of Grail leaders once in a while. On those occasions, he kept accentuating the importance of the sacrificial spirituality and the cause of world conversion. But by then it had become clear that the type of girls' movement that belonged to the interwar years had outlived its appeal and would not easily be restored after the war. When, in 1946, Van Ginneken died of a brain hemorrhage, the Grail seemed to be finished.

3.1 *Renewal of Christian Culture*

Nevertheless, the so-called Nucleus (central group) of the Women of Nazareth, who after the war had continued under the name of the Grail, did eventually manage to work out a new orientation. The concept of conversion underwent major changes in this new orientation. Engaging itself with the world crisis that now manifested itself, the Grail reappeared with a vision of a renewed Christian culture. A universal perspective and a missionary spirit became key concepts, yet still closely linked to the all-embracing nature of Catholicism. The movement set out to develop a kaleidoscopic range of apostolic endeavors to advance what was now called "spiritual conversion", ranging from work among poor neighborhoods and students in the US to the development of a world-wide missionary movement.¹²

12 Alden V. Brown, "The Grail Movement to 1962: Laywomen and a New Christendom," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 3, 3 (1983): 149–166.

Primarily, the new Grail became an international movement that aimed at training young women to work as lay missionaries in education and health care and to catechize all over the world. Already in 1947, the Tiltenberg, the movement's mother-house, had become a mission school attended by dozens of young women who were eager to work as missionaries but felt no attraction whatsoever to becoming nuns. None other than the Dutch Prime Minister Beel opened the school and applauded its existence. A year later, the school moved to a reconstructed house in Ubbergen (near Nijmegen).¹³ The successful reorientation of the Grail attracted hundreds of young women who spread the organization's work in an increasing number of countries. It made the Grail even more of an international movement than it had been before the war. Although there were some generational differences within the movement, its success seemed to compensate for that.

3.2 *In Search of New Concepts of Identity*

Success and growth seemed to imply that the Grail's approach to Christian cultural renewal was seen as valid, but this was only partly true. The new-style Grail had to deal with a world that was rapidly changing, politically as well as socially, economically, and technologically. This affected its religious setting to a great extent. While the number of people leaving organized religion was growing, the Catholic Church experienced an increasing influence of modern theologians. Throughout the 1950s, these theologians began to turn away from the neo-Thomism and anti-modernism that had been dominant since the nineteenth century and began to address relations between the Church and the modern world. They pleaded for the integration of modern human experience with the principles of a Church based on Jesus Christ, and for re-engagement with the Scripture and with the Church Fathers as a basis for renewal. It was these reflections and deliberations that led to the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), in which various Grail women were actively involved, both as translators, hostesses and auditors.¹⁴ Although the Grail unambiguously supported the Council's conceptualization of *aggiornamento*, they did not immediately grasp the consequences it would have for them. The conciliar call for a new orientation on both the present and the past had an enormous impact on the Grail movement, which had just been theologically retuned.

13 *Limburgs Dagblad* (November 8, 1947 and April 22, 1948).

14 Marjet Derks, "Changing Lanes: Dutch Women Witnessing the Second Vatican Council," *Trajcta. Religion, Culture and Society in the Low Countries* 22, 1 (2013): 81–102.

As far as the present was concerned, the Grail felt forced to discuss the lay status that had been the core of its identity since the creation of the Women of Nazareth. The Decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, on the adaptation and renewal of religious life, stated that all members of religious orders were in fact lay people and should be regarded as such. In this way, nuns became competitors to the Grail women who had always cherished their lay status and wanted fervently to distinguish themselves from women religious. Despite the renewal that was going on in the religious orders, the Grail women felt that nuns would never understand the world in the way that they did. A member of the Nucleus wrote in 1963:

[W]e need an approach to our world that has much more real contact with the kind of world in which we are living. The nuns do not have this and I doubt, even with many changes, if they can achieve it.¹⁵

Consequently, the Grail women felt the need to re-conceptualize their identity as well as rethink the needs of modern life to which they should adapt. In other words, once again, the Grail needed to reinvent itself. In several national and international conferences, the movement opted to open itself to women from all kinds of spiritual backgrounds, and began to focus more strongly on social, political and economic justice. This was reflected in a changing vocabulary, from which phrases such as “integral Catholicism” or “new Christendom” disappeared altogether.¹⁶

4 Evaluating the Sacrificial Past

Much more difficult, and according to historian Alden Brown even ‘agonizing’, was the long process of self-criticism in which the past was re-examined. The Grail felt that it, too, was addressed by the Council’s urging religious orders to engage in a program of *ressourcement* in order to determine what needed to be changed so that they could better accord with the spirit of their founders. The Nucleus set out the results of a thorough research of Van Ginneken’s original aim and spiritual assumptions. This included his perception of the spirituality of the Cross, which had held such a central place in the militant Catholic

15 *Archives of the International Grail*, nr. 53: letter of Mary Imelda Buckley to Dolores Brien (July 1963).

16 Brown, “The Grail Movement,” 164–165.

interwar years but now seemed hardly compatible with Vatican and theological renewal.

4.1 *Personal Images of the Cross*

In 1964, the Nucleus of the Grail decided it was time for a written consultation with all its members. This consisted of 33 questions that were divided into several sub questions. A total of 148 Grail women (77 individuals and 71 group participants) sent in their answers.¹⁷ One of the key questions of the consultation addressed the theme of the spirituality of the Cross, referring to the spirituality of suffering and sacrifice on which Van Ginneken had continually placed so much emphasis. "How do you see the place of the Cross in your life?", was the first sub question, to which some women filled in more than one answer.

The answers were quite revealing. A substantial group of respondents attached positive meanings to the Cross. Fourteen respondents, in particular older members, stated that it was central in their lives. "To my generation (25 years ago) it was very involving to accept and propagate the Cross in a feminine way", one member wrote. Ten women answered that, for them, it represented a participation in redemption.

For 26 women, the Cross did not refer to a 'thing', but rather was an attitude and a day-to-day reality which came from God. As one of them stated: "[I]t is a training to live in the spirit of the Gospel and to keep being directed towards God".

Five respondents said it meant the joyful acceptance of daily difficulties and disappointments; eight members saw it as union with Christ and one even as the climax of Incarnation. Fourteen said that it was a source of life and even consolation to them, eleven that it represented the obedience of surrender to God, and six that it held purifying qualities.

For a much larger group, however, the Cross held merely negative connotations. Three respondents stated that it caused tensions about what they were and should do; sixteen women said that their temperament hindered the demands of sacrifice; two explicitly said that it made them lonely; two that it added to their sense of aging.

One Grail woman stated that she felt the culture of sacrifice had brought her into confrontation with the unpredictable whims of her flesh and emotions, while another said she felt exposed to her state of being unredeemed.

A large group of Grail women responded that they experienced the Cross mostly in relationships with other Grail members (community life), or people

17 The following is based upon *Archives of the Grail International*, nr. 70: Consultation (1964).

they had to work with, or in having to confront a changing world or their own aging process. They did not need any additional suffering, as coping with all this was difficult enough:

As I grow older, I have come to realize that the cross exists in the acceptance of everything that life holds in store: Old age, sickness, and everything that accompanies those processes.

One of the former leading Women of Nazareth was of the same opinion. She believed that in the past, the Cross had been “looked for”:

I believe that spiritual growth will, as a rule, be promoted rather through the circumstances of life itself than through things of our own finding.

One Grail woman wrote as a comment:

I have never been inspired by the idea of looking for the Cross, not because this is difficult and painful, but because I believe that we should be humble and ready to accept what He sends us, we must leave it to Him whether to send us comfort or pain, and we must trust that He will help us.

The responses made it clear that the spirituality of suffering and sacrifice no longer held the place it used to. The answers were quite diverse and did not unequivocally point in the same direction. For some respondents the cross held a very positive quality, while others referred to it as a source of loneliness, cutting them off from the community. Some seemed to give it a very central position, while others wanted to minimize it.

4.2 *Personal Images of Mortification*

The second part of the question was even more revealing. It addressed the theme of personal mortification: “How do you understand the relation of mortification and penance as we have practiced them to your present circumstances?”. It was answered by 56 individual Grail members and 74 participants in groups. The way the question was formulated led some women to give their evaluation of the “old forms” of penance. Again, sometimes more than one answer was given.

Eighteen respondents stated that the past forms of penance and mortification had been helpful and meaningful. For two of them, they had given a certain discipline and helped to free them up for higher goals:

I understand the relation of mortification and penance as follows: Mortification is the giving up of egoism and turning towards Christ, penance is for me the reparation of my personal sins and the sins of others. The relation is the complete trust in God's mercy.

Two women said that it had helped them to surrender to God or to feel one with the Church or the group. One of them did add, however, that she no longer performed any penances like the ones she used to "because I am just not strong enough for that (physically!)", thus implying how hard these practices had in fact been. Two others stated explicitly that they loved what they described as "these symbols of religious extremism". They expressed their desire that corporal penances would remain, albeit as a matter of personal choice.

Several explicitly named fasting and waking as 'authentic' and therefore desirable forms of penance – provided they could be done voluntarily, not on demand – while at the same time rejecting other forms that had prevailed in the past.

On the other hand, 41 women said that none of the penances and acts of mortification had been helpful or meaningful at all. Three said that they had hindered their growth to maturity, and that they certainly had not helped them to acquire any sense of responsibility. For two, they were not at the heart of Christian living and charity did not grow because of it.

Thirteen women stated that the mortification had been artificial, too extreme, isolated acts and separate from real life. Three said that the acts of mortification had made one concentrate too much on oneself and had been a hindrance to contact with others, thus blocking rather than stimulating any sense of community.

Three respondents even said that the acts of mortifications had intensified conflicts and pressures, while for two women they had been unhealthy and caused nervous breakdowns. One respondent made it clear that the mortification held the danger of conformity, while another woman said that they had an ambiguous flavor of pain-seeking. Four respondents explicitly stated that the penances had been merely a means of personal achievement, done in order to be perfect or to be in control of oneself.

Several women explicitly warned that mortification and penances had even been a *source* of wanting to perform and excel: "The danger of wanting to excel was very great", one woman stated, and another said:

I, personally, find this a dangerous method because it easily degenerates into a desire for achievements. It also creates unnecessary tensions in our life which already has more than enough tensions without these

additional ones. In relation to my present circumstances these practices appear rather childish.

5 A “Proto-Feminist Movement”

From this period onward the sacrificial culture became a matter of personal choice, a practice mainly for the older generation, which was tolerated, but not applauded. The Grail’s self-perception gradually aligned with the feminism of the feminist theological tradition. Books written by Grail women about the movement’s past stressed that it had originated as a women’s and a lay movement, and, moreover, as an ecumenical movement.¹⁸ In 1985, it was even claimed that as far back as the 1920s their predecessors had been driven through and through by a feminist approach. By now, even older members, such as Lydwine van Kersbergen, who had been one of the Grail leaders in the interwar period, one of Van Ginneken’s most intimate confidants and a fierce defender of the sacrificial culture, declared that the Women of Nazareth had been the beginning of women’s liberation: “No authority from outside”.¹⁹

The process of feminizing the Grail’s history came to a height in the volume *Dangerously modern*, published in 2001, where it says that Grail women had been the prototypes of the proverbial “strong woman”: Emancipated, renewing and autonomous.²⁰ The word ‘sacrifice’ did not come up once in any of these histories. In fact, when a television documentary on the Grail was made in 1982, in which a former member did refer to the penances and acts of mortification, even adding that this had been her reason for leaving, the leadership either toned it down or denied it altogether. By then, talking about sacrifice and “sought suffering” had already become so alien, awkward and uncomfortable that it had been erased from history.²¹

18 Gertie Lauscher, *De graankorrel in de aarde* (not published, 1970); *50 jaar Graal, 1921–1971. Verleden, heden, toekomst* (not published, 1971).

19 Lydwine van Kersbergen, “De Graal: een katholieke jonge-vrouwenbeweging,” *Het Binnenhof* (14 mei 1991).

20 Ine van Emmerik, ed., *Gevaarlijk modern. Levende geschiedenissen van vrouwen in de Graalbeweging* (not published, 2001).

21 Hilde van Oostrum, Documentary in two parts. Part 1: *K(l)eurig, kwiek en katholiek*; part 2: *Hé, is dat mijn moeder?* (1982). See <http://www.filmfestival.nl/industry/films/kleurig-kwiek-en-katholiek-de-graal>.

5.1 *Welcome and Unwelcome Heritages*

The meaning and valuation of the concepts of sacrifice and, consequently, of personal suffering varies throughout history. Sacrifice and suffering are also highly gendered notions. This becomes apparent when we look at two distinct periods in Dutch modern history (the interwar era and the post-Vatican era) in which the Grail evolved from a Catholic conversion movement into a feminist theological religious group.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the ritual and personal meaning of sacrifice and of both personal and communal suffering was vital for the self-understanding of the Grail members. They were influenced by converts like Jacques and Raïssa Maritain and their entourage, and by a widespread revival in the western world of 'victim-souls', people who indulged in physical and mental suffering in the imitation of Christ. Incited and controlled by their founder and spiritual leader, Father Jacques van Ginneken SJ, the intellectual women of the Grail movement cultivated personal and communal sacrifice, both within their own ranks and in the thousands of young girls that they gathered and guided in a girls' movement. They saw the capacity for suffering, in particular suffering for religious reasons, as the most outstanding female quality. In this way, Catholic femininity was heroically and romantically equated with conversion and sacrifice.

This specific historical example sheds light on the confusing character that religious sacrifice held for women. While its overall spirituality referred to the suffering of Christ, and offered women a way to become co-saviors, in practice it did much more than that. It ambiguously spelled both the shaping of a collective purpose and the creation of hierarchy. While being directed at submission to the will of God, it also provided means for individual human excellence. Last but not least, these practices served as a disciplinary instrument on various levels, thus pointing at sacrifice as a source of repression.

That the meaning of sacrifice is basically historical became obvious through the transformation of the culture of sacrifice from the 1960s onwards, when, under the influence of both the Second Vatican Council and the feminist movement, it became a contested concept. A new generation of Grail members sought female heroism in personal spiritual transformation, while both sacrifice and conversion were first frowned upon and later disappeared altogether from their vocabulary. While trying to reinvent their past and their tradition, they radically erased all notions of sacrifice and suffering from their collective memory, replacing them with feminist concepts of assertiveness. To a large extent, the same process took shape in many female religious orders – the same from which the Grail movement so explicitly wanted to differ. In the aftermath of Vatican II they, too, distanced themselves from sacrifice and suf-

fering and from other aspects of their history.²² The idea of the proud suffering Catholic woman, as well as that of the strict male leader that supported her, had become unwelcome heritages that disappeared from memory and therefore from history.

22 This process has been eloquently described in Annelies van Heijst, *Models of Charitable Care. Catholic Nuns and Children in their Care in Amsterdam, 1852–2002* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 301–350.

Self-Sacrifice and Care Ethics

Inge van Nistelrooij

1 Introduction

What if your close friend of many years asks if she can stay with you for a couple of weeks? What if she is suffering from cancer and her stay with you will be for a treatment in your town? I do not think many people would hesitate for a moment. At least Helen does not, when her friend Nicola turns to her in Helen Garner's novel *The Spare Room*.¹ Nicola is not only suffering from bowel cancer, she is dying of it. But instead of facing what lies ahead, she flees from it into a ridiculous alternative therapy, forcing Helen (and others who compassionately surround her) to emotionally come to grips with her impending death while she herself denies it.

This story is about friendship and farewell, hope and denial, companionship and support, being alive and dying. But it is also a story about a caregiving friend, suffering from her friend's suffering and – although full of doubt as to whether she is entitled to rob her of her hope – seeking courage to confront her friend in her self-deception at the cost of truth, love and other people.

A touching story. I take it, however, as a starting point for thinking about those things that are the 'natural' setting of the story, that is, the sacrifices that Helen makes. The story of Abraham and Isaac teaches us that being prepared to making sacrifices may imply other sacrifices. No doubt Abraham is asked to sacrifice what is dearest to him, but implicitly Isaac is supposed to sacrifice his life without even being asked. It seems to me that this sacrificial entanglement sheds light upon the story of Helen and Nicola as well. Helen is willing to sacrifice time and energy, but how about the sacrifices her family has to bring?

First of all, Nicola requires much more care than expected. She is seriously ill and suffering day and night, with only an exceptional good hour or good day. Helen sacrifices her own physical well-being from the minute they meet at the airport. Within a few days she is exhausted. Washing and cleaning, day and night, cooking, driving, worrying, spending hours in waiting rooms and supporting her suffering friend, while suffering herself from what she sees as a

1 Helen Garner, *The Spare Room* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2008). Helen is the novel's main character, and although there are similarities between her fictional life and Helen Garner's real life, the story is fiction.

hopeless situation getting worse. Helen also sacrifices her family, being forced to suspend every contact with her daughter's family living next door, as they have caught a severe cold which is a major threat to Nicola's complete lack of resistance.

Helen puts her own life plans on hold, as caring for Nicola requires every bit of her energy; and Helen must also repress her own beliefs, as Nicola asks her to support her choice in favor of an alternative therapy and not to rob her of her last hope. Friendship in the end demands honesty, but when the air is cleared and the therapy is canceled, Helen still finds herself conforming to the wishes of Nicola in her final months. Caregiving entails accepting that in the end Nicola decides about the final stage of her life and affectionately submitting to her demands. In short, Helen's caregiving requires a great deal of sacrifice, almost to the point of sacrificing herself.

2 Responsibilities in Caregiving

This chapter examines self-sacrificial caregiving. Caregivers care for others, instead of sacrificing them. Abraham, being his son's caregiver, might have considered giving priority to his responsibility in that role and offered to sacrifice himself instead of his son. From the viewpoint of care ethics he should have. My point of departure is this emphasis of care ethics on the responsibilities in caregiving. I will focus on the self-sacrifice of the caregiver within the caring relation, as care ethics has a problem with engaging with the experience of caregivers sacrificing themselves. Although there are good reasons for being critical about self-sacrificial caregiving, I will argue that thinking about caregiving can be enriched by including thinking about self-sacrifice. In order to do so, we must reflect on the ambiguity of self-sacrificial caregiving: It is neither mere stupidity nor mere heroism. Therefore, I will take the experience of Helen in *The Spare Room* as one that raises questions about the relation between caregiving and self-sacrifice, specifically with regard to the distinct meanings and interpretations of sacrifice and self-sacrifice. I do not claim to interpret the book, nor do I use it as an illustration for a line of argumentation. Rather, I consider Helen's experience as one that challenges certain ideas about caregiving and reveals a more complex and ambiguous reality, which surfaces when we look at the sacrifices she makes.

This is not only Helen's experience, but can also be found in other literary works. I am thinking of the experience of the servant Gerasim, comforting his dying master by supporting his agonizing legs for hours night and day, in Leo

Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*; or John Bailey's experiences of the increasingly demanding care he gives to his wife, Iris Murdoch, as related in his books *Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch* and *Elegy for Iris: A Memoir*. These books relate stories about the demanding care which the caregiver feels obliged to give out of compassion or love for the one needing care. These books, and many others like them, depict caregiving that requires a lot more than expected. Caregiving entails giving time, energy, sleep, health, well-being, and one's own relations. In doing so, the caregiver not only makes sacrifices, but also appreciates the essence of care. Strange as it may seem, these caregivers risk (at least) their health and happiness while simultaneously affirming themselves and realizing their own goals. In this article, I want to look at sacrificial caregiving on an everyday level in everyday circumstances.

2.1 *Aspects of Self-Sacrifice in Care*

Accepting the responsibility to care for another human being without considering the possible personal consequences – or maybe better, without having been able to consider them all beforehand – is an experience, I would like to defend, all-too familiar to caregivers. This experience gives rise to the thought that caregiving often takes place in an unavoidable tension between involvement and care for others, on the one hand, and self-care or self-preservation, on the other. This is well-acknowledged in care ethics but needs further exploration.

I take the term 'self-sacrifice' as a heuristic device for this exploration, as I think it illuminates exactly the point where the dynamics of care itself leads to giving up parts of ourselves, possibly even up to the point of sacrificing the self. Firstly, I will delineate how care ethics think about the costs of caregiving on the part of the caregiver, in order to further explore the difficulties of the tension. Then I will turn to theology, in which I offer a survey of the various meanings of self-sacrifice arranged in a taxonomy; I will also explore a distinction between what is and is not self-sacrifice. In a third part, I will return to the story of Helen. I will argue that care ethical thought is enriched by incorporating self-sacrifice in its various meanings.

The story, however, shows that there are three additional points. First, the suggested taxonomy needs to be extended, in order to include what was excluded, building on concepts of self-sacrifice from the spiritual and mystical traditions. Moreover, I will put the taxonomy of self-sacrifice itself into two dialectic tensions, each as a way of further deepening our understanding of care and sacrifice. In my conclusion, I will offer a definition of self-sacrifice in caregiving.

3 Self-Sacrifice from a Care Ethical Point of View

The epistemological starting point of an ethics of care can be traced to the publication of *In a Different Voice* by psychologist Carol Gilligan in 1982. Gilligan, a student of Lawrence Kohlberg, proposes an ethics that takes into account the concrete responsibilities for concrete others, rather than an ethics formulated from an abstract and disconnected “point of view”.² A morality of care focuses on ‘relationality’ and the mature handling of responsibility claims.³ Gilligan speaks of the need to compromise that is felt by caregivers when facing conflicts between interests of the self and interests of the other. Only when a connection between integrity and care is discovered is one capable of mature care. Moreover, the identity of caregivers is defined by their relationships, responsibilities and care, rather than by their autonomy from others.⁴

From the start most care ethicists have been aware of the tensions involved in care and have discussed the question of asymmetry and equality. Those interested in Gilligan’s findings take two opposing positions. On the one hand, researchers embrace her elaboration of a “feminine ethics”. They ignore the aspect of power connected to care and gender roles, emphasizing the natural symbiosis of the caregiver (mother) and the care receiver (child), while making care a dyadic practice. A major representative of this essentialist view is Nel Noddings, who was one of the first to develop an ethics of care.⁵ She distinguishes between a natural moment and an ethical moment. The first is the natural feeling of ‘engrossment’, of being seized by the other person’s need. This first moment may yield the ethical moment, when the caregiver actively accepts her responsibility for taking care. On the other hand, feminists advocate a disconnection of femininity and care, either by rejecting care ethics as an ethical perspective altogether, or by connecting care ethics to a power analysis and political ethics.

A major representative of this latter view is Joan Tronto, who defines care as:

[A] species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible.

2 Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (London: Harvard University Press, 1982).

3 Inge van Nistelrooij, *Martha en Maria revisited. Zorg als ethisch perspectief* (Tilburg: Tilburg University Press, 1996).

4 Gilligan, *Different Voice*, 156–160.

5 Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Noddings does not use the term caregiver but ‘one-caring’.

That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.⁶

Her moral and political view of care involves an elaborate analysis of power inequalities in relations of care, on the levels of personal relationships, institutions, and the wider society. She considers care as a practice that not only builds relations but also builds society and orders relations in a political and institutional context. She concludes that, in many respects, taking responsibility for caregiving tasks involves assuming a subordinate, marginalized and powerless position, whereas pursuing power often involves the transfer of caregiving responsibilities to others. Tronto's plea is for a reallocation of the boundaries between a political and a moral view so that arguments from a care perspective can gain political impact.

3.1 *Responsibility and Power*

How do these lines of thought relate to self-sacrifice? Thinking of self-sacrifice in relation to care is difficult for various reasons. First, self-sacrifice in care is paradoxical. How could care entail self-sacrifice, as care aims at support, continuation, repair and maintenance? Would sacrificing the self not be the exact opposite of, and therefore incompatible with, the goals of care? Further, if one wants to take care of another person, the loss of self in sacrifice would simultaneously be the destruction of care and the end of the caring activity. Still, care involves commitment to the other who needs or deserves care because of his or her vulnerability or needs, or simply because he or she is loved.

Noddings and Tronto both consider the risk of sacrifice. Noddings understands the care relationship as a dyad, making the caregiver the sole source of care, and therefore can only see the risk of destruction of the caregiver, which she fiercely rejects. In order for care to be given as long as necessary, the caregiver must also take care of herself, upholding "the strength and beauty of her ideal (of being one-caring)."⁷ Her argument starts from the idea of caregiving itself, in which two persons want and need the caregiving to be continued. Obviously the one in need of care wants this, but the caregiver does so too, according to Noddings, for in caregiving the caregiver acts according to her moral conviction and accomplishes her moral ideal. In order to protect caregivers from self-sacrifice and exhaustion, there are instances in which they must 'quantitatively' reduce their ideal by excluding particular persons or groups in order "to maintain the quality of the ideal for remaining cared-fors."⁸ Tronto

6 Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries* (London: Routledge, 1993), 103.

7 Noddings, *Caring*, 105.

8 Noddings, *Caring*, 114–115.

frames care in a much broader constellation of social relations, institutions and politics, and rejects Noddings' dyadic structure; she thus acknowledges that care is other-directed and involves sacrifices.

However, there is power involved here too, and its distribution is inversely related to caregiving responsibilities. Those with power often are less inclined to make sacrifices, whereas those with little power often are inclined to give care, to give in, and to sacrifice even more.

Some people make greater sacrifices of themselves than do other people; some will even sacrifice too much. Part of this moral problem is exacerbated by the fact that those who are most likely to be too self-sacrificing are likely to be the relatively powerless in society.⁹

Hence, care ethicists have strong arguments *against* caregivers making sacrifices, most certainly against sacrificing themselves. Still, they acknowledge the tension within caregiving, when caregivers are engrossed by the other, experience compassion and love, and are more than willing to stand by the other and not abandon the one in need. Noddings' warning that an exhausted caregiver risks terminating care, and Tronto's warning that sacrificing entails a further marginalization and a relinquishing of the possibility of gaining power, make clear that sacrifices and self-sacrifice play a role in caregiving. It is paradoxical: Caregiving cannot do without sacrifices, even of the self, but it also should not be so. In order to gain clarity regarding this paradox, it seems helpful to make a semantic analysis.

4 Self-Sacrifice from a Theological Point of View

I now turn to theology, which not only has reflected on self-sacrifice for centuries, but can also help us with a clarification of terminology. What exactly do we mean by the ambiguous term self-sacrifice?¹⁰

Ruth E. Groenhout gives an extensive answer to this question in her analysis of *kenosis*, which is the Greek term for the self-emptying of God by becoming man in Jesus Christ.¹¹ She understands *kenosis* as self-emptying, self-giving,

9 Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 141.

10 This question is asked by John Lippitt, "True Self-love and True Self-sacrifice," *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 66 (2009), 125–138.

11 Ruth Groenhout, "Kenosis and Feminist Theory," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: the Self-emptying of God*, (ed. Stephen C. Evans; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 291–312.

self-sacrifice.¹² God in *kenosis*, however, did not stop being God. This is the leading idea in her analysis of self-sacrifice, which she opposes to self-destruction. She unfolds a taxonomy that is a sliding scale of distinct meanings of self-sacrifice:



FIGURE 1 Groenhout's taxonomy of self-sacrifice.

Firstly, Groenhout explains the stages of self-sacrifice. *Self-limitation* is imposing limits on the self while also retaining "some sense of robust identity".¹³ Self-limitations that are imposed in the interest of others or of a higher good are close to *kenosis*.

The next stage is the *giving up of prerogatives*, when "a sense of a core self or identity is retained, but what is owed to that self is temporarily set aside".¹⁴ (It hardly needs to be said that this is often the case in caregiving, as in the story of Helen.) *Self-giving* is next, which "implies some measure of giving up self-determination".¹⁵ Giving, in Groenhout's view, presupposes a recipient, and hence self-giving is other-directed, as the only possibility of giving the self to the other.¹⁶ The very next stage is *self-sacrifice*, which she describes as:

[T]he strongest term because it implies that in some significant way the self is actually lost. At a minimum it involves some sort of denial of the self, though this can be the denial of one part of the self for the sake of another part. At the maximum it involves what the phrase literally means – the sacrifice of the self, or of life. Further, in order for this to be a sacrifice (rather than, say, mere destruction) it also must involve giving up the self for some other person, or some other good. Self-sacrifice is the term I have focused on in this chapter [on *kenosis*] because it has connotations of giving more than just some aspect of the self – it suggests a giving up of the self itself, of giving up parts of one's identity. When the

12 Groenhout, "Kenosis," 291.

13 Groenhout, "Kenosis," 297.

14 Ibidem.

15 Groenhout, "Kenosis," 298.

16 Ibidem. I will refute this view later.

parts of one's identity given up are central to one's sense of self, it may involve a loss of identity at some level.¹⁷

Secondly, Groenhout scrutinizes the distinction between self-sacrifice and mere self-destruction or self-annihilation.¹⁸ The distinction is in the *telos* (goal) of the action or practice: When one gives up "the self, or life itself, altogether, for some other person(s) or good", this is self-sacrifice. Self-annihilation and self-contempt fail the test. For self-sacrifice is the paradox of a self that not only sacrifices the self but also remains a self in this action of sacrificing. Therefore, according to Groenhout, a proper sense of self is fundamental for a proper understanding of self-sacrifice. This sense of self contains:

[A] sense that one is loved for one's own sake, that one's existence is a good thing, and that one can properly love the fact that one is alive and able to do things that are worth doing.¹⁹

These beliefs should be neither too strong nor altogether absent. Groenhout's conclusions are twofold. First, the self that is sacrificed must be recognized as a self with intrinsic value. Only a valued self that is emptied can be considered a sacrifice.²⁰ Second, following from the first, a proper self-sacrifice is oriented towards the good, rather than a sacrifice of the self for its own sake. The latter is mere self-destruction.²¹

4.1 *Kenosis, Caregiving, and Feminism*

Two more things need to be said about Groenhout's thoughts on self-sacrifice. First, she confronts *kenotic* thought of self-sacrifice with feminist theory. She is well aware of the extensive and valuable feminist critique of self-sacrifice, as for instance in Valerie Saiving's classic article *The Human Situation: A Feminine View*²² However, she opposes the idea that feminism should reject the worth of sacrifice, for feminism has always been a movement fighting for a just cause, asking and inspiring women to sacrifice for this cause. And many women did sacrifice their happiness, according to Groenhout, fighting for this just cause.²³

17 Groenhout, "Kenosis," 298.

18 Groenhout, "Kenosis," 298–307.

19 Groenhout, "Kenosis," 303.

20 Groenhout, "Kenosis," 302.

21 Groenhout, "Kenosis," 304 and 307–310.

22 Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *Journal of Religion* 40 (1960): 100–112.

23 Groenhout, "Kenosis," 308.

Feminist thought therefore can contribute to theological thinking by unveiling the harmful effects of the theological rhetoric of self-sacrifice, especially for women, and the ways in which Christians have misused sacrificial language in order to ask women to sacrifice themselves for inappropriate ends.²⁴ However, when feminist theory concludes that self-sacrifice cannot be appropriate for women, it not only denies the feminist movement's history, in which self-sacrifice did take place, it also denies that women can be called upon to sacrifice themselves. This would be inappropriate for feminist thought itself, since it would be based on the assumption that women are weaker and less capable moral agents than men.²⁵

Hence, the notion of self-sacrifice should not be rejected but must include an awareness of men and women sacrificing themselves for proper causes, on the one hand, and an awareness of the abusive and oppressive social systems (and, I might add, cultural expectations) that impede proper self-sacrifice, on the other.²⁶

Put more strongly, unless one thinks that women's choices to sacrifice themselves for something appropriately important are justified, one runs the risk of denying women their own moral agency.²⁷

A second addition to Groenhout's views comes from the English ethicist and philosopher of religion, John Lippitt, who has appropriated Groenhout's analysis as part of his study on "true self-love and true self-sacrifice". To the notion that self-sacrifice is based upon a sense of self-worth he adds the surprising suggestion that pride can be a virtue in self-sacrifice, despite the Christian and non-Christian rejection of pride. In his view, pride is not vanity but rather the same as self-respect. It is "a positive view of oneself [that] is necessary to live" and to be able to continue doing ethical work.²⁸ It is a vital aspect of true self-love, which Lippitt considers crucial for other-relatedness. He refers to Paul Ricoeur who argued: "Must one not, in order to make oneself open, available, *belong to oneself* in a certain sense?"²⁹ A sense of the self as worthy of love and respect is essential for understanding proper self-sacrifice.³⁰

24 Groenhout, "Kenosis," 308.

25 Groenhout, "Kenosis," 309–310.

26 Groenhout, "Kenosis," 310–311.

27 Groenhout, "Kenosis," 311.

28 Lippitt, "Self-love and self-sacrifice," 135.

29 Lippitt, "Self-love and self-sacrifice," 136.

30 Lippitt, "Self-love and self-sacrifice," 136–137.

5 A Further Analysis of Self-Sacrifice in Caregiving

Groenhout's taxonomy, considered in the previous section, offers us insight into the distinct meanings of self-sacrifice. We recognize them all in Helen's story, to which I now return. Helen indeed limited herself, gave up her prerogatives, gave herself, and sacrificed herself. At the same time, she valued herself, considered herself worthy of respect, when she defended herself and her beliefs against Nicola. She did not aim at destroying herself; rather she aimed at what she believed in, at what was of value: Their friendship and intimacy, especially during her friend's last months. Groenhout's sliding scale offers clear and plausible distinctions, not only between the possible gradations of self-sacrifice that determine the self's identity, but also between good and bad instances of self-sacrifice.

These clear distinctions, however, are challenged when we look a bit deeper at everyday experience. The ethical distinctions between right and wrong and between good and evil, both in literature and in life, often appear as simplifying reductions of reality. So, too, in Helen's story: While Groenhout's taxonomy is clarifying, it can also be shown to be insufficient.

In the next three parts, I will first propose to draw Groenhout's sliding scale differently and to extend it with a certain form of both self-loss and self-destruction. In both the second and third parts, I will disclose a complexity of the scale as a whole, as it contains two tensions within itself. In the second part I will elaborate on the tension between violence and pride, and in the third part I will describe the tension between giving and receiving. These complicating additions to Groenhout's taxonomy have surfaced both from a consideration of Helen Garner's book and from my own research on self-sacrifice in caregiving.

5.1 *Extending Groenhout's Taxonomy to Self-Destruction*

Helen's story shows an expansion of demanding caregiving, starting with the offer of simple everyday help to a good friend in need and eventually leading to demanding caregiving and even self-sacrifice. Her care can be well characterized by Groenhout's taxonomy of self-sacrifice. Her *telos* is not self-destruction, as she values herself and the care she is providing. Throughout the story she learns to handle Nicola's demands, seeing them not as opposed to her own interest, but rather as a way of leading a different, giving life. The story portrays a formation process, a positive unfolding of a new (but perhaps also familiar) way of life, in which the self becomes more and more self-giving and self-emptying, while remaining a self.

At the same time, however, the story challenges this idea. Although we see how Helen tries to remain a self, giving expression to her exhaustion,

defending her own needs and advocating her beliefs, there is also her commitment to Nicola and to caring for her. The situation is one she cannot control, as Nicola's need for care continuously pushes her to provide more and more care, beyond her limits. Helen's goal is to care for her dying friend, no matter what sacrifices this entails and despite the risk of losing the self, annihilating the self. Her commitment to Nicola, to their friendship, to care, is simultaneously a risk to herself. Only afterwards are we able to conclude that Helen, fortunately, remained a self. The goal of caring for Nicola could have led her to disregard her other *telos*, namely remaining a self, valuing the self. In fact, at times this is what caregivers do.

The question then is whether there can be a positive evaluation of self-loss, of selflessness, of self-effacing caregiving that is *in line with* self-sacrifice rather than opposed to it. Groenhout's sliding scale has a sharp-edged end, where self-sacrifice stops and is contrasted with the other practice, in which both the self of the caregiver was not valued and the practice was one of self-destruction. In view of the more complex reality in which aiming at a good might involve self-destruction and the forgetting of one's own value, I propose to redraw the sliding scale, based upon a tradition that Groenhout does not take into consideration. Mystical and spiritual traditions have displayed a different idea of identity, in which the self does not need to be preserved at all costs. Mystics have expressed a "highly dramatic" form of self-sacrifice, one that, in a certain sense, assigns positive value to self-destruction and the unworthiness of the self.

Starting from the everyday level, our sliding scale has the following stages: Self-limitation – giving of the self – self-abandonment (*abandon*) – self-destruction (*anéantissement*).

'Self-limitation' takes place on an everyday, mundane level, involving minor sacrifices made in giving care. Caring for others requires the acceptance of less time for the self, of a limitation on one's autonomy. A tension begins to emerge between care for the self and self-loss, that is, the experience of limiting the self's activities, giving up hobbies, habits, needs. This is self-sacrifice on the most ordinary, daily level.

The next stage is the "giving of the self" to others or to an ideal in dedication, obliteration, abnegation or effacement of the self. Here persons come to mind

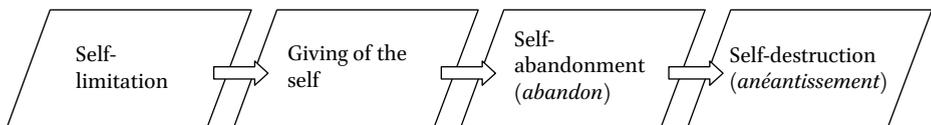


FIGURE 2 Extension of Groenhout's taxonomy of self-sacrifice.

who care for someone or something with a strong sense of belonging, of loyalty and commitment, or of truthfulness, such as persons inspired by political, religious, social, juridical, scientific, or even sporting ideals.

The next two terms on the sliding scale are 'self-abandonment' (*abandon*) and 'self-destruction' (*anéantissement*). Both terms are defined in the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique*, which is my source here.³¹ 'Abandon' is a spiritual term for a state in which the soul either actively relies on (*s'abandonner à*) God or is passively abandoned by (*être abandonnée par*) God. In the active sense, the soul conforms itself to the will of God. The idea of *abandon* stems from the view that our spiritual life is the work of two: God and us. When we submit or conform to God's will, this is obedience, which is the normal means of reaching perfection.

However, this is not yet 'abandon', which requires an even more generous giving of the self, a form of conformity to the divine will proceeding from love. 'Abandon' is a total conformity, a complete renunciation of one's own will in order to embrace God's will. The source of the virtue of 'abandon' can be found in the Scriptures, in the teachings and examples of Jesus, culminating in the moments of his passion when he prays in the garden, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me: Nevertheless not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42) and when he falls beneath the Cross and prays, "Not as I will, but as you will" (Matt. 26:39).

Anéantissement is an expressive hyperbole that characterizes certain acts or states of the spiritual life. The term, however, should never be taken in an absolute sense. It expresses the supreme moral effort to diminish or eliminate the human self insofar as it opposes God, in all of its elements that block perfection. In worshipping God, the self expresses its unworthiness as a creature, symbolically obliterating the self and sacrificing it to God in a religious act of adoration. More perfect still is the passive form of *anéantissement*, in which the soul feels profoundly emptied and totally liberated by a powerful outward force. This mystical experience is described by Saint John of the Cross as a "dark night of the soul". It becomes a more or less permanent state, a path or special vocation, in which one's own will is given up while being mystically united with God. This experience of selflessness has also been expressed by the former UN Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjöld (1905–1961): "I am the vessel. The drink is God's. And God is the thirsty one".³²

31 Marcel Viller SJ, Ferdinand Cavallera and André Derville, *Dictionnaire de spiritualité et mystique: doctrine et histoire* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1932–1995); "Abandon," 1–49; "Anéantissement," 560–565.

32 Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982), 76.

In searching for a sliding scale of self-sacrifice, for obvious reasons we are anxious to avoid the extremely violent and destructive forms. Mystical traditions, however, shed new (yet old) light on extreme forms of loss of self that do not oppose self-realization, but rather are a passive realization of the self, in a non-autonomous, radically dependent way. The value of the self is not denied but related to something or Someone greater than the self.

5.2 *The Tension of Violence and Pride*

Helen's story also gives rise to thought about the dimensions of violence, on the one hand, and pride, on the other. The scale of self-sacrifice itself exhibits a constant tension between pride and violence. Both are involved in caregiving, as shown in Helen's experience. One can rightfully say that Helen fulfills her gendered role as a mother and female caregiver submitting to cultural expectations of women that are oppressive and violent toward women, as they undermine their own life in the process. Yet there is also something else. During an exhausting night of endlessly remaking Nicola's bed (she is perspiring from pain, soaking the bed), Helen recalls her mother, who did the same for her when she was a child wetting her bed. She remembers her mother being able to remain patient, warm and loving, and she is very glad that she is able to care that way too. She feels that she is good at it. Lippitt's idea of pride as part of self-sacrifice can be recognized here. We must acknowledge, then, that violence (the harm to Helen's health), care (the alleviation of Nicola's distress), and pride (in Helen's performance) go together in Helen's experience.

Hence self-sacrifice stands in a tension. On the one hand, there is the inevitability of violence when living with and caring for others, requiring us to act on the other's behalf. On the other hand, there is the necessary affirmation of a self that is capable of doing good things, which is indispensable for any ethics.

As we have seen in Helen's story, caregiving is not all pleasure but also takes its toll. For instance, when Helen confronts Nicola with her honest concern that she is putting false hope in a dubious therapy, Helen is both violent, by destroying Nicola's hope against her explicit wish not to do so, and proud to have found the courage to end their dishonest concealment of reality, making a new intimacy possible in which they can face together what lies ahead.

Caregiving is a mixed experience, which cannot easily be divided into right and wrong. Both pride and violence are inevitable in real life, including in practices and relationships of caregiving. Caregivers are not always faithful to their ideal of caring, as described by Noddings. And when they give care they do not straightforwardly realize their ideal but also have to abandon other ideals, giving up wishes and needs, giving in and limiting their other plans. Giving care can be harmful to all involved; moreover, along with realizing goods,

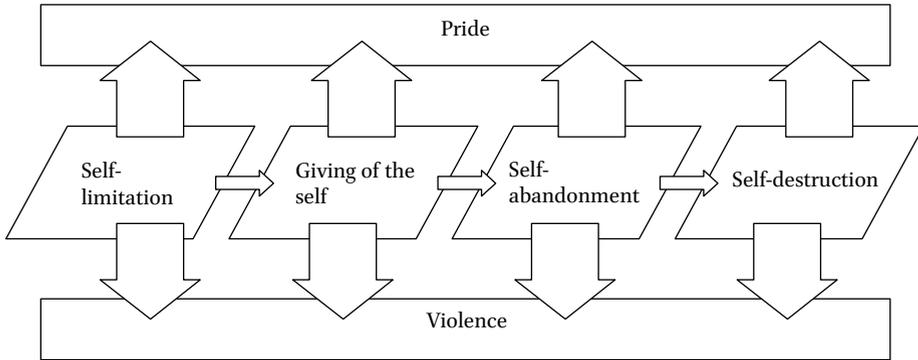


FIGURE 3 *Self-sacrifice standing in the tension of violence and pride.*

there often is unavoidable damage too. Things of value are cared for, nurtured and accomplished, but simultaneously other things of value are oppressed, neglected or rejected.

5.3 *The Trap of "Easy Heroism"*

In short, giving care is not unambiguous, and it cannot be reduced to "realizing a good". On the other hand, in giving care one does *aim* at a good, or rather one good among other goods. And when this good is realized, one can be proud of one's (part in the) accomplishment. This is everyday, small heroism in care. However, at this point Groenhout warns us against "easy heroism". She criticizes forms of idolatry in the case of caring for one's children.³³ Many women, she argues, are lauded for devoting their lives to their children, and although she does not deny that this may be a high calling, she points out that it may also be a "spineless submission to whatever anyone else requests or demands of the agent".³⁴ Feminist thinkers have rightly alerted us to this form of submission. The call to self-sacrifice may in fact be used as an excuse for failing to become capable of doing great things, and this evasion of higher activities often is made easier for women by societal expectations, according to Groenhout.³⁵

Along with this undue making of heroes out of everyday, unexceptional caregivers, we should also acknowledge that violent self-sacrifice is often socially and culturally expected and excused. Taking seriously the cultural expectations felt by women, we should think of self-sacrifice as social aggression as

33 Groenhout, "Kenosis," 310–311.

34 Groenhout, "Kenosis," 311.

35 *Ibidem*.

well. Caregivers who provide demanding care do feel bound by expectations of what mothers, nurses, partners, friends, family, and neighbors (and among these especially women) do and should do. We should not discount the power of ideologies that have historically deprived women of their dignity, idealizing their physical suffering and self-abnegating behavior in favor of others (most often men) and religion. It is an image not only of self-abnegation, but also of social destruction through oppression, subordination, deprivation, and sexism.

5.4 *Self-Sacrifice in the Tension of Giving and Receiving*

Taking a final look at the story of Helen's care for Nicola, we want to add one more dimension to the sliding scale of self-sacrifice, namely that of giving and receiving. Groenhout has connected giving and receiving in self-sacrifice, arguing that in giving a recipient is presupposed. Again, reality is more complex. First of all, self-sacrifice is indeed giving, but giving has many meanings. And second, in many cases it may be that there is no receiving. At least we can say that in self-sacrifice and in care receiving is not guaranteed, neither as the receiving-care of the one needing care, nor as the receiving-back of the caregiver. And yet self-sacrifice and giving may have taken place.

Helen's story tells us about giving. She gives her home, her time and her energy to Nicola. She gives in, gives up, gives away and gives way to Nicola. She forgives her, and gives back to her what used to be and should continue to be valuable in their friendship. This does not mean that she does not receive. But first of all she gives, because that is both what Nicola needs and what Helen herself feels urged to do. She is not motivated by any prospective reward or return gift from Nicola. The care that Nicola has asked of Helen (and which turns out to be much more demanding than expected) is readily given, because Helen wants and is able to do so. Giving stands central, not an exchange or expected gifts in return.

This is an experience of caregiving. Someone or something needs care. Caregiving requires involvement and openness to the other, in order to see what constitutes care. Constitutive elements of care are not only needs but also what lends value to the friendship or relationship. One gives away what is of value to the self. What is *not* constitutive of care is what may be received-in-return. There is no *do ut des*, not "I only give X when you give Y back to me". Receiving is not anticipated. It is not a condition for giving care; it is not constitutive of care itself.

Moreover, there may be a gift (of care) without it being actually received, and still there was a gift (of care). Helen, like other caregivers, sometimes experiences her care as given but not received. For example, she spends her time and money on special meals for Nicola, which turn out to be given in vain

when Nicola is too ill to eat. This, however, does not erase the gift. The giving was in the meal, in the care devoted to preparing it, so that Nicola could have eaten, if she had wanted to. Hence a gift may be given without there being a recipient. We see that, for instance, when we give money to charity or when we save money for the future studies of our children or for our pensions. The recipient is distant, either in space or in time, and may or may not be a recipient in the end. This does not mean that nothing is given: There was a gift, or even a sacrifice. And in this sacrifice something of value was given, or given up, for something which the giver or the one sacrificing holds to be sacred, sometimes even without taking into account whether or not it is received.

An example may be helpful here, of one sacrificing himself for a good without it being received. This example is Father Maximilian Kolbe, who volunteered to die in place of somebody else in Auschwitz.³⁶ He must have seen the ambiguity of his deed. He was not rescuing anybody, as everybody in the concentration camp would eventually be killed anyway, and he was not changing any system for the better. Nazism would not change because of his choice, nor would there be political implications. And yet, he realized a good by giving his life. There was no receiving of this gift; the man whose place he took did not receive his life, but only a bit more time. Still, Kolbe gave his life. Was it in vain? Practically speaking: Yes. We can sense the value of his action nonetheless.

This does not mean, however, that there cannot be receiving in care. There certainly can be, including in the story of Helen and Nicola. When giving care, one unexpectedly may receive the other, or one's (better) self, or contact, community, grace, love . . . As a nurse in a home for the elderly once expressed her definition of care: "Giving care is sharing intimacy", while another nurse said: "Giving care is being there for the resident without him needing to be grateful".³⁷ These remarks show the fragility of the relationship, which may, but also may not, be one of giving and receiving.

We may conclude, therefore, that self-sacrifice is pure giving. If a return is required, then the character of sacrifice is erased. A return, if there is one, can only be gratuitous. This is what is rightly expressed by the term 'sacrifice', in which something of value to the self, or even the self itself, is given, given up, given away. Therefore, in our figure, receiving care is not part of the figure of self-sacrifice. It is not a required element, but rather an unexpected, hoped-for grace.

36 See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maximilian_Kolbe.

37 Inge van Nistelrooij, *Zorgen doe je samen* (Heeswijk: Uitgeverij Abdij van Berne, 2009), 12 and 17.

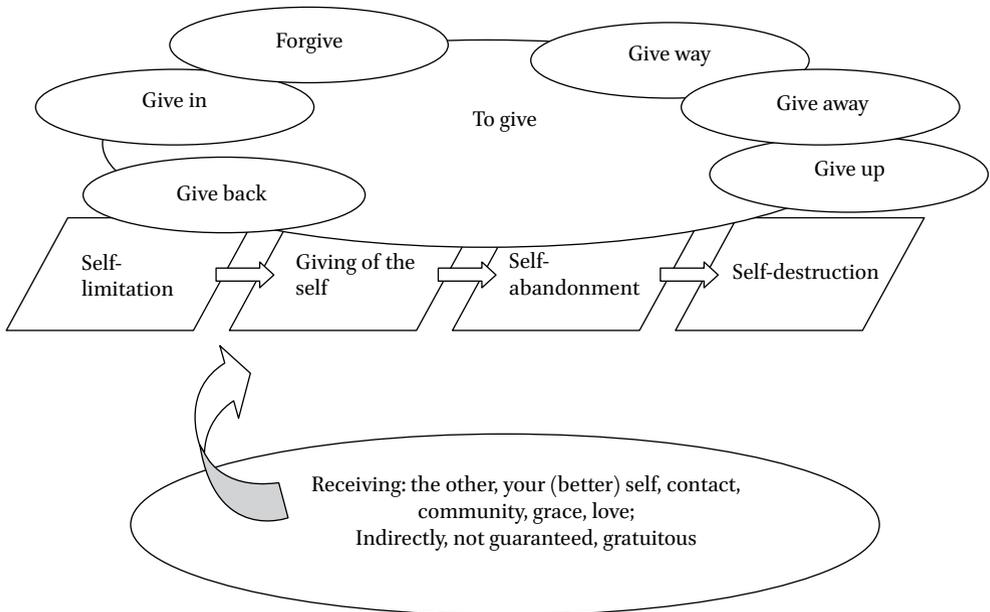


FIGURE 4 *Self-sacrifice as giving without presupposing receiving.*

6 Conclusion: Thinking of Care from a View of Self-Sacrifice

In the light of the semantic analysis we may define self-sacrifice in caregiving as follows. Self-sacrificial care is care that the self is determined to give because of the good realized in this specific act of caring, despite the acknowledgment by the self that one will not realize other goods (for instance, care for the self), and despite the acknowledgment that the good of this caring is not unambiguous or indisputable. In the latter case, for instance, the one cared-for may not be very much loved, or may not be indubitably deserving care; or the caring activity may be the caregiver's pitfall; or the caregiver may be exhausted.

When thinking about self-sacrifice in care, we must always be aware of the proper and improper forms of self-sacrifice. The caregiver's dignity is at stake, both when the caregiver does not aim "high enough", evading his or her capabilities and responsibilities, and when a caregiver seeks submission or self-destruction. This is not merely a personal decision but is always mixed with cultural, societal and religious systems as well as images and language that reflect social distribution of power and positions.

Throughout the present analysis we have gained a view of the self as fundamentally permeable, not self-determining, but affirming itself (sometimes

with pride!) while receiving all that is given in his or her existence as well as existence itself. As in the experience of Helen, the self cannot be understood as living and shaping its life by itself alone but only as living a life given by grace, that is, as a gift and a task that one may fulfill with pride. Helen would not be Helen, would not be realizing herself, if she did not respond to Nicola's needs. But she did respond, even before she could decide to do so or could determine the amount of time and energy she would spend. Self-sacrifice serves as an adequate heuristic device to show the contingency and "tragic edge"³⁸ that should always be incorporated in our understanding of care.

38 Groenhout, "Kenosis," 305.

Animal Substitution as a Reversed Sacrifice: An Intertextual Reading of Genesis 22 and the Animal Stories of Shūsaku Endō

Sigrid Coenradie

1 Introduction

In Genesis 22, God provides an animal substitute for a human sacrifice. It is of note that God was also the intended receiver of the sacrifice, as Abraham was required to sacrifice his son to God. Therefore, I will call these animals ‘reversed’ substitute sacrifices, which emphasizes the idea of sacrifice as a gift. I will start with a reflection on the critique of Levinas on Kierkegaard’s interpretation of Genesis 22, and read the result against the various stories on ‘reversed’ sacrificial substitution in the oeuvre of the Japanese Catholic author Shūsaku Endō (1923–1996), in which a bird or a dog are substituted for dying humans. Next, I will stress two major differences between the biblical story and Endō’s stories of animal substitutes:

1. In the story of Abraham and Isaac, it is God who gives the ram to prevent Abraham from sacrificing his youngest son. In contrast to the biblical story, the ‘giver’ in Endō’s narratives of sacrificial substitution is anonymous. This difference is significant in relation to the second difference, the role of the females in the stories.

2. In the story of Abraham and Isaac, the relationship between Abraham and God seems to take priority over the human relationships of Abraham and his wife Sarah, his son Isaac and his servant / friend Eliezer, whereas the relationship of the main character in Endō’s stories to the unknown giver of the animal substitute seems to improve the relationship to his family. This difference is, as I will argue, significant for approaching substitution as a gift instead of a sacrifice. I will elaborate on both differences, in order to contribute to reflection on the concept of sacrificial substitution.

Drawing on philosophical theories on giving and receiving, I will analyse and compare the nature of sacrificial substitution in Genesis 22 and in several of Shūsaku Endō’s stories. Sacrifice is, next to a religious theme, an event, and in most cases a drama. For understanding the concept, it is necessary to study it in praxis. Fiction can be regarded as solidified experience, and hence have an eye-opening quality. Literature is “an exploration of the abyss: The author’s

and our own”¹ Thus, literature can stimulate religious awareness and contribute to theological reflection. Applying this to Genesis 22, I will use Endō’s narratives on sacrificial substitution to criticize Abraham’s morality. Furthermore, this intertextual reading of Endō’s ‘animal’ stories will give rise to a different interpretation of the sacrifice in the biblical story.

2 The Given Animal in Genesis 22

Animal sacrifice is the practice or an act of ritually slaughtering an animal as an offering to a god or gods.² It is found in many religions as a means of appeasing a god or gods, or to change the course of nature. The identity of someone performing the sacrifice is symbolically transferred to the sacrificial animal, which suffers death on his or her behalf. Animal sacrifices are well-known in the Hebrew Bible. In Genesis 22, Abraham is willing to sacrifice his son. He is, however, stopped by the provision of a ram that could be sacrificed instead. This chapter will focus on the animals involved. The substitute of the ram caught in a thicket which is sacrificed in place of Isaac is a special case. After God has saved Abraham’s first-born son Ishmael and his mother Hagar in the wilderness of Beersheba, He orders Abraham to offer Isaac. Abraham does not protest, and follows the way God has told him to go. He even refrains from informing his family, including his son, about the intent of the journey. On their way to the mountain Moriah, Abraham stops to worship. Then he loads firewood onto Isaac.³ “Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Isaac asks his father. “God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son,” Abraham answers. At the supreme moment, when Abraham lifts his knife, he hears an angel’s voice which stops him and a substitute ram appears. The animal replaces the son.

In this special case it is the receiver, God, who seems to provide the sacrificial creature. Instead of the son, an animal given by the recipient is sacrificed. Human sacrifice is replaced by animal sacrifice, human death by human life, thus re-establishing the covenant between God and Abraham.

1 A. Blanchet, *La Littérature et le Spirituel. La Mêlée Littéraire* (Paris: Aubier, 1959), 11.

2 Oxford English Dictionary.

3 On this point the story can have been interpreted as foreshadowing the willingness of God to sacrifice his Son Jesus; just as Isaac carried the wood for his sacrifice up to Mount Moriah, Jesus carried the wood of his sacrifice up to Golgotha.

3 Alternative Interpretations

Genesis 22 is a complicated story, and its ‘inhumane’ theme of a father sacrificing his own son calls for interpretations. An important theme seems to be the replacement of child sacrifice with animal sacrifice. It is God who provides for the ram, thereby stressing the difference between the God of Israel and other gods, such as Baal.

In *The Binding of Isaac, Religious Murders & Kabbalah*, Lippman Bodoff argues that Abraham never intended to actually sacrifice his son, and that he trusted that God had no intention that he would do so. According to Bodoff, God required that Abraham would persist with what Abraham understood was asked of him, “with faith that the just and righteous God would answer his prayer.”⁴ Abraham’s prayer during the stop on their way to the mountain was intended to persuade God to intervene, to prevent a terrible injustice from occurring.

Others, such as Dalferth, suggest that Abraham’s apparent complicity in the sacrifice was actually his way of testing God. Abraham had previously, in Genesis 18, pleaded with God to save lives in Sodom and Gomorrah. By silently complying with God’s instructions to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham was putting pressure on God to act in a moral way to preserve life.⁵ Another indication that Abraham might have thought that he would not actually sacrifice Isaac comes from Genesis 22:5, where Abraham said to his servants, “You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you”. The use of the word *we* (as opposed to *I*) reveals his expectance that both he and Isaac would return. Apparently, he did not believe that Isaac would actually be sacrificed. Likewise, Endō’s Numada, by insisting on a “fifty-fifty gamble” operation, is anticipating a good outcome, although in his case it is not clear who the addressee of his challenge is. As I aim to show, comparing Abraham in Genesis 22 to Numada in *Deep River* brings an alternative interpretation of the former to the fore.

4 Lippman Bodoff, *The Binding of Isaac. Religious Murders, and Kabbalah: Seeds of Jewish Extremism and Alienation?* (Jerusalem/New York: Devora Publishing Company, 2005), 28.

5 I. U. Dalferth, “Self-sacrifice: From the act of violence to the passion of love,” in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 68 (2010): 77–94 (87).

4 The Case of Numada: Faces of Jesus in a Japanese Setting⁶

Substitution is a dominant theme in the literary work of Shūsaku Endō, one of the outstanding East-Asian authors of the twentieth century. Between 1955 and 1993 he published around 200 titles, including short stories, plays, essays, critical biographies, diaries, and novels. After the publication of *Silence* (1966), he became famous. Due to his parents' divorce the young Shūsaku moved from Dalian in Manchuria to Japan. He lived in the house of his mother's older sister in Kobe, who was a Catholic. At twelve he was baptized. Endō experienced the "foreign religion" in a country with less than two percent Christians as an "unfitting western suit."⁷ In his literature the struggle with faith is a recurrent theme. Three dissertations highlight the theological themes in Endō's literary work *Endō Shūsaku: A Literature of Reconciliation* (1999) by Mark B. Williams; *Christ in Japanese Culture: Theological Themes in Shusaku Endo's Literary Works* (2008) by Emi Mase-Hasegawa; and *Transcultural Theodicy in the Fiction of Shūsaku Endō* (2009) by Adelino Ascenso. The last study offers a renewed image of Jesus Christ through an analysis of Endō's narratives.⁸

Shūsaku Endō's novel *Deep River* (1993) is composed around a journey of Japanese tourists to the holy Buddhist places in India. In this novel, the last Shūsaku Endō wrote, each protagonist has his or her own chapter. All protagonists are motivated by a personal desire to undertake the journey, each striving to accomplish a private goal. The theme of animal sacrifice plays a role in two chapters of *Deep River*. In chapter five, the main characters are Kiguchi and Tsukada. They recollect their past as Japanese soldiers at the end of the Burma campaign. Exhaustion and hunger had driven them to desperation. Kiguchi's friend Tsukada purchased some "lizard meat," which he devoured, whereas Kiguchi was too sick to eat. Not much later the "lizard meat" turned out to be human flesh, the remains of a dead soldier they both knew. In the story of Kiguchi, the 'animal' is believed to have saved the living soldiers' life.⁹ In chapter four, the reader is introduced to Numada, a writer of children's books. He

6 "The Case of Numada" is the title of chapter four in: Shūsaku Endō, *Deep River* (London: Peter Owen, 1994), 69–83.

7 Shūsaku Endō, "The Anguish of the Alien," *The Japanese Christian Quarterly* 6/4 (1974): 179–180.

8 Adelino Ascenso, *Transcultural Theodicy in the Fiction of Shūsaku Endō* (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2009), 11.

9 The similarity between "The Case of Numada" and "The Case of Kiguchi" is elaborated on by Zhanze Ni in "Japan's Orient and Animal Theology in Endō Shūsaku's *Deep River*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81 (2013 No. 3): 669–697.

uses dogs and birds as main characters in his books, since his first dog Blackie had taught him “that animals can converse with humans” and “he had also learned they can be companions who understand your sorrows”.¹⁰ During his youth, one day Numada took home a stray dog, named *Kuro* (Blackie).¹¹ The filthy dog followed him when he went to school and when he returned in the afternoon. The relationship between Numada’s parents was problematic. Often his father came home drunk and his mother was depressed. The young Numada confessed his sorrows to Blackie.

If I live with Dad, that would hurt Mother, and if I live with Mother, that would be a bad thing to do to Dad (...). Blackie had been the one who understood his sorrow in those days, the only living creature who would listen to his complaints: His companion.¹²

When his parents finally got divorced, the boy went with his mother from Manchuria to Japan to live with an aunt in Kobe. The dog had to stay behind. As an adult, Numada was never able to forget the eyes of Blackie, who chased after their carriage as it drove away. The grown-up Numada has a hornbill in his room, called Pierrot, after Rouault’s paintings of clowns who symbolize Jesus.¹³ The bird was forced upon the writer by an old man at the local department store, who ran the pet department.

One day he popped up on Numada’s doorstep, accompanied by a young man in working clothes, carrying a large *furoshiki*-wrapped parcel. *This fellow’s a friend of mine. He has a shop at Shibuya where he sells little birds and animals. He’s just recently got his hands on a hornbill. And here’s what I said to him: I know a man like Mr. Numada would want a bird like this.*¹⁴

To his wife’s distress, Numada lets the hornbill have free run of his study. When Numada appears to have tuberculosis and is hospitalized, the bird has to be

¹⁰ Endō, *Deep River*, 74.

¹¹ The story in *Deep River* is highly autobiographical. Like Endō, the protagonist Numada is a writer. Like Endō, Numada was raised in Dalian, Manchuria, which at the time had been occupied by the Japanese.

¹² Endō, *Deep River*, 73.

¹³ Georges Rouault (1871–1958) was a French Catholic expressionist painter and printmaker. From 1917, he specialized in religious themes. The clown-like faces of Jesus and the cries of the women at the feet of the cross in Rouault’s work are symbols of the pain of the world.

¹⁴ Endō, *Deep River*, 75.

returned to the pet shop. During his two years' stay in hospital, Numada had two unsuccessful operations. Now he has pleaded with the physicians to have a third operation, for "it was distasteful to consider staying alive another ten or fifteen years bereft of the ability to do anything".¹⁵ While the doctors deliberate, Numada is longing for an animal to share his anguish and doubts, as he does not want to cause distress to his wife by confessing his despondency to her. "But if he told all to a bird (...) it would silently take it all in".¹⁶

One day his wife buys Numada a myna bird. "Its eyes were just like those of the hornbill". The author shares his hesitation about the dangerous operation with the bird. He has the impression his bird is laughing at him in response. "The laugh seemed at once to mock his cowardice and to offer encouragement".¹⁷ Like the hornbill, the myna bird is regarded by Numada as a companion. During his third operation his wife is so full of anxiety, she leaves the myna bird on the roof of the hospital and forgets all about it.

I wonder if it died in place of me?, wonders Numada afterwards. A feeling very close to certainty boiled up like hot water from his lacerated chest. (...) Numada's recovery after surgery, the source of such profound concern to his doctors, was nearly miraculous. (...) The myna bird died, as though in his stead.¹⁸

In later years, Numada joins the journey to India to visit a bird sanctuary, purchase a myna bird and release it to thank for his miraculous rescue.

5 Comparing and Confronting the Stories

Several questions arise when the stories are compared: Who is demanding the sacrifice? Who is giving the substitute animal? Who is sacrificing? Who suffers from the sacrifice? Who benefits from the sacrifice?

In the Genesis 22 story, the ram is recognized as a substitute for the son. Likewise, in Shūsaku Endō's "The Case of Numada," the bird is believed to be a substitute for Numada as well as a reference to Jesus, who, according to Endō, is believed to be a representative for humanity.¹⁹ Endō introduces the aspect of

15 Endō, *Deep River*, 79.

16 Endō, *Deep River*, 80.

17 Endō, *Deep River*, 81.

18 Endō, *Deep River*, 82.

19 Endō, *A life of Jesus*, 178.

substitution through animals, specially birds and dogs, referring to the significance of the eyes and the juxtaposition of the eyes of the bird and the dog with the compassionate eyes of the Jesus engraved on the *fumie*.²⁰ In an attempt to bridge the communication gap between his non-Christian readers and the theme of his stories, Endō did not write about “the eye of Christ” until he wrote *Silence*. “Instead I tried to refer to it through different forms, such as the eye of a bird that dies.”²¹ A *fumie* is a wooden or metal image of Jesus or Mary. It was used by the authorities during the persecutions of Christians in the Tokugawa Period (1600–1868). In this ritual, people had to trample on the image as a proof that they did not belong to the Christian religion or as a sign of abandonment of the Christian faith. In Shūsaku Endō’s *Silence*, the main character, the priest Rodrigues, apostatizes by stepping on the *fumie*. When he raises his foot, the

Christ in bronze speaks to the priest: *Trample! Trample! I more than anyone know of the pain in your foot. Trample! It was to be trampled on by men that I was born into this world. It was to share men’s pain that I carried my cross.*²²

According to Endō, Jesus becomes the substitute for the one who suffers. His redemptive suffering is a suffering of the substitute: He takes the pain of the ones who are suffering on his shoulders to the point of death. In *Deep River*, Endō compares the main character Ōtsu, who is a Jesus-like substitute, to the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53. Two chapter titles in *Deep River* concerning Ōtsu explicitly point to the bible passage; chapter eleven is called “Surely He Hath Borne Our Grievs” and chapter thirteen “He Hath No Form Nor Comeliness”. In chapter two, Mitsuko, another central character, enters a chapel and reads a few sentences from the Isaiah 53 passage.²³

Jacques Derrida, relating to Kierkegaard’s epilogue of *Fear and Trembling* (written under the pseudonym of Johannes de Silentio) sees a connection of Genesis 22 and the Christian Passion story. To Derrida, there is an obvious analogy between the story of the sacrifice of a son by the father, and that of the son sacrificed by men and saved by a God who seemed to have abandoned him

20 Cf. Ascenso, *Transcultural Theodicy in the Fiction of Shūsaku Endō*, 248, and Mark Williams, *Endō Shūsaku: A Literature of Reconciliation* (London/New York: Routledge, 1999), 77.

21 Endō, “The Anguish of an Alien,” 185.

22 Endō, *Silence*, 171.

23 Endō, *Deep River*, 44–45.

or put him to the test.²⁴ In this way, he states, Jesus' death has been seen as a substitute sacrifice, comparable to and associated with the near-sacrifice of Isaac.²⁵ In the light of the compassionate eyes of the bird in Endō's narrative, which could stand for Jesus' compassion with the suffering main character, it is astonishing that Abraham ignores the eyes of Isaac when he raises the knife. An angel is needed to withhold Abraham.

A theme in both Genesis 22 and Endō's narrative concerns relinquishing one's life and surrendering one's future in an uncertain situation. Both Abraham and Numada are on the brink of risking death. On his way to respond to the voice that commanded him to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham is about to kill his only remaining son, thereby ending his own future as well. In Numada's case, his life is at stake as a consequence of his own wish for the lung operation despite the risks. In both stories, the substitute by the animal brings life.

Whereas Abraham remains silent, Numada expresses his doubts and anguish towards the bird.²⁶ In response, the myna laughs at him, thereby acknowledging the paradoxical nature of the situation. At the same time, the bird's laughter breaks the tension and encourages Numada. In contrast, nothing seems to ease the loneliness of Abraham's dilemma.

5.1 *Two Differences*

Next I will elaborate on the two main differences between the Genesis 22 story and Endō's stories of animal substitutions: The (unknown) giver and the absent female. Furthermore, I will argue that these differences are related to each other. I start by reflecting on Levinas' critique of Kierkegaard's interpretation of Genesis 22 to enlighten the story's ethical element.

Levinas' ethic is based on the responsibility of the self for the other. The 'self' is not well-grounded, autonomous and in control; rather, it is naked, open. The responsibility for the other is expressed in terms referring to the condition of hostage and the call to substitute, which relieves the 'I' of the concern with his or her own being (and his or her own death). According to Levinas, the relation

24 Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death & Literature in Secret* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1999; 2008), 81.

25 Hereby suggesting that Isaac is an Old Testament 'type' of Jesus.

26 Abraham's silence has puzzled Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard recalls Abraham's strange answer to Isaac (that God will provide an animal) by stating that Abraham speaks but keeps his secret at the same time. Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Problem 111, (tr. Walter Lowrie, New York: Doubleday, 1954, reprint 1941), 123–124. On the one hand, God has promised Abraham (who symbolizes Israel) a land, a people and a future in the form of a son. On the other hand, God is demanding the life of Abraham's son. This tension between the promise and its impossibility leads to a crisis that silences Abraham.

between other and self (the ethical) is prior to the relation between God and self (the religious). From this perspective, Levinas criticizes Kierkegaard's interpretation of Abraham's absolute obedience to God, which distinguishes the God-human relationship from human relationships. Abraham seems to place unconditional obedience to God above the suffering of Isaac and Sarah, which renders Abraham's action, as interpreted by Kierkegaard, "violent" in the view of Levinas.²⁷ According to Levinas, responsibility for the other human puts the 'I' in question. However, in Kierkegaard's Abraham, there is no trace of doubt. In his essay "On the Suspension of the Ethical," Martin Buber wonders why Kierkegaard takes for granted that it is God who summons Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, for it might have been Moloch, imitating the voice of God. The identity of the giver is important.

In the *Deep River* story, however, the substitute animal is given by an anonymous giver. It remains unclear whether the substitute bird, which stands for Jesus, who died for humanity, is given by God or by life itself. In Endō's stories on substitute animals, the relationship between the giver of the substitute animal and the 'I' is closely connected to the human relationships. The participation of Numada's wife is no denial of the divine. She may here serve as an instrument of the divine. The "love your neighbour" in Endō's stories seems to be equal to "love your God".

6 The Giver

The substitute sacrifice in the story of Abraham and Isaac is thought to be given by an identified authority – God. As Nico Schreurs argues, one could read this form of reversed substitution as an equivalent of God giving up Egypt and the surrounding peoples to save the life of Israel (Isaiah 43:3–4).²⁸ Biblical scholars of the School of Tübingen, who studied substitution and atonement, like Hartmut Gese, Bernd Janowski and others, stress the Hebrew Bible's term *kpr*, pointing to the relationship between God and sinful humanity, which does not keep the law. God is prepared to accept a ransom instead of human life.²⁹ The *kofer* takes the place of the sinner, whose life, by his evil deeds, is forfeited.

27 Emmanuel Levinas, *Proper names* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 76.

28 Nico F. M. Schreurs, "Substitution and Salvation: An Example of Systematic Theology in Dialogue with Exegesis," in *Theology between Church, University and Society*, Studies in Theology and Religion (STAR), vol. 6 (eds M. E. Brinkman et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2003).

29 H. Gese, "Die Sühne," in *Zur biblischen Theologie: Alttestamentliche Vorträge* (München: BEvTh, 1977), 85–106.

Remarkable in texts such as Isaiah 43:3–4 and Exodus 21:28–32 is that God, the offended party, is the one who provides the ransom in the form of an animal in exchange for the life of the sinner. This seems to be a reversal of the sacrificial substitute required.³⁰

In the story of Numada, the sacrifice is only a sacrifice because it is interpreted as such, in hindsight. The question who has given the bird remains unanswered. After an excursus on philosophical thoughts on giving and receiving, helping me to elucidate the concept of sacrificial substitution in the narratives, I will return to this theme of the anonymity of the giver.

6.1 *Between Giving and Receiving*

In both stories, the animals are received as a gift. Abraham recognizes the ram as the expected provision. Numada accepts the hornbill which is offered to him on his doorstep and he is touched by his wife's present of the myna bird.

In this section, I will interpret the sacrificial substitution in the narratives from the perspective of the gift. As the Dutch philosopher Van Velthoven has pointed out, a gift can only be a gift if there is someone who actively and consciously receives.³¹ The gift must be recognized as such. At first sight it may seem that the giver is the active one whereas the receiver remains passive. However, the receiver has a truly active part in the act of receiving. People can be willing to give, and act accordingly, but have to wait and see if their gift will be received. A gift implies the reception of the gift, and yet it is only the receiver who can accept it. This diminishes the difference between the giver and the receiver, for the acceptance is in itself a gift, intended and hoped for by the giver. By acting as though the gift will be accepted, the giver is expressing his/her hope for future intersubjectivity. The act of giving and receiving assumes a bond between the one who gives and the one who receives. Katherine Rupp shows how in the Japanese context a gift can be experienced as an offense to a receiver. In Japan, gift-giving functions as a major means of social mobility. The giving of gifts is extremely important in patronage. Summer gifts and winter gifts are given to bosses, doctors, and teachers of one's children. On a macroeconomic level, politicians receive donations from industry and they, in their turn, intercede with bureaucracy on the latter's behalf. The gift-giving of humans to deities reflects the gift-giving among humans. The making of

30 Schreurs, "Substitution and Salvation," 129.

31 Theo van Veldhoven, *Ontvangen als intersubjectieve act: Rede uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van bijzonder hoogleraar vanwege de Radboudstichting in de betrekkingen tussen christendom en wijsbegeerte aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam*, September 29, 1980.

offerings is thought to reinforce the cosmological hierarchy between humans and deities.³²

The Japanese context emphasizes the economy of exchange that is part of giving and receiving. However, as Derrida has shown, the gift functioning in such a system of calculated exchange is no longer a gift in the strict meaning of the word. As soon as we give something to someone to receive something in return, we put that person in our debt, thus taking, not giving. The gift has become a measure to reach another aim, a form of calculation. By such a system the gift is destroyed as a gift. Derrida argues that the *true* gift is extravagant, exceeding what is strictly required, expecting no reciprocity. In this respect, gifts resemble sacrifices. Abraham had to sacrifice his youngest son, to give Isaac to God, without expecting anything in return. “The gift of death (...) has been accomplished without any hope of exchange, reward, circulation or communication”.³³

Furthermore, Derrida argues that for a gift to be a gift not only must the donor or recipient not perceive or receive the gift as such, that is, have no consciousness of it, but they must also forget it right away.³⁴ A true gift forgets itself as a gift that has been given. All one could know of the gift would be the trace of its having already passed. The gift can only be known by way of a trace. The true gift cannot take place between subjects. Then who could meet the conditions of giving a gift? In *Rethinking God as Gift*, Robyn Horner suggests that Derrida’s interpretation of the pure gift “precludes any possibility of belief that God is giver”.³⁵ One can conclude that only God or an anonymous giver is able to give a “pure gift”, which is precisely the case in both stories.

6.2 *The (Unknown) Giver*

Jean-Luc Marion aims at transgressing the economic system of giving and receiving by reducing the gift to what he calls ‘givenness’.³⁶ Instead of the object, Marion stresses the process that precedes the act of giving. Marion’s thoughts can be applied to the narratives in this chapter, because no object

32 Katherine Rupp, *Gift-giving in Japan: Cash, connections, cosmologies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

33 Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 81.

34 Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 16.

35 Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 197.

36 Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Towards a Phenomenology of Givenness* (tr. Jeffrey L. Kosky; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

is involved in the reversed sacrificial animal cases. In contrast to a given object, the life of the animals is given without a possibility of being repaid. Time, love, power and life are ‘things’ that can never be returned to the giver. Instead, Numada’s freeing of the myna in India can be seen as accepting the gift of the animal by transmitting it. The anonymity of the giver prevents him from returning the gift, however, while at the same time it emphasizes the gift itself. The anonymity of the giver gives Numada, the ‘givee’, freedom to react. Numada finds himself “paying back” by writing children’s books in which birds and dogs are main characters.

In his analysis of Abraham’s sacrifice in terms of giving and receiving, Derrida values Abraham’s gift as a “pure gift” that is, strictly speaking, “not of this world”.³⁷ According to Derrida, Abraham’s gift avoids the manipulative *do ut des* principle. In this sense, Abraham’s gift of his son is the sacrifice of the economy of sacrifice itself, because, according to Derrida, it is impossible Abraham could have benefited from this sacrifice, since his own future would be at stake in sharp contrast to God’s promise to multiply Abraham’s descendants. However, one could argue against Derrida that if Abraham had not been stopped, he would probably have murdered Isaac. In his critique of Kierkegaard, Levinas emphasizes not Abraham’s response to the first voice, asking him to sacrifice Isaac, but his response to the second voice, asking him not to “lay his hand upon the lad”.³⁸ The second voice brings Abraham back from the religious reign into the ethical reign. Levinas’ interpretation gives reason to doubt whether the test is about Abraham’s obedience to God. Abraham’s loyalty to Isaac, Sarah and Eliezer might have been tested too. I will argue that for this last test Abraham seems to fail. To illustrate my point, I will turn to the second significant difference between Genesis 22 and “The Case of Numada” in *Deep River: The role of the female in both narratives*.

7 The Absent Female

Abraham’s wife Sarah is strikingly absent in Genesis 22. Abraham does not communicate with her, nor with his son Isaac or his friend Eliezer. Numada’s wife, by contrast, plays an important part. She is the one who gives the bird to Numada as a present and neglects the bird in the hectic time around her

37 Jacques Derrida, from “On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion,” in *God, The Gift and Postmodernism* (eds J. D. Caputo and M. J. Scanlon; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 59.

38 Genesis 22, 12 (King James Version).

husband's surgery, which indirectly causes its substitute death. One could state that she unconsciously sacrifices the bird in Numada's stead, recognizing the sacrifice only after the bird's death. Various comments on the Genesis 22 story suggest that Isaac and Sarah suffered from the near-sacrifice. In *Deep River*, Numada and his wife benefit from the substitute death of the myna bird.

Derrida has observed the absence of "anything feminine whatsoever" in the Genesis 22 story.³⁹ Sarah Coakley also points to this lacuna.⁴⁰ The absence of Sarah in Genesis 22 might affirm that the necessary violence in such a cultic act of sacrifice is "condoning, justifying and even glorifying the abuse of the powerless (including, of course, children and women)". Coakley wonders if the "unthinking male obedience even unto death" is typical for the establishment of "patriarchal religion".⁴¹ She protests against the tendency to distinguish between sacrifice and gift in the postmodern discourse,⁴² for which she introduces an alternative. Searching for the lacking female participation in the story, Coakley turns to Isaac, inspired by Rembrandt's etching of Abraham's sacrifice (1655), which shows a nearly grown, rather feminine picture of Isaac. Referring to plural rabbinical midrash on the story, she suggests to see in Isaac an "honorable woman". As a grown-up, Isaac was not an unwilling victim, but cooperated in his sacrifice. Isaac, in the story depicted as a powerless boy, according to Coakley, is utterly transformed by the event. The divine interruption by the angel disrupts the negative father/son relationship, which was inclined toward violence. The angelic third lifts the spell of the patriarchal duality. The purification enhanced by the near-sacrifice ended a false sacrificial logic and a falsely idolatrous desire. In Coakley's view, the divine gift inevitably invites human sacrifice "if it is to draw us more deeply into participation in that gift".⁴³

This thought is consonant with the conception of evil in the literary work of Shūsaku Endō. According to Endō's main character in *Deep River*, Ōtsu, good and evil are not separate and mutually incompatible. "God makes

39 Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 76.

40 See also e.g. Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity*, (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago, 1992). Jay states that when Abraham was stopped and he offered a ram in place of Isaac, the latter received his life from the hand of his father. Jay sees the nearly sacrifice of Isaac as a spiritual 'birth' accomplished without female assistance.

41 Sarah Coakley, "In Defense of Sacrifice: Gender, Selfhood, and the Binding of Isaac," in *Feminism, Sexuality, and the Return of Religion* (eds L. M. Alcoff and J. D. Caputo; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 17–38.

42 See e.g. Derrida, "On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion," 59.

43 Coakley, "In Defense of Sacrifice: Gender, Selfhood, and the Binding of Isaac," 23.

use not only of our good acts, but even of our sins in order to save us". This thought is familiar to the Buddhist conception of good-evil and its principle of "dependent origination" with good and evil being "completely dependent on one another".⁴⁴ Sin, in Endō's view, is a state of infidelity in a relationship.⁴⁵ Therefore, restoration of that relationship cannot occur without participation of the parties involved. Seen from the perspective of Endō's story, in which the woman participates by providing a substitute animal, I wonder if the lacking female element in Genesis 22 could account for the tragedy in Abraham's family relationships since the event. According to diverse rabbinical comments, the relationships of both Abraham and Sarah and Abraham and Isaac were frustrated by Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. Some comments have interpreted Sarah's sudden death in Genesis 23 as the result of maternal shock and grief over her husband's willingness to sacrifice their son.⁴⁶ To demonstrate the significance and consequences of this difference in female participation, I will turn to several of Shūsaku Endō's stories on animal sacrificial substitution.

7.1 *Endō's Tales of a Substitute Death*

What is the function of the substitute sacrifice in Endō's stories? The death of the bird serves to reframe Numada's recovery in terms of a sacrifice. In a lecture at the University of Utrecht, Kathryn McClymond stated that "sacrifice is about storytelling".⁴⁷ McClymond analyzed the execution of Saddam Hussein, on December 30, 2006, in terms of sacrifice. In the eyes of his followers, Saddam Hussein's death must have looked like a sacrifice for his people, as the date of the execution coincided with the Feast of the Sacrifice in Islam. This connection was partly due to Saddam Hussein's own efforts to present his death as a sacrifice in the media.

Likewise, the death – due to neglect – of the animal in "The Case of Numada" is rephrased as a sacrifice, a life-giving substitute death. Shūsaku Endō's

44 See e.g. Masao Abe, "The problem of evil," in *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Mutual Renewal and Transformation* (eds P. O. Ingram and F. J. Streng; Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 146.

45 Ascenso, *Transcultural Theodicy in the Fiction of Shūsaku Endō*, 234.

46 Stephen Stern interprets Sarah's death in Kiriath-Arba, a foreign land, as an indication that she left Abraham due to his role in the near-sacrifice of her son. Cf. Stephen Stern, "The Unbinding of Isaac," in *Sacrifice, Scripture, and Substitution: Readings in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (eds A. W. Astell and S. Goodhart; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 277.

47 Kathryn McClymond, *Ritual gone wrong*, a lecture held on September 22, 2010 at Utrecht University.

short stories “A Forty-year-old Man” (1964) and “A Fifty-year-old Man” (1973) will enlighten this point.⁴⁸ These short stories were sketches for the story of Numada in *Deep River*. Hence, the degree of repetition occurring in these short stories is considerable. Combining the various forms in which Endō attends to the theme of an animal substitute for a dying person creates an interesting picture that can contribute to the understanding of the stories written by Endō as well as to a deeper understanding of Genesis 22.

7.2 “A Forty-Year-Old Man”

In “A Forty-year-old Man,” the main character is Suguro. A few days before his third operation, Suguro is visited by a priest who tells him that Jesus died for the sins of us all. Suguro’s sins are clear. However, he does not confess them to the priest, but to his myna bird. Soon after, Suguro is visited by Yasuko, his wife’s cousin with whom he had a secret sexual relationship. This happened several years previously, during the two weeks Suguro’s wife Yoshiko was in the maternity ward of the hospital before delivering their baby. Yasuko became pregnant, and had an abortion. Although they never discussed the event, Suguro has the strong impression that his wife knows everything. The conversation at the hospital bed, during a visit of Yasuko and her husband to Suguro and his wife, conceals the past, although Yasuko’s husband is the only one who is unaware of what has happened. “They all behaved as though nothing had happened,” although “there were thorns and private meanings concealed beneath each of their remarks”.⁴⁹ “Everyone is covering up for everyone else”.⁵⁰

This conversation between family members mirrors the conversation between Abraham and his son. The painful issue is avoided.⁵¹ On the day of the surgery, Suguro asks to say goodbye to the bird.

You’re the only one who knows what I could not tell the old priest in the confessional. You listened to me, without even knowing what any of it meant.⁵²

48 Shūsaku Endō, “A Forty-year-old Man,” in *Stained Glass Elegies* (Suffolk: Penguin Books, 1986), 11–27. In Japan, it is regarded as one of the most admired and most frequently anthologized of Endō’s stories. And “A Fifty-year-old Man,” in *The Final Martyrs* (New York: New Directions, 1994; 2009), 58–73.

49 Endō, “A Forty-year-old Man,” 21.

50 Endō, “A Forty-year-old Man,” 22.

51 Cf. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (tr. Willard R. Trask; Princeton University Press, 1953), 11.

52 Endō, “A Forty-year-old Man,” 26.

The operation succeeds. When Suguro asks about the bird, Yoshiko tells him how it died.

The nurses didn't have time to look after it. Neither did I. We fed it, but one really cold night we forgot to bring it back into the room. We shouldn't have left it out on the veranda all night. Suguro remains silent. "I'm sorry," continues Yoshiko, "but I feel as though it took your place (...) I buried it at home in the garden".⁵³

In this story, Yoshiko is the one drawing the conclusion that the bird died in place of her husband. She is also, as in "The Case of Numada," the one who leaves the bird on the roof or veranda. It is as if she unwittingly sacrifices the bird, so that her husband will live. Consequently, Endō's stories on substitute animal sacrifices seem not only to restore the relationship between the protagonist and God, but also between husband and wife. The bird's death functions as a catalyst in the family's relationships.

7.3 "A Fifty-Year-Old Man"

Nearly ten years after, Endō revisited this theme once again. In "A Fifty-year-old Man," however, the relationship between the giving and receiving parties is not so clear. In this short story, the animal is a dog named Whitey (instead of the former Blackie), the main character is Chiba, and the dying person is the protagonist's brother. The dog is an old mongrel, whose eyes remind Chiba of a dog which stared at him in Dalian many years ago, when he was forced to leave that dog behind. As his brother is in hospital in a critical situation, the condition of the dog deteriorates. The main character is troubled by dividing his attention between his brother and his dog. He cannot be with both of them at the same time. Chiba stays in the hospital, watching over his brother, who undergoes a successful operation. The next morning he returns home just in time to be beside his dying dog. The 'crime' in this story are the dancing classes that Chiba attends. The participants of the classes are in their twenties, whereas Chiba is over fifty.⁵⁴ When he dances with a young partner, he imagines having sexual

53 Endō, "A Forty-year-old Man," 27.

54 This theme occurs once more in Shūsaku Endō's "A Sixty-year-old Man". The main character of this story is a writer, who is working on the draft of a book called *Life of Jesus*, a rewrite of *A Life of Jesus*, which he wrote fifteen years earlier. He frequents a coffee shop on Sundays, where he secretly meets a high-school girl named Namiko. The author feels guilty and shameful about stealing glances at the young woman. Shūsaku Endō, "A Sixty-year-old Man," in *The Final Martyrs*, 128–146.

intercourse with her as he secretly inhales her sweat undiluted by perfume. The story suggests a vague relationship between the behavior of Chiba and the death of Whitey. Again, it is the wife of the protagonist who concludes: “He died in place of your brother”.⁵⁵

7.4 *Substitute for Trespassing or a “Pure Gift”?*

In contrast to Abraham, the main characters in Endō’s stories reflect on their past misbehaviour towards both God and their wives. Endō’s three different stories indicate that the protagonists somehow deserve to be punished for their secret misconduct.⁵⁶ When the Genesis 22 story is regarded in the light of these stories, the suggestion is that Abraham is ‘paying’ for previous misbehaviour. Some Jewish comments interpret the sacrifice of Isaac as a punishment for Abraham’s earlier mistreatment of Ishmael, his elder son, whom he expelled from his household at the request of his wife Sarah. According to this

55 Endō, “A Fifty-year old Man,” 73. The self-reflection in the three stories on substitute animal sacrifice by Endō is typical for the literary genre of his writing. *Shishōsetsu* is a Japanese literary genre in which transparency, sincerity, subjectivity, and autobiographical character result in a kind of confession. *Shishōsetsu* is based on the assumption that realism in the novel can only be founded on authenticated personal experience. Fiction and autobiography thus overlap when the author concentrates on narrating his or her own life and feelings. For detailed information on *shishōsetsu*, see e.g. *The Rhetoric of Confession: Shishōsetsu in Early Twentieth-Century Japanese Fiction* (ed. E. Fowler; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). According to Mark Williams, Shūsaku Endō belongs to the third generation of *shishōsetsu* writers, who attempted to expose the conflicts within the Self. This Self is in constant confrontation with an ‘other’ – within or without itself – urging the protagonist(s) to seek reconciliation. Cf. Williams, *Endō Shūsaku: A Literature of Reconciliation*.

56 This relationship can also be found in a combination of the story of “The Case of Numada” and “Life,” another story with autobiographical elements by Shūsaku Endō in *The Final Martyrs*, 114–127. In the district Hokkaidō where the young Endō/Numada lives, Chinese, who had lived there for a long time, were regarded second rate. His mother hires Li, one of the Chinese children, as a houseboy. One day Numada picks up a stray dog. His parents are not pleased with the filthy Manchurian dog and order Numada to get rid of it. Li, however, washes Blackie and secretly hides the dog in the coal shed near the house. After a couple of days Numada’s parents agree to the dog’s staying. A month later Li is fired. The padlock to the coal shed had been opened and half of the supply of coal had disappeared. Although he denies it, Li is accused of the theft. He is been fired and sent away. In “Life,” however, the reader learns about another reason for Li being fired. In this autobiographical story, the main character is an eleven-year-old boy, who is so bored by his depressed mother, who is grieving about the bad relationship with the boy’s father, that he steals her ring and sells it. Li, the houseboy, is accused instead and sent away.

view, Abraham failed to show compassion for this oldest son, so God punished him by ostensibly failing to show compassion for Abraham's youngest son.

In line with the two differences between Genesis 22 and Endō's narratives, the reactions of the protagonists show a third difference: Their reaction to the animal's substitute death. One of the untold elements in the Genesis 22 story is Abraham's reaction to the gift. While Numada expresses his gratitude for receiving a substitute, it remains unclear whether Abraham thanks God explicitly. One could argue that the reverse occurs: God thanks Abraham for his obedient attitude of absolute loyalty (Gen. 22:15–19).

In contrast to Abraham, Numada makes great efforts to give form to his gratitude. The reason for Numada to subscribe to the tour to India lies in his desire to visit a bird sanctuary, where he can set a bird free, as a sign of recognition of the myna bird which had died in his place. "Do you remember those nights?" he asked the captured myna he eventually buys, just before he lets it go. Numada tells this new bird about those nights when he confessed his anxiety and loneliness to a similar bird. A bird that died "as though in his stead". Then he opens the cage and frees the bird.

Watching its laughable movements from behind, Numada felt as though the heavy burden he had carried on his back for many years had been removed.

After releasing the bird, he realizes that animals are 'reborn' in his children's stories.

From this perspective, the substitution can be regarded as a subtle form of reincarnation.⁵⁷ Analogue to Endō's description of Jesus who continued to live in the hearts of his disciples, the birds are restored to live in Numada's children's books. From the stories preceding "The Case of Numada" as well as "The Case of Numada" itself, it becomes clear that the relationship between the man and woman benefits from the sacrifice of the substitute animal. In the airplane to India, Numada buys perfume to thank his wife. "A Forty-year-old Man" ends with Yoshiko saying that "everything will be all right now". And despite her distaste for Whitney, in "A Fifty-year-old Man," the wife of Chiba "plucked several cosmos flowers" to lay on the dead dog's head. In contrast, as

57 Ascenso points to other characters in *Deep River*, in whom the Buddhist concept of reincarnation might be recognized: the dying wife of Isobe and her 'rebirth' in her husband; the volunteer Gaston as the Jesus figure who is 'reborn' in Kiguchi's dying friend and, finally, the dying Ōtsu and his 'resurrection' within Mitsuko. Cf. Ascenso, *Transcultural Theodicy in the Fiction of Shūsaku Endō*, 269.

Heleen Zorgdrager states, Sarah, who is excluded from information and participation, is – symbolically speaking – the one who is sacrificed, namely as the mother of her child.⁵⁸ In my view, the difference between the supposed lack of gratitude of Abraham and the abundant gratitude of Numada is in line with the differences in their relationship to their nearest and dearest.

8 Conclusion

From comparing and confronting the stories of ‘reversed’ sacrifice in Genesis 22 and “The Case of Numada” (and its previous sketches), the following characteristics have emerged. God or a divine power provides the sacrificial animal (hence: Reversed, for God or a divine power also receives the sacrifice). The animal sacrifice serves as a substitute. By the substitute death of the animals the incomprehensibility of God/the paradoxical situation is broken and the protagonists’ lives are saved. In the case of Numada, the substitute animal has an additional function as a silent witness to Numada’s confession. In the Japanese stories, the sacrifice is performed without witnesses or priests, without a ritual and without the protagonists knowing. The substitution is recognized as a gift only in hindsight. The animal dies in loneliness, at the moment that the protagonist should have died. Characteristic of the animal substitutes is their clumsiness; they are laughable figures. However, their vulnerability, relativism and availability seem to encourage the main characters to surrender themselves to the unknown.

Compared to Numada, Abraham seems to be a violent figure. In his obedience to God he is willing to suspend the ethical. He is not even moved by the other right beside him, who is his own son. Therefore he ceases to communicate. Abraham uses Isaac as a means to receive an absolute relation to the absolute, the price of which seems to be radical solitude and consequent disturbance of his family relationships. Unlike Sarah in Genesis 22, the wives in Endō’s stories are playing an active and decisive role, which gives the reader hope for an interpersonal reconciliation. In the Japanese story, the substitute is experienced as a *dōhansha*, a motherly constant companion who remains

58 Heleen Zorgdrager, “The sacrifice of Abraham as a (temporary) resolution of a descent conflict? A gender-motivated reading of Gen. 22,” in *The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and its Interpretations* (eds E. Noort and E. Tigchelaar, Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2002), 182–197 (196).

loyal up to the end.⁵⁹ The substitute animal sacrifice enables a new future for the protagonists and hence provokes gratitude.

59 See e.g. Ascenso, *Transcultural Theodicy in the Fiction of Shūsaku Endō* and Williams, *Endō Shūsaku: A Literature of Reconciliation* for a discussion of the concept of *dōhansha* in Endō's literary work.

The Fruits of Dissent and the Operationalization of Faith: A Midrashic Reading of the *Akedah*

Elliot Lyons

1 Introduction

The Bible is a text fraught with ‘gaps’ – narrative silences, inconsistencies, and places where questions arise – and as such yearns to be interpreted. Genesis 22, Abraham’s intended sacrifice of Isaac, the *Akedah* (‘binding’) as it is known in Judaism, is nothing but exemplary in this regard. The biblical text maintains two ‘gaps’¹ where *Midrash* – biblical interpretation in the Jewish tradition which juxtaposes biblical passages – places Satan into the narrative in a manner that emphasizes the fortification of faith through interrogating its very premises.² The more questions put to Abraham, in other words, the deeper his faith becomes.

Accordingly, this chapter will begin by locating the two main ‘gaps’ in the text: Genesis 22:1, where Abraham was tested “after these things/ words”, and the narratological gap between verses three and four. In presenting the textual gaps, I will use traditional historical-critical exegesis in order to juxtapose the radical potential and imagination present in Midrash to a method of interpretation that either entirely fails to answer the gaps, or only glimpses the tip of the theological iceberg that is the *Akedah*. Next I will discuss three Midrashim, from *Genesis Rabbah* (*GR*), from *Midrash Tanhumah Yelammedenu* (*TY*), and from the *Babylonian Talmud* (*BT*), which reconsider the gaps from the first half of the chapter in light of Satan questioning the ethics of a sacrifice-forged faith, and God pressing the grim task of filicide.

1 There is another ‘gap’ between the end of chapter 22 and the beginning of chapter 23, where Abraham returns and finds Sarah dead. This issue will not be dealt with here due to space restrictions and thematic inconsistency.

2 I am heavily indebted to Daniel Boyarin, who is also responsible for the notion of ‘gaps’, and Gary Porton for this rendering of Midrash. Cf. Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Gary G. Porton, *Understanding Rabbinic Midrash* (Hoboken: KTAV Publishing House, 1985). My article is an elaboration of my master thesis written under the aegis of prof. dr. Marcel Poorthuis (University of Tilburg).

Here is the biblical text of Genesis 22:1–5:

Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test.

He said to him, ‘Abraham,’ and he answered, “Here I am.”

And He said, ‘Take your son, your favoured one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you.’

So early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out for the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar.

2 The Gaps and their Defining Questions

2.1 *Gap 1: After these Things. Language and the Problem of Reference*

Genesis 22 begins easily enough with, “Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test.”³ Here, the issue is the interpretation of the Hebrew text:

ויהי אחר הדברים האלה והאלהים נסה את אברהם

(*wajehi achar haddevarim ha'ele wehaElohim nissah et Avraham*).

And specifically the terms, ‘דברים’, (*devarim*) ‘speeches’, ‘occurrences’, ‘things’, ‘נסה’, (*nissah*, < *nasah*) to ‘try’, ‘test’, or ‘prove’, and ‘האלהים’, (*haElohim*) or ‘the God’. For example, דברים (*devarim*) is not translated in the Jewish Publication Society (JPS) translation and in the Dutch translation *Nieuwe Bijbel Vertaling*, while the New Revised Standard Version translates the term as ‘things’, along with the King James Version. The main question or gap here is what preceded Genesis 22:1, because the sentence suggests that what came before is intimately related to the opening text. Traditional historical-critical commentary will be applied to this question below.

2.1.1 Gordon J. Wenham’s Misdirection

Traditional biblical commentaries furnish us with answers to the literary function of the phrase and the impossibility of identifying the precise events preceding Genesis 22:1. Gordon J. Wenham assesses the opening statement as being a:

3 The Jewish Publication Society (JPS). All biblical translation will come from this source, unless otherwise noted.

[G]reat moment, both from a dramatic and a theological perspective. It serves to cushion the listener from the full impact of the horrific command to Abraham, and it diverts attention from the question whether Isaac will be sacrificed to whether Abraham will stand up to the test.⁴

While admitting the theological import of the phrase, he fails to identify the events that underscore said import. However, he does touch upon the potential (mis)direction of attention from Isaac to Abraham in order to make the death sentence seem less horrific. Wenham believes listeners are spared the full impact of the command because Genesis 22:1 shifts emphasis from the *content* of the command – Isaac being sacrificed – to its form: That a command was given by God, and as such should be obeyed.

However, this interpretation itself is misleading because questioning whether Abraham will carry out the command cannot be seen as separate from the content – sacrificing Isaac – owing to the relationship between Abraham and Isaac. Hence shifting attention from Isaac to Abraham only leads back to Isaac, underscoring the horrific consequences of the command. Still, (mis)direction remains a key element of the narrative, as will be seen in the Midrashim, where Satan’s (mis)direction pierces the heart of Abraham’s dilemma.

2.1.2 Victor P. Hamilton’s ‘Lad’

Victor P. Hamilton gives another interpretation of the verse when he claims that it is impossible to know the identity of the preceding events referred to in verse one, concluding that the timespan is most likely years because Isaac does not seem to be a newborn. Abraham refers to Isaac as a ‘lad’ or *na’ar* in verse five, a term which would suggest that Isaac is not a fully-grown man.⁵ It almost seems as if Hamilton dismisses the preceding events – marking them as insignificant – *because* they cannot be known in any concrete manner; it is precisely this dismissal that is concretized in Midrash.

2.1.3 Hamilton and Wenham: God tested Abraham

A curious use of language in Genesis 22:1 is the formulation of ‘*the God*’ (האלהים) in relation to ‘test’ (נסה), which has implications on how the gap in the text posed by “after these things” is read. This is a strange formulation due to the

4 Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 2* (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 103.

5 Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50, The New International Commentary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 100.

'the' before God, as if the text is trying to distinguish God in some manner regarding the testing. Both Hamilton and Wenham note the bizarre inclusion of 'the' before *Elohim*, with Hamilton remarking 'the' ensures that the order is coming from none other than God himself.⁶ Furthermore, he goes to great lengths proving it is God who is appropriately testing Abraham, by comparing the verse to Exodus 15:25, the next instance where God appears as the subject, and Exodus 20:20.⁷

Hamilton's analysis deals with the tension in the text – why *God* would assign such a horrible task – and does away with it through a normative understanding of faith: God could not possibly do anything inappropriate or uncalled for, and therefore, by virtue of the command being given, it must be just, and even *good*. However, if God's test is to be appropriate, then what did Abraham do to deserve such a fate? How is ordering the slaying of an innocent son by a righteous father in any way ethical? Can blind obedience be the answer? This piece of exegesis also brings to the surface concerns about how to categorize 'good', and whether or not these categories can apply to God at all. It is clear in Hamilton's analysis that the text – "*the* God tested" – has the mark of Satan all over it, for Satan is normally associated with such cruel acts. Yet it is *the* God who tests. Where Hamilton falters by explaining away the tension, Midrash makes its stand in this very tension by inserting Satan who prompts God to test Abraham, engaging the thoughts that arise when God does the inexplicably cruel.

Wenham provides another viewpoint by characterizing the *Elohim* as the persona God assumes when He desired to *distance* himself from his actions.⁸ Through the juxtaposition of names, Wenham voices, just as Hamilton, nearly inescapable thoughts and feelings in the contradiction between perceptions of God's justice and his present actions – cruel and confounding. However, just as quickly as he begins to unravel the thread of meaning, similarly to Hamilton, he cuts the thread by not seeking out what constitutes the individual threads that compose the string. God may be acting remotely, and this just may be marked by the use of *Elohim*, but why would God choose to act in this manner? What would He be attempting to prove? Wenham remarks נִסָּה – 'test',

6 Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 100.

7 For Hamilton, the two instances are similar because God is doing the testing. When a human being is the subject of the verb, or testing, and God is the object, Hamilton categorizes the testing as negative, being "uncalled for, and out of place." In Exodus 20:20, God is doing the testing and some form of *nasa* (to test) is being used for evidencing fear of God. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 101.

8 Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 103.

‘prove’, ‘tempt’ or ‘try’ – is used to show a person’s true character, generally in the face of hardship,⁹ but what purpose does such a test have in Genesis 22? What does it prove, and to *whom*? Moreover, what was the temptation? Was it Abraham’s love of Isaac, and to overcome this love in the face of divine commandment? Or was it to test whether Abraham would follow such a cruel and senseless order just because God commanded it?

The gaps in the text are already numerous in the opening words of Genesis 22, being present in the language – ‘test’ and *the God* – and the language which narrates absence, as in the case with claiming that the command came “after these *things*”. The biblical commentaries are useful in so far as they begin to unearth kernels of information that send our minds spiralling down a path towards an answer, but they fail to supply that level of *imagination* that will push the limits of what can be said theologically about faith, due to being bound by the conventional exegetical method.

Yet, “after these things/words”, whatever they were, Abraham is asked by God to take his son and offer him up as a burnt offering at a place that God will show him.¹⁰ Responding to the call, Abraham rises early the next morning, enlisting two of his servants as well as his donkey to accompany him and Isaac. He also splits wood for the fire, and with this last preparation, he sets their feet to the road, and so ends verse three. Verse four begins two days after the beginning of the journey, “On the third day.” This is where the next gap comes into sight.

2.2 *Gap 2: Three Days of Silence*

The biblical text gives no hint about what occurred during the walk that has lasted almost three days. However, it does identify that Abraham and his retinue are at a place where they can see the mountain on which he is to offer up Isaac. Needless to say, curiosity is piqued by this omission of details: If they had been travelling for two days, why were they still so far away on the third day? Did something impede their progress? What did they talk about? Or were they, as the text and also Hamilton in his commentary on the gap suggest,¹¹ silent and speechless?

Hamilton and Wenham give similar answers to the gap between verses 22:3 and 22:4. Hamilton notes that the expression “on the third day” is the Hebrew equivalent of “at the eleventh hour”.¹² Wenham remarks that three days is

9 Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 104.

10 Genesis 22:2.

11 Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 107.

12 Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 107.

a typical period of preparation for something important, also noting that Abraham was most likely filled with anxiety and dread.¹³ Although Wenham puts into words what is undoubtedly on the minds of readers – Abraham being anxious at the prospect of having to sacrifice his son – he leaves no further comment on this most interesting issue of Abraham’s feelings. The Midrash, on the other hand, gives us a situation where Abraham’s anxieties are manifestly present before him in the form of Satan, leaving him to confront his fears and anxieties about having to sacrifice his beloved son.

After the events on the mountain – the building of the altar, the binding, the retaining of Abraham’s hand by the angel because he had not withheld Isaac from the Lord, the blessing given to Abraham – and his journey to Beersheba, the chapter comes to a close.

3 Satan’s Akedah and the Process of Faith

The foregoing concentration on the gaps in the text acts as a beginning point in both the interpretation of the biblical text and the concurrent process of Abraham’s journey towards faith, a process which is brought out in the Midrash. The three Midrashim presented below – from the *Babylonian Talmud*¹⁴ (*BT*), from *Genesis Rabbah*¹⁵ (*GR*), and from *Midrash Tanhuma Yelammedenu*¹⁶ (*TY*) – deepen the biblical text through inserting Satan into the narrative gaps, in a

13 Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 106–07.

14 The word *Talmud* is derived from *lamad*, ‘to study’. This text was still being developed throughout the fifth century of the Common Era. Cf. Moses Mielziner, *Introduction to the Talmud* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1968).

15 The *Genesis Rabbah*, or *Bereshit Rabbah*, achieved its final form circa 450 CE, being a Midrash collection composed of a verse-by-verse analysis of the book of Genesis. Cf. Jacob Neusner, “Genesis in the Genesis Rabbah,” in *The Encyclopedia of Midrash: Biblical Interpretation in Formative Judaism* Vol. 1 (eds Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery Peck; Leiden: Brill, 2005).

16 This Midrash collection derives its title from the opening formula that precedes the main text: “Thus began R. Tanhuma bar Abba.” However, R. Tanhuma did not author these texts. Rather it is thought that he may have laid the groundwork in the latter half of the fifth century CE for the text that would later bear his name. A definitive dating of the text, or any of the *Tanhuma* homilies for that matter, is not possible, while the place of origin is not certain either. “Introduction,” in *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu: An English Translation of Genesis and Exodus from the Printed Version of Tanhuma-Yelammedenu with an Introduction, Notes, and Indexes*, trans. Samuel A. Berman (Hoboken: KTAV Publishing, 1996). Cf. Myron B. Lerner, “The Works of Aggadic Midrash and the Esther Midrashim,” in *The Literature of the Sages* Vol. 11 (ed. Shmuel Safrai; Assen: Von Gorcum), 169–70.

way that questions the nature of the relationship between God, Satan, faith, and Abraham, and the normative conceptions of each. In other words, the process of faith is its interrogation, asking the difficult questions. Through the texts, we will find the truth in lies and the ugliness of truth, and we will notice that sacrifice may be but a canvas on which these concepts are painted, constructing spirituality as a process in which Satan plays a positive role. The texts will be treated synchronically because Satan's character remains the same throughout – knowledgeable, sensible, surly – which makes them effective for discerning a general rabbinic opinion on Satan's character. By treating the texts synchronically, each Midrash is a revision of the biblical text, and when read together they create a new narrative.

We will start at the beginning of the tale and work our way through the two gaps, mirroring the structure of the previous section. The first gap – “after these things” – will be analyzed using the BT and GR, which prepares the critical theological questions regarding God's truth and justice Abraham must deal with in the second gap – three days of silence – where Satan comes to Abraham and Isaac, forcing them to confront the implications of these theological issues.

3.1 *Gap 1: The Midrash on “After these Things”*

The *Babylonian Talmud* furnishes us with a conversation where God bets with Satan that should he require Isaac, Abraham would not withhold him, thus filling in the gap in Genesis 22:1 with a wager. ‘After these things’ is here interpreted as ‘after these words’. Which words? The conversation between God and Satan. The conversation begins with Satan flattering God, conveniently contrasting God's graciousness at giving Abraham a child at the age of one hundred to Abraham's ungratefulness at failing to provide a sacrifice at Isaac's weaning:

Sovereign of the Universe! To this man didst Thou graciously vouchsafe the fruit of the womb at the age of a hundred, yet of all that banquet which he prepared, he did not give one turtle-dove or pigeon to sacrifice before thee.¹⁷

God replies that should he require Isaac, Abraham would obey.

Satan gives the Sovereign of the universe due recognition, contrasting the gift – a miracle – that he gave Abraham and Sarah to Abraham's failure to offer

17 BT Sanhedrin 89b, translation in *The Babylonian Talmud* (ed. Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein; London: Soncino Press, 1935), 595.

the paltriest of offerings at Isaac's weaning – a turtledove and pigeon, which would have had no intrinsic value to Abraham, unlike Isaac who is the earthly manifestation of Abraham's pact with God and God's faithfulness to Abraham.¹⁸ Accordingly, Satan recognizes that one can only sacrifice what one esteems, and what would be more highly esteemed than Isaac, a miracle? Yet, at the same time, Satan could be chastising Abraham for forgetting an offering as meagre as a turtledove and pigeon, underscoring the importance of the offer, even if it is not equal to what was given. Hence Satan's emphasis is on the sacrifice, which contrasts to Wenham's earlier remarks where the purpose of the first verse was to direct the listeners' attention away from the sacrifice.

God, on the other hand, confidently and seemingly plays into Satan's hands through placing the wager. If God knows Abraham is faithful, it would indeed be cruel to give such a test, particularly to bolster his ego and show off his star pupil. Moreover, even if God was punishing Abraham for a failed sacrifice, the punishment given rather befits a tyrant than a just, merciful and forgiving God. This incongruity leads us to pose the same question again, this time with the new information provided by the *BT*: Why would God place such a bet? Seeking to understand the text, this Midrash asks questions of the biblical text in order to foster understanding through the mouth of Satan. Hence, although the gap is 'filled' by a specific answer, "a wager", the overall theological question still needs refinement. Next, we move to *GR* where a reason is given for the test: "So that the world may know the truth."

3.1.1 Genesis Rabbah: Abraham as God's Banner of Faith

The following passage uses the term נסה (*nasa*) which, as stated earlier, is not only a test but also an event that proves the mettle of the individual being tested. Here Abraham stands as an example for truth, something which proves to be as enigmatic as faith:

And it came to pass after these things, that God did prove ('nissa') Abraham (Gen. 22:1). It is written, Thou hast given a banner ('nes') to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed ('le-hithnoses') because of the truth. Selah (Ps. LX, 6): This means, trial upon trial, greatness after greatness, in order to try them in the world and exalt them in the world like a ship's ensign [flying aloft]. And what is its purpose? Because of the truth. Selah: In order that the equity of God's justice may be verified in the world. Thus, if one says, "Whom He wishes to enrich, He enriches; to impoverish, He impoverishes; whom he desires, He makes king; when he wished, He

18 Genesis 17:16.

made Abraham wealthy, and when He wished He made him a king”, then you can answer him and say, “Can you do what Abraham did?” *Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born unto him* (Gen 22:5); yet after all this pain it was said to him, *take now thy son, thine only son* (Gen 22:2), *yet he did not refuse*. Hence, *Thou hast given a banner to them that they fear thee, that it may be displayed*; so it is written, *that God did prove Abraham*.¹⁹

Abraham endured even the annihilation of a miracle because he feared God, knowing that the truth is this very fear, or an awe that reveres and listens, echoing Psalm 60:6 – “Give those who fear You because of Your truth a banner for rallying”,²⁰ The banner is itself the fear of God.

Similarly to the *BT*, God is cloaked in a cruel mysteriousness on account of his incomprehensible stance on justice. If God does what he wills, giving this name to justice and truth, then how can it be just to ask a largely innocent Abraham to commit filicide, going directly against God-given commandments? Is this his truth? Or is facing the death of Abraham’s son, who was given to him at one hundred years old,²¹ by his own hands²² the price of faith? Could *you* do any of these things after being similarly blessed? And so the test began *after these things*;²³ after having a son and the accompanying joy swept away. Hence, in *GR*, Hamilton and Wenham’s issue of whether the command originates from God is not of central importance, but rather what the command says about how we think about God.

If the remarks from the *BT* are considered as an answer to *GR* – why would God place such a horrible wager? – then it seems God needs Satan in order to uplift Abraham to greatness, using him as an example for the world to see. Put simply, God is omnipotent, thus he could have acted alone, which leads to the question why Satan has a role in this. Wenham remarked “*the Elohim*” was used to distance God from the act, and here God is distant in that Satan spurs the test, and in doing so, bridges the gap between God and the command in a seamless manner. Yet at the same time God is still intimately involved in the events. Satan could possibly be one half of the same force, with the other half being occupied by God.

19 *Genesis Rabbah* 55:1, in *Midrash Rabbah* Vol. 1, trans. Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (London: Soncino Press, 1951), 482.

20 JPS. Note that the Midrash contains a wordplay: *nissah* (‘prove’), *nes* (‘banner’, ‘miracle’).

21 *Genesis* 21:5.

22 *Genesis* 22:2.

23 *Genesis* 22:1.

Considering the Midrashim surveyed so far and looking ahead to the proceeding texts, it could also matter not so much which ‘side’ – light or dark, good or bad and evil – that either of them occupies as the opposition existing in the first place. Stuck in the middle of this continuum is Abraham, who must navigate it in order to understand faith through confronting it, and questioning it, as will be seen in the Midrashim from the *TY* and *GR* regarding the second gap where both Abraham and Isaac are confronted by Satan on the way to Moriah.

3.1.2 Satan and the Road to Moriah

We will deal with the unintended consequence of the faithful: Satan confronting Abraham in the Midrash *Tanhuma Yelammedenu* and *Genesis Rabbah*. *GR* will not be given a separate subheading because it reiterates the same sentiment found in the *TY* – that Abraham will be labelled a murderer if he commits filicide – save that in the former text, Abraham, when pressed by Samael,²⁴ confesses his intent to kill Isaac. In both texts, Abraham remains stalwart and faithful in having the consequences of his actions put plainly before him in a straightforward, confrontational manner.

Satan appears to Abraham as an old man in the *TY*, inquiring about Abraham’s destination. Abraham is going to pray, and Satan smugly retorts – “[D]oes one carry fire and a knife in his hands, and wood on his shoulders?”²⁵ Abraham needs the knife and wood to prepare food, but Satan cuts in, revealing his presence when God gave the command, and Abraham would be foolish to relinquish such a blessing:

Have you not heard of the parable of the man who destroyed his own possessions and then was forced to beg from others? If you believe that you will have another son, you are listening to the words of a seducer . . . And if you destroy a soul, you will be legally accountable for it.²⁶

24 Louis Ginzberg gives this as an alternative name for Satan; Freedman, in his translation of *Genesis Rabbah*, marks Samael as a wicked angel, with the *Dictionary of Deities and Demons* giving Samael as a name given in the intertestamental period for the devil, who, among other things, is leader of the hosts of evil and persecutes the righteous. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1937), 175; B. Becking, P. van der Horst, K. van der Toorn, eds, *The Dictionary of Deities and Demons [DDD]* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 468; Cf. E. E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* Vol. 1, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), 161–169.

25 *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu* Wayera 30a, 144.

26 *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu* 30a, 144.

Satan unearths the legal ramifications of Abraham's actions through speaking common sense. Ironically, he warns Abraham for the seducer (Satan). He prepares Abraham for the idea that *God* may be fooling him, as if to ask, utilizing the themes from *GR* above, yet refined, what *type* of truth involves contradicting the law? Abraham will be not only breaking the general prohibition against killing but also the law prohibiting child sacrifice in Leviticus 20:2:

Moreover, thou shalt say to the children of Israel: Whosoever be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that giveth his seed unto Molech; he shall be surely put to death; the people of the land shall stone him with stones.²⁷

Legally, according to Satan, Abraham will be held accountable, and this will most likely be through paying with his life; thus, although Satan does not refer to Leviticus 20:2, he certainly implies as much in his speech. Accordingly, listening to a voice that told Abraham otherwise would be foolish – seduction to a fault – and how can one possibly represent God's truth through filicide resulting in death? This would indeed be a grim fate.

In *GR*, Samael also confronts Abraham, pointedly asking, "What means this, old man! Hast thou lost thy wits? Thou goest to slay a son granted to thee at the age of a hundred!"²⁸ Abraham cannot, in Kierkegaardian terms, be both in adherence and in violation with the law at the same time. Moreover, Samael averts, "To-morrow He will say to thee, Thou art a murderer, and art guilty".²⁹ Satan further presses Abraham, asking him if he could withstand an even greater test, following this question with a quote from Job's friend, Eliphaz, "If a thing be put to thee as a trial, wilt thou be wearied?"³⁰ This last question functions to precipitate further reflection on Abraham's behalf because it seeks after his motivations, which in turn asks after his values – is filicide a fair price for anything? Especially for something unknown? These questions could very well prove too heavy a burden; hence in *GR* and the *TY*, we find the weight of the questions becoming stronger as Satan himself speaks to Abraham.

27 JPS. The term 'Molech' has been argued to be a divine name as well as a technical term used in the cultic sacrifice of children. The Old Testament view on this cult of child sacrifice is that 'Molech' was predominantly a Canaanite practice, as is demonstrated in Deuteronomy 12:31 and 2 Kings 17:17, although it was practiced in Jerusalem. *DDD*, 1090–1097.

28 *Genesis Rabbah* 56:4.

29 *Genesis Rabbah* 56:4.

30 Job 4:2.

The two Midrashim underscore and deepen the questions raised in the first ‘gap’ as to the nature of God, Satan, good, bad and evil. Satan argues the moral point of acting in accordance with the law, while God, in a Job-like distance, allows Satan to approach Abraham, and counter His orders – yet Abraham remains steadfast, rebuffing Satan. The key question here is the purpose of Satan, and the answer may be that Satan will *aid* Abraham in understanding *why* he believes and adheres, that is, the content of his faith, and not only the fact that he adheres unquestionably.

This is, of course, in spite of the fact that the rabbis did not view knowledge of the reasons for the commandments as necessary for following them; thus the commandments have merit apart from the motivations behind them.³¹ Yet, part of the purpose of the commandments is to benefit and keep people away from the evil inclination through testing, which makes one mindful of one’s mistakes.³² However, in the end, none of this reasoning is needed to carry out a command. Thus, to use the language of Plato’s *Eutyphro*, commandments are pious both because they are God-given and because of their intrinsic value. At every turn of thought we find a ‘but’, and we know from the *GR* that Abraham is an exception, and *the* rule, who would obey because it is required. He must face Satan and his fear of failure without having the belief filicide will be recalled, believing with *understanding* through considering the contrary – Satan’s words, which very competently ask: What kind of God would require filicide? However, in all the texts surveyed, no hint of Abraham’s inner process has been given, and he has faced Satan coolly, confidently.

3.1.3 A Mother’s Love: Satan, Sarah, Isaac and Abraham in the Midrash Tanhuma Yelammedenu and Genesis Rabbah

The *TY* and *GR* will be discussed together because both are built upon Satan noting Sarah’s disgust at Abraham’s actions, if only she knew, and Satan coming to Isaac to tempt him, disguised as a young man. In the latter text, Satan also mentions Ishmael, and Isaac breaks down in the face of Satan’s word, causing Abraham to comfort him by telling him that if God does not provide an offering, Isaac will be the offering. These Midrashim add to the depth of the trial because both Abraham and Isaac admit and *accept* the truth that the former will sacrifice and the latter will be sacrificed.

In the *TY*, Satan questions Isaac in the same manner as Abraham, with Isaac releasing that he is journeying to study law. “Alive or dead?” Satan inquires.³³

31 Urbach, *Sages*, 368.

32 Urbach, *Sages*, 367.

33 *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu* 30a, 144.

Isaac responds by asking how one could possibly study law while dead, resisting Satan's attempt to tempt him away from his father's trust. Lastly, Satan relays that Sarah would be beside herself if she knew to what grim task this 'demented' man set himself, as if to say that death is a perverse tool for instruction.³⁴ Like his father, Isaac accepts his fate by avowing fealty to his heavenly and earthly fathers.

Isaac, here, is faced with the reality of death. The *TY* also reveals that Abraham, to explain their departure, told Sarah he was to provide Isaac with critical instruction.³⁵ Hence Satan confronts Isaac with the lies of Abraham, giving Isaac all the information he needs to make an informed decision himself, just as he did with reminding Abraham that he would be breaking the law. Similarly, in *GR* Samael calls on Isaac as the "son of an unhappy mother", telling him Abraham will kill him, and then asking him whether his inheritance would go to Ishmael, "the hated of her [Sarah's] house".³⁶ Isaac cries out to Abraham, causing Abraham to shun Sammael and offer the strange comfort of telling Isaac that if God fails to provide an offering, Isaac will be the burnt offering – "*so they went both of them together – one to slaughter and the other to be slaughtered*".³⁷

In the text from *GR*, Samael forces Abraham to tell Isaac the truth, which is a bizarre comfort, in fact being the same comfort afforded Abraham in his relation to God: Both must have faith in their fathers as their only solace. With the same processes being mirrored between father-son and God-Abraham, a queer bond is made between all parties based in faith, and a *new* understanding of the role love plays in faith. Love requires sacrifice, which in turn requires sacrificing parts of the self. Consequently, this may be the 'instruction' Abraham told Sarah he would give Isaac in the *TY*, and the truth Abraham uttered along with this lie – for how can one be instructed and study law while dead? Moreover, faith could be rendered here as Abraham and Isaac submitting to the reality of having to sacrifice and be sacrificed after a thorough questioning, with the guiding issue of Abraham speaking the grim reality into existence. In the *TY* below, Abraham continues this thread by fully admitting the truth of Satan's lies.

34 *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu* 30a, 144.

35 *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu* 30a, 143.

36 *Genesis Rabbah* 56:4.

37 *Genesis Rabbah* 56:4.

3.1.4 The River in the Road: Satan's Role in the Tested Faith in the *TY*
 On the third day, when Abraham lifted his head and saw the place from afar, the *TY* notes the incongruent amount of time for the short distance travelled, accounting for the lack of progress, by explaining that Satan, perturbed by being ignored, placed a river in Abraham's path. Abraham and retinue wade out up to their necks; Abraham cries out to God to spare him so he can do as he was commanded.³⁸ God removes the river. Undeterred, Satan again uses the words of Eliphaz from the book of Job (4:12):

Now a word was secretly brought to me (Job 4:12); that is, I have heard from behind the heavenly curtain that a lamb shall be sacrificed as a burnt offering instead of Isaac.³⁹

Abraham, stalwart yet revealing as ever, tells Satan that it is a liar's penalty that even when he speaks truth, no one will believe him.

The process of faith is at play here, its contents in the willingness to fulfil commandments in the face of not only a physical obstacle, but the *truth*. Abraham beseeches the heavens, evoking the banner motif from *GR* in asking God who will fulfil his commandments if either he or his son dies. This idea of sight aligns with the language of Genesis 22, where the term 'to see' (ראה, *ra'ah*) appears in various forms multiple times.⁴⁰ Abraham cannot be the example of how God *sees to* or provides for those who heed his words if he is dead, which, curiously enough, are congruent with the implications of Satan's earlier remark to Isaac in the *TY* on the impossibility of studying law while dead: How is one to learn how to carry out the law when one's instruction is in breaking the law? To reformulate the question, how is the truth built upon a lie, and how can a lie be the truth?

Satan's river challenges Abraham, testing his resolution in order to discern his mettle, as if to suggest faith would be useless without *these things* – obstacles, doubts and having one's own fears externalized, in this case manifest in an inquisitive, plainly speaking Satan. Satan's challenge is utterly indistinct from God's – for did not God agree to the wager? *After* and *in these things*, seeing events as good, bad, or evil is of no use because truth has many facets – it is relative – and not all of them are normative. Abraham conjures

38 *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu* 30b, 144.

39 *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu* 30b, 145.

40 For example, in the noun *Moriah*, which is used throughout the verse, and also in the famously enigmatic verse 14, where Abraham names the location of the sacrifice, יהוה יראה, or something "the Lord will see" or "the Lord will provide".

images of deceit and misdirection, but his character here and in the other Midrashim directs him to consider what faith means, and whether it includes sacrifice. Notice that in the first 'gap' the analysis concerned the nature of God, while presently it centers around Abraham taking on the burden that he has accepted, and doing so by calling upon God to dry up the waters when death would have been an easy way to avoid filicide. Thus, it seems the more Satan pushes and questions, the stronger Abraham's resolve becomes.

Satan offers that a lamb will replace Isaac, which is the truth in the end. Yet this truth is most likely contingent upon Abraham being deterred or not. That is to say, if he quit, God would probably not have taken Isaac, while Abraham would still have maintained a place among the holy because he followed the law. However, to be able to offer the lamb in place of Isaac – even if it also served as a belated offering for the forgotten ritual at Isaac's weaning (*GR*) – would surely be the greatest achievement, because in this case God is trusted to *see to* the situation. Although Abraham may be uncertain about the outcome, he is certain God will provide a solution, and this is a truth set against the truth that there may be honour in turning back when faced with death. Thus, just as this and the other Midrashim have brought out and fortified the 'gaps' in the biblical text, Satan within this form brings out and fortifies the 'gaps' in Abraham's spirituality.

4 Conclusion: The New Akedah

This chapter began by briefly detailing how traditional biblical commentaries treated the 'gaps' in the biblical text by hinting at the theological depth plumbed in Midrash. The strength of Midrash lies in its creative use of the text by inserting Satan into the narrative, causing one to rethink conceptions of faith. The Midrashic texts surveyed here in no small part call for a re-evaluation of the way we speak about sacrifice, and specifically how we view sacrifice through the lens of faith. The form of Midrash was a narrative that questioned the biblical text in order to explicate the minutia, and in this case, the devil was literally in the details. Relentlessly pursuing Abraham and Isaac, Satan opposed God, beseeching Abraham to *uphold* God's law, challenging Abraham to *find* and ground his faith through placing what were undoubtedly his own apprehensions right at his doorstep.

The power of the Midrashim is in their treatment of faith as dynamic process that resists being diluted into formulas and rudiments, seeing faith as a truth among truths. It asks one to doubt to believe, with doubt pointing at what one finds difficult, what one cherishes. Wenham gave the opening words

of Genesis 22 a dampening function – they direct attention away from the intended sacrifice, focusing on whether Abraham will *sacrifice*. Abraham's trial is precisely not forgetting the importance of Isaac, and Satan potently reminds him in the Midrashim of his folly. Although Abraham confidently rebuffs Satan, his soul must have yearned and uttered a soft 'I know', for there would be no trial without recognition of the love he had for Isaac.

Satan, as he did throughout the Midrashim by opposing God, interrogates the value of the truth regarding faith. In *GR*, God's truth would be known through Abraham, but Satan inquires what type of truth is known through the sacrifice of innocents. Yet, just as Midrash asks the difficult questions, it draws back, giving no answers to the problem of Abraham's faith, for remaining steadfast – or faithful – is not an answer to the problem, but a tautology that can only be managed by Abraham. Consequently, perhaps the truth is in not believing the lie of fixed solutions, in removing the veil presented by the holy and admitting the gritty yet intoxicating allure of having one's eyes opened to the possibility of faith being a violent movement of the soul, in the suspension of belief and judgment.

It is recognized that the above reading is in many ways a radical reading of the Midrashim, but it is grounded in the view that Midrash itself is a radical manner of biblical interpretation, sacrificing certainty for the pursuit of what cannot be grasped. Endless discussion and interpretation of the Midrashim continually make Abraham's tale anew, and it is this remaking of tradition and viewing ancient texts through new eyes which keeps religion vibrant and relevant. Thus, the true import of the Akedah may be in the process, and in finding one's own manner of confronting reality.

Epilogue

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Fascination of Sacrifice

Kathryn McClymond

We are at a critical juncture in the study of sacrifice. In a world troubled by war, economic crisis, and deprivation, the language of sacrifice is used frequently to rally men and women to extend themselves on behalf of others. Sacrificial rhetoric is used to justify and give meaning and honor to this extra effort, and it is embraced as language rooted in the world's great religious traditions and highest philosophical ideals. At the same time, the resources for scholarship have never been richer in terms of the data and methodologies available. Scholars can draw on ancient texts, archaeological evidence, contemporary philosophy, classical theology, literary works, and popular culture to find examples of sacrifice and to inform their thinking. By contrast, however, theorizing regarding sacrifice in modern Western academia suffers greatly. I would argue that this is largely because sacrificial theorizing continues to be driven by a narrow range of examples and framed largely by Protestant Christian models, in which 1) the sacrificial offering substances are assumed to be animal or human; 2) the purpose of the sacrifice is substitutionary atonement via violent destruction; and 3) the nature of the sacrifice is monothetic, with a single aspect of sacrifice presented as its defining and essential element. I have argued elsewhere that this approach to sacrifice cripples our appreciation for this rich phenomenon.¹ We have been seduced by the drama evoked by bloody and violent elements of some forms of sacrifice, and thus distracted from the subtleties and complexities that exist more broadly. As a result, current scholarship is relatively “one note”, lacking in sophistication.

The essays in this volume are prompted, at least in part, by a recognition of the current state of sacrificial studies, both its strengths and its weaknesses. The authors represented here take up the rich data and methodological resources available and present a dazzling range of case studies in sacrifice, case studies that lay bare the complex nature of sacrifice. In addition, these essays implicitly challenge the narrow models that dominate sacrificial studies conversations by presenting example after example of sacrifices that cannot be satisfactorily explained by these approaches.

¹ An extended presentation of this argument can be found in Kathryn McClymond, *Beyond Sacred Violence: A Comparative Study of Sacrifice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

Without ever explicitly saying so, this volume also asserts the value of the comparative study of sacrifice. While our work continues to benefit from in-depth descriptions and analyses of individual sacrificial systems, the theorizing of sacrifice requires a broad approach, brings multiple sacrificial traditions into conversation with one another. Historically, comparative work has received harsh criticism, largely because early attempts generated ahistorical descriptions of sacrifice that ignored context and glossed over differences between traditions. This reductionist approach led to unwarranted claims about far-reaching similarities between traditions. Attempts to address this problem led to an over-correction in which comparison was discounted entirely. Area studies were praised while comparative work was shunned out of fear of overreaching. However, responsible comparison recognizes its limitations, taking on research problems that suit comparison. In addition, responsible comparison is modest in its conclusions. Comparative studies of sacrifice make sense, given the prevalence of sacrifice around the world. In addition, a comparative approach to sacrifice offers a corrective for models that claim universality. The present volume presents a series of case studies of sacrifice, clustered into three sections. Each case study speaks for itself while being framed in conversation with other related essays, giving the reader a sense of the breadth and depth of the issues to be tackled. Ultimately, this approach invites each reader to come to his/her own conclusions about the broader nature of sacrifice.

The study of sacrifice goes back at least as far as the study of religion. In the following few pages, I highlight the prevailing views of sacrifice that this collection implicitly engages. I will briefly describe the approaches that currently dominate the field and then note some of the ways in which these approaches fall short. In so doing, I hope to set the stage for the case studies that follow.

I. While theoretical approaches to sacrifice span a wide spectrum, contemporary theorizing tends to be dominated by three different approaches. Probably the most well-known is that of René Girard, who argues that sacrifice is the unconscious redirected aggression of a society:

[Sacrifice] is a substitute for all the members of the community, offered up by the members themselves. The sacrifice serves to protect the entire community from its own violence; it prompts the entire community to choose victims outside itself.²

2 René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 8.

For Girard, scapegoating is at the heart of ritual, religion, even culture as a whole. In his work Girard builds on a Christian notion of vicarious atonement via an innocent victim. He argues: “society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a ‘sacrificeable’ victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented upon its own members, the people it most desires to protect”.³ While it is clear that many sacrificial systems include substitutionary atonement, this motif alone is woefully inadequate as a singular, definitive characterization of all sacrifice.

Others have characterized sacrifice as some form of cuisine. W. Robertson Smith’s classic work, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, focused on sacrifice as a communal meal, in which worshipers reestablish a broken connection with their god, in addition to forging communal ties.⁴ Marcel Détiénne and Pierre Vernant, in their work on ancient Greek sacrifice, argue that sacrifice is a kind of political cuisine: “Political power cannot be exercised without sacrificial practice”, noting “the political and alimentary vocation inherent in sacrificial practices”.⁵ Finally, Charles Malamoud, commenting specifically on Vedic sacrifice, argues, “it is essentially a matter of cooking: It is the preparation, sometimes through the combination, but always through the cooking, of edible substances”.⁶ While these approaches differ significantly from one another in their understandings of the nature and purpose of the sacrificial meal, they all attempt to argue that the ‘meal’ or ‘cuisine’ metaphor captures the thrust of sacrifice.

Finally, scholars have consistently characterized sacrifice as part of a broader system of social exchange. In his classic work *The Gift*, Marcel Mauss invokes this image, underscoring the fact that no gift is free gift; rather, gift-giving systems depend upon ongoing reciprocity, either between individuals and communities or with the divine: “One of the first groups of beings with which men had to enter into contract, and who, by definition, were there to make a contract with them, were above all the spirits of both the dead and of the gods. Indeed, it is they who are the true owners of the things and possessions of this

3 Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 1.

4 W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957 [Orig. 1889]).

5 Marcel Détiénne and Pierre Vernant, *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks*, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 5.

6 Charles Malamoud, *Cooking the World: Ritual and Thought in Ancient India*, trans. David Gordon White (New York, Oxford University Press), 34.

world”.⁷ More recently, Gregory Alles has continued imagining sacrifice as a kind of exchange, asserting:

Exchange did provide one of the oldest theoretical models for understanding the widespread ritual of sacrifice: The notion that sacrifices are gifts given to the gods or ancestors in the hope of receiving a gift in return. This perspective is summed up in three Latin words *do et des*, “I give [to you], to that you will give [to me]”.⁸

The phrase *do et des* is commonplace in sacrificial studies, emphasizing the dynamic that is created between the giver and the recipient in a sacrificial exchange on multiple levels. Again, however, characterizing sacrifice simply as a form of exchange fails to capture other activities and dynamics at play in sacrificial events.

Each of these models offers valuable insights into some sacrificial phenomena, but none of them adequately explores all the sacrificial phenomena available to us, and each of them emphasizes one element of sacrificial practice to the detriment of other elements. We turn now to an explanation of the fundamental problems with these approaches and one possible solution.

II. Common thinking about sacrifice makes several faulty assumptions. First, sacrifice is commonly associated with animal and human victims, but the world’s religions include a much wider range of sacrificial offerings. Around the globe we find liquid offerings such as wine and ghee; vegetal offerings such as gourds, grains, and fruit; and material offerings such as fabric. However, theorists have largely ignored or dismissed this fact. Hubert and Mauss acknowledge the existence of vegetal offerings:

It may cause surprise that in this scheme we have not mentioned those cases where the victim is not an animal. We might indeed have done so (...) The preparation of the [grain] cakes, the way in which they were anointed with oil or butter, etc., corresponds to the preparation of the [animal] victim.⁹

7 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Arabic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: Norton, 1967 [Orig. 1925]), 16.

8 Gregory Alles, “Exchange,” in Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, eds, *Guide to the Study of Religion* (New York: Cassell, 2000).

9 Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Functions*, trans. W. D. Halls (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964 [Orig. 1898]), 137 n291.

Vast numbers of sacrificial offerings – and the procedures applied to these offerings – have been largely ignored in sacrificial theorizing to date. I suspect that this is because pouring ghee and pounding grain cakes is not nearly as dramatic as the death of an animal, and the dramatic activities have captured our scholarly attention. However, this narrow focus on animal and human offerings has crippled our understanding.

Related to the focus on the substance of sacrifice is the problem of its purpose. Sacrifice is commonly assumed to be destructive, usually in a violent way. Hubert and Mauss, long viewed as the ‘grandfathers’ of modern sacrificial studies, state this boldly:

[W]e must designate as sacrifice any oblation, even of vegetable matter, whenever the offering or part of it is destroyed.¹⁰

The procedures that receive attention in sacrificial studies are those that dismember animal victims, and these activities are fundamentally viewed as destructive. However, reviews of the world’s sacrificial systems reveal that sacrifice is often a constructive activity. Unique elements are constituted over the course of a sacrifice, and even when a substance is taken apart, this is often best understood as the generation of multiple new, discreet offerings out of a single ‘unformed’ substance. In addition, the sacrificial ritual itself is often performed in order to stave off destruction, disintegration or chaos. Rather, sacrifices often maintain or reestablish the stability of the cosmos, including the social and political worlds as well as the natural world. In these examples, sacrifice is best understood not as destructive or violent, but as a generative, constructive activity.

Finally, sacrifice has been misrepresented in terms of its nature. Sacrifice is largely characterized as monothetic. That is to say, one element of sacrificial activity – usually consumption or killing – is emphasized as the sole defining element sacrifice. A cursory study of sacrifice, however, reveals that sacrificial events are far more complex. I have argued elsewhere that sacrifice is better understood as a polythetic phenomenon, in which multiple activities combine in countless ways, and none of which is essential or definitive. Sacrificial events include many activities, including the selection of an appropriate sacrificial offering; the association of the offering with a particular deity or deities; the identification of that offering with the sacrificer(s); the killing of some (but not all) offering substances; the apportionment of unformed substances into

10 Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice*, 12. Note that despite this quick reference to vegetal offerings, Hubert and Mauss consciously bracket out vegetal offerings from their theorizing.

multiple, discrete sacrificial offerings that are distributed to different participants; the heating of offering portions, either by fire or other means; and the consumption of certain portions. Each unique sacrificial event involves combination of these basic “building block” activities, combining in distinctive ways and in specific relationship with one another.

The complexity of sacrificial activity requires us to resist the temptation to reduce sacrifice to a single defining motif – destruction, cuisine, etc. Instead, we are invited to appreciate its multi-faceted, dynamic nature. Sacrifice is an organic phenomenon. It evolves constantly, generating various forms, some of which involve material substances, some of which are internalized processes within the body (e.g., tapas-generating yogic activities), and others of which are metaphoric (e.g., Jewish prayer, reading of the Bhagavad Gita in certain strains of Hinduism). In its different incarnations sacrifice addresses multiple concerns simultaneously: Individual and communal, as well as spiritual, social, economic, political, and cultural. In addition sacrifice manifests itself in multiple realms of human activity: The natural world, the socio-political arena, and countless cultural forms (including visual art, literature, and song). As a result we have an embarrassment of riches upon which to draw, a veritable playground for the scholarly imagination. Our task at this moment in sacrificial scholarship is to reject reductionism and let the full spectrum of sacrificial substances and activities speak to its theorizing.

III. The essays in this volume take up the challenge of reimagining sacrifice with these points in mind. First, they take on sacrifice in relationship with three key constituents: Community, ritual, and identity. In section one, the essays remind us that communities offer the opportunity to offer ourselves in sacrifice – or they demand it. Whatever the dynamic, sacrificial events forge connections between individuals and construct communities as a result. Section two examines sacrificial ritual in a host of religious traditions. We are reminded of the wide range of sacrificial rituals performed in religious and cultural traditions, but more importantly of the variations that occur within specific traditions, depending on time, place, and historical factors. Rituals are sensitive phenomena, and they reflect and respond to their specific contexts. Finally, section three explores the relationship between sacrifice and various identities we craft as individuals. The essays present exercises in the discovery of individual identity, implying that individual identity is always developed in response to other beings and to specific challenges. In clustering the essays in this way the editors underscore the fact that sacrifice never occurs in isolation – it is always constructed, deployed, and negotiated in rich social circumstances.

The case studies in this volume also display the broad range of data available to scholars of sacrifice. Most obviously, these essays discuss a wide variety of religious sacrificial traditions, including Vedic-Hinduism (Nugteren), early Christianity (Rouwhorst), Catholicism (Poorthuis), Judaism (Lyons, Wallet, Wetter), Islam (Wallet, Ljamai) and that of the Kapsiki/Higi in North Cameroon (Van Beek). In addition, the authors vary widely in the types of data they address. Certain authors draw on historical texts, such as Poorthuis's discussion of Gertrud von le Fort's account of the execution of Carmelite nuns during the French Revolution. Others join in contemporary philosophical and theological debates (Nistelrooy, Wulf). Certain authors draw on creative works. Prevo examines Friedrich Hölderlin's eighteenth century tragedy *Der Tod des Empedocles*, while Coenradie explores Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows and several novels by Shūsako Endō. Two essays focus on modern films: DePoortere addresses Andrei Tarkovsky's 1986 film *The Sacrifice*. Dresen explores contemporary popular culture in her study of the Twilight vampire saga. Finally, some authors address issues of contemporary concern. Gender is a key issue in Derks's study of the Grail movement, while De Wit explores rhetoric used in justifying self-sacrifice on behalf of one's country. Van Goelst Meijer examines sacrifice in the context of conversations regarding nonviolence.

The breadth of data presented here invites us to reimagine the substance, the nature, and the purpose of sacrifice in its countless manifestations. In so doing, the essays in this volume challenge us to infuse our theorizing about sacrifice with the same richness and complexity we find in sacrifice itself. We will never fully comprehend sacrifice – and in the end, this may be why it continues to fascinate.

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