

**Protest by Fire:  
Essay on a Paroxysmal Element**

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## Introduction

In his book *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* Gaston Bachelard presents a theory of fire as a fundamental element. He points out that life accounts for all slow changes, but fire creates quick changes. Fire “rises from the depths of the substance and offers itself with the warmth of love. Or it can go back down into the substance and hide there, latent and pent-up, like hate and vengeance” (Bachelard 1964: 7). In the same context Bachelard observes that fire is the only element to which “the opposing values of good and evil” may be attributed. “It shines in Paradise. It burns in hell. It is gentleness and torture. It is cookery and it is apocalypse.”

Bachelard goes on to explain that fire has a sexual nature. From the age of prehistoric societies to the present sexual intimacy has been the model for the objective production of fire. Rubbing two pieces of wood together to start a fire would be analogous to the rubbing together in the sexual act (Bachelard 1964: 23–24). He collects examples of the rubbing together analogy in Germanic, Scottish, and Native American rituals. Bachelard believes that since ancient times fire has been a sexual element as expressed in dreams, symbols, and moral values.

Bachelard’s provocative study betrays an ambiguity between the sexual nature of fire and moral values. In this paper I contend that fire as a symbol pertains psychologically to moral experience rather than to sexuality. To clarify the moral and psychological aspects of fire I appeal to the concept of the paroxysmal drive as developed by Leopold Szondi. In his study of the biblical figure of Cain Szondi quotes the attributes of fire stated by Bachelard in his book, which I have cited above, and he points out that the values of fire, such as the God of love and “the hidden God of hate and vengeance,” the protecting angel and the punishing God, or good and evil, are moral qualities rooted in the paroxysmal pattern of human experience or the Cain-Moses polarity (Szondi 1969: 78–79). He finds that persons of a paroxysmal temperament are associated with fire, particularly in the vocational choice of fire fighters, suicide method of self-immolation, and arson as a crime of vengeance.

As a clinical syndrome, Szondi’s paroxysmal drive has three phases. First, in the paroxysmal phase one builds up anger, rage, envy, jealousy, hatred and/or vengeance to a lethal peak against a real or imagined enemy (Szondi 1963: 327). In the second or epileptiform phase the pent-up emotions explode in an attack which signifies either an incomplete killing intent or a substitute for a killing. These two paroxysmal-epileptiform phases represent the Cain personality who conceals the smoldering, pent-up emotions of rage or vengeance which flare up in a fiery homicidal attack. In the third phase the Cain personality seeks to do the good, pursue justice, or make restitution for the killing intent through religious feeling or moral action.

In his study of Moses, the sequel to his book on Cain, Szondi acknowledges correctly that in the Old Testament fire is a primary means for the revelation of God (Szondi 1973: 64). Moses, bearing a paroxysmal-epileptiform nature, kills an Egyptian (Ex. 2:12) and flees to the desert where he encounters God in the vision of the burning bush (Ex. 3:2). After leading the enslaved Hebrews out of Egypt to freedom in the Exodus, Moses promulgates the Law or *Torah* on Mount Sinai, which he receives from God in a revelation of fire and smoke (Ex. 19:18). By giving the Law to the people Moses establishes a structure of justice and makes restitution for his killing, as with the commandment: “You shall not murder” (Ex. 20:13).

A brief review of the meanings of fire in Indo-European civilization demonstrates the moral aspects of the element and refutes Bachelard’s sexual conception of fire. In ancient Hinduism Agni was the god of fire who mediated gods and humans, presided over sacrifices, and released the soul from the body in cremation. In the Hindu Scripture *Rig Veda* Agni is celebrated in Book One, hymn one:

I laud Agni, the chosen Priest, God,  
minister of sacrifice,  
The hotar [invoking priest], lavishest of wealth.  
Worthy is Agni to be praised by living as  
by ancient seers.  
He shall bring hitherward the Gods (I. I: 1–2).

Fire is the central element in Buddhism, as made evident by the Buddha's Fire Sermon:

Bhikkhus [monks or medicants], all is burning. And what is the all that is burning? Bhikkhus, the eye is burning, visible forms are burning, visual consciousness is burning, visual impression is burning, also whatever sensation, pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant, arises on account of the visual impression, that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fire of lust, with the fire of hate, with the fire of delusion (Rahula 1974: 95).

In the remainder of his sermon the Buddha applies the same description of fire to the ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Thus, fire has multiple symbolic meanings, and in light of Szondi's diagnostic scheme they represent sexuality (lust), paroxysmality (hate), and the ego (delusion), respectively.

Fire was central to ancient Germanic folklaw as well. Public assemblies were held to resolve disputes over blood feuds between clans or households. Assemblies had to determine the guilt of vengeance and propose the ideal of pacification. The ordeal was used as a method of legal proof, involving fire or water. "Those tried by fire were passed blindfolded or barefooted over hot glowing plowshares, or they carried burning irons in their hands, and if their burns healed properly they were exonerated" (Berman 1983: 57).

The Germanic trial by fire lay behind the evolution of the doctrine of purgatory in the Roman Catholic Church. Before purgatory became a post-mortem place in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, it was fire. In Medieval Catholicism the purgatorial fire had three functions: punishment, expiation or purification, and testing (Le Goff 1984: 43–44). The testing or probative function was modeled in particular after the Germanic ordeal by fire.

The belief that fire had multiple functions continued in the vision literature of Medieval Catholicism. The eighth century Vision of Drythelm featured a near-death experience. Drythelm died one night after a serious illness, but he came back to life the next morning. He told his wife and later a monk, who preserved his story, that an angel had escorted him through a wide valley with flames on one side and hail and snow on the other. He saw the fires of purgatory and hell, and his angel-guide differentiated the two, as in the following description of purgatory: "That vale you saw so dreadful for consuming flames and cutting cold, is the place in which the souls of those are tried and punished, who, delaying to confess and amend their crimes, at length have recourse to repentance at death...they shall all be received into the kingdom of heaven at the day of judgment ...." (Zaleski 2000: 24). The angel also said to Drythelm that "fiery and stinking pit, which you saw, is the mouth of hell, into which whosoever falls shall never be delivered to eternity." In these visions, which lasted from the sixth to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, fire was for testing, punishing, and purging (Zaleski 1987: 63).

Thus, within Indo-European civilization fire has had multiple moral or judicial associations which are not sexual. The three-fold functions of the Medieval purgatorial fire fit Szondi's

paroxysmal pattern of moral experience. Testing corresponds to the paroxysmal phase, punishment to the epileptiform, and purging to the restitution stage. In the remainder of this essay I illustrate the paroxysmality of fire by discussing three fire protests in the turbulent 1960s of American history. These three fire protests were connected directly or indirectly with the Civil Rights Movement.

## **Mississippi Church Fires**

At Brookhaven, Mississippi on February 15, 1964 Sam H. Bowers, Jr. organized 200 members of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) into the White Knights, as an elite commando unit of the Klan. Bowers became the Imperial Wizard of the White Knights, and he directed a four-year holy war against the Civil Rights Movement which he believed to be a force of atheistic communism in complicity with the Devil. The White Knights pledged to defend the Christian faith, as proclaimed by white, Anglo-Saxon Protestantism, with random, unpredictable acts of violence. The White Knights used fire in punitive acts of rage. One method was the burning of crosses at night.

In his “Executive Lecture” of March 1, 1964 Bowers viewed the world as a struggle between two opposing forces, one of Satan and the other of the “Spiritual Force of Almighty God championed by our Savior Christ, Jesus” (Mellhany 1975: 123). In order to fight the Satanic forces of the Civil Rights Movement Bowers organized the White Knights into three branches, those of security, intelligence, and propaganda. In whatever branch they worked the members had to maintain secrecy. They would neither appear in public wearing white robes and hoods, nor march in parades. Members would remain hidden and engage in collective acts of violence at night. As an example, in April, 1964 White Knights burned crosses across 60 counties in one night, and by the end of May their secret membership grew to 10,000 (Branch 1998: 240).

Bowers believed that the federal government was a satanic force. He interpreted the arrival of federal agents and civil rights workers in Mississippi during the summer 1964 as a crucifixion of the innocent people of God in Mississippi. To vindicate the people of God Bowers adopted the term crusade and devoted all of his energies to the service of the Lord. He based his crusade on the biblical story of Elijah, the eighth century BCE prophet in ancient Israel who destroyed the priests of Baal (Marsh 1997: 60). When confronting those priests, Elijah cried out to God and asked for a reply. “Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stone, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench” (1 Kings 18:38). Seeing the fire, the people praised God and said: “The Lord indeed is God ....” (1 Kings 18:39). Then Elijah commanded the priests of Baal to be seized, and he killed them.

As the warrior-priest of the crusaders, Bowers declared a holy war against the Civil Rights Movement on June 7, 1964 at Boykin Methodist Church in Raleigh, Mississippi. The assembled White Knights were armed with pistols, rifles, and shot guns, and outside the church building men were mounted on horses and riding through the surroundings woods, as two airplanes circled the property from the air.

Bowers entered the pulpit and explained the tactics of the holy war. He predicted that there would be open conflict between black civil rights workers and white militants, but he advised that the White Knights should avoid such public conflicts. Instead the White Knights should be armed and ready to act on short notice “to attack the local headquarters of the enemy, destroy and disrupt his leadership and communications (both local and Washington) and any news communication equipment or agents in the area” (Marsh 1997: 65–66). The White Knights would attack the enemy quickly and violently and immediately retreat many miles away. Attacks should be carefully planned and limited to “the leaders and prime white collaborators of the enemy forces.”

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was the principal organizer of Freedom Summer 1964, a black voter registration campaign in Mississippi. In Meridian, Mississippi Mickey Schwerner was the director of Freedom House, a voter registration center. He worked with black children of the community and coordinated local voter registration activities. In the early spring 1964 the Sovereignty Commission, an anti-civil rights spy agency created by the Mississippi legislature in 1956, circulated a description of Schwerner's blue Ford station wagon and New York state license plate, thereby defining him as an enemy (Dittmer 1994: 251). In preparation for Freedom Summer white students from northern colleges and universities attended a one-week training session in Oxford, Ohio and then travelled by bus to Mississippi to work alongside poor, disenfranchised blacks. They were taught to expect to be beaten, jailed, or killed (Hogan 2007: 67). The first busload of students arrived in Mississippi on June 20, 1964.

Mickey Schwerner recruited Andrew Goodman, both of whom were white, and they were joined by James Chaney, a 21-year old African-American from Meridian, Mississippi. When Schwerner was seen with black men and women, attempting to worship at all-white churches, Sam Bowers decided that Schwerner should be killed (Marsh 1997: 67). In Mississippi the white churches were considered the guardians of the soul of white supremacy (King 1993: 139).

Charles Golden, black bishop of the Methodist Church, requested that all black churches participate in the Freedom Summer voter registration campaign. Mount Zion Methodist Church in Neshoba County was one of the first black churches to respond to Bishop Golden's request. It served as a freedom school, and the congregation extended a warm hospitality to Schwerner.

On Sunday evening June 16, 1964 30 White Knights, armed with rifles, shot guns, and clubs, quietly surrounded the Mount Zion Church building as a board meeting was ending. They broke into the building, looking for Schwerner, and brutally assaulted several board members, including Bud Cole whom they beat into unconsciousness. As they were about to hit his wife Beatrice, she fell down on her knees and cried out the lines of an old Methodist hymn: "Father, I stretch my hands to Thee, I stretch my hands to Thee, no other help I know. If Thou withdraw Thyself from me, whither can I go?" (King 1993: 144). Moved by her prayer, the White Knights left her alone, but later that night they returned and burned the church building to the ground.

Five days later Mickey Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney drove into Neshoba County to inspect the ruins of the church. At 3pm on June 21 the three civil rights workers were arrested by Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price and jailed in Philadelphia, Mississippi. At 10:30pm that night Sheriff Lawrence Raney released them from jail. As the three drove along a country road, Deputy Price stopped them after a high-speed chase and turned them over to the White Knights, who murdered all three. On June 23 Schwerner's burned-out station wagon was discovered at the edge of Bogue Chitto Swamp, still smoldering. The bodies of the three remained missing until they were found on August 4, 1964 buried beneath an earthen dam on the farm of Klansman Olen Burrage.

Altogether, the White Knights committed nine murders, 300 assaults and 75 church fires in their holy war against the Civil Rights Movement. During Freedom Summer alone, black churches were being burned to the ground at a rate of at least one a week. Martin Luther King, Jr. toured rural Mississippi in the summer 1964, visiting the sites of the burned-down churches and getting death threats from the White Knights hidden in the crowds. At one site he said: "I feel sorry for those who were hurt by this...I rejoice that there are churches relevant enough that people of ill-will will be willing to burn them. This church was burned because it took a stand" (King 1993: 143).

For many years after the Civil Rights Movement ended black churches in Mississippi and Alabama continued to be burned by arson fires. On November 5, 2008 the day after Barack

Obama won the presidential election, three white men burned to the ground the Macedonia Church of God in Christ in Springfield, Massachusetts. After their arrest, they confessed that they had burned the church because the congregation was black, and that they were angry at getting a black president (Saltzman and Ballou 2009).

### **Antiwar Self-Immolations**

On June 11, 1963 the Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc burned himself to death in Saigon, South Vietnam in order to express the suffering of the Vietnamese people under the dictatorial regime of Ngo Dinh Diem. On May 16, 1967 Nhat Chi Mai, a Buddhist nun, burned herself to death outside Tu Nghiem Temple in protest against the Vietnamese War, and in a letter to the United States government she wrote:

I offer my body as a torch  
to dissipate the dark  
to waken love among men  
to give peace to Vietnam  
the one who burns herself for peace  
(S. King 2000: 127).

Throughout the 1960s many Buddhist monks and nuns burned themselves to death to protest the Vietnam War. The exact number of Buddhist self-immolations is not known.

In his letter of June 1, 1965 to Martin Luther King, Jr. the Buddhist monk and scholar Thich Nhat Hanh explained that the Buddhist self-immolations were neither protests nor suicides. He said that to “burn oneself by fire is to prove that what one is saying is of the utmost importance. There is nothing more painful than burning oneself” (Hanh 1967: 100). He also pointed out that, during the ordination ritual in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, the monk-candidate is required to burn small spots on his body, as he recites the vows to live as a monk, achieve enlightenment, and devote himself to the salvation of all living beings.

By burning themselves to death the Vietnamese monks and nuns were demonstrating that they could endure extreme pain in defense of their people. Their aim was not so much to die as to express their will and determination in the context of political oppression. Expressing one’s will by self-immolation was not suicide but a constructive act, attempting to change government policy. Their actions were religiously motivated self-sacrifices (S. King 2000: 148).

These Vietnamese self-immolations took place in the context of 1600 years of auto-cremation in Chinese Buddhism. Since the fourth century self-immolations occurred in public, usually at midnight, with large audiences as a means of enlightenment (Benn 2007: 8). Both men and woman burned themselves to death, offering their bodies as gifts to the Buddha, revealing the emptiness of fire, imitating the Buddha’s cremation, and showing a lack of pain as evidence of enlightenment. Self-immolation has been a central, well established tradition in Chinese Buddhism, frequently occurring in periods of crisis when Buddhists faced political hostility (Benn 2007: 195, 199).

In the United States Alice Herz, an 82-year old Quaker and part Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany, immolated herself on a street corner in Detroit, Michigan on March 16, 1965, then dying ten days later. She had sent a letter to her daughter stating: “I do this not out of despair but out of hope. I choose the illuminating death of a Buddhist to protest against a great country trying to wipe out a small county for no reason” (Zaroulis and Sullivan 1984: 3).

On November 2, 1965 Norman Morrison, a 32-year old Quaker, drove from his home in Baltimore, Maryland to Washington, D.C., taking with him his 18-month old baby daughter

Emily. After arriving in Washington, he mailed a letter to his wife, stating in part: “Dearest Anne: For weeks even months I have been praying only that I be shown what I must do. This morning with no warning I was shown as clearly as I was shown that Friday night in August, 1955, that you would be my wife. Know that I love thee but must act for the children of the priest’s village” (Branch 2006: 359).

Earlier that day Morrison had learned through a news report, which cited a French priest in a Roman Catholic refugee village of Duc Co, that he saw seven Vietnamese women and children in his parish burned to death by an American napalm attack. On the previous day a Buddhist monk burned himself to death in Saigon on the second anniversary of the assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem.

Morrison proceeded through the Potomac River entrance to the Pentagon. He carried Emily in one arm and a gallon can of kerosene in the other. He took off his Harris tweed jacket, poured the gallon of kerosene over his body, ignited it, and began to burn—in front of the office of Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense and architect of the American war policy in Vietnam. It is not known if Morrison released his daughter before his burning; either she fell, was dropped, or floated to the ground (Hendrickson 1996: 188). Many office workers saw the flames shooting up in the air six or seven feet. Two uniformed service men tried to extinguish the flames, one with his coat and the other with his hands, but they were too late to save the life of Norman Morrison.

On the next day Morrison’s charred body was cremated, and his widow said of her husband:

Norman Morrison has given his life to express his concern over the great loss of life and human suffering caused by the war in Vietnam. He was protesting the Government’s deep military involvement in this war. He felt that all citizens must speak their true convictions about our country’s actions (Zaroulis and Sullivan 1984: 2).

Five days after Morrison’s death the North Vietnamese poet laureate To Huu wrote a poem, imagining Morrison’s dying thoughts:

Emily, my child, it’s almost dark—  
I can’t carry you home  
Once I have turned into a lamp  
Your mother will come looking for you  
You must hold your mother and kiss her for me  
And you must tell your mother  
He died happy. Please don’t be sad.  
Washington  
At twilight  
Oh souls  
Are you hovering or missing?

I have reached the moment when my heart is brightest (Branch 2006: 360).

In the early morning hours of November 9, 1965 Roger LaPorte, a 21-year old member of the Catholic Worker movement, walked to First Avenue in New York City and sat down in a cross-legged posture in front of the library of the United Nations. He had been wandering the city streets for three nights. At 5:00am he soaked himself with gasoline, ignited it, and declared amid the flames: “I’m a Catholic Worker. I’m against war, all wars. I did this as a religious action.” (Branch 2006: 361). LaPorte lingered throughout the day and night, while the city was

paralyzed by a massive power failure. He died the next day at Bellevue Hospital with second and third degree burns on 95% of his body.

Three days before his immolation he had sent a letter to his draft board, giving up his ministerial exemption to which he was entitled as a former Trappist seminarian. He had also attended an aborted draft protest in New York, when a hostile crowd attack 1500 conscription opponents and shouted: “Give us joy! Bomb Hanoi!”—followed by “Burn yourselves! Not your cards!” (Branch 2006: 361). In spite of the attack five pacifists burned their draft cards. LaPorte had considered burning his draft card but burned himself instead.

Between 1965 and 1970 eight Americans burned themselves to death in protest against the Vietnam War (Zaroulis and Sullivan 1984: 4–5). Other young men tried to immolate themselves but failed. Self-immolations as political protests have not been confined to the 1960s. On April 1, 2012 *The Washington Post* reported that 33 Tibetans had burned themselves to death, protesting the systematic program of the Chinese government “to destroy their culture, silence their voices and erase their identity” (Denyer 2012).

### **Antiwar Draft Card Burning**

By the mid-1960s the antiwar movement was opposing military conscription. This kind of opposition was not new in American history. On February 22, 1947 between 400 and 500 Americans either destroyed their draft cards or returned them to President Harry S. Truman (Ferber and Lynd 1971: 3). During the Vietnam War era President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the draft card bill on August 30, 1965, authorizing a five year jail sentence and a \$10,000 fine for the intentional destruction of a draft card.

Over Labor Day weekend in 1965 the Fifth Avenue Vietnam Peace Parade took shape and planned a large antiwar demonstration in New York City in the following month. On October 16, 1965 about 25,000 marched down Fifth Avenue from 94<sup>th</sup> Street, carrying signs reading: “Stop the war in Vietnam.” The marchers were jeered by crowds, throwing tomatoes, red paint, and eggs on them. The New York demonstrators were joined by large crowds of draft protestors on the West Coast and by smaller ones throughout the country.

At the Army Induction Center on Whitehall Street in New York City David Miller, a 22-year old Catholic Worker and registered Conscientious Objector, burned his draft card. He was the first to burn his draft card after President Johnson had signed into law the draft card bill on August 30. Miller told reporters that he intended to do “a significant political act” by bringing punishment upon himself (Branch 2006: 357). Miller’s act was reported on television and radio broadcasts, causing the American public to take notice. For his crime he went to prison for two years.

On March 2, 1967 students at Cornell University, who had organized themselves as the “We Won’t Go” group, proposed a large-scale draft card burning on April 15 as part of the Spring Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam. The students believed that they would begin a mass resistance by publicly destroying their draft cards. On the day of the demonstration in New York City about 75 students burned their draft cards (Zaroulis and Sullivan 1984: 113). The estimated numbers of marchers varied between 100,000 and 400,000. A similar demonstration occurred in San Francisco where about 50,000 marched.

With these spring 1967 demonstrations the idea of resistance entered the antiwar movement, and in Boston, Massachusetts it took shape as the New England Resistance (NER). On October 16, 1967 NER conducted a draft-card turn-in worship service at Arlington Street Unitarian Church. In that service 214 students surrendered their draft cards, and 67 burned theirs (Foley 2003: 108). The young men who turned in their draft cards knew that the cards would be



delivered to the Justice Department where officials would file charges against them for violating the Selective Service Law. The burning of the draft cards took place at the altar of the church.

The principal organizer of NER was Alex Jack, a student at Boston University School of Theology. Jack had worked in the Mississippi voter registration campaign of Freedom Summer 1964. He had visited South Vietnam in 1967, flown with American forces in combat missions, and he had seen in hospitals children burned by American napalm attacks but shielded from the press (Foley 2003: 81). He had been deeply affected by those experiences.

Jack defended draft card burning as a “symbolic identification with Buddhist monks and American immolators.” He argued that

The crime at issue in America is the burning of people, not a piece of paper. Those who enflame the Vietnamese country side with napalm and white phosphorous and burn down villages and entire forests, not those who put the match to the ticket that stands for their compliance and service to this inhuman system—they are the real non-cooperators” (Foley 2003: 120).

In the presidential campaign of 1968 Richard Nixon promised to end the draft, believing that such action would undermine the antiwar movement. After winning the presidency he promised to end the war, but instead he expanded it by ordering bombing missions over Cambodia and by sending ground troops into that country. This expansion of the war intensified antiwar protests. Finally, in January 1973 his executive order eliminated the draft, and the United States signed the Paris Peace Accords in the same month, thus ending the Vietnam War.

## Conclusion

The Mississippi church fires, antiwar self immolations, and antiwar draft card burnings deployed fire as a means of protest. According to Szondi, fire is a paroxysmal element that manifests the three-fold Cain-Moses moral structure. The paroxysmal phase accumulates pent-up emotions which are discharged convulsively against an enemy, and followed by a movement toward restitution or justice. If there were no movement toward restitution, then the aggression would be non-paroxysmal (Szondi 1980: 163). Instead it would be sadism, frustration aggression, or schiziform total destruction.

The Mississippi church fires were fueled by the Cain emotions of rage, hatred, and vengeance, and their bearers were the White Knights who exhibited collectively the pure Cain typology. The pure Cain builds up the Cain emotions and acts them out in public without shame or guilt (Szondi 1980: 160). The pure Cain personality is envious, excitable, and violent. He or she may hold a respectable social position or vocation, but behind the mask of respectability one lacks conscience, is intolerant, and wishes to hurt people. The pure Cain thinks in terms of dichotomies and views world history as a conflict between good and evil forces. To Mississippians of the 1960s the good was represented by white evangelical Protestantism and the evil by the Civil Rights Movement. The civil rights evil was perceived as a threat to the southern way of life, with its racial segregation and white supremacy, and the mission of the White Knights was to defend that way of life with punitive violence. Their mission was a holy war.

The antiwar self-immolators expressed the ambivalent Cain personality type. In this phase one is plagued by doubt and caught in a dilemma of good and evil. One’s conscience is burdened by a moral struggle in which the tendency to commit evil becomes stronger than the tendency to do the good.

The Buddhist self-immolators did an evil deed by destroying their own lives. Nevertheless, in Buddhist ethics it is permissible to act violently without acquiring negative karma, provided that

one acts with a pure motive and affirms life with compassion (S. King 2000: 140, 145). By acting with a pure motive one's self-immolation would not be considered suicide. In Buddhism suicide is an act of self-destruction caused by a lack of courage to live, hopelessness, and a desire for non-existence (Hanh 1967: 107). The Vietnamese immolators expressed the tendency to do the good by suffering and dying for their people.

Norman Morrison's self-immolation brought out ambivalence in the Society of Friends. On the one hand, Morrison's fellow Quakers wished he had not taken his own life; but, on the other hand, they were proud of him and encouraged their youth to emulate his moral sincerity but not his immolation (S. King 2000: 141). Morrison's intent to do the good was compromised, however, by his taking his baby daughter with him to the Pentagon. He compared himself to Abraham, whom God called to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac in a burnt offering (Gen. 22:2). In his November 2, 1965 letter to his wife Morrison stated: "I shall not plan to go without my child as Abraham did" (Hendrickson 1996: 215). Like Isaac Emily's life was spared. She was neither burned nor bruised, but her clothing had the smell of kerosene.

Watching Morrison's fatal burning from his office window, Robert McNamara was shocked. Within one month he was urging President Johnson to halt the bombing in the Vietnam War (Hendrickson 1996: 198). Morrison's self-immolation caused him to doubt the war policy and believe the war could not be won militarily. His change of mind was a movement toward a restitution of the good and a reversal of an unjust war policy.

The draft card burnings fit Szondi's profile of the simple Cain (cf. Szondi 1960: 105–106; van Rhijn 1993: 72, 76). The draft card burners were lawbreakers in the sense that they defied the conscription policy of the government and were angry at the American destruction of life in Vietnam. Alex Jack advocated draft card burnings to identify with the Buddhist and American self-immolators like Norman Morrison (Foley 2003: 120). He recognized the historical role of protest by fire and thought it should not be abandoned because the Ku Klux Klan burned crosses in the south.

These 1960s fire protests illustrated the central role of fire in historical events. Szondi began his study of Cain with the provocative assertion that Cain rules the world and that his reign may be confirmed by world history (Szondi 1969: 7). The Cain personality is associated with fire, and Szondi's theory of drive splitting discloses the variety of Cain types. The erupting, flaring forth of fire symbolizes volcanic convulsions of anger and rage, envy and jealousy, hatred and vengeance. Fire releases sudden changes that bring forth light and illumination or ash and destruction. The pure Cain personality discharges a total destruction in the name of a split-off, abstract ideal. The ambivalent Cain sets forth an ambiguity in historical events. The simple Cain sets fires to express anger and succeeds only in achieving limited social change.

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