

RELIGION AND STRUGGLE:

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Studies of religion and violence continue to expand at an unprecedented rate. Historical treatments continue to deepen, theoretical approaches grow more sophisticated, and new themes and nuances emerge continuously, even for well-worked subjects. The *Journal of Religion and Violence* is pleased to support this expansion by featuring four new articles on topics ranging from late antiquity to the recent past. Two of the articles treat otherness and blasphemy in early Christian discourse. A third treats trauma, memory, and identity among Twelver Shī'a. The fourth attempts to untangle the various motivations for the Patani conflict in southern Thailand between 2004 and 2014. All four of these articles address to some extent the struggles of religious peoples who perceive themselves as oppressed and who, as we see so often in our discourse, occasionally perceive themselves as justified, even sanctified, oppressors. Below is a summary of the articles, followed by a sketch of the book reviews for issue 5.3.

ARTICLES

First, in “‘Formerly a Blasphemer and a Man of Violence’: First Timothy and the Othering of Jews,” Benjamin Lappenga takes on the critical issue of violent language and its injurious effects. Noting the far-reaching influence of First Timothy’s identification of Jews as blasphemers and willful fighters against God, he demonstrates how the text has been forceful in shaping Christians’ perceptions of themselves as zealous fighters for God in the model of the apostle Paul. He traces anti-Jewish sentiment to the earliest audiences for the letter, who would have recognized the testimony of the once violent, blaspheming, and Jewish Paul, now blessed and transformed by the mercy

and grace of his Christian Lord (1 Timothy 13–14). Once Christianized, Paul and others like him are impelled to fight the good fight (1 Timothy 1:18) and to turn over to Satan (1 Timothy 1:20) those who continue to reject Christian teaching. Echoes of 1 Timothy are found in other early writings, perhaps none more striking than Ephrem of Syria’s “Hymn of Unleavened Bread,” which champions the body of Christ (the eucharistic bread) over the obsolete and unleavened bread of Passover and the bloody hands of those who eat it, thereby harvesting the familiar trope of Jews as Christ-killers (“his blood be upon us”). The theme continues through the Middle Ages through Luther all the way into contemporary exegeses on 1 Timothy, some of which spin pacifistic aims into the text and attempt to justify its polemics by comparison to Greco-Roman rhetoric. But the author identifies an unmistakably virulent tone elsewhere in the Pauline corpus (e.g., Philippians 1:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:3; Romans 2:8–9) and concludes by pondering strategies to problematize the violence in sacred texts, including studying passages which might seem to subvert it (e.g., 1 Timothy 6:18–19).

Second, in “Apparently Other: Appearance and Blasphemy in the Ancient Christian Martyr Texts,” James Petitfils outlines the way that physiognomic and sartorial conventions functioned to establish tiered identities and status for Roman elites in contradistinction to low born peoples. Based in part on two Roman novels and two Christian martyr narratives, he shows the pervasive Roman association of good grooming, cleanliness, and white robes with inborn nobility, an association that Christian martyr narratives exploited in describing visibly beautiful Christian deaths before Roman audiences conditioned to visualize status hierarchies. This ideology of visual difference sharpened in the second and third centuries in reaction to a slippage in traditional claims to privilege, as citizenship became more widely available to the multitudes. Martyr narratives such as Perpetua’s and Blandina’s then responded to this sharpened emphasis by highlighting the majesty and grace of the two Christian women—eliding their different social statuses—and by staging their contrast to dirty, ugly, and ill-dressed criminals in the arena, with the presumable intent to impress the non-believing and blaspheming audiences who gazed at them.

Next, in “Trauma Unending: Shī‘ī Islam and the Experience of Trauma,” Abby Kulisz offers collective trauma as a theoretical lynchpin to religious identity among Twelver Shī‘a. Citing studies of collective versus individual trauma, she notes that, in contrast to individual trauma survivors who seek to recover from the experience, some religious communities collectively forge identities based on memories of it. “Sacred pain,” as Glucklich calls it, is cherished and relived among a group of Twelver Shī‘a who reignite memories of Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī’s suffering and betrayal at the *mātam* ritual of

self-flagellation during the Day of ‘Āshūrā’ at Karbala, the legendary site of the 680 CE martyrdom of the Prophet Muhammad’s grandson. There are a variety of historical elements to the construction of the *mātām* ritual and certainly political expediencies in the idealization of Karbala legends, pending the historical era. The Safavid period (sixteenth century) is argued to be when soteriological ideas became attached to the suffering of Husayn, and they continue. His suffering for many Shī‘a today is envisioned as both eternal and eternally redemptive, and their vicarious reliving of it as spiritually gratifying.

Lastly, Marte Nilsen and Shintaro Hara offer “Religious Motivation in Political Struggles: The Case of Thailand’s Patani Conflict.” The article questions whether the widespread “jihadist brand” is quite so enlightening for understanding conflicts associated with Islam, using as a case study the Malay-Muslim uprising in Thailand from 2004 to 2014. Based in part on interviews with participants, they show that political, ethnic, and religious motivations for the conflict were so intertwined as to make the “religious,” “ethnic,” and “political” designations unhelpful. Instead the movement sprang from regional aspirations, involving urges for Malay independence and autonomy stemming back conceivably as far as the beginning of the twentieth century. This is not to say there is no religious ideology involved. Indeed, Malay fighters often deem their own struggles a kind of *jihad qital* (an armed jihad), Malay people as *mujahideens*, and even consider Malay language an “Islam language.” But these identifications are rooted in the complex local context and not aligned with the kind of global struggle one expects from, say, the Islamic State. The authors see the Patani case as instructive. In pursuit of astute political discourse, they advocate rejection of popularizing Islamist jargon in favor of analyses attentive to regional and historical intricacies.

BOOK REVIEWS

Our first review is Gail Streete’s chapter-by-chapter critique of Rubén Rosario Rodríguez’s *Christian Martyrdom and Political Violence: A Comparative Theology with Judaism and Islam* (Cambridge University Press, 2017). Espousing a version of liberation theology, the book’s author challenges the conception that Abrahamic religions are violent at the core, highlighting instead an impulse for non-violent political resistance to social injustice. The Christian martyrs’ embrace of suffering and death in the face of adversity is the expression of martyrdom that he privileges, although the Christian example is held in conversation with Jewish and Muslim examples and all are contextualized by a careful discussion of the principles of Islamic jihad and Christian just war. While some of the author’s choices to illustrate the

martyr's impulse are seen by the reviewer as curious (e.g., the historically elusive book of Revelation), and a few omissions are noted (e.g., gender and the threat of violence in the same book), Rosario Rodríguez's discussions of Jonah, Augustine, liberation theology, and martyrdom and remembrance are commended. Rosario Rodríguez's argument is unabashedly theological and, taken on its own terms, successful.

Next, Susan Ridgely reviews Julie J. Ingersoll's *Building God's Kingdom: Inside the World of Christian Reconstructionism* (Oxford University Press, 2015). Ingersoll traces Reconstructionism from the earliest writings of R. J. Rushdoony in the 1960s through its repackaging by members of the Tea Party in the 2010s, focusing along the way on the movement's foundational notions: presuppositionalism, "theonomy," and post-millennialism, which intertwine. Presuppositionalism presupposes the biblical god's truth as the basis for all morally correct actions; theonomy is Rushdoony's idea that biblical law should inform civil law; while post-millennialism sees the unfolding Kingdom of God in history as the event for which Christians should ardently work, rather than wait. The Reconstructionists claim that Christian dominion should prevail in the spheres of the American family, church, and civil government, while humanist or statist goals are to be rejected as aligned with Satan. The author shows how homophobia, anti-Semitism, and racism, among other ideas, are integrated into Reconstructionist theology, and how these explications of "God's truth" are invoked to shape political policy. As Ridgely states, the book offers a "stunning intellectual history" and an overview of Reconstructionism's effects on American public life.

Next, Michael Bailey reviews the 416-page *Oxford Illustrated History of Witchcraft and Magic*, edited by Owen Davies (Oxford University Press, 2017). While just one of a flurry of new publications reflecting a growing fascination with the topics, the book covers vast historical ground, from ancient Mesopotamia to contemporary obsessions with the likes of Harry Potter and Buffy the Vampire Slayer. It also covers new approaches, such as art history, anthropology, and media studies. Bailey sketches the contents of each chapter, noting the expertise of the contributors and attention to traditional subjects such as demonology and the real and structural violence attested in court records for early modern witch trials. Religious anxieties are central to understanding these and indeed, as Bailey points out, intellectual violence predominates in several time periods covered by the book. A telling account of shifting mores is provided by Robert Wallis, who chronicles an evolution in anthropological approaches to indigenous magic and witchcraft, from the colonial prejudices of early explorers to later twentieth-century field reports showing the social utility of magical practices, and finally today to postmodernism, which has "introduced the conundrum of the participant observer

who [can] no longer maintain the illusion of complete, clinical separation from the object of her study.” In popular discourse too, the old gulf between magical worlds and ours is eliding, as we see in the contemporary allure of fantastical accounts of witches and magic set in contexts reflecting modern social and cultural concerns.

Finally, Asbjørn Dyrendal coyly reviews Massimo Introvigne’s 665-page opus, *Satanism: A Social History* (Brill, 2016). Through the social history of ideas, Introvigne takes on a vast range of material, from biblical and church-related figurations of Satan up through the Satanism hysteria of the 1980s and early 1990s. The reviewer finds the presentation of material both enlightening and entertaining. The episodes covered tend to be sequential, which helps novices learn the events and disputes in the field, but also lively enough to maintain the interest of experts, who might actually find something new in the book’s encyclopedic compass. Introvigne discusses speculation about actual Satanism versus anti-Satanist phantasies and written accounts of Satanic gatherings versus Satanic hoaxes, covering along the way the personalities of advocates and detractors. France in the 1890s was one center for Satanist disputation, although, as the reviewer opines “Satanism was in vogue but not in existence.” Introvigne also points out that a number of twentieth-century personalities claimed Satanism as a self-identity, conspiracy theorists found Satan on the far right and the far left, and Satanism was embraced boldly by a few heavy metal bands. According to Dyrendal, the book offers erudition on a vast corpus of history and literature.

As usual, the *Journal of Religion and Violence* is pleased to be on the vanguard of these approaches to our subjects.