

行政院國家科學委員會專題研究計畫 期中進度報告

宗教經驗及其理論建構：以 Wilfred C. Smith、Mircea Eliade、Ninian Smart 為探討範例(1/3)

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行政院國家科學委員會補助專題研究計畫期中進度報告

「宗教經驗及其理論建構：以 Wilfred C. Smith、Mircea Eliade、Ninian Smart 為探討範例」(1/3)

一、前言

本人自九十三年八月一日起，受國科會為期三年的資助，進行題為「宗教經驗及其理論建構：以 Wilfred C. Smith、Mircea Eliade、Ninian Smart 為探討範例」的研究計畫。至今九十四年四月為止雖未滿一年，但進展順利，已獲得部分的成果。

誠如本人在申請案中所言，此研究的主要目的和內容，在於「以 Wilfred C. Smith、Mircea Eliade、Ninian Smart 三位二十世紀最具影響力的宗教學者為範例，探討他們如何觀察人的宗教經驗，並建構廣為當代學者討論的對應理論。」本人第一年的具體工作，即集中在 Smith 和 Eliade 兩位理論學者，閱讀和分析他們的主要著作，希望藉此為往後的探討建立基礎和參考架構。

二、進度現況

本人在今年度所進行的工作，主要包括四個項目：(一)閱讀 Eliade 的著作，並據此撰寫論文一篇，發表於北京中國社會科學院；(二)閱讀 Smith 的著作；(三)閱讀新柏拉圖主義的原典著作。(四)另外，本人亦撰寫一篇有關暴力和儀式方面的論文，於今年三月在東京 International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) 所舉行的大會上發表。

(一) 閱讀 Eliade 的著作並撰寫論文

Eliade 的著作等身，不易在短時間內窮盡其所有的作品，本人先期以下列數本為主要對象：

Patterns in Comparative Religion, tr. R. Sheed. London: Sheed and Ward, 1958.

The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion, tr. Willard R. Trask. London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959.

Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism, tr. P. Mairet. London: Harvill Press, 1961.

Myth and Reality, tr. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harper & Row, 1963.

Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy, tr. Willard R. Trask. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964.

The Myth of the Eternal Return, tr. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965.

The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1969.

Eliade 的著作雖多，但有其中心主題，而其在建構理論方面，更有一邏輯脈絡。本人初步總結對其理論的了解，並加入個人的推演反思，撰寫成論文一篇，題為「全球化與宗教研究：再思伊利雅德的『新人文主義』」。全文主要分四個部份闡述。第一部份分析伊利雅德在 1961 年發表的「宗教歷史學與一個新人文主義」，舉出伊氏當年的「人文視野」，即是在檢討現代化之後，西方知識潮流科學化與專精化的弊病，而提出人是「宗教人」、是「全人」，有其內在的主體、中心與意義以為對治。宗教研究應依此為前提，內容須廣泛包含新興的知識領域，在此「整體學域」下進行深度的詮釋。第二部份則指出我們目前生存於「全球化」的事實，其主要特徵為一統的「世界文化」與「去中心化」的多元地方文化同時並存，「神聖」與「世俗」分野的逐漸模糊，各類文化或宗教的「融合」成為最顯著的「視景」。第三部份舉例基督教、伊斯蘭、佛教、新興宗教等，接續論述在此「全球化」潮流中已經產生的急遽變化。第四部份則進一步演繹伊利雅德的「新人文主義」，強調在問題意識方面，我們仍須確立「宗教人」的主體性，為宗教研究釐清界圍，在內容範疇方面，則須以「全球化」的多元知識為資料，在主題選擇方面應跳脫傳統的「文本」框架，涵蓋更新的議題，而在方法途徑方面，除了一般的靜態文獻研究之外，尤應積極採用動態的訪談與田野調查方式，以符應現階段宗教發展的特色。本文總結指出，伊利雅德的「新人文主義」洞見，對於今天的宗教研究者而言，仍然具有反思性與前瞻性的啟發效用。

此論文已於去年八月底發表於北京中國社會科學院，之後收錄於《覺醒的力量》(台北：世界宗教博物館，2004)一書。

(二) 閱讀 Smith 的著作

在 Smith 的著作方面，本人主要閱讀其下列作品：

The Faith of Other Men. New York: New American Library, 1963.

The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind. New York: Macmillan, 1963.

Faith and Belief. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.

Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion.

Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981.

Religious Diversity. New York: Crossroad, 1982.

What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

本人目前正整理閱讀心得，擬以「論史密斯(Wilfred C. Smith)的宗教觀：兼談當代新儒家的『宗教性』」為題，於今年五月在政治大學所舉辦的第六屆「中國近代文化的解構與重構」學術會議中發表。

(三) 閱讀新柏拉圖主義的原典著作

宗教經驗多元而繁複，依隨各宗教傳統、教義、歷史遭遇、象徵符號、信仰者性格等等因素之不同而有差異極大之呈現。「神秘經驗」雖然隸屬宗教經驗之一，但因其具有實踐隱晦、難以言喻、不容正統等特質，長久以來並未受到應有

的重視。不過弔詭的是，根據近來學者的研究，此種經驗卻是所有宗教社群中最普遍甚至是最核心者，可以構成宗教比較的重要主題或進階。職是之故，本人選擇廣為研究「神秘主義」(Mysticism)學者所提的「新柏拉圖主義」(Neoplatonism)學派為對象，試圖理解其所謂的「經驗」為何，希望將此納入本計畫的關注焦點中，並測試 Eliade、Smith、Smart 三位理論學家對此一主題的詮釋。本人所選擇的新柏拉圖主義者，以 Plotinus (205-270 CE)及其傳人 Prophyry、Iamblichus、Proclus 等為主，讀本如下：

Armstrong, A. H., tr. *Plotinus*. 7 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966-1988. (Loeb Library)

Dodds, E. R., tr. *Proclus. The Elements of Theology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963.

Gregory, John. *The Neoplatonists: A Reader*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Wallis, R. T. *Neoplatonism*. London: Duckworth, 1972; rep. 1995.

此一領域的閱讀進行緩慢，但對本計畫的主題探討卻助益極大，本人擬在往後第二、三年中仍持續進行。

(四) 撰寫 “Ritual Violence and Communal Sanity: The Case of *Herem* and Its Solution in Biblical Judaism” (儀式暴力與社群健全：論猶太教的「赫倫」)

近來有關宗教的衝突和暴力問題，廣為宗教學術界重視，咸認為是吾人理解宗教群體經驗的另一重大面向，在過去往往受到忽略或忌於深究，而今許多國際學術會議皆以此為題，一方面希望糾正偏見，另一方面也為當今因為宗教因素所造成的流血、衝突、不安、失序等世界亂象，尋覓可資採用的洞見和路徑。

本人在執行本計畫中，因感於有必要嚴肅對待宗教中的暴力問題，又因適逢「國際宗教史學會」(IAHR)五年一次的大會將在東京舉行，所以以英文撰寫論文一篇，題為“Ritual Violence and Communal Sanity: The Case of *Herem* and Its Solution in Biblical Judaism”，並已在今年三月在大會上發表該文。本論文主要以猶太教歷史中的「赫倫」為中心，除了就字義、衍生義加以解釋，並舉史書中所記載的幾個案例，深入分析其經文脈絡，解釋其產生的緣由和宗教上的意義。緊接著在理論的討論方面，本文特別舉出幾位學者如 Norman K. Gottwald、Bruce Lincoln、René Girard、Mark Juergensmeyer 等人的見解，強調此皆是吾人在探討宗教的暴力經驗時，值得詳加參考者。

三、未來進度

根據以上所述以及本研究計畫的整體內容，本人擬定未來的進度如下：

(一) 九十四年五月~七月

1、持續閱讀 Eliade 和 Smith 兩位之著作，對於在台灣無法覓得的資料，本人打算利用暑假期間，赴美國波士頓幾間大學的圖書館借閱。

2、持續閱讀新柏拉圖學派的著作，除了求得一完整的認識外，更注意其與「宗教」相關的部分。另一方面，也將從宗教史的角度，探討其在中古時期與三大一神傳統的思想交流與互動。

(二) 九十四年八月～九十五年七月

- 1、此一階段將集中閱讀 Ninian Smart 的主要著作。
- 2、嘗試比較 Eliade、Smith、Smart 三人的學說。
- 3、蒐集和閱讀現階段對於此三位學者的正、負評論文章。

四、經費預核

無須更改，仍然依照「宗教經驗及其理論建構：以 Wilfred C. Smith、Mircea Eliade、Ninian Smart 為探討範例 (2/3)」之預核進行。(流水號：94PFA0200126)

國科會學者出席國際會議報告

報告人姓名：蔡彥仁

服務機關及職稱：國立政治大學宗教研究所專任教授兼所長

會議時間 / 地點：2005 年 3 月 24-30 日於日本東京

本會核定補助文號：93WFA0200126

會議名稱：(中文) 第十九屆國際宗教史學會大會：「宗教：對抗與和平」

(英文) XIXth World Congress of the International Association for the
History of Religions: “Religion: Conflict and Peace”

發表論文題目：(中文) 儀式暴力與社群健全：聖經猶太教中的「赫倫」
及其解決之道

(英文) “Ritual Violence and Communal Sanity: The Case of
Herem and Its Solution in Biblical Judaism”

一、參加會議經過

1、「國際宗教史學會」(International Association for the History of Religions, 簡稱 IAHR)是當今世界第二大的宗教學術團體，僅次於「美國宗教學會」(American Academy of Religion)。IAHR 發源於歐洲，代表百多年來的歐洲宗教研究傳統。該學會目前每五年才舉行一次大會，聚集世界各國宗教研究學者，討論當前重要的宗教學術議題。本國學者參與此學會者少，一來是因為其組成會員是以國為單位，又隸屬聯合國「科教文基金會」(UNESCO)，台灣受限於外交處境，影響接觸的機會，再來以往的會議地點皆在歐洲地區舉行，有其特定的地域和學術背景，本國學者知悉者不多。

2、台灣的宗教研究在近年來有長足的進步，許多學者開始積極參加國際學術會議，發表論文，尋找機會與國外學者交往。由於本次大會移師在東京舉行，因地緣之便，自然吸引不少本國學者參加。在一年多以前，本人即決定在此次會議上發表論文。為達符合大會的「宗教：對抗與和平」主題，並且顯示台灣亦有從事世界宗教的比較研究學者，本人立刻組成一「論文發表小組」(panel)，聯合林鎮國教授、黃柏棋教授、蔡源林教授等，訂下共同主題為“Conflict and Communalism: Taiwanese Perspectives on Violence in World Religions”，然後依個人在世界宗教方面的專長，分別從猶太教、伊斯蘭、印度教、佛教諸傳統中，擇一具體小題寫成論文。另外，本小組又邀日本南山大學的 Watanabe Manabu 教授為講評人，為四篇論文做一綜合的評述。

3、由於大會場次眾多，又散佈在不同旅館內，本小組發表時前來參加的聽眾不多，但是正因為人數較少，與會者反而更能盡興發言，受小場地的親近氣氛感染，個人皆能暢所欲言，進行深度的意見交流。

二、與會心得

1、宗教中的對抗與和平因受 911 攻擊事件的影響，在近來的國際學術會議上，成為學者關注的焦點。誠然，宗教皆以和平為最高鵠的，但是自世

界宗教史觀之，對抗、戰爭、暴力卻充斥所有的宗教傳統，此一弔詭現象，可能困惑許多人。其實自宗教教義、儀式的意義、政治和經濟的層面、宗教領導人的特殊性格等角度，皆可提供相當的線索，為我們對宗教的本質和功能，有更進一步的認識。本次的議題即讓學者能夠再一次的思考和交流。

- 2、本人所處理的猶太教「赫倫」(herem)案例，雖然發生於上古時代，不過類似的宗教心態，在今天的世界卻隨處可見。本人由此注意到當代以色列境內的猶太教極端份子，例如 Gush Emunim，正是反映此一具有爆裂性的宗教思想與行動。雖人本人的研究並非集中在當代宗教，但是經由此一主題的探討，將有助於日後對宗教的衝突和暴力方面，具備背景知識和臨即感，此是一大收穫。
- 3、根據本人觀察，IAHR 目前由 35 個會員國組成，可謂一小型的聯合國。雖然台灣並非會員，但是此一組織對外開放，歡迎學者在各種會議場合前來參與。職是之故，本人認為台灣學者需要多多把握類似的機會，不但參加五年一次的大會，更應積極出席不同國家或地域所舉行的小型會議，以便有更多的機會與世界其他國家的學者交流，此在學術與外交層面上，皆是意義重大。

三、考察參觀活動

(無)

四、建議

1、本人此次與同僚一起拜訪不少日本的宗教學者，特別是東京大學文學部的教授，發現其大都學術涵養深厚，尤其著重基礎功夫的培養，例如深入宗教語言、爛熟經典、把握宗教史等，並由此凝塑學風，經由數代傳承之後，有正面意義的「學派」自然形成。這些說來簡單，但仍須有心人在財力與人力方面給予支援，並紮實而沈穩的塑造優良環境，方能慢慢得出結果來。期望在台灣的有心學者和相關單位如國科會等，能通力合作，用心經營出屬於我們的學術傳統。

2、此次開會，發覺除了日本學者最多外，更有許多來自東南亞和南亞地區，這些都是我們過去容易忽略者。本人建議今後我們應該花費更多的精力和時間認識我們的周圍鄰居，而非僅知悉遙遠的歐、美等國的現代文化而已。純就學術而論，印度文化和宗教是一豐富而瑰麗的園地，值得我們認真的學習。伊斯蘭文明其實距離台灣很近，它的傳統之多元特性、地理區域涵蓋之廣、以及信仰者人口之眾多，並非僅認識中國或台灣文化者能夠想像。我們實在有必要組成研究團隊，對這些宗教文明進行深度和持續的探討。

五、攜回資料名稱及內容

本人所發表之論文及相關議程表。

六、其他

(無)

Ritual Violence and Communal Sanity: The Case of *Hērem* and Its Solution in Biblical Judaism

「XIXth World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, 2005, Tokyo」

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I. Introduction

The 911 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon heightened our sensitivity to the relationship between religion and violence in the contemporary world.¹ The Islamic *jihād*, commonly translated as “holy war,” has rapidly captured the public attention. Many scholars and mass media alike have tended to affiliate terrorism or terrorist with this crucial Islamic concept, thereby seemingly treating Islam as the sole source of religious violence. At the core of the issue, to my mind, is not Islam or its *jihād* belief and practice, but the fundamental question about the nature and function of religion itself. The problem, then, is a universal rather than a particular one.

For a better understanding of the relationship between religion and violence, I propose to look into the *hērem* in biblical Judaism as an illustration. *Hērem* is a complicated and meaning-laden term. Literally it denotes separation, taboo, consecration, and destruction.² In the extended context of ancient Judaism, it can be defined as:

the status of that which is separated from common use or contact either because it is proscribed as an abomination to God or because it

¹ Recent publications on this subject are too numerous to name them all. Some of them, however, are worth mentioning: Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997); Mark Juergensmeyer, *The Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003); Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003); Oliver McTernan, *Violence in God's Name: Religion in an Age of Conflict* (New York: Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003).

² E. Kutsch, “הרם”, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. V, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Rignnren (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), p. 188.

is consecrated to Him.³

This key word frequently occurs in the Hebrew Scripture.⁴ Actions or events centering about it took place in various forms along the development of the ancient Jewish history, almost all related to violence.⁵ It is significant to note that even in our days, the concept of *ḥērem* is still being applied to realistic struggle against one's enemy by such Israeli fundamentalists as Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful).⁶ In this sense, the *ḥērem*, although remote in its historical occurrences, is by no means irrelevant; it still has rich implications for our reflection on the relationship between religion and violence today.

In what follows, I will explore the deep meaning of the *ḥērem* in more detail. I will do that by specifically focusing upon a series of episodes that demonstrate direct application of this religious concept in military campaigns as recorded in *Joshua* 6-8. After analyzing them, I will proceed to discuss their implications and significance in light of some theories of religion, particularly the one offered by René Girard. In the end, I will return to the issue of religion and violence and see what a deeper understanding of the *ḥērem* can bear on our pressing concern.

II. Recounting the Episodes: *Joshua* 6-8

How the ancient Israelites conquered the land of Canaan has been a controversial issue. Exact routes, dates, sites, and actors involved in the conquest process, due to insufficient historical evidence, are yet to be determined. Further, the *ḥērem* accounts in the Hebrew Scripture as part of the military adventures might not be actual historical happenings; they were *post eventum* reconstructions most likely in the reign of king Josiah (r. 640-609 BCE) as imperialistic ideology.⁷ Most scholars, however,

³ Moshe Greenberg, "Ḥērem," *Encyclopedia of Judaica*, vol. 8, ed. Cecil Roth (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1972), p. 344.

⁴ There are eighty times in total, and *Joshua* 6-8 witness its highest frequency of occurrence; see Gordon Mitchell, *Together in the Land: A Reading of the Book of Joshua* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), p. 55.

⁵ E. Kutsch, pp. 194-215; Moshe Greenberg, pp. 346-350.

⁶ Regarding the history, beliefs, and activities of Gush Emunim, see Ian S. Lustick, "Israel's Dangerous Fundamentalists," in *Foreign Policy*, 68 (1989 / Fall), pp. 118-139; David Newman and Tamar Hermann, "A Comparative Study of Gush Emunim and Peace Now," in *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 28, No. 3 (July 1992), pp. 509-530.

⁷ Gerhard von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, tr. & ed., Marva J. Dawn (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991); Robert G. Boling, *Joshua: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1982), p. 230; T. R. Hobbs, *A Time for War: A Study of Warfare in the Old Testament* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1989), pp. 206-207; Paul D.

agreed that the conquest was a violent one which took place in the latter part of the thirteenth century BCE.⁸ *Joshua* 6-8 paradigmatically reflect the violent conflict between the ancient Israelites and the Canaanites, thus the *ḥērem* practice described therein deserves our special consideration.

The first *ḥērem* account is related to the capture of Jericho.⁹ *Joshua* 6 narrates that the Israelites, led by Joshua, marched to surround the fortified Jericho, the first stronghold they encountered after they had crossed the Jordan River into the land of Canaan. They obeyed the Lord's instruction by circling around the city once a day for six days and seven times of the same action on the seventh day. Upon completing the last circling, the priests blew the trumpets and the multitude shouted. The wall miraculously fell flat as a result and the people rushed in to take hold of it. What is crucial is that "the city and all that is in it shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction," (6:17) as the strict commandment was given beforehand, with the exception of gold, silver, and vessels of bronze and iron because "they are sacred to the Lord; they shall go into the treasury of the Lord." (6:19) The Israelites therefore had to shy away from the *ḥērem*, "things devoted to destruction," (6:18) and slaughtered "all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys." (6:23)

The second *ḥērem* episode closely follows the consequence of the capture of Jericho, as *Joshua* 7 opens with an accusatory statement that "the Israelites broke faith in regard to the devoted things." (7:1) When Jericho was being destroyed, Achan of the tribe of Judah disobeyed the Lord's interdiction and hid away some of the *ḥērem*. Owing to his transgression, the Israelites' campaign against the much weaker city, Ai, failed, and thirty-six men perished. The Lord revealed to Joshua that someone among them stole the *ḥērem* (7:11) and thus that one became a *ḥērem* and as such had to be destroyed. (7:12, 15) Facing this crisis, the Israelites sanctified themselves and gathered together to find out the culprit. By the casting of lots, they found out that Achan committed the guilt. They took him, what he stole, and all that belonged to him, including "the silver, the mantle, and the bar of gold, with his sons and daughters, with his oxen, donkeys, and sheep, and his tent." (7:24) They "stoned him to death; they burned them with fire, [and] cast stones on

Hanson, "War, Peace, and Justice in Early Israel," in *Bible Review*, vol. III, no. 3 (1987), pp. 32-45.

⁸ George E. Mendenhall, "The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine," in *The Biblical Archaeologist*, vol. XXV (1962), pp. 66-87; John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), pp. 129-133.

⁹ I use *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, ed. Michael Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) for the scriptural reference.

them” in the Valley of Achor. (7:25, 26)

The third *hērem* account continues the aftermath of Achan’s expurgation. Once this transgressor was removed from the congregation, the Israelites made their second attempt to capture Ai. This time the Lord was with them, and by a scheming strategy they easily overwhelmed the defending force. Joshua and his army “utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai,” (8:26) twelve thousand in all, both men and women. (8:25) They further burned the city and “made it forever a heap of ruins,” (8:28) but, different from the case of Jericho, they, given the Lord’s sanction, took the livestock and spoil out of it as their booty. (8:27)

It is obvious that these three narratives, although with different actors involved, are developed along a closely-knit thread. The plot of each story is serially related. The Jericho account tells how the Israelites dealt with an outside opponent, so does the Ai narrative. In between them is the Achan story that accounts how this ethnic group resolved its crisis. What is common among the stories is that they all center about the concept and practice of the *hērem*, a crucial theme that manifests the intertwined relationship between religion and violence.

III. Interpreting the Episodes

The barbaric and atrocious nature of the warfare profoundly strikes us when we read *Joshua* 6-8. We may wonder: why were the Israelites so ruthless as to utterly destroy their opponents, women, children, and livestock all unpardoned? Why a minor crime like theft would cause the compatriot-offender and his entire family an ultimate destruction the magnitude of which parallels to that applied to the foreign enemies? Could there be any more humane way by which the Israelites could deal with both the Canaanites and the domestic transgressor in the process of their conquest?

Scholars’ interpretations of these *hērem* events vary. Some, from the perspective of public health, claim that the burning of the captured cities was for the purpose of plague control.¹⁰ This opinion might appear suggestive, but it is too outright to explain the subtle religious beliefs that propelled the ancient Israelites to take the drastic action in their warfare. Others aver that, seen from the evolution of the *hērem* in ancient Jewish history, this religious belief was not actually instituted; rather, it was

¹⁰ Carol Meyers, “The Roots of Restriction: Women in Early Israel,” *Biblical Archeologist*, 41:3 (1978), 91-103.

practiced on *ad hoc* occasion.¹¹ This explanation may correspond to the historical reality, but it eschews the central concern of our questions, the religious belief cum violent action in the warfare. Still others argue that the *ḥērem* was not exclusive to the Israelites. It was a customary practice shared by many ethnic groups in ancient Near East; the dedicated slaughter of the Israelite captives to Chemosh by Mesha, king of Moab, was a good case in point.¹² This approach of comparative ethnology may provide us with useful background knowledge, it still leaves our questions unsolved.

We are reminded that separation is one of the primary meanings of the *ḥērem*. In this regard the *ḥērem* functions to distinguish what belongs to the Lord and what is not. As Israel's God is holy, what can be attributed to or associated with Him cannot not but be sacred and pure. This is why the ancient Israelites understood themselves as God's "treasured possession out of all the peoples, . . . a priestly kingdom and a holy nation." (Exodus 19: 5-6) In other words, as the Deuteronomist repeatedly emphasizes, they were separated from other ethnic groups and chosen to reflect God's holiness.¹³ When they marched to Canaan the promised land and encountered the local inhabitants, they cautiously followed this dualistic mode of understanding and made distinction between the pure and the impure.

The *ḥērem* of the Jericho episode demonstrates that the Israelites consciously chose those things whose nature perfectly matches with the Lord and their status as well. Although this stronghold was consigned to destruction according to the divine commandment (Joshua 6: 2), not every human being and object inside would suffer this ill fate. Rahab the prostitute, who had previously rescued Israel's two spies (Joshua 2), and her whole household were exempt from being slain. (6:17) Besides, what were considered to be precious metals and vessels, including gold and silver, were also saved for cultic purposes. (6:19) The Israelites were fully aware of what were pure and what not, and on the basis of which to engage in the fierce battles and their outcomes. The demarcation line to

¹¹ Abraham Malamat, *Mari and the Early Israelite Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 78; Philip D. Stern, *The Biblical Ḥērem: A Window on Israel's Religious Experience* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), p. 217.

¹² Moshe Greenberg, p. 348; Norman K. Gottwald, " 'Holy War' in Deuteronomy: Analysis and Critique," in *Review and Expositor*, vol. LXI, 4 (1964), p. 301; James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. With Supplement (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 320.

¹³ *Deuteronomy* 7:6; 14:2; 26:18-19.

include the pure and sacred seems moveable, however, hence livestock and spoil that were forbidden to take at Jericho were granted to the Israelites when they successfully seized Ai. (8: 2, 27) The practice of the *ḥērem* changed in content, but adherence to the notion of the pure and the holy, in contrast to the impure and the unholy, remained steady and clear in these *ḥērem* episodes.

Paradoxically, the *ḥērem* also indicates indispensability of the abominable and the offensive. Although the Israelites consciously chose what were pure and holy for their Lord, those things chosen were taken out of the sphere of the profane. The inhabitants and their belongings in Jericho, except a few, were regarded impure in the eyes of the Israelites, therefore they became an untouchable taboo. The same situation happened to the city of Ai. But since both of these two alien cities were meant to be dedicated to the Lord, the Israelites put themselves in a state where they simultaneously dealt with two opposite things. On the one hand, in order to keep their pure identity, they were eager to exterminate the impure which were contradictory to their status. On the other, since only what was pure was acceptable to the Lord, they dedicated these two impure cities as a sacrifice. By doing that they attempted to transform the intended targets and elevate them to the status of purity. Sacrifice, thus, plays a key role in the *ḥērem* context.¹⁴ Thanks to it, the Israelites legitimated their killing and empowered their entire military campaigns against their opponents.

The idea of sacrificial transformation also went to the case of Achan, the violator of the divine order. That Achan stole the “devoted things” was by no means a small offence. If the *ḥērem* was a taboo, those who touched it became themselves part of it. In this sense, the *ḥērem* was contagious in nature; it dangerously affected whomever got hold of it. Achan was thus abominable in the eyes of God and the Israelites as well. He was now degenerating into the status of impurity, not unlike the Canaanites whom the Israelites were prepared to eliminate. As he became another source of pollution and for fear that more other Israelites might become contaminated, he, his family, and all what belonged to him were burned as a sacrifice. It is evident that the congregation saw Achan’s destruction as manifestation of the divine punishment.¹⁵ But it is

¹⁴ For a more detailed exposition of the *ḥērem* in relation to sacrifice, see Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 28-55.

¹⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the *ḥērem* in relation to divine punishment, see Susan Niditch, pp.

unmistakable that through a sacrificial process, this offensive element was removed, the whole community restored its state of purity, and a successful military expedition was ensured. The *ḥērem* was in this sense equally applicable to the external as well as to the internal foe, and it functioned to equally address the issues of the pure and the impure.

Seen in this light, the battles described in the three *ḥērem* episodes were not ordinary ones. Rather, they were cultic in nature and were conducted as a series of ritual sacrifices for the sanity of the community. This is because, in the first place, the idea of purity was strictly observed.¹⁶ It was the fundamental principle which guided the Israelites to separate themselves from the impure and the abominable, be they foreigners or compatriots. Here they assumed a “corporate personality,”¹⁷ manifesting themselves as “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.” They acted in a concerted effort to keep their identity as such, and elements that endangered this purity status were sought out and expurgated.

Once the victim was targeted, the act of slaughter was always fierce, utter, and complete. As the Israelites believed that they did not act for themselves but on behalf of the Lord, they as the executioner of the rite merely helped to accomplish the entire ritual process. What might appear barbaric and violent in the eyes of the beholder turned out to be expression of religious devotion in the mind of the ritual agent. With this self-understanding, the warriors engaged in the *ḥērem* were sanctioned to kill; they were empowered to achieve not a common human feat but a lofty religious goal.

Finally, in the ritual sacrifice, the Israelites acted not only as the celebrant but sometimes as God’s partner. The *ḥērem* episode at Jericho indicates that the Lord was the patron of the war as well as the sole beneficiary who received the city as the consecrated sacrifice, including the destroyed sentient beings and the reserved precious metals. But when it comes to the Ai event, one sees that the Israelites shared portion of the *ḥērem*; they were endowed with spoil and livestock. Since the whole city had undergone ritual process, the “devoted things” they took were no longer impure or abominable; they were on this occasion legitimated to enjoy the purified sacrificial objects.

The analysis above cautions us to see the *ḥērem* not as an ordinary

57-77.

¹⁶ One can refer to other biblical passages for the strict rules of ritual cleanness with respect to military situation in ancient Judaism; see Deuteronomy 23:10-14; 1 Samuel 21:4; 2 Samuel 11:11.

¹⁷ Robert G. Boling, p. 230.

violent act. It reminds us that when violence falls into a religious context, it often reaches a complicated degree that surpasses our common understanding. It is farfetched to designate the military struggles in the Jericho, Achan, and Ai *ḥērem* accounts as programmatically instituted “holy war,”¹⁸ but they are heavily cultic and altogether exhibit the intricate relationship between religion and violence. In particular, such key terms or concepts as purity, sacrifice, ritual, and community play significant roles in shaping our interpretation and understanding of this relationship. The following passages will concentrate on these important concepts in further theoretical exposition.

IV. Theoretical Discussion

An ethnic group tintured with such a strong religious background as that of the ancient Israelites, purposely joint actions are absolutely needed in its pursuit of growth. Among many actions it may take, war, “as a means for releasing human aggression and as a method of social control and arbitration,”¹⁹ serves a positive function. Thus the *ḥērem* violence, although ferocious and bloody, is by no means irrational. Rather, as Norman K. Gottwald would argue, it is “a theologically rationalized concept” on which a religious community relies for its survival. Against the outside opponents, it is used to legitimate killing and boost morale. Domestically, it is utilized to stamp out the non-conformist or transgressor. It can be easily constructed as an ideology which empowers the religious community to eliminate the unwanted element. The *ḥērem* therefore can be understood as a consciously orchestrated, collective cultic act. In this respect, we are advised to regard the *ḥērem* as a highly suggestive avenue through which we evaluate how the community conducts itself in situations of crisis.

The *ḥērem* also reflects an intense state of war. On such an occasion, what a community needs most is to make clear distinction between friends and enemies. Who can be included into and who should be expelled from the community becomes crucial if it aims not only to survive but also to succeed. In other words, boundary and identity are two vitally important determinants at this point. The *Joshua* 6-8 episodes reveal that the ancient Israelites applied the concept of purity or impurity

¹⁸ Gerard von Rad, pp. 41-73; Gwilym H. Jones proposed “Yahweh War” to replace “Holy War;” see his “ ‘Holy War’ or ‘Yahweh War’ ?” in *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. XXV, Fasc. 3 (1975), pp. 645-658.

¹⁹ Norman K. Gottwald, p. 296.

as the mechanism to achieve this purpose. By adopting the concept of purity, they established themselves as the “holy nation,” their unmistakable identity. A boundary was hence clearly drawn. As Bruce Lincoln contends, in time of war, a community often treats its enemies, those outside or beyond the boundary, as Others. They are relegated to the status of sub-humans or even non-humans, and in this way it is legitimate to exterminate them at will.²⁰ This is why the inhabitants at Jericho and Ai became the “devoted things,” suitable for consecrated destruction. Once its boundary is crossed and its identity is challenged, the community immediately feels that its existence is threatened. In order to resolve the crisis, violence, again, emerges to be a useful means by which the “object” or “thing,” be it outsider or insider, is expelled or rooted out.²¹ Violence functions, it is significant to note, to reconfirm the boundary as well as to reestablish the community’s original identity.

At this juncture, René Girard’s theory about the intimate connection between religion, sacrifice, and violence merits our serious consideration. Deriving many examples from myths and ancient literature, Girard proposes that religion originated in violence. He argues that for a religious community, how to maintain its stability and order is its foremost concern. If a feud between two rivals breaks out, it usually leads to incessant strifes that destabilize the community. To stop the spiral of feuding, victim is sought as a substitute to ease the tension. The celebration of ritual sacrifice is exactly to check the crisis of violence. In a real sense, sacrifice is a collective, legitimate crime the purpose of which is to prevent more illegitimate crimes from happening; it is a form of violence itself. In this connection, violence is an unalienable part of religion; they co-exist in a reciprocal relationship and find shelter in each other.²²

That a religious community should maintain its order is absolutely crucial, according to Girard, and this order is best manifested in its hierarchical distinction. The afore-mentioned concept of purity and impurity is assuredly related.²³ When impurity penetrates the community,

²⁰ Bruce Lincoln, “War and Warrior: An Overview,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 15, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 341-342.

²¹ Lori L. Rowlett, *Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence: A New Historical Analysis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 174-179.

²² René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, tr. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns-Hopkins University Press, 1977), esp. pp. 1-38.

²³ Girard in this regard adopts the theory of Mary Douglas; see *Ibid.*, p. 55; also Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1966).

it pollutes it, endangers the status quo, and likely causes the existing order to crumble. When such an undifferentiated or even chaotic state would occur, “purification is no longer possible and impure, contagious, reciprocal violence spreads throughout the community.”²⁴ To solve this “sacrificial crisis,” “good violence,” that is, finding a victim and sacrificing it, is needed for the purpose of regaining the original order and purity. Hence violence and sacrifice together help to keep the communal sanity of a religious group.²⁵

Further, Girard asserts that violence is not only contagious in nature, it is also like an object that possesses value and urges the beholder to imitate. It is often the case that “as the sacrificial conflict increases in intensity, so too does the violence.”²⁶ In the situation of sacrificial crisis, “mimetic counterviolence” is eagerly sought to resolve the issue and “reciprocal violence” carries on in a vicious circle. This “mimetic desire” explains why two competing rivals always inflict fiercer violence upon each other and treat their victims, external or internal, without mercy.²⁷

Girard’s theory sheds much light on our understanding of the intricate relationship between religion and violence. It facilitates our interpretation of the *ḥērem* episodes from deeper perspectives. As argued, it would be illuminating to view ancient Israel’s conquest of the Canaanites as a series of ritual acts. These ritual acts or sacrifices functioned to consolidate the Hebrew community as an integrated whole. They were legitimate or “good violence” which warded off possible rifts or conflicts that might occur and shake the nascent religious group. When they launched attacks against Jericho and Ai, the pagan opponents, they did those in the understanding of dedicating the enemies to the Lord. Ritual sacrifices as such encouraged the Israelites to proceed with more thorough violence either out of imitation of their enemies or for the purpose of maintaining their community’s integrity. When Achan was found to be a traitor, the community’s purity was invaded, its order disrupted, and hence it fell into sacrificial crisis. This violator was eventually sacrificed as a victim, the violence of which served to ease the community’s tension and retrieved the order and stability essential to its existence.

²⁴ René Girard, p. 49

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-67.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-149. For an elaboration of Girard’s theory and its application to concrete cases in world religions, see the different essays collected in *Violence and the Sacred in the Modern World*, ed. Mark Juergensmeyer (London: Frank Cass, 1992).

With respect to the scale and extremity of religious violence, Mark Juergensmeyer offers another useful suggestion. He opines that the religious terrorists often conduct their violent acts as dramatic performance. They would consider the environment in which they live to be a state of undifferentiated chaos. The foes they fight against represent this chaos, and to conquer them equals the creation of a new order, a superhuman feat accomplished only by deities or mythic heroes. What is concrete and historical warfare is thus compared to the paradigmatic archetype that only exists in myth and imagination. Acts of religious violence are in this way transhistorical and magnified to the cosmic scale.²⁸

Parallel to this “chaos to order” mode of thinking, we may explain that Joshua and his multitude marched into the land of Canaan with the attempt to establish a world order. Inhabitants of the land were in their sight forces of chaos, and by eliminating them the Israelites would achieve the cosmogonic purpose.²⁹ What would be historical encounters between different ethnic groups for material resources was enhanced to such a cosmic magnitude that eventually contained brutal and extremist destruction. Here the *ḥērem* episodes provide us with a revealing case to probe into the depth of the complicated relationship between religion and violence.³⁰

V. Concluding Remarks

The *ḥērem* in biblical Judaism is by no means an isolated case, fundamentalists or extremists in other world religions share its concept or ideology.³¹ Although they each have their respective goals to achieve in different historical contexts, the application of this *ḥērem*-type ideology appears very similar. An investigation of the *ḥērem* seems to cast a grim shadow upon us, it nevertheless offers rich implications for our

²⁸ Mark Juergensmeyer, *The Terror in the Mind of God*, pp. 247-248; *Violence and the Sacred in the Modern World*, pp. 101-117.

²⁹ This explanation is derived from Philip D. Stern who in turn obtains his idea from Mircea Eliade; see Stern, *Biblical Ḥērem*, p. 141. For Eliade’s theory of cosmogony, see his *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, tr. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1961), pp. 20-64; *Myth and Reality*, tr. Willard R. Trask (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), pp. 54-74.

³⁰ Philip D. Stern, *Biblical Ḥērem*, pp. 139-156.

³¹ For inspiring discussions of violence in other world religions than Judaism, see Mark Juergensmeyer, *The Terror in the Mind of God*; also the different authors’ essays collected in *Violence and the Sacred in the Modern World*, ed. by Mark Juergensmeyer.

understanding of religion and violence in general. In particular, it alerts us to the fact that every religion has a “dark underside,”³² and it often manifests itself in different forms of violence. We are advised to take this intrinsic element seriously when we come to evaluate religion. In an age of conflict, religion has therefore become one of the primary causes that deserves our understanding in its own right.³³

It is widely claimed that peace is the ultimate goal that every religion strives to pursue.³⁴ From our study, however, we are reminded that even the practice of the *hērem* is precisely for this end. The gist of the matter lies in the fact that interpretations of peace vary, and they make sense only in each self-cohered religious system. It is pointless simply to reiterate that “all religions are for peace” or “a true religion cannot possibly resort to violence.” Rather, it is vitally important to look into each religion and see how peace in its specific context is actually realized.

From the case of the *hērem*, we understand that identity and boundary are crucial to the existence of a religious community. Many religions, such as ancient Judaism in our discussion, would preserve or defend them at all costs. When the sense of their self-integrity is intruded, it is always the time that violence would break out. More serious is that in the process of defending a community’s sanity, many evocative elements are elicited for this end. First, the community would consider itself to be representation of purity and faithfulness, whereas its opponent is reversely dehumanized to be a thing or satanized to be an infidel; it is thus legitimated to destroy the enemy. Further, the community often conducts its violence in the pattern of collective ritual sacrifice. If that would be the case, the execution of violence becomes sanctified, transcends historical context, and reaches the degree of mythic proportion. Religious violence of this trans-historical or cosmic nature is something we least want to see happen, but it, sadly, plagues our contemporary world mostly egregiously and almost beyond human control.

Solutions to the eradication of religious violence are yet to be explored. One of the proposals, the promotion of diversity or plurality in

³² Martin E. Marty, “Foreword,” in *The Destructive Power of Religion: Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, vol. 1: Sacred Scriptures, Ideology, and Violence*, ed. J. Harold Ellens (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), p. xiii.

³³ Here I subscribe to the same opinion emphasized by Oliver McTernan; see his *Violence in God’s Name: Religion in an Age of Conflict* (New York: Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003), pp. ix-xv.

³⁴ See Geoffrey Parrinder, “Peace,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 11, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987).

place of oneness or absolutism, for example, is certainly worth our consideration, as it means to relativize the dualistic mode of thinking that has continued to create violence in the monotheistic traditions.³⁵ The other proposal strongly asserts the necessity of cross-cultural and cross-religious dialogue. It assumes that through wide and frequent exposures to other alien beliefs and practices at the grass-roots level, one's hostility or obstinacy would gradually dissolve.³⁶ While these opinions are suggestive, whether or not they can be enduringly efficacious still remains to be seen. What is more assured is that from our study of the *ḥērem* case in biblical Judaism, a deeper understanding of the nature and function of religion is something we cannot afford to ignore. It is exactly in this sense that, to quote Mark Juergensmeyer sagacious observation, "the cure for religious violence may ultimately lie in a renewed appreciation for religion itself."³⁷

³⁵ Regina M. Schwartz, pp. 1-12; John J. Collins, "The Zeal of Phinehas, the Bible, and the Legitimation of Violence," in *The Destructive Power of Religion: Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, vol. 1: Sacred Scriptures, Ideology, and Violence*, ed. J. Harold Ellens, pp. 11-33, esp. p. 24.

³⁶ Oliver McTernan, pp. 157-164.

³⁷ Mark Juergensmeyer, *The Terror in the Mind of God*, p. 249.