Why does Religion Turn Violent? A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Religious Terrorism
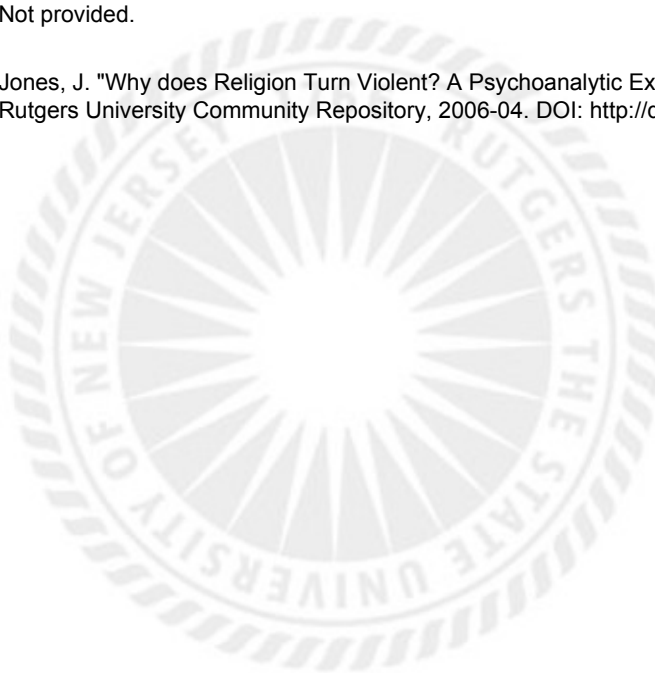
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WHY DOES RELIGION TURN VIOLENT?
A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Religious Terrorism

James W. Jones

This is a work in progress. It may look like a finished academic paper with its text bristling with citations and references, but that is an illusion—in Freud's sense. It is a wish—a wish to be done with this terrible topic. Over the summer of 2001 a book of mine was completed titled *Terror and Transformation: The Ambiguity of Religion in Psychoanalytic Perspective* (Jones, 2002). Because it had the word *Terror* in the title and came out a few months after 9/11, I have been swept up into a vortex of discussions about religion and terrorism, a topic I find extremely foreign to my experience and very aversive. Also, like many in the New York metropolitan area, I find that 9/11 still casts a longer shadow over my life (in ways that I still find hard to talk about) than the World Trade Center towers ever cast when they stood erect over lower Manhattan. As much as I want to escape from these discussions, I have been unable to.

I am writing as a clinical psychologist of religion, interested in the psychological dynamics involved in religion and especially in religiously motivated violence and what that might contribute to the psychology of religion. I am not proposing a general theory of terrorism but rather asking what a psychological, primarily psychodynamic, exploration of religious terrorism might tell us about that phenomenon and about the psychology of religion in general. Reading the literature on this topic I am struck by the paucity of discussion of both of these factors—the psychodynamics of religious terrorists and the religious aspect itself. In part that is because most of the mainstream, scholarly literature is written by social psychologists, not clinicians, and political scientists rather than by scholars of religion or psychologists of reli-

gion. This paper is one small contribution to filling in that gap in the discussion.

A factor that is virtually always cited by social psychologists and political scientists writing about religiously driven terrorism is the experience of shame and humiliation. For years, forensic psychology has emphasized the connections between shame, humiliation, and violence. Forensic psychologists cite numerous studies correlating conditions of shame and humiliation with increases in violence and crime, especially for males (Gilligan, 1996; Miller, 1993). For example, a psychiatrist working in prisons reports on a study that suggests that every act of violence in the prison was preceded by some humiliating event in the life of the prisoner (Gilligan, 1996). Statistics show that in the United States, at least, increases in crime follow exactly increases in the number of un-employed men. Feelings of humiliation on the part of Arab populations have been one of the most frequently cited "root causes" of the turn to fundamentalist Islam (Abi-Hashem, 2004; Davis, 2003; Hassan, 2001). One Palestinian trainer of the bombers has said, "Much of the work is already done by the suffering these people have been subject to. . . . Only 10 percent comes from me. The suffering and living in exile away from their land has given the person 90 percent of what he needs to become a martyr" (Davis, 2003, p. 154). A Palestinian psychiatrist reports that "humiliation is an important factor motivating young suicide bombers" (quoted in Victoroff, 2005, p. 29). By one estimate, over 90 percent of the recruits to militant Palestinian groups come from the villages and camps suffering the most from the Israeli presence, where the humiliation is greatest and the struggle is most intense (Post, Sprinzak, & Denny, 2003, p. 173). Hassan reports: "Over and over I heard them [militants] say, 'The Israelis humiliate us. They occupy our land, and deny our history'" (p. 38). Like many New Religious movements, the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo—some of whose members released sarin nerve gas in a Tokyo subway and also murdered several people—regularly engaged in rituals of shaming and humiliation of its members. Members were often harangued by the guru, kept in isolation, or made to wait hours for their leader to appear while chanting over and over, "Master, please appear" (Lif-

ton, 2000; other, even more horrific acts of humiliation are described in Reader, 2000, pp. 137–141).

While often rooted in social and political circumstances, shame and humiliation are profoundly psychological, and often spiritual, conditions. By holding out an absolute and perfect ideal—whether it is a divine being or a perfect guru or master or sacred text—against which all mortals inevitably fall short and by insisting on the "infinite qualitative difference" (in the words of Soren Kierkegaard) between human beings and the ideal, religions can easily exacerbate and play upon any natural human tendency toward feelings of shame and humiliation (McNish, 2004; Pattison, 2000). I would suggest the more a religion exalts its ideal, or portrays the divine as an overpowering presence and emphasizes the gulf between finite human beings and that ideal so that we must feel like "worms, not human" (in the words of the Psalms), the more it contributes to and reinforces experiences of shame and humiliation.

In addition, many writers have noted the connection between feelings of shame and disgust with the body and embodiment. As many authors have commented, a classic example in the West is St. Augustine, who virtually single-handedly made the doctrine of original sin central to the Western Christian understanding of human nature. It is not coincidence that this proponent of the idea that we are born sinful and impure continually (in his book the *Confessions*) expresses revulsion at anything associated with his body. But such a theological linkage of the body with feelings of shame is (unfortunately) not unique to Augustine but can be found in the traditional texts of many religions. One of the Muslim leaders of the 9/11 attacks wrote some years earlier in his will that no woman or other unclean person should touch his body and that his genitalia be washed with gloved hands. Even the very secular, science-fiction-based "Heaven's Gate" cult in the United States—most of whose members committed ritual suicide in 1997—recommended castration for all the men involved.

If it is the case, as much research suggests, that there is a linkage of shame, humiliation, and violence, one way that religion can contribute to terrorism is by creating and/or reinforcing and potentiating feelings of shame and humiliation, which

in turn increase the likelihood of violent outbursts. And this increased potential for violence needs to be channeled in socially approved ways. By fomenting crusades, dehumanizing outsiders, and encouraging prejudices, fanatical religions provide ready, religiously sanctioned, targets for any increase in aggression. While much of the humiliation that fuels certain acts of terrorism might begin in social and cultural conditions, fanatical religions may build upon that and establish a cycle wherein their teachings and practices increase feelings of shame and humiliation, which intensify aggressive feelings, as well as then providing targets for that aggression.

One common belief, which many commentators mention, of fanatically violent religious movements is their apocalyptic vision of a cosmic struggle of the forces of the all-good against the forces of the all-evil (Juergensmeyer, 2000; Kimball, 2002; Wessinger, 2000). Virtually all religious terrorists agree that they are locked in an apocalyptic battle with demonic forces, usually, that is, with the forces of secularism. The late Rabbi Meir Kahane, whose Jewish Defense League was responsible for numerous attacks on Muslims in the United States and Israel, said bluntly, "Secular government is the enemy" (Juergensmeyer, 2000, p. 55). Kahane's arch enemy, the founder of Hamas, Sheik Ahmed n Yassin, told a reporter, "There's a war going on" not just against Israeli occupation but against all secular governments including the Palestinian authority because there "is no such thing as a secular state in Islam" (Juergensmeyer, 2000, p. 76). Asahara, the founder of the Aum Shinrikyo cult is reported to have shouted again and again at his followers, "Don't you realize that this is war" (Lifton, 2000, p. 56) and to have insisted that his group existed "on a war footing" (Lifton, 2000, p. 60). The Reverend Peter Hill, who shot and killed a physician in front of a family planning clinic in the United States, justified his actions to an interviewer as being part of a "great crusade conducted by the Christian subculture in America that considers itself at war with the larger society, and to some extent victimized by it" (Juergensmeyer, 2000, p. 36). Juergensmeyer (2000) concludes his investigation of religiously sponsored terrorism around the globe, *Terror in the Mind of God*, with the comment that "what is strikingly similar about the cultures of which they [religious terrorists] are

a part is their view of the contemporary world at war" (p. 151). Klein, Fairbairn, and others have written about the obvious psychoanalytic antecedents to this splitting of the world into all-bad, all-good camps.

Violently apocalyptic movements not only split the world into irreconcilable opposites of good and evil, they also look forward to the climatic end of history, when evil will be violently eradicated. Apocalyptic religion is not only about dividing the world, it is also about purifying the world. In the apocalyptic mind-set, purification is almost always bloody. Rather than envisioning a spiritual process through which the unholy is transformed into something holy, apocalyptic religions are full of fantasies and images of violence, warfare, and bloodshed in which the unholy is destroyed in the most gruesome fashion imaginable. Here purification becomes linked with violent death. We must explore the psychological dynamics involved in this linkage of purification and violent death.

The underlying theme of death and rebirth is common in virtually all the world's religions. Virtually all the traditions say that some process of dying—to self-centeredness, to a false self, to antispiritual cravings—is central to spiritual transformation. Apocalyptic religion takes this theme and historicizes it. Death and rebirth are now something that can and must happen within history, in real time. Another theme that runs through this material is the increasing spiritual and moral decline of the world, which is often pictured as sinking rapidly into moral and spiritual oblivion, a world heading for disaster. One Aum Shinrikyo member reports feeling that "the world was getting worse, pushing itself towards Armageddon with its increasing evil" (Lifton, 2000, p. 93). Rottenness of the world is just crying out for purification to set things right. Things are getting so bad that only a drastic intervention can turn things around. Lifton (2000) describes Aum Shinrikyo, in a phrase that could equally well be applied to many religiously motivated terrorist groups, when he writes that they were driven by "the relentless impulse toward world-rejecting purification" (p. 204).

We should note that, while Aum Shinrikyo is often mentioned in books on religiously motivated terrorism because of its roots in the syncretistic Japanese religious milieu, Lifton's ac-

count makes clear that the cult relies as much on science, science fiction, and the idealization of high technology as on religion (see also Reader, 2000, pp. 185–187). In that sense Lifton links it with the "Heaven's Gate" UFO cult. Both groups would have been impossible apart from a milieu saturated by popular science, science fiction, video game culture (with its merger of science and violence), and the idealization of technology. Yet in popular accounts of Aum Shinrikyo, religion is featured and science and technology ignored. But the themes of apocalyptic violence and rebirth through death are hardly absent from popular science-fiction culture, both in the United States and Japan.

Apocalyptically historicized or not, the theme of purification, often linked to themes of death and rebirth, appears central in virtually every major religious tradition. Some, like Durkheim (1965), have argued that the split between the pure and the impure, the sacred and the profane, is the defining characteristic of the religious consciousness. Certainly this seems especially true of fanatical religions at war with the impure and unrighteous world around them. The traditional sectarian response has been to withdraw from the sinful world and create islands of purity separate from it (for example, the Amish people). Religious terrorists are not content to simply withdraw and protect their purity; they seek to actively transform and purify the surrounding world. Asahara is described as developing a "vision of an apocalyptic event or series of events that would destroy the world in the service of renewal" (Lifton, 2000, p. 203).

In many religions the theme of purification is linked with the theme of sacrifice. The Latin root "sacri-ficium" means to "make holy." Sacrifice is a way of making something holy, of purifying it. Sacrifices are offerings to the divine and to the community. But they are a special kind of offering in that what is given is destroyed. But something is not only destroyed, it (or something related to it, like the religious community) is also transformed. Something is offered; something is made holy.

The practice of sacrifice may go back to the very foundations of religion. The early Vedas in India center around various sacrificial rituals, and much of the Hebrew Torah is taken up with instructions for conducting sacrifices. Of course, Hinduism later gave rise to the Upanishads with their elaborate metaphysi-

cal discussions as well as to a wide range of yogic, meditational, and devotional practices. Furthermore, the Hebrew prophets and later writings came to ridicule the idea that God requires bloody sacrifices, insisting instead on a "broken and contrite heart" (Isaiah) and "justice, mercy, and humility" (Micah). But the theme of sacrifice did not die out entirely. It was taken up by some strands of Christianity that continued to insist, with the author of the Letter to the Hebrews (apparently a conservative first-century Jewish convert to Christianity), that "without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins." One of the burdens of this paper will be to attempt to unpack the psychology behind this connection between purification or redemption and the shedding of blood, since that theme appears so central to so much religiously motivated violence.

The theme of sacrifice often appears central in the larger religious context from which "human bombers" emerge.[1] For example, the leader of the 9/11 attacks called on his comrades to "purify your soul from all blemishes" and spoke to them of "offering sacrifices and obedience" in "these last hours" (Atta, n.d., *Last Letter*, discussed later in this paper). There he also refers to those whom they will kill as animals being ritually sacrificed. It underscores the sacrificial, that is to say, religious, nature of these actions. The terrorist is sacrificing both himself and his victim.

In reference to this theme of sanctification by self-sacrifice, Strenski (2003) writes that "The 'human bombers' are regarded as 'sacred' by their communities of reference. They have been 'made holy' in the eyes of the community that 'accepts' them and their deed. They are elevated to lofty moral, and indeed, religious levels, as sacrificial *victims* themselves or as kinds of holy saints" (p. 8). For example, Hassan (2001) reports that in Palestinian neighborhoods:

> Calendars are illustrated with the "martyr of the month." Paintings glorify the dead bombers in Paradise, triumphant beneath a flock of green birds. The symbol is based on a saying of the prophet Mohammad that the soul of a martyr is carried to Allah in the bosom of the green birds of paradise. . . . A biography of a martyr . . . tells of how his soul was borne upward on a fragment of a bomb. . . . [An imam] explained that the first drop of blood

shed by a martyr during jihad washes away his sins instantane-
ously. On the Day of Judgment, he will face no reckoning. On the
Day of Resurrection, he can intercede for several of his nearest
and dearest to enter Heaven. . . ." (p. 39)

Scholars familiar with the hagiographic traditions of the world's
religions will see many common themes here—for example, the
images of Christian saints and Buddhist Bodhisattvas borne up
to paradise and ensconced in the highest heavens where, puri-
fied and sinless, they can intercede for others. By their offering
and sacrifice, the human bombers and other martyrs have in-
deed become holy. Along this line, a Palestinian militant said, "It
is attacks when a member gives his life that earn the most re-
spect and elevate the bombers to the highest possible level of
martyrdom" (Post et al., 2003, p. 179). Likewise, the Tamil Tigers
describe call their suicide bombings in Sri Lanka by a world that
means "to give oneself." Their actions are "a gift of the self." In
joining the Tigers one takes an oath in which "the only promise
is I am prepared to give everything I have, including my life. It
is an oath to the nation" (Strenski, 2003, p. 22). A Palestinian
questioned by Post and his colleagues angrily rejected their ap-
pellation of suicide and told them, "This is not suicide. Suicide
is selfish, it is weak, it is mentally disturbed. This is *istishad* (mar-
tyrdom or self-sacrifice in the service of Allah)" (Post et al., 2003,
p. 179). It must be noted that this understanding of martyrdom
and self-sacrifice is not traditional in Islam, and it has been con-
demned by many leading Muslim clerics and scholars around the
world (for references see Strenski, 2003; Davis, 2003). Rather, it
represents a major theological innovation on the part of the radi-
cal Islamicists like bin Laden.

That "martyrdom operations" are understood by their par-
ticipants as religious acts is made clear by the rituals that sur-
round them. Mohammed Atta, the leader of the 9/11 terrorists,
left for posterity a letter, the major themes of which are obedi-
ence, prayer, union with God, and sacrifice. Atta calls on his
comrades to engage in devotions as preparation for their mission:

Remember the words of Almighty God. . . . Remind yourself of
the supplications. . . . Bless your body with some verses from the
Qur'an. . . . . Pray the morning prayer in a group and ponder the
great rewards of that prayer. Make supplications afterward, and

> do not leave your apartment unless you have performed ablution
> before leaving. . . . Read the words of God. (Atta, n.d., *Last Letter*)

Such religious ritualizing was not unique to the 9/11 cell; it is a
normal and crucial part of the human bomber's mission:

> Just before the bomber sets out on his final journey, he performs
> a ritual ablution, puts on clean clothes, and tries to attend at least
> one communal prayer at a mosque. He says the traditional Islamic
> prayer that is customary before battle, and asks Allah to forgive
> his sins and bless his mission. He puts a Koran in his left breast
> pocket, above the heart, and he straps the explosives around his
> waist or picks up briefcase or a bag containing the bomb. The
> planner bids him farewell with the words, "May Allah be with you,
> may Allah give you success so that you achieve Paradise." The
> would-be martyr responds, "*Inshallah,* we will meet in Paradise."
> Hours later, as he presses the detonator, he says, "Allahu akbar"—
> "Allah is great. All praise to Him." (Hassan, 2001, p. 41)

Atta's letter goes on to stress the need for continual supplication
throughout the 9/11 hijacking and the assurance of divine pro-
tection, favor, and reward: "Everywhere you go, say that prayer
and smile and be calm, for God is with the believers. And the
angels will protect you without you feeling anything," Atta writes
to his comrades. There are few references in his letter to anger
or revenge: rather, the driving motivation is reunion with God.
The letter makes it clear that the terrorists were not seeking po-
litical or social goals but rather that they "are heading toward
eternal paradise." A leader of Hamas said "Love of martyrdom
is something deep inside the heart. But these rewards are not in
themselves the goal of the martyr. The only aim is to win Allah's
satisfaction. That can be done in the simplest and speediest man-
ner by dying in the cause of Allah" (Hassan, 2001, p. 36).

     The same attitude emerges from an interview with a Pales-
tinian suicide bomber who survived a failed attempt and a gun
battle with Israeli troops. Like Atta he describes his preparation
for his "martyrdom operation" as a spiritual discipline.

> We were in a constant state of worship. We told each other that
> if the Israelis only knew how joyful we were they would whip us
> to death. Those were the happiest days of my life. . . . We were
> floating, swimming, in the feeling that we were about to enter
> eternity. We had no doubts. We had made on oath on the Koran,

in the presence of Allah. . . . I know there are other ways to do jihad. But this one is sweet—the sweetest. All martyrdom operations, if done for Allah's sake, hurt less than a gnat's bite. (Hassan, 2001, pp. 36–37)

On a similar note, the killer of a doctor outside a family planning clinic in the United States says he was comforted by reading the Psalms on his way to commit the murder. One of the perpetrators of the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center is reported to have told a journalist that secular Americans will never understand why he did what he did because they miss "the soul. . . . The soul of religion, that is what is missing" (Juergensmeyer, 2000, p. 69).

Hence, the 9/11 attacks were not a political act; they were a religious act. Therefore, the psychology involved here is that of religion. Although humiliation and relative deprivation clearly play a part in much of the terrorism in the Middle East, the unusual sociological variables—poverty, lack of education, and the like—often appear to play little role and provide little predictive value. One of the best predictors is religiosity. The Singapore Parliamentary report on captured members of terrorist cells in Southeast Asia emphasizes this connection: "These men were not ignorant, destitute, or disenfranchised. All 31 men had received secular education. . . . they held normal, respectable jobs. . . . As a group, most of the detainees regarded religion as their most important personal value" (quoted in Atran, 2003, p. 1537).

One of the most extreme examples of the linkage of death and purification is Asahara's doctrine of killing a person in order to save them (called *poa*), which became increasingly important as Aum felt more threatened by surrounding society. Such a doctrine, based on Asahara's reading of esoteric Tibetan Buddhism, clearly provides the kind of sanctification of killing found in every case of religiously sponsored terrorism. In addition, this doctrine supports an inability to empathize with victims, thereby easily promoting what the social psychologist Waller (2002) calls their "social death." Many of Aum's remaining members do indeed express an astonishing lack of empathy for the victims of their group's actions. The most extreme is the Aum member who responded to Reader's (2000) mention of the subway attack with "Wonderful, wasn't it?"—because of the attention it brought

to Aum (p. 222; see Maekawa, 2001, for many more examples of this lack of empathy for the victims).

Shimazono (2001), to some extent, and Watanabe (1998, 2005), more strongly, lay much of the blame for Aum's crimes on Asahara's doctrine of *poa*. This would be another example of the idea of sacrifice (either of oneself or others) leading to one's sanctification that is central in much religiously sponsored terrorism. But in the case of Aum, psychologically we need to ask, why does such an extreme doctrine as *poa* take root in some people's minds? Is it primarily, as Shimazono and Lifton seem to imply, because of their extreme devotion to guru Asahara? Or is there a deeper, psychological reason that inclines people to accept the idea of sanctifying oneself (and the other, too, in the case of *poa*) through death?

Once again we are back to the psychodynamic linking of holiness and purification with death that also is found in many examples of religiously sponsored violence. The theme of purification was central in Asahara's message virtually from the beginning; his techniques were supposed to enable individuals to rid themselves of "bad karma" and other impurities. Themes of purity and purification are central in Japanese Shinto, and thus were surely present in Asahara's consciousness and that of his disciples. But such themes are present in some form in virtually every religion. They not in the least unique to Shinto, Aum, or violent religious groups. Again, psychologically it is not the themes of sanctification or purification that are at issue. Rather, it is their linkage with violence and death that matters in the psychology of religiously motivated terrorism. This theme of sacrificing one's self and one's victim in order to sanctify or purify both becomes more and more prominent in Asahara's religious rhetoric as Aum Shinrikyo turns more violent and Asahara seeks to justify the group's murderous actions (Shimazono, 2001; Watanabe, 1998, 2005).

Since the human bombers and the members of Aum Shinrikyo are offering a religious sacrifice, Strenski (2003) argues, their actions are not primarily motivated by "a utilitarian or pragmatic calculus" (p. 26). One important and perhaps unhappy practical conclusion of this situation is that it is mistake to seek to understand religiously motivated terrorists using the

game theoretic or rational choice models so prominent in the social sciences these days (for relevant reviews, see Victoroff, 2005, as well as Moghaddam & Marsella, 2004). Counterterrorism policies based on either appealing to the religiously motivated terrorists' self-interest or frightening them into surrendering by an overwhelming show of force will probably have little success. The religious drive to sacrifice and make holy one's life and one's cause transcends and subsumes any pragmatic or purely self-interested motivations. Knowing themselves to be engaged in religious acts of sacrifice and understanding the West's orientation away from the spiritual and toward the pragmatic is one of the reasons why militant Islamicists insist over and over that the West will never understand them.[2]

Virtually every report on militant Muslims stresses the reward of entering paradise as a major motivator for their actions (Davis, 2003; Post et al., 2003; Hassan, 2001). In Western accounts, often this is accompanied by descriptions of scores of beautiful virgins waiting to welcome the adolescent male martyr home, even though most traditional Islamic scholars insist that the delights of paradise are not erotic. But clearly the desire to be with God is a powerful motivation at work here.

A Palestinian militant, when asked about his motivation, replies, "The power of the spirit pulls us upward," (Hassan, 2001, p. 37). Atta tells his fellow hijackers: "You should feel complete tranquility, because the time between you and your marriage (in heaven) is very short. Afterward begins the happy life, where God is satisfied with you and eternal bliss" (Atta, n.d., *Last Letter*). A Palestinian recruiter said of his methods of recruitment, "We focus his attention on Paradise, on being in the presence of Allah, on meeting the Prophet Muhammad, on interceding for his loved ones so that they too can be saved from the agonies of Hell" (Hassan, 2001, p. 40). A Palestinian arrested by the Palestinian Authority before he could carry out his mission said of Paradise, "It is very, very near—right in front of our eyes. It lies beneath the thumb. On the other side of the detonator" (Hassan, 2001, p. 40).

Clearly this is not unique to fanatical religious. Quite the reverse. The desire for an experience of union with a transcendental or divine reality appears as fundamental in virtually every

religion, whether it is the universal, nameless primal Source of the Upanishads, Neo-Platonic Christian mysticism, and much Mahayana Buddhism, or the personally beloved Other of devotional Hinduism, pietistic Christianity, or Tibetan guru yoga, or the divine Creator of traditional Judaism and Islam. This desire for spiritual reunion may well be the beating heart of every living religion.

What is unique to fanatical religions is the linkage of the desire for spiritual reunion with violence, especially the violence of sacrificial killing or apocalyptic purification. It may be this linkage of a well-nigh universal and powerful spiritual desire with the themes of bloody sacrifice and purification through violence that turns spiritual longing into terrorist action.

Psychologically speaking, why is the shedding of blood experienced as necessary for redemption?

Clearly it seems connected to the image of God that is at work here—the image of a vengeful, punitive, and overpowering patriarchal divine being. The believer must find a way to relate to an omnipotent being who appears to will the believer's destruction. The believer must humiliate and abject himself, feeling himself profoundly worthless and deeply guilty. Furthermore, the punitive, omnipotent being must be appeased, placated. A bloody sacrifice must be offered. So we return again to the combination of a wrathful, punitive image of God, the insistence on purification at any cost, and the theme of bloody sacrifice.[3]

The God that demands sacrifice as the means of purification is an angry, punitive God. Here the psychologist of religion can contribute to the discussion by pointing to some of the correlates of such an image of God. There is research that suggests, at least for religiously committed populations, that punitive and wrathful images of God are associated with external locus of control, anxiety and depression, and less mature object relations (Brokaw & Edwards, 1994; Spear, 1994) The reverse has also been found to be true, that a more benevolent internal representation of God is associated with more mature psychological development and the capacity for more mature object relations. A believer's capacity for object relations encompasses his or her religious expressions (Jones, 1991). Thus it makes theoretical as well as empirical sense that a person who envisions God as

wrathful or punitive would also be inclined toward more rigid splitting and have less capacity for empathy—traits that appear to characterize many religiously motivated terrorists.

So sacrifice and redemption, bloodshed and spiritual transformation become linked when the deity to be appeased by sacrifice is humiliating and punitive. But there was no transcendental deity in Aum. As Watanabe (n.d.) astutely points out, when Asahara had his vision anointing him with a messianic vocation, the result was not a religion of devotion to that god—as is usually the result in the history of religions—but rather a cult based on devotion to Asahara himself. So did Asahara himself serve as a humiliating but sacred Other that had to be appeased by abject submission and by sacrificing oneself and others? We can surmise so, but we do not really know. We can suggest that whatever is the psychological connection between purification and the shedding of blood, which seems operative in so much religiously motivated violence, it was probably present in at least some Aum members as well.

From a clinical standpoint, what appears most salient in the turn toward violence on the part of religion are the themes of shame and humiliation, the apocalyptic splitting of the world into all-good/all-evil camps, the wrathful, judgmental image of God, the drive for purification, and the authoritarian concern with submission and prejudice against outsiders (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992). Research suggests that shame and humiliation may be crucial elements in most religiously sponsored violence. Religion can become involved with humiliation-driven violence in one or both of two ways. One, people may be humiliated by the circumstances of their lives (Palestinians under Israeli occupation, Chechens under Russian occupation, Iraqis under American occupation), and their religion may play upon that humiliation, potentiating it and channeling it for its own purposes. We should note that religion may also mute and transform that humiliation rather than reinforce it, as the Dali Lama is trying to do with the Tibetans under Chinese occupation and as Martin Luther King attempted to do with the humiliation of African-Americans in the face of American racism.

Second, religions may directly evoke and exacerbate feelings of shame and humiliation. Images of a wrathful punitive

deity, a revered master or leader who harangues and humiliates his disciples, or a sacred text read in a way to aggravate shame and condemnation are all ways that religions can intensify those feelings. Here we can begin to see some of the connections among these themes often found together in religiously motivated terrorists, that is, their punitive image of God or some other religious object and their humiliation-driven turn toward violence. My suggestion is that when the divine, the revered master, or the sacred text is experienced as a source of humiliation and shame, the possibility of violence increases. Previously I argued (Jones, 2002) that idealization was central to religion and to religious violence (and also to religious transformation, hence the subtitle of my book *The Ambiguity of Religion*). Here I am revising that thesis to say that it is not idealization alone that is central to the psychology of religious violence but an idealized object that is also a source of shame and humiliation. The psychodynamic connection to something sacred that results in religious violence is not just a tie to an idealized object but, in addition, to an idealized humiliating or overpowering object. Perhaps that is why Buddhist and Hindu religions, whose devotees also have ties to idealized objects—pantheons of divine beings or enlightened masters—less often produce violent actions. These objects, while idealized, are rarely humiliating and persecutory. When they do turn punitive and humiliating (as perhaps in the case Aum Shinrikyo or the devotees of Kali), then these groups do turn violent.[4] In addition, research done with religious believers in North America suggests that such punitive images of God tend to be associated with an external locus of control, a lack of empathy for others, a tendency toward psychological splitting and less self-esteem. Again, there may be connections between the punitive experience of the divine, authoritarian personality traits, and the appeal of an apocalyptic polarization of the world. In addition, the self-aggrandizement that Juergensmeyer (2000) argues comes with being a part of the army of the righteous may have a special appeal to those whose self-esteem needs bolstering.

The drive for reunion with, by submission to, this humiliating but idealized object sublates all other human desires. The desire for God overwhelms all connections between human beings. The result is a detachment from empathic connections be-

tween human beings and their replacement by a totalizing connection with God alone. By identifying with God and what is supposed to be God's perspective, other human beings appear small and insignificant. As opposed to those religions that see each human spirit as infinitely precious, created in God's image, terrorist forms of the religious imagination envision individual human beings as insignificant in the larger context of God's eternal plan. This is a religion focused on obedience, submission, purification, and earning divine favor. One might call these the central themes of a patriarchal religion. Although there are women martyrs in Palestine and Chechnya, the 9/11 action was an all-male rite. Indeed, most of the fanatical religious groups are clearly male dominated (Lawrence, 1989). So part of the psychology involved is the psychology of patriarchal religion.

Freud himself provides one of the most profound analyses of patriarchal religion in his book *Totem and Taboo* (a fuller discussion of *Totem and Taboo* can be found in Jones, 1996). Here, instinct-driven ambivalence is the key to understanding the genesis of religion and culture. At first the sons of the primal horde hated their father, who stood in the way of their boundless desire. But they loved and admired him too. After murdering him, their affection for him, which they had had to deny in order kill him, reappeared as guilt and remorse. This is how guilt, on which all religion depends, originated (Freud, 1913, p. 143).

The murderous sons of the primal father, the harbingers of culture and religion, had to make peace with their returning repressed guilt. A substitute father had to be found. Like Freud's phobic child-patient little Hans—who projected his fear of his father onto an animal—the guilty sons projected their feelings onto an animal, and totemism, and with it religion, was born. Totemism is the beginning of religion; patriarchal theism is the end. Freud (1913) remains convinced that the root of every religion is a "longing for the father" (p. 148). The first religious object, the totem, could only be a surrogate father. As time went on and the primal murder faded into unconsciousness, an object entered consciousness that carried a more complete resemblance to the lost father—a god "in which the father has regained his human shape" (p. 148).

The oedipal legacy of patriarchal religion becomes the lens

through which Freud (1913) sees all religious history. "The god of each of them is formed in the likeness of the father, his personal relation to God depends on his relation to his father. . . . at bottom God is nothing other than an exalted father" (p. 47). Freud, convinced that the murder of the father and its continual replay in fantasy and culture is the hinge on which history turns, can easily read religious development forward or backward from that point.

The original theory of the process of internalization in *Mourning and Melancholia* implies that the boy should internalize an image of his mother, because she is the lost object. But in the third chapter of *The Ego and the Id,* Freud complicates the earlier theory (for example, by invoking the category of bisexuality) in order to argue that in dissolving the Oedipus complex the males of the species, the creators of culture, simultaneously renounce their attachment to their mother and internalize an image of their father. For it is the internalized image of the father, as ego-ideal, that is the foundation of culture and religion. In the resolution of the male Oedipus complex the connection to the mother is displaced by an identification with the father.

The same displacement of the feminine influence by the masculine takes place in psychoanalytic theorizing, as the preoedipal, mother-dominated period is downplayed in favor of the developmental centrality of the oedipal, father-dominated stage. Keeping to the parallel between individual and cultural development, Freud (1913) confesses he can find no place "for the great mother goddesses, who may perhaps in general have preceded the father gods" (p. 49). This oversight surely parallels the fact that he can find no place in his theory for the preoedipal, maternal period in human development except its displacement by a normative patriarchy. With the coming of the oedipal period individually and prehistorically, the normative ethos of patriarchy returned. "With the introduction of father deities a fatherless society gradually changed into one organized on a patriarchal basis. The family was a restoration of the former primal horde and it gave back to fathers a large portion of their former rights" (Freud, 1913, p. 149).

In a letter to Freud, responding to *The Future of an Illusion,* Freud's friend Romain Rolland, a student of Hindu religion and

biographer of Ramakrishna and Vivekenanda, proposed a preoedipal origin to religion in a "feeling of something limitless, unbounded-as it were, oceanic . . . a purely subjective fact, not an article of faith." Freud, having firmly committed himself to the centrality of the father, the father God, the oedipal struggle, and the masculine gender, must deny Rolland's claim that religion arises from preoedipal, maternal dynamics. The only definition of religion Freud will consider is a patriarchal religion of law and guilt built around the father God.

Freud's analysis of religion depends on a specific image of God. The patriarchal God of law and conscience is the only religion Freud will countenance. If he were to give up that paternal representation of God as normative, his argument would lose much of its force. Freud reproduces the exclusive, patriarchal monotheism of Western religion in his theory of the exclusively oedipal and paternal origins of culture, religion, and morality. Freud must insist that religion is essentially patriarchal, for that is the only religion that fits within the frame of the oedipal drama and that can easily be derived from the instinct theory.

In tying morality tightly to the Oedipus complex so that "religion, morals, society converge in the Oedipus complex," Freud (1913, p. 157) is insisting that morality consists mainly of rules and prohibitions. Freud's tendency to limit morality to a set of prohibitions, like his restriction of religion to patriarchal theism, follows naturally from the centrality of the oedipal period in his theory. Again, the importance of the preoedipal, maternal period has been forgotten. Just as forms of religion may be rooted in preoedipal, maternal dynamics, so likewise with morality. Along with a postoedipal, paternal morality of law and authority, there may well be a preoedipal, maternal morality of connection and relationship. An appreciation of the integrity and centrality of preoedipal dynamics might point to an ethic of relatedness in which the maintenance of connections between people is more central than the imposition of rules. Such an ethic has been taken up by many feminist writers. Such a relational, feminist approach to moral reasoning parallels the relational view of human nature found in contemporary psychoanalysis.

Freud's analysis points to the deep psychodynamic connections between patriarchal cultures, paternalistic deities, and guilt-

engendering religions. Such connections, common in the history of religion, are not accidental, but can be explained by the Oedipus complex understood not as biological necessity but as cultural expression. Exploring oedipal dynamics reveals the ways males in a patriarchal culture identify with the father and internalize the motifs of dominance and submission, detached impersonal experiences of power, and the need for distance. When what is sacred is encountered in the context of these masculine identifications, religion is experienced in terms of dominance and submission and transcendental power and control. Furthermore, when morality is worked out in this context, the result again is an ethics of moral principles and law backed up by sacred power and dominance. This develops a patriarchal religion of divine law and power in which submission to the law of the father is the primary moral imperative and guilt the main religious emotion.

Along with the dynamics of patriarchy, another psychodynamic element in much religiously motivated terrorism is this Manichean splitting of reality into all-good and all-evil, pure and impure, categories and groups. Fairbairn (1952) describes a clinical constellation that appears to map readily onto certain religiously motivated terrorist groups. In order to maintain the experience of the parents as "good," the inevitably dependent child splits any experience of badness off from the parents and takes it on himself. The child maintains an idealized view of the parents at his own expense, experiencing himself as bad and seeing the parents, on whose goodness he depends, as good. The child sanitizes the image of the parents at the cost of his own self-esteem and self-worth, protecting his idealization of them by taking the pain and pathology of their relationship into himself, bearing "the burden of badness" (p. 65). Thus a dichotomy is created in the child's, and later the adult's, experience between an all-good, overly idealized, external parental object and an entirely bad self.

The person may then turn the experience of being bad against himself. Here religion may play a crucially facilitative role. In that psychological context, encountering an overly idealized other (perhaps God, or a religious teacher, text, or institution that claims divinity and perfection) inevitably invokes a split-

ting of experience into all-good and all-bad domains. Idealizing the other means inevitably denigrating oneself and everything connected to oneself. This splitting is common in those religious communities that call upon their devotees to denigrate and demean themselves and bemoan their unworthiness in the face of some ideal other. It is not accidental that Fairbairn (1952) uses theological language to describe this clinical syndrome and the splitting that results from it, calling it "the moral defense against bad object" and saying "it is better to be a sinner in a world ruled by God than to live in a world ruled by the Devil" (p. 67).

Another possibility, besides turning the burden of badness against oneself, is to expel the feeling of badness from oneself by projecting it onto the outside world. Here again, religion may facilitate such a move. Weighed down by this sense of badness, a person may identify with an idealized tradition or group and then project the sense of badness onto some outside person or group, thereby seeing some other group, race, or religion as evil. The experience of badness that the individual has taken into himself is so painful that often it must be discharged by being projected onto a despised group. Religious groups that encourage this splitting of the world into all-good and all-bad camps often find others to demonize and carry this sense of badness. Research on religious fanaticism and terrorism provides countless examples of this dynamic. It is not coincidence that this research has found the more fanatical groups are also the most racist, homophobic, and anti-Semitic (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992). Thus the psychological appeal of what Juergensmeyer (2000) calls satanization. Such a denigration of the other, an almost inevitable result of the moral defense with its overidealization of an object and the splitting of the world, makes the denigrated other a ready victim of terrorist violence.

In the face of an uncritical overidealized object, religious devotees experience shame and a sense of badness, which they turn against both themselves, in rituals and assertions of self-deprecation and impurity, and others, by demonizing them as impure and unrighteous. Such feelings of shame and humiliation may further provoke intense feelings of hostility, which can then also be discharged against the demonized others either in

fantasies of apocalyptic destruction or, if they grow more intense, in actual terroristic deeds of world purification.

My suggestion in this paper is that universal religious themes such as purification or the search for reunion with the source of life can become subsumed into unconscious dynamics such as splitting and a Manichean dichotomizing of the world into all-good, all-evil camps, or into the drive to connect with and appease a humiliating or persecuting idealized patriarchal other. The result is the psychological preconditions for religiously sponsored terrorism and violence.

NOTES

1. Neutral designations are almost impossible here. Muslims, even those who reject the appeal to martyrdom, reject the designation of "suicide bombers," since these individuals have none of the psychological characteristics of those who commit suicide, and, furthermore, suicide is condemned in the Koran. While I regard them as terrorists, and as hard as it is for me personally, I feel that stance should not dominate a scholarly text. I will follow the convention of Raphael Israeli (quoted in Strenski, 2003) and refer to them most frequently as "human bombers."
2. Examples of this assertion are found throughout, the works by Davis (2003) and Hassan (2001). Post et al. (2003) conclude that, in contrast to the West, in Middle Eastern Muslim communities "liberation and religious freedom are the values that define success, not necessarily academic or economic success" (p. 175).
3. Ruth Stein (Stein, n.d.-b, p. 6) proposes a very helpful model of a linear progression of psychological stages in the process of transforming sacrifice into suicidal terrorism:

   1. Stage 1 involves the differentiation of the pure from the impure and a desire to safeguard what is holy and pure.
   2. Stage 2 is the elicitation of more vigorous activity, for example, more rigid adherence to ritual, if the need to separate the pure from the impure grows more intense. This may intensify into attempts to go beyond segregating the impure and unholy to eliminating them, violently if necessary. Here the wish to please God and the wish to kill begin to merge.
   3. Stage 3 represents the transition of this attitude into martyrdom, where one not only sacrifices the enemies of God but also seeks to purify oneself by self-sacrifice as well.

4. In a series of papers, Ruth Stein has proposed that the tie to an idealized and overpowering or persecutory object results in a psychological state that she describes as "the libidinal and perverted relations between a certain kind of believer and his God, in which the libidinal and the violent come together" (Stein, n.d.-b, p. 6). Stein calls this "vertical desire," which is

> the mystical longing for merger with the idealized abjecting Other. On this view the starkly opposing terms and polarizations with which fundamentalist thinking is suffused come to assume positions of higher and lower. . . . Fundamentalism is not only a psychic mode of separation; it is also a psychic mode of inequality. . . . Fundamentalism is about inequality . . . [including] the believer's inequality to God." (p. 10)

Stein is proposing that religiously motivated terrorism is motivated by love, not hate—love and the concomitant desire for union with an abjecting primal father, under the guise of a god. So if religious terrorism is regression, it is a regression to the primal father, not the primal mother. She also argues that violent religiosity demonstrates a process "involving transformations of hatred (and self-hatred) into idealizing love, whereby a persecutory inner object becomes an exalted one." Thus "coercive fundamentalism is based on a violent, homo-erotic, self-abnegating father-son relationship" (p. 10). There is little overt expression of self-hatred in the recorded interviews with religious terrorists. However, given the extreme judgmentalism and intense superego-driven morality in many religious terrorists, it is reasonable to suggest that masochism and self-hatred may lurk below the surface. Stein is arguing that fundamentalist religion transforms this masochistic self-hatred into a love for the father God who calls on devotees to hate and despise themselves.

Based on his research into the psychodynamics of the Nazi movement in Germany, Richard Koenigsberg (1975) argues that terrorism and genocide arise from a devotion to an idealized, absolute, and psychologically omnipotent object, be it the state, god, the party, and the like. (Copies of Koenigsberg's other relevant papers are available from Psy.BC online.)

In another place (Jones, 2002), I have argued that the same dynamic can be found in Otto's (1958) classic text, *The Idea of the Holy.* Otto's description of the holy as a "mysterium tremendum" carries this same sense of an overwhelming and overpowering presence to which we can only submit ourselves. In different ways, then, Stein, Koenigsberg, and I agree that an idealized, absolutized, and humiliating or persecuting Other is implicated in acts of religiously motivated terrorism and genocide.

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Oceanview Towers #30
510 Ocean Avenue
Long Branch, NJ 07740
E-mail: jwj@rci.rutgers.edu