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Streaming Violence:  
Religion and Violence in Television Media

By

Stephanie A. Abrams

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Thesis Director:

Debra Ballentine

Religion is a part of the general culture, and people can choose to engage with it on various levels. Because we live in a media culture, popular media, including entertainment media, is where many people encounter religion. Entertainment media that uses religion to create its narratives becomes a part of the culture and becomes stories that are disseminated around the globe. Entertainment media's use of religion can have real consequences. Unfortunately, there is a gap in the field of religious violence. Religious violence as displayed in entertainment media is not readily explored. This gap needs to be addressed and can be addressed using the theories that others have presented regarding religion and violence. The methodology of this thesis project is to examine the violence that is present in popular television series that use religion as their main theme and discuss that violence

through the lens of religious violence theories. Because many popular television series draw on religious stories, motifs, and imagery that are violent, viewers may conclude that these television shows confirm that religions are violent. Chapter One focuses on *Ares*, a Dutch television series that utilizes the idea of “cult” to create the theme of the series. Television series often rely on the basic principles of “cult” to create dark, eerie, and often violent examples of “cults”. *Ares* uses the themes of religion manifest in its use of cult as well as violence to capture the audience’s attention. While violence is sometimes contested, for the most part, the characters and the series itself accepts violence and it is often encouraged. Chapter Two focuses on *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* and how the creators utilize biblical narratives to create the plots. The biblical passages of 1 Kings 3:16-28 and 2 Kings 6:26-29, when used in the Netflix Original Series *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, have taken on a positive valence for the violence, which is a turn from the negative valence that the biblical passages have in their original context. In addition, the creators of the show comment on the power structures that are present in organized religion and offer their own interpretation of how religions can function. They propose the idea that there are power structures that can create prosperity. However, this does not mean that these structures stop the violence that can be present in the religion. Chapter three focuses on *Good Omens*, which utilizes characters and narratives from *Revelation, the last book of the New Testament* to form its plot. Through the characters of the demon Crowley and the angel Aziraphale, the show challenges the conventionally held beliefs of who and what are good and evil in *Revelation*. Crowley and Aziraphale contest the violence that other characters in the show participate in and wish to participate in. Chapter Four focuses on *Warrior Nun*. The television series deals with violence through the themes of good

versus evil, The Church versus its members, and religion versus science. Within all of these “battles,” violence is used by both sides to gain triumph, violence done by those who are religious (nun), is usually portrayed as accepted. However, violence done to the nuns is contested and portrayed as negative use of violence. In the conclusion, I return to the issue of the conflation of religion and violence with attention to how the audience perceives the violence and how that violence can affect their views of religion. Throughout this thesis project, we can see that television series that use the themes of religion and violence challenge and work to reinforce "common" views of organized religion, and the audience must parse through these interpretations to come up with their own understanding and opinions.

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## Introduction

### **The Intertwining of Religion and Popular Media**

Religion is a part of the general culture, and people can choose to engage with it on various levels. Religion is also “always experienced and practiced in a specific cultural context, and today's context is saturated by popular media and artifacts of the marketplace” (Clark ix). We live in a media culture; popular media is where many people encounter religion and should be an area explored by religious studies scholars. Religious studies scholars understand that “religion has always taken place within cultural contexts largely shaped by both the culture's storytellers and the expectations of the marketplace of the day” (ix – x). Entertainment media that uses religion to create its narratives becomes a part of the culture and becomes stories that is disseminated around the globe. Entertainment media’s use of religion can have real consequences. Living in a time where “both the fast-paced culture of media and the unchanging verities of traditional religions based on sacred texts are enacted daily, lived out, reimagined, and reframed as contemporary truths,” we need to consider these culturally relevant sources and explore how they can affect people’s interpretation of religion (Badaracco 2). It is important to note that religion and popular media are not two separate entities within culture, instead they “constantly inform one another and are, to an increasing extent, blurred, indivisible, and inherently connected” (2).

### **Religion and Violence: The Absence of Media Discussion**

The *Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence* claims that it “provides a comprehensive examination of the field [of religion and violence] and introduces new ways of understanding it,” however, the book does not contain a chapter that discusses the

intersection of religion, violence, and entertainment media (1). This gap in the field of religious violence needs to be addressed and can be addressed using the theories that others have presented regarding religion and violence. Some theories discuss how religious texts can work to justify violence “within the literary and theological foundation of” religious traditions in addition to how violence is “used symbolically and in ritual practice, and how social acts of vengeance and warfare have been justified by religious ideas” (1). Other theories discuss patterns and themes related to religious violence, such as sacrifice and martyrdom. All of these theories, while normally applied to material that is as recognized as religious, can be applied to secular entertainment media that contains religious themes, motifs, imagery, and characters. The *Princeton Readings in Religion and Violence* editors recognize that “most religious teachings are about peace” and that “the idea of killing is abhorrent to all religious traditions, and even attempts to coerce and bully are regarded as anathema” (1). However, they also recognize that “the fact remains that [religions] are also filled with symbols and language of violence” (1). While there may be a link between religion and violence it is not correct to assume that religions *are* violent. Unfortunately, this is a fine line that many people do not see; people can conclude that while religions do have a connection to violence it does *not* make all religions as a whole violent. The methodology of this thesis project is to examine the violence that is present in popular television series that use religion as their main theme and discuss that violence through the lens of religious violence theories. Theories that currently discuss religion and violence regarding primary sources and situations involving those who practice religion can also be used to discuss how violence is presented in these television series. Because many popular

television series draw on religious stories, motifs, and imagery that are violent, viewers may conclude that these television shows confirm that religions are violent.

### **Definitions of Violence**

There are many different definitions of violence; these definitions range from broad to very specific. David Riches defines violence as “an act of physical hurt deemed legitimate by the performed and illegitimate by (some) witnesses” (“The Phenomenon” 8). This definition is important because it points to the fact that not everyone will agree with the violence that is occurring. This allows further exploration of how people interpret violence and why they interpret it the way they do. Jon Abbink also discusses definitions of violence in his piece; he explains that violence can have “possibly fatal consequences” and can be used for the “*humiliation* of other humans” (xi). By pointing out that violence does not always have to end in the death of the victim and that violence can function to humiliate the victim, this definition opens up the discussion of how violence is used not only to cause physical harm as a direct result of violence but how violence can also inflict a deeper, more internal pain. This type of violence that causes internal pain can be termed “mental violence.” Debra Ballentine succinctly states in her piece, “What Ends Might Ritual Violence Accomplish?: The Case of Rechab and Baanah,” several facets of violence that she has gleaned from the work of David Riches, Jon Abbink, and Bettina Schmidt. She states,

“(1) Violence is “meaningful”; that is, it is not random, aimless, or biologically driven. (2) Violence communicates; it can be a statement of social protest, intimidation, terrorizing, or self-assertion, for example. (3) Violence is contextual; so we may evaluate violence as a socially embedded performance.<sup>19</sup> (4) Violence can be an organizing principle in society; so, it can be “creative” in the sense that it can be a “constituent” force in social relations” (12).

A couple of questions that these definitions of violence raise are who gets to define something as violence and who gets to decide if the violence is legitimated or not. Riches, in his definition, points to one possible answer; however, there are many more scenarios that can be explored. As anthropologist Kenneth George explains, “dictating what the story of violence will be is fundamental to its exercise, and being in a position to do so puts someone or some group very close to the matrices of order and disorder” (xii). In the case of television series, the narrative’s author defines what is legitimate and illegitimate violence. However, the audience can either accept this view or contest it. Because the audience can exist within the world of the narrative when they suspend their disbelief and within reality, they may hold two different views of the violence. The audience can go back and forth from their view of violence within the world of the narrative as well as reality, which makes their views of violence complex, nuanced, and interesting to explore.

### **Theories**

While many theories can be used to explore religion, violence, and television series, a couple of theorists create a foundation that can be used for further investigation into the topic. The theories of Johan Galtung, David Riches, Russell T. McCutcheon, and Hector Avalos not only create a foundation for an exploration into “religious violence” in television series, discussions of “religious violence” in conjunction with these theories can help to expand them. This discussion opens up more uses for these theories and creates avenues of exploration for the television shows. These theories work to create an understanding of how the television series are using and exploring religion and violence and they can demonstrate how the audience perceives what the show is up to.

Johan Galtung provides a definition for what constitutes violence and notes that because violence is avoidable, there is always another option. Because people choose to participate in violence, their actions can be contested. David Riches provides a concept, “the triangle of violence,” which allows situations of violence to be broken down and viewed from the position of the perpetrator of violence, the victim of violence, and the witness(es) of violence<sup>1</sup>. Examining violence from these three angles allows for a deeper and more nuanced examination of situations of violence. Riches also provides various lenses to examine what types of violence are being used and who is doing the violence; these lenses include mental violence, symbolic violence, structural violence, and ritual violence. Using these lenses helps to sharpen the focus on the discussion of violence. Russel T. McCutcheon discusses myth and “mythmaking” and how they are narratives created by humans and are everchanging. Myths can be used to reinforce the use of violence, justify violence, or contest violence. Finally, Hector Avalos proposes that religions create scarce resources, and these perceived scarce resources can cause violence among the people who wish to obtain those resources. In the following chapters, I will discuss each of these theorists and their application in further detail<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Many triangles can be explored through this theory. An example of another triangle could include the perpetrator of violence being the author of the television series, the character being the victims, and the audience as witnesses. This example would place the triangle outside of the narrative framework of the television series. In this thesis project, I focus on triangles of violence that occur within the narrative framework of the show. The perpetrator of violence and the victims of violence will always be characters within the series. The witnesses of violence are characters within the show and the audience (those who chose to tune into the series). This is the closest possible level to examine and also provides a path to discuss the audience's immediate responses to the show while they still are suspending their disbelief. It also can examine the immediate afterthoughts of the audience without removing them too far from the action of the television series.

<sup>2</sup> These theories and the methodology of this thesis project can be applied not only to television series but all narrative entertainment media.

### How the Authors and Audience Interpret Television Series<sup>3</sup>

The creators of these works may not be seeking to make definitive statements on religion. Even though the creators are not making definitive statements, their complex relationships with religion can manifest within the series, and the audience can pick up on this. The audience also brings with them their own concept of religion and violence and may feel that these works and their creators either reinforce or challenge their views. This form of contact with the concept of religion is important to explore because it adds a layer of understanding to the ever-evolving views that are present in society regarding religion. Many creators and showrunners discuss how they view their television series and often comment on how they view the religious elements that they have incorporated. However, not all creators are vocal, nor do they all contextualize their television series as "religious". In this work, four television series with varying levels of engagement with religion will be discussed. These include the Netflix Original Series *Ares*, the Netflix Original Series *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina (CAOS)*, the Amazon Original Series *Good Omens*, and the Netflix Original Series *Warrior Nun*<sup>4</sup>.

The creators and showrunners of *Ares* have not participated in interviews, nor have they released any commentary on their series. Netflix categorizes the show as "TV Horror"

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this thesis project, when I use the term "audience," I am referring to the viewing audience or those who are watching the show on Netflix or Amazon. When I reference those in television series who are witnesses to violence, I specify who the witness within the television series is.

<sup>4</sup> Below, I address that three out of the four television series (*The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, *Good Omens*, and *Warrior Nun*) were first released as written material (comic books and a novel). I would explore the written source material more extensively if I were to do a more expansive report on each television series as a whole. I would explore the differences in how religion and violence are represented in the written source material versus the television series. I would also explore the differences in characters, plot points, and descriptors as they pertain to religion and violence. However, for the scope of this thesis project, only the television series will be explored.

and “TV Drama,” and there is no mention of the show being connected to religion. On the surface, it appears that the television series is seeking to comment on fraternity culture as well as political corruption. However, upon a deeper examination there is a level of commentary on the functioning of “cults”. Even though the show is not overtly religious, the audience can make connections between the worship of Beal and the worship of deities present in some religion.

*The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* was originally released as a comic book that was situated as a part of the Archie Comic universe. The creator of the comic is Roberto Aquirre-Sacasa, who also adapted it into a television series for Netflix. Roberto Aquirre-Sacasa contextualizes both the comic and the television series as a “coming-of-age story”. As Roberto Aquirre-Sacasa explains it, “a lot of horror is set during or tied to coming-of-age — “Carrie” is the best example...I’ve always been attracted to that, and I’d been wanting to do a horror project for years in television” (Turchiano). Not only does Roberto Aquirre-Sacasa understand the television series to be a coming-of-age horror story he recognizes that he is dealing with witchcraft, the ““witches worship the Dark Lord, who is a patriarchal figure. So, the show is kind of based on a paradox: These women are empowered [because] they’re witches, but they are subservient to a patriarch” (Turchiano). While Roberto Aquirre-Sacasa does not interpret the witches’ worship of the Dark Lord to be religious, the audience can certainly make the connection to organized religion. In addition, Roberto Aquirre-Sacasa uses religious narratives in his show that are taken directly from the Hebrew Bible. Roberto Aquirre-Sacasa also uses character from Jewish and Christian culture such as Lucifer Morningstar, Beelzebub, Judas, and Lilith.

The creator of the Amazon Original Series *Good Omens*, Neil Gaiman, is also the writer of the book that the series is based on. Unlike Roberto Aquirre-Sacasa, Gaiman is well aware that his story incorporates elements of religion in general and Christianity. Gaiman contextualizes his work with what he loves to explore, “I love and am fascinated by religion. And I love and am fascinated with myths. I love and am fascinated with history” (Sommers 39). Gaiman also understands that the audience may be offended by his work if they are Christians. He states, “everything is blasphemous. Technically speaking, *Good Omens* is blasphemous against religious order, as blasphemous as you can get” (19). Gaiman believes that he has some leeway in how he uses elements of Christianity because he sees the elements that he engages with as “myths”. According to Gaiman, “Mythology tends to be what religion decays into. A sort of second stage religion. Or it’s the bits of religion that won’t get you shot or harmed if you don’t take them seriously enough... All of these things sort of accreted around the edge. Nobody is going to call for you to be killed if you don’t take the Gospel of the Infancy of Christ seriously” (144). Gaiman also recognizes that the audience does take away things from the show, “one of the great things about humor is, you can slip things past people with humor, you can use it as a sweetener. So, you can actually tell them things, give them messages, get terribly, terribly serious, and terribly, terribly dark, and because there are jokes in there, they’ll go along with you, and they’ll travel a lot further along with you than they would otherwise” (18). The use of religion is overt in *Good Omens* and the audience can perceive what Gaiman is up to without having read his interviews. Some Christians felt that Gaiman was attacking their religion and created a petition to have Amazon to pull the series from their platform<sup>5</sup>. This

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.returntoorder.org/petition/tell-netflix-to-cancel-blasphemous-good-omens/>

highlights that television series hold weight and those that disagree with the perceived message of the show will speak out.

The writer of the original comic book that *Warrior Nun* is based on is Ben Dunn. Dunn recognizes that his own past influenced his choice of subject matter. Dunn graduated from a Catholic High School and learned the teachings of the Catholic Church. Dunn, like Gaiman, understands that some people would not “agree with [his] approach” (Martinez). According to Dunn, he “tried to look more at the fantasy aspect of it and not as the real Catholic Church” (Martinez). Dunn contextualizes his comic as “a superhero story with the trappings of the Catholic mythology” (Martinez). Dunn was not involved with the writing of Netflix’s adaptation of *Warrior Nun*. However, showrunner Simon Barry did speak about his interpretation of the comic. He believes that there is “an advantage [to subvert “things known to Christianity as a whole”] strangely enough because there’s so much familiarity with Christian mythology, and heaven and hell, and angels and demons. It was something we didn’t have to explain” (Hale). Barry believes that using elements of Christianity aids in his storytelling because the audience is already familiar with the subject matter; he can build on that known material (Hale). Barry also chose to enhance the context of each episode by titling the episodes with a passage from either the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament. According to Barry, they were “trying to find the spirit of the episode and the spirit of the show, and then finding verses that captured maybe something that was ironic, or something that was specific” (O’Keefe). The passages have “a connection to the episode they’re attached to, but they also all speak to the philosophy of the show a little bit, as well. Sometimes, it’s done in jests or irony. Sometimes it’s done in very literal terms. It was our way of including the audience in a bit of an Easter egg hunt” (O’Keefe). The

audience can easily pick up on the religious elements of the show as well as the critiques of Christianity that are present. Nothing is hidden in *Warrior Nun*; it is all overt connections to Christianity.

While the audience can learn about these shows from commercials and other forms of advertisement, those who actually elect to watch them have made the conscious decision to do so. All of these shows are behind a paywall; both Netflix and Amazon are subscription services. This changes the demographic of the audience; a person cannot just turn on their television, and these shows would appear on public access. This does not change the fact that the audience brings their own interpretation to the shows and may consciously or subconsciously begin to conflate religion with violence. The creators of the works are mostly upfront about their source material, and the audience can detect this. However, the audience may not be able to separate the creator's interpretation of religion from the religion practiced by believers. What further complicates the field is that there are different interpretations of religion by those who would consider themselves believers. This complex situation should be examined as it adds a layer of understanding to the field of religious studies.

### **Chapter Summaries**

Chapter One focuses on *Ares*, a Dutch television series that utilizes the idea of “cult” to create the theme of the series. Television series often rely on the basic principles of “cult” to create dark, eerie, and often violent examples of “cults”. *Ares* uses the themes of religion manifest in its use of cult as well as violence to capture the audience’s attention. While violence is sometimes contested, for the most part the characters and the series itself accepts violence and it is often encouraged. Chapter Two focuses on *The Chilling*

*Adventures of Sabrina* and how the creators utilize biblical narratives to create the plots. The biblical passages of 1 Kings 3:16-28 and 2 Kings 6:26-29, when used in the Netflix Original Series *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, have taken on a positive valence for the violence, which is a turn from the negative valence that the biblical passages have in their original context. In addition, the creators of the show comment on the power structures that are present in organized religion and offer their own interpretation of how religions can function. They propose the idea that there are power structures that can create prosperity. However, this does not mean that these structures stop the violence that can be present in the religion. Chapter three focuses on *Good Omens*, which utilizes characters and narratives from *Revelation, the last book of the New Testament* to form its plot. Through the characters of the demon Crowley and the angel Aziraphale, the show challenges the conventionally held beliefs of who and what are good and evil in *Revelation*. Crowley and Aziraphale contest the violence that other characters in the show participate in and wish to participate in. Chapter Four focuses on *Warrior Nun*. The television series deals with violence through the themes of good versus evil, The Church versus its members, and religion versus science. Within all of these “battles,” violence is used by both sides to gain triumph, violence done by those who are religious (nun), is usually portrayed as accepted. However, violence done to the nuns is contested and portrayed as negative use of violence. In the conclusion, I return to the issue of the conflation of religion and violence with attention to how the audience perceives the violence and how that violence can affect their views of religion. Throughout this thesis project, we can see that television series that use the themes of religion and violence challenge and work to reinforce "common" views of organized religion, and the audience

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## A Thirst for “Religious Violence”: A case of “Cult” and Television Media

### **Introduction**

There is a plethora of television series and movies that have delved into the topic of “cults,” both fictional and historical. Most recently, streaming platforms such as Netflix have launched documentaries and original series exploring “cults.” These include the Netflix original documentary *Bikram: Yoga, Guru, Predator*, the Netflix original series *Apostle*, and the Netflix original series *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*. Some of these movies and series attempt to document real communities that have been labeled as “cults,” some use religious sources to create fictional plotlines, while others use the “basic principles,” or the modern connotations associated with the “cults” for comedic effect. It is important to understand what the word “cult” denotes and what “basic principles” are normally associated with the term. “The word ‘cult’ comes from the Latin *cultus deorum* or ‘care of the gods.’ In the ancient world, the term had a neutral connotation as cults would worship and ‘care for’ a particular god” (Laycock 443). In other words, the term “originally referred to an organized system of worship” (443). However, the term has, for the most part in colloquial speech, lost this connotation. Some “common characteristics [or basic principles] ascribed to cults include having a charismatic authoritarian leader, using deceptive recruiting practices, demanding a “‘totalizing’ religious lifestyle that may include isolation from outsiders or working without pay, and financial and sexual abuse to followers” (443). Television series often rely on the basic principles to create dark, eerie, and often violent illustrations of “cults”. An example of one such television series is the

Netflix original series *Ares*<sup>6</sup>. The Netflix Original Series *Ares* uses the themes of religion manifest in its use of cult as well as violence. The themes of religion and violence can be further explored through Galtung’s theory of violence, David Riches’ concept of the triangle of violence, Russell T. McCutcheon’s discussion of myth, Ronald L. Grimes’ discussion of ritual, and Hector Avalos’ concept of scarce resource theory.

### **The framework of *Ares*<sup>7</sup>**

The Netflix original series *Ares* is about a Dutch “secret society” in which the elite members of Dutch society work to sustain their deity, Beal<sup>8</sup>. The members of *Ares* are supposed to feed Beal by vomiting up black liquid and dumping the liquid into a golden bowl, which deposits the liquid into an unseen chamber below. This chamber does not lead to a woman, the deity Beal, as the audience and most *Ares* members are led to believe. The black liquid is collected in a large whirlpool in a different chamber. It turns out that the black liquid is a manifestation of all of the members’ guilt. This makes sense; a person can only produce the black liquid after they have done something that would cause guilt most often, this is murder. The point of the expulsion of the black liquid is so that the members of *Ares* do not feel remorse about anything that they had to do to move forward in either the “secret society” or in Dutch society as a whole. The series purports that its members

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<sup>6</sup> The term “cult” in its original meaning meant “care of gods.” The Netflix original series *Ares* uses most of the basic principles associated with the modern connotation of “cult” to drive the narrative forward. It is important to recognize that within the world of the series, the members of *Ares* society use the term “secret society” instead of “cult.” In the United States, and perhaps other places, the term “secret society,” when combined with the fact that the society worships a deity and has to murder to create offerings for said deity, can often be interpreted as a code word for “cult.”

<sup>7</sup> *Ares* is a television series whose original language is Dutch. The series was dubbed in English as well as several other languages when it was released on Netflix. All terms that are used in the series are translations.

<sup>8</sup> Pronounced bae–ae-l.

have taken part in the Dutch slave trade, which demonstrates that Ares was established at least in the 16th century. The point is that the members of Ares have been in control of Dutch society for a long time, and the only reason that Dutch society has been able to be so successful is through the members of Ares.

The structure of Ares is complex; “novices” are recruited and put through initiation or hazing rituals. These rituals are extremely violent and often involve murder. The highest rank in the society that the “novices” are told they can make it to is “president”. To become “president,” a candidate must kill someone who is most precious to them. This killing is termed a “sacrifice”, according to the society’s principles, its members can only continue to thrive if sacrifices are made. Some of the examples of sacrifice that are shown in the series include a child, a young girl, and a father. The killing of this person is supposed to commence the processes of expelling all guilt that the individual who is doing the killing has bottled up. However, it is made clear that the “president” is not the highest rank in Ares as there are many “senior members” who work together to not only choose who will be the next president of Ares but what they do after they become president. In other words, the “president” is a puppet for the truly elite of Ares. Only this upper echelon of the society knows the truth about Beal and the “president” only becomes privy to this information after they pass their test.

### **Galtung’s Theory of Violence and *Ares***

The theme of violence is the backbone for the television series *Ares*. To discuss the use of violence in more depth: it is important to start with some foundational definitions of violence. Johan Galtung defines “violence as avoidable insults to basic human needs, and more generally to life, lowering the real level of needs satisfactorily below what is

potentially possible” (292). According to this definition, there is always another option before one has to choose violence; however, within the world that *Ares* has created, this is not the case. According to the tenets of Ares society, the only way to progress within the cult and greater Dutch society is through violence. In addition, this definition points to the concepts of direct violence and contested violence. If violence can be avoided, then its use is contested, meaning some of those involved do not agree with its use. The concept of violence as contested is further discussed by David Riches regarding his concept of the triangle of violence.

Direct violence in the series is committed in the form of murder. Several members of the cult perform murder in order to give an offering to Beal. One of the most prominent characters to perform this action in the series is Rosa. The way that the elite members of Ares see it, the only way to demonstrate complete loyalty and purge all guilt is to murder. The members of Ares also interpret direct violence in the form of murder as a survival need. According to Galtung, violence can stem from a survival need, which leads to killing (292). Not only does the killing allow the members to survive and thrive within Ares, but it also allows them to survive and thrive in general Dutch society. Survival appears in two elements of Ares societies; the offerings to Beal are what fuel the deity, allowing it to survive. In addition, the members of Ares are only allowed to remain within the society if they can produce the liquid to give to Beal. The elite members of Ares use their connections to achieve a greater position within Dutch society.

Another form of direct violence, demonstrated in the television series, is suicide, though it manifests as a form of indirect violence as well. The direct violent act is taking one’s own life. However, suicide is triggered when the guilt of the members of Ares’s

violent actions are released. One of the main characters, Jacob, becomes infected with the black liquid of guilt, and it takes over two of his fingers. When Jacob touches another person with these infected fingers, the person is forced to remember all of their guilt. This guilt is so strong that it causes them to commit suicide. Jacob's role in these suicides can be examined further as an example of indirect violence. Jacob did not ask for the ability to release the guilt of Ares members. In episode two, Jacob explores the tunnels of the Ares building and follows the flow of black liquid through pipes. While in the tunnels, he touches wall that sticks to his hand. Touching this wall causes Jacob to have a vision of a being covered in black liquid ("Episode 2" 16:56 – 20:25). After touching the wall Jacob's hands start to turn black. By episode three, two Jacob's figures have turn completely black ("Episode Three" 1:10). Later on, in episode three, while attending a party, Jacob touches the current president of Ares, Joost, with his black fingers ("Episode Three" 21:33 – 21:40). Only the audience is privy to what happens next; Joost has visions of a man that he killed. The guilt from this memory is overwhelming, and Joost commits suicide ("Episode Three" 22:00 -24:25). Jacob's role is a form of indirect violence because he is aware of what his touch will do. Nevertheless, he does not perform the violent act of killing himself. While the direct violence of murder is accepted by the members of Ares and even encouraged, the violence of suicide is brushed over or intentionally ignored. The act of suicide itself is not seen as negative instead: it is the breaking of the normal structure of violence that is viewed in a negative light.

Galtung also posits that "cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, and even feel, right or at least not wrong" (291). These acts of violence are "legitimized and thus rendered acceptable in society" (292). This is one of the most

important aspects of violence when it comes to the discussion of violence within a cult. David Riches also discusses violence as structural; he notes that the system is “*dependent on individual actions*” (“Aggression, War, Violence” 294). In other words, the system cannot be used as a scapegoat for the actions of its members. Jacob should still be held accountable for his role in the suicides, Rosa should be held accountable for killing Jacob, and the other members of Ares should be held accountable for all the violent actions they have done in the name of the society. Not only does violence viewed as a part of the culture and the fabric of Ares legitimize violence for the members: the society also has measures in place to remove all guilt from these violent actions. On some level, there is a recognition that any use of violence is wrong, yet the members have created mechanisms within the society to avoid culpability for their actions.

Riches also discusses violence in broad terms in his article, “The Phenomenon of Violence”. He defines violence as ““the intentional rendering of physical hurt on another human being”” (4). This is quite a broad definition that could do with some sharpening, which he does later on in the piece. Riches refines his definition of violence as ““an act of physical hurt deemed legitimate by the performer and illegitimate by (some) witnesses”” (8). Riches’ definition relates to his theory of the triangle of violence in which he examines situations through the lens of the perpetrator of violence, the victim of the violence, and the witnesses.

### **Riches’ Triangle of Violence and *Ares***

In David Riches’ discussion of the victim triangle, he posits that “‘violence’ is very much a word of those who witness, or who are victims of certain acts, rather than those who perform them” (3). He states that “witnesses may come to accept the performer’s view

of things or may come to detract from this view; performers may come to accept the opinions of detracting witnesses – and cease or modify the act they are perpetrating” (9). While there are many instances of violence within the television series *Ares* that can be explored through the concept of the victim triangle, there are two that stand out in particular for their complexity. The first of which involves Rosa, Jacob, and the alumni of Ares.

Within the first triangle, Rosa is the perpetrator of violence, Jacob is the victim, and the alumni of Ares are the witnesses. In this instance, the violence that is being perpetrated is accepted by all those involved. During the time frame of the ritual, it is the audience who must initially label the act as violent. Rosa, Jacob, and the alumni of Ares interpret this event as being a necessary step to ensure the continued success of Ares. In episode eight, Rosa has been chosen to become the next president of Ares. In order to become president, she must follow the customary practice of killing someone who is most precious to her. This person happens to be Jacob, her best friend, and the person who introduced her to Ares. Gathered in the large room, the elite members of Ares look on as Rosa stabs Jacob in the heart (“Episode Eight” 11:42-15:15”).

Jacob, the victim of the violent act, wants Rosa to be able to free Beal, as he thinks Beal is a female deity that is being held hostage in the basement of the Ares building. Because Jacob believes that his death will bring about the freedom of Beal, not only does Jacob accept it, but he is also eager for Rosa to complete the task and become president of the society. Jacob believes that his death has a higher purpose, and Rosa will use her opportunity to fulfill this purpose. Jacob might not have been so eager to sacrifice himself if the elite members of *Ares* told the truth about what Beal was. Without access to all the accurate information, Jacob willingly accepted his role. The alumni of Ares also lack all of

the information to fully comprehend the situation. The alumni want Rosa to become president because the true mastermind behind Ares, Mr. Zwanenburg, has informed them that Beal is upset with how the society is being run. In order to remedy the situation, Rosa must be elected president in order to please Beal and bring new life into the society. The alumni do not view this act as violent; instead, they view it through a lens of maintaining order. If the murder of Jacob did not occur, other, far worse, consequences could arise. It is the perceived threat to the alumni and all other members of Ares that change the valence of this action.

Rosa, during the ceremony, does not view the situation as violent; she views it as a necessary action. The act has a level of legitimacy as the alumni of Ares support the act as does Jacob. Rosa acts only after Jacob provides his reasoning for agreeing to his murder; however, after Rosa kills Jacob, she is supposed to offer the customary black liquid to Beal. Instead of vomiting it into the golden bowl, she swallows it (“Episode Eight” 21:11 – 22:28). This action allows her to keep the guilt that she feels for killing her best friend. Both the killing of Jacob and the swallowing of the guilt show that Rosa had a specific strategy in mind while she was performing the act of violence as well as after the violence occurred. According to Riches, “a particular act will very likely have several explicit purposes, one of which will probably predominate and will therefore give the act its primary sense of reason” (5). Rosa’s predominant purpose in both acts was to take over Ares so that she would no longer have to answer to the elite of Ares; she sought a fundamental change in the society’s structure.

In the second triangle, Jacob is the perpetrator, the victims include Jacob as well as the individuals whom Jacob caused to commit suicide, and the individuals who committed

suicide are the witnesses. While this action occurs several times in the series before Rosa kills Jacob, one of the most shocking for the viewer is the first time it occurs in episode 3. Jacob, after his fingers have turned black, attends a party in honor of Hester de Hoogh, a member of Ares who achieved her fame in neuroscience through the efforts of Ares. Jacob encounters the current Ares president, Joost, and touches him with his black fingers. Jacob's fingers have been infected with the guilt of all Ares members. When Jacob touches Joost, he returns all the guilt Joost previously expelled. The guilt and the reliving of the murder are too much for Joost to deal with. He ends up slitting his own throat in a shower during the party. Joost is the only one in the room when he commits suicide. This suicide also occurs outside of the view of the audience, and thus the only person who can view the actual act is the victim ("Episode Three" 22:00 -24:25).

Labeling Jacob as the perpetrator is quite complex. There is an element of fantasy involved, as the guilt appears to have a mind of its own. The guilt not only takes over the people that Jacob touches, nonetheless it also takes over him. The guilt that has transferred to Jacob causes him to see visions; these visions impair Jacob's judgment. Jacob can also be considered a victim in this scenario as the black liquid of guilt is recognized as the perpetrator. While Riches' does recognize situations where the victim may not be fully human, within the victim triangle, the perpetrator is a human<sup>9</sup>. It is possible for the audience to stretch this concept and view the liquid as a deity. This interpretation would fall in line with what the elite members of Ares, who know what Beal actually is, believe. However,

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<sup>9</sup> See Riches' "Aggression, War, Violence" page 294. In his section labeled "Violence where the victim is not fully human: violence towards very young infants, fetuses, animals and inanimate objects".

Jacob does need to touch an individual to set the violence into motion, thus, his touch perpetrates the violence.

After Jacob touches Joost, Joost ends up reliving the killing of a man who he whacked over the head with a shovel. Joost as the witness does not interpret his death to be legitimate or illegitimate: he views it as the only option to cease feeling guilt. Joost's reasoning is never fully explored by the television series, and this makes the situation difficult to assess. After viewing the other suicides that happen within the series, it is easy to presume that the feeling of guilt is so powerful, they cause the person to want to end their lives. This also plays into the fact that part of the ritual of Ares is to expel the liquid guilt to continue committing violence without remorse. In terms of witnesses, Joost is the only one present for the act. However, several characters find Joost's body. These members of Ares, including Rosa, deem the act illegitimate as they work to cover up the fact that his death was a suicide. Instead, they concoct a story to tell Joost's parents, that Joost was alive when he left the party, and no one knows that happened.

### **Non-physical (Mental) Violence and *Ares***

The second triangle of violence can also be examined as an example of mental violence. Riches defines mental violence as the "inflicting upon another of a deleterious psychological impact" ("Aggression, War, Violence" 294). It is the regaining of thoughts that causes Jacob to commit suicide. The guilt he regained consumed his mind, and he could no longer live with it and himself. Jacob also suffered mental violence at the hands of the black liquid. The guilt for the liquid caused him to see visions of a woman who Jacob assumed was Beal though this women's purpose is never fully explained. Yet, it is made clear that she is not Beal. While the images that Jacob received from the liquid were not

violent in nature, they caused Jacob to commit violence. Overall, this triangle is complicated because the catalyst for violence does not exist in reality. The fantastical element complicates the actions of all parties involved. Yet, it demonstrates that some actions of violence are not as simplistic as they first appear.

Another example of mental violence is when Rosa is forced to take an internship away from a girl who deserved it more than her. In episode four, Rosa is “rewarded” with an internship as a research assistant for neuroscientist Hester de Hoogh. She is granted this internship after she lies to Joost’s parents about his suicide that occurred at Hoogh’s party. The internship spot should have gone to another “novice” who deserved it on the ground of the work she has done in neuroscience. Nonetheless, Rosa feels guilty for this. Carmen, the daughter of Mr. Zwanenburg, convince her that that taking the internship is fine and that it will only help her within Ares. After this interaction with Carmen, Rosa vomits the black liquid for the first time. Carmen insists that this is the way that things have to be (“Episode Four” 14:22 – 14:54, 18:37 - 20:14). This incident is the catalyst for Rosa’s continuation into increasingly violent actions, including the murder of Jacob. Carmen’s insistence causes psychological harm to Rosa. In conjunction with Mr. Zwanenburg’s lying about Ares and insisting that Rosa is doing the right thing causes Rosa to stop being able to think for herself. As she notes in episode eight while talking to Jacob, she does not even know who she is anymore. The manipulation of Rosa can be viewed as a form of violence, specifically mental violence (“Episode Eight” 11:42-15:15).

Carmen also experiences mental violence at the hands of her father when he makes her believe that she will become president. Carmen convinces her father to let her take the test that would make her president, unaware that the test involved killing something she

considered her most prized possession. Carmen's father knows that she will not be able to pass the test, yet he still allows her to be subjected to it. In episode seven, Carmen is brought into the same room that Rosa will later be brought to. However, the alumni do not attend this ceremony. Waiting in the room is a prenatal baby in an incubator hidden under the sheet. Carmen is told that she must shut off the child's incubator. Carmen is deeply pained by just the idea of having to shut off the incubator. Carmen's father harasses her and tells her she has to shut it off. Instead, she drops to the floor, shaking. Presumably, the child was not real as Carmen's father shuts off the incubator from a remote as he leaves the room ("Episode Seven" 15:30 – 20:20). For the rest of the series: Carmen is changed and no longer is present in Ares though she is still considered a "novice". Carmen's father knew that she would not be able to kill a child, and he knew that she would not be the same after she was subjected to the situation.

### **Appeal to Myth and the Justification of Violence in *Ares***

Another angle to view the violence perpetrated by the members of Ares is through the lenses of myth. Russell T. McCutcheon points out that the term "myth" is often used to denote "widely shared beliefs that are simply false" (190). However, myth can be understood as "ordinary human means of fashioning and authorizing their lived-in and believed in 'world'" (200). McCutcheon also suggests that myths should be reconceived as "mythmaking," which denotes an "ongoing process of constructing, authorizing, and reconstructing social identities or social formations" (202-3). McCutcheon states that "social formation by means of mythmaking is nothing other than the reasonable response to the inevitable social disruptions, contradictions, and incongruities that characterize the

ordinary human condition” (206). With this understanding in mind, the myth of Beal can be examined further.

In episode eight, Mr. Zwanenburg explains to Rosa that Ares uses the myth as a way to scare the other members into submission. The liquid that has been named Beal has existed before the creation of Amsterdam. It is unclear who originated the myth of Beal, yet it is clear that the myth was created by a human being, most likely in the 16th century, as that is the earliest time the society is linked to in the series. It can be assumed that some founding members of the society created the myth while they were forming the society. The elite members of Ares society work together to perpetuate the myth that Beal is a female deity that needs offerings from the members of the society to survive. This myth functions as a foundational myth for the society as well as something that holds the members together (“Episode Eight” 18:50 - 21:01).

The elite members of Ares no longer have to believe in the myth because they have already reaped the rewards of belonging to the society. The elite members of Ares have already achieved fame and respect in their respective fields in Dutch society and have reaped the monetary benefits that comes with their success. They continue to propagate the myth in order to keep the rest of the society in order as well as to make sure that new members will join. If Ares were to fall and be exposed, all members would lose their positions of power within Dutch society as well as within Ares. The myth no longer functions as the driving force to create the black liquid; instead, the elite members are able to harness the power of the black liquid to make decisions as Mr. Zwanenburg tells Rosa in episode eight.

The myth of Beal functions not only as a way to hold the society together, but it also functions as a way to justify violence. As Mr. Zwanenburg explains in episode eight, Beal lives in everyone and it only manifests itself as a black liquid when someone has a need to expel the guilt. There is nothing special that Ares has created; every person, even those who do not participate in Ares, could produce the black liquid that Ares has named Beal. What makes the actions of the Ares members special is their membership to the society. The members' actions of murder would be seen as unnecessary violence in any other social setting. However, because the members believe that their offerings have a higher purpose, they are not simply performing acts of violence they are performing offerings. Understood within the context of the myth, the members of Ares are simply performing their duty. In addition to the myth, the violent actions are also framed as a ritual that helps to further justify the members' violent actions as legitimate.

### **Appeal to Ritual and the Justification of Violence in *Ares***

Ronald L. Grimes, in his piece on ritual, brings forward a definition by Stanley Tambiah. Tambiah defines ritual as a “style of action, one that is formal, stylized, prescribed, symbolic, non-technological, repetitive, tradition, and so on” (262). Grimes also mentions that rites are transformative. In order to discuss transformation, one must “specify what a rite changes and to... what degree of change transpired” (267). Grimes notes: in a rite of initiation, “transformation may occur in self-perception, relationships with cosmic or divine power, access to power, knowledge, or good, kin- and other social relationship” (267). This definition of ritual and the specific attention to a rite of intuition can be used to further explore Rosa's murder of Jacob.

Rosa's murder of Jacob is framed as a ritual within the structure of Ares. This ritual of murder was created with the idea that the one performing the violence would advance in rank within the society. In addition, after the ritual is complete, the member is told the truth about what Beal actually is. The rite also changes that member's relationship with the other members of Ares. As president, they are above the "novices" that they joined with, they can more freely communicate with the alumni of Ares, and they are controlled by the elite members of Ares. For the performer of the ritual, only the change in status within the society is a known consequence. Due to the myth of Beal, the member assumes that they are closer to the deity because they can give her a large offering. The intent of the ritual is to bring the member performing it deeper into the folds of the society. The increased knowledge and the rise in status are supposed to impress the member and keep their ambitions satiated. The disparity in knowledge about the true function of the ritual would normally not cause tension as the society has not crumbled. However, Rosa could not accept that she did not understand the purpose of the ritual, and thus the ritual created a rift between her and the society.

David Riches also discusses ritual in the context of violence. Riches points out that "normal notions of intentionality are absent... participants conceive of one another as if objects" ("Aggression, War, Violence" 294). The ritual happens outside of the boundary of everyday life, and thus it does not have to be viewed in conjunction with the normal social constraints. Instead, it can be viewed as an act that is beneficial for the society. As opposed to seeing the murder that initiates a member into the role of president as a violent act, the member sees it as a sacrifice for Beal. While the alumni and the elite members of society recognize that the person being killed is the thing that future president most adores,

the person is just an obstacle for that member. Emotional attachments are frowned upon, and thus the ceremony instills within the new president the idea that people are just objects, obstacles, and hurdles in achieving what they want. This notion of people as objects extends beyond the boundaries of the ritual as it is a skill that members must learn in order to become a highly functioning member of the Ares society.

### **Scarce Resource Theory, Violence, and Power in *Ares***

Another angle to approach the violence that occurs within *Ares* is with Hector Avalos' scarce resource theory. According to Avalos, "most violence is due to scarce resources, real or perceived... people perceive that there is not enough of something they value, then conflict may ensue to maintain or acquire that resource" (555). Avalos also remarks that "when religion causes violence, it often does so because it has created a new scarce resource" (555). Within the world of *Ares*, there are two scarce resources; the role of president, and the black liquid that is offered to Beal. The role of president is a real scarce resource as only one person can occupy this position within the society. The black liquid is a perceived sacred resource: the "novices" are led to believe that they need to achieve a certain rank within Ares in order to produce the black liquid. These two scarce resources created by the society cause infighting amongst the "novices".

The black liquid that is offered to Beal is touted as a scarce resource in order to make the novices believe that they need to belong to Ares in order to offer it. Though Mr. Zwanenburg revealed to Rosa that this is not the case, anyone can produce the black liquid if they perform an act that causes them enough guilt. In episode four, Carmen, the daughter of Mr. Zwanenburg, becomes jealous of Rosa because she is able to produce the black liquid. After all, Carmen has been taught that only those who are elder members should be

given the privilege. However, this jealousy does not cause Carmen to want to inflict physical harm on Rosa. Instead, Carmen tortures Rosa by bringing Rosa to see her mother, who is in the psychiatric ward of the hospital. Carmen intends to force Rosa's mother to remember her past as a member of Ares. This causes Rosa's mother to break down, which upsets Rosa ("Episode Six" 16:30 – 20:50). Carmen wants Rosa to become disillusioned with society and leave so that Carmen can become favored again. In episode seven, five novices kidnap Rosa in order to make her produce the black liquid. They do this as an effort to prove that she is unworthy of the internship because she has not achieved the same level within the society that they have. Having access to the black liquid proves that the individual is worthy of belonging to the higher rung of society. Rosa does not produce the black liquid, and because of this, the group touts her as being a liar in an attempt to ostracize her from the group ("Episode Seven" 20:30 – 21:22).

The title of president is also a real scarce resource within Ares society. The role of president is supposed to only be given to elder members of the society; those who have been members for a decent amount of time (this time is not specified in the series). The role of president is assumed by the younger members to go to an individual from a family with a lineage of belonging to Ares. In addition, the role of president has only gone to males in the society's nearly two-hundred-year existence. In addition, the president of Ares is chosen by the elite of the society. These parameters make it difficult to obtain the position; thus, most novices fight each other to make themselves more noticeable. One of the most significant battles is between Carmen and Rosa. After Rosa expels the black liquid for the first time, Carmen believes that her father prefers Rosa over her. For the rest of the

series, Carmen tries to outshine Rosa and tries to demonstrate that she is more worthy of the position. Though as previously explained, Carmen is unsuccessful.

In conjunction with scarce resource theory, Avalos mentions group privileging which, “refers to the idea that certain groups have privileges and rights not granted to those outside of the group” (562). In this instance, the privilege is the scarce resource. In the case of Ares society, the privilege is being a part of a lineage of the members of Ares. In episode five, Marije, the girl Rosa took the internship away from, complains to her brother Joost. She explains that Rosa should not have gotten the internship because she does not come from an “Ares family,” meaning, Rosa’s parents nor her ancestors have been a part of the society (“Episode Five” 7:58 – 8:15). The younger members of Ares are convinced that lineage is one of the most important factors in becoming a member in the first place. Rosa is looked down upon because she does not come from an Ares family. In addition, the specific “in-group” has a lineage within Ares which are all rich white families. Presumably, these families are rich because of their connection to Ares, but race does play a role. Rosa not only does not belong to an Ares family, but she is also poor, and she is half black. Rosa’s economic status and race make it glaringly obvious that she does not belong to the privileged group, which makes it easier to target her.

### **Audience Perception: Fantasy and Culpability**

While the audience may be shocked by the sheer amount of bloody violence that is depicted by the television series *Ares*, they are brought into a realm where this violence is accepted and even desired. When the audience suspends its connection to the real world, they are permitted to disregard modern social conventions. While most of the acts of violence could happen in the real world, there are several that cause the audience to view

the series as fantasy; these include a person posing as a cadaver in order to be killed and a man ripping off his own face. The series employs these elements of fantasy in order to further remove the audience from reality. The black liquid is shown to have a mind of its own; the liquid infected Jacob through a wall even though the audience is shown that it is housed in a whirlpool in the middle of a room. The black liquid also causes very specific visions, visions of former murders. These fantasy elements help dramatize acts of violence in such a way that audience is willing to accept them.

The series also makes it easy for the audience to side with Rosa and Jacob. While they may have perpetrated violence, their violence is legitimated within the world of Ares. Rosa and Jacob are portrayed as the wronged parties. The series accomplishes this by using the basic characteristic of a cult in order to define Ares. By framing Ares as a cult, the audience is led to believe that the individual members should not be held accountable for their actions; it also brings the series back into the realm of possibility. Mr. Zwanenburg, the true leader of Ares, has maintained the ruse that Beal is a female deity that the society must support, and the only way to do so is through violent acts. The audience feels bad for Rosa and Jacob and are led to believe that without the influence of the society, they would have never committed violence. Within the series, Mr. Zwanenburg stands in for a charismatic authoritarian leader. The elite members of the group use deceptive recruiting practices. They lie about the purpose of the production of the black liquid. Ares also forces a demanding and ‘totalizing’ lifestyle on its members. The “novices” are supposed to move into the Ares building until they move up in the ranks. The production of the black liquid ends up changing the person’s personality and makes them want to stay within the group. The group also promises that if the members of Ares stay within Ares they will succeed in

Dutch society. In addition, the members of Ares are constantly abusing each other, mentally and physically.

With these characteristics in mind, the audience is led to believe that Rosa and Jacob were taken advantage of by the society and thus should not be held accountable for their actions. The audience may even feel sorry for Carmen and how her father abused her and allowed her to believe in the lies the society perpetuates. The blame then shifts to Mr. Zwanenburg, who is held accountable for all that has occurred within the series. Indirect violence, in the form of mental harm, becomes the form of violence that the audience focuses on. While the audience can accept the bloody violence that occurs when Ares is seen as a positive entity, once the truth is revealed, the indirect violence becomes the most contested form of violence within the series. Because the audience ultimately sides with Rosa and Jacob their preconceived notions of cult can be reinforced thus producing the mindset that organized societies that worship a deity are nefarious. If the audience is able to link the ideas of cult and organized religion together, the negative feelings that have toward cults might be projected onto religion as a whole, which is not a desirable outcome.

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## *A Chilling Acceptance of Violence: A Case of Biblical Narrative and Television Media*

### **Introduction**

Adaptations of Biblical stories into film and television are nothing new. There are plenty of television shows today that do not shy away from biblical themes, narratives, and characters; some examples are Netflix's *Lucifer* and NBC's *Kings*. While these television series alert their audience to the fact that they will be dealing with the Hebrew or Christian Bible from the get-go, other television shows are less forthcoming. Netflix's *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is one such show. *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (CAOS) is about a young half-mortal half-witch teen, Sabrina Spellman, who lives with her Aunts Hilda and Zelda after the mysterious death of her parents. Her family belongs to the Church of Night and worships Satan, who provides witches and warlocks with their full powers after they sign the Book of the Beast during their dark baptism, or so the audience is led to believe. Young Sabrina must navigate high school and witch school all while learning to deal with the various demonic creatures that can rear their ugly heads at any moment.

The television series' use of biblical themes and narratives abound, as do criticisms of the Christian church and modern-day society. As Monica S. Cyrino states in her piece on television and film adaptations, "the image of the ancient world on screen can be used to support contemporary political goals, to interrogate current social issues, or to engage in cultural debates about the modern world's connection to the classical past" (1). *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* uses this approach to biblical narratives. It is important to remember that the biblical stories themselves have a goal within the context of the Hebrew Bible. The television series also has a goal and something that the audience can take away from it, even if it is not the same as what they would take away if they read the biblical passage

alone. Because the television series has its own motives that set the stage for which these stories are told, these motives guide why certain elements can be found in the Biblical version of the story and not the television series and vice-versa.

In season one's Christmas special, Sabrina, her family, and all the witches and warlocks celebrate the Winter Solstice. Each house must light a Yule Log to prevent evil spirits from entering their homes. Unfortunately for the Spellman family, the Mother of Demons, Lilith, snuffs their fire, which allows the Yule Lads to enter their home. The Yule Lads are protected by their "mother" Gryla, and only she can call them back to the mountains. Through the character of Gryla, two biblical stories that deal with violence against children are woven into the episode's narrative. The biblical passages of 1 Kings 3:16-28 and 2 Kings 6:26-29, when used in the Netflix Original Series *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, have taken on a positive valence for the violence, which is a turn from the negative valence that the biblical passages have in their original context.

### **Kings Overview**

The book of Kings is a retelling of the life of specific monarchs to "make known their righteousness or wickedness and the reward that they would receive from the Lord for their deeds or punishment" (Cogan, 1 Kings 88-89). The author of Kings is considered to be a "Deuteronomist or Deuteronomistic Historian" (96). One of the goals of Kings is to speak of complete devotion to YHWH (96). The stories in Kings serve a purpose, and the female characters are only present to assist in the storytelling of the biblical monarchs. The female characters in both narratives lack a background and real character development. The stories are sparse in details and can be confusing for the audience; however, that is precisely why these stories are used in television adaptations. As Kristine Hendriksen

Garroway states in her piece on film and television adaptations of biblical stories, “while poetry or paintings may fill in some of the gaps, screen representations present a complete narrative and dictate its content” (54). The television show *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* fills in the apparent gaps in the narratives of 1 Kings 3:16-28 and 2 Kings 6:26-29 by conflating the two texts and adding a background to the characters involved.

### **1 Kings 3:16-28**

The story of 1 Kings 3:16 – 28 falls under the heading of “The Judgment of a Wise King” (Cogan, 1 Kings 193). The point of the story is to inform the reader that King Solomon has been granted wisdom by YHWH and that this wisdom allows him to “render clever and difficult judgments” (196). In the narrative, two women approach the king, one of the women begins to tell their story. As the story goes, the women both gave birth around the same time, and they were living in the same house. One night one of the women rolls over her own baby. The woman who rolled over the baby replaces the dead baby with the other woman's live baby. The accused woman refutes this and says she did no such thing. King Solomon decided that they should cut the baby in half and give one half to one woman and the other half to the other woman. One of the women cried out to save the baby. King Solomon recognized this and declared the woman who refused to let the baby get cut in half as the real mother.

One of the first downfalls of the story is that none of the women nor the child is named in the narrative. With the sole use of pronouns, it is difficult for the audience to keep track of who is the real mother and who is lying. In the end, is difficult to say if the true mother was the one who brought the complaint to the king or the one who accompanied the woman who complained. The audience never truly finds out who the “real” mother is

(195). There are also no witnesses present for the death of the woman's child or the baby swapping. Because there are no witnesses it was one woman's word against another. The biblical commentary states that lack of witnesses is the reason "the king would have to employ unconventional methods to determine the truth in the case;" however, this reads as a type of apologetics (194). Because the women are lacking depth in character and the story itself can be expanded upon, it makes a great candidate for television adaptation.

<sup>16</sup> Later, two women who were prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. <sup>17</sup> The one woman said, "Please, my lord, this woman and I live in the same house; and I gave birth while she was in the house. <sup>18</sup> Then on the third day after I gave birth, this woman also gave birth. We were together; there was no one else with us in the house, only the two of us were in the house. <sup>19</sup> Then this woman's son died in the night, because she lay on him. <sup>20</sup> She got up in the middle of the night and took my son from beside me while your servant slept. She laid him at her breast and laid her dead son at my breast. <sup>21</sup> When I rose in the morning to nurse my son, I saw that he was dead; but when I looked at him closely in the morning, clearly it was not the son I had borne." <sup>22</sup> But the other woman said, "No, the living son is mine, and the dead son is yours." The first said, "No, the dead son is yours, and the living son is mine." So they argued before the king.

<sup>23</sup> Then the king said, "The one says, 'This is my son that is alive, and your son is dead'; while the other says, 'Not so! Your son is dead, and my son is the living one.'" <sup>24</sup> So the king said, "Bring me a sword," and they brought a sword before the king. <sup>25</sup> The king said, "Divide the living boy in two; then give half to the one, and half to the other." <sup>26</sup> But the woman whose son was alive said to the king—because compassion for her son burned within her— "Please, my lord, give her the living boy; certainly do not kill him!" The other said, "It shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it." <sup>27</sup> Then the king responded: "Give the first woman the living boy; do not kill him. She is his mother." <sup>28</sup> All Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to execute justice. (*NRSV* 1 Kings 3:16-28)

## **2 Kings 6:26-29**

The narrative of 2 Kings 6:26-29 is named "A Famine in Samaria" (Cogan, 2 Kings 76). During the famine, a woman approaches the king and asks him for help. The woman tells the king that the woman who was with her told her to give up her son so that they both could eat him that day, and the next day they would eat her son. The wronged woman

continues to tell the king that the woman broke the deal and hid her son so they could not eat him. The story abruptly ends, and there is no closure for the women or their story. Unlike in 1 King 3:16-28, the king does not pass any judgment, nor does he aid the women in any way<sup>10</sup>. This is odd considering that the proceedings between the king and the woman "follow formal rules of address" (79). This would place the narrative in a court setting, but the king does not act as a judge. It is also important to note that "the gruesome story of the woman belongs to the conventional *topoi* of starvation under siege as depicted in biblical and Mesopotamian literature" (80). This could be used to explain why the narrative lacks closure and detail surrounding the women and their plight. However, these gaps in the story leave room for other narratives to be formed, as discussed below<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> Now as the king of Israel was walking on the city wall, a woman cried out to him, "Help, my lord king!" <sup>27</sup> He said, "No! Let the LORD help you. How can I help you? From the threshing floor or from the wine press?" <sup>28</sup> But then the king asked her, "What is your complaint?" She answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give up your son; we will eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.' <sup>29</sup> So we cooked my son and ate him. The next day I said to her, 'Give up your son and we will eat him.' But she has hidden her son." (NRSV 2 Kings 6:26-29)

### *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Some scholars may argue that because the king tears off his clothing in mourning, he has passed judgment through his grief. However, there is no formal sentencing and no formal punishment for the killing of the child. This is shocking because the narrative occurs within a legal context where the king acts as judge and jury. Because of this lack of a formal sentence and punishment, the audience may not interpret the tearing of clothing as an action that demonstrates judgment.

<sup>11</sup> Cannibalism is generally regarded as an illegitimate form of behavior in the Ancient Near East/Mediterranean as well as in modern-day. However, because the biblical narrative lacks an explicit rejection of the behavior (the king renders no judgment), it creates ambivalence within the narrative. This ambivalence is shocking given that there is a possible universal rejection of cannibalism, yet it leaves the judgment to the audience.

<sup>12</sup> There is intertextuality happening between the two biblical passages and the episode of *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. There are no direct one-to-one comparisons between the characters. However, there are many similarities in the roles and the actions of the characters in the biblical passages and the television episode. These similarities facilitate the conversation between the texts and allow the further exploration of the television episode in light of the biblical passages.

*The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* takes advantage of the gaps within the narratives of 1 Kings 3:16-18 and 2 Kings 6:26-29. The television series conflates the two texts through the character of Gryla<sup>13</sup>. Gryla becomes the wronged woman in the narrative of 2 Kings; it was her son that was eaten after she made a pact with another witch. Because there is no decision or retribution given at the end of 2 Kings, the television series makes it so that Gryla decided her own judgment. For the past thousand years, Gryla has been traveling the world and collecting orphaned children in an attempt to replace her lost son all the while adding to her blended family. She collects orphans because she feels that will be safer and better cared for with her (“Chapter Eleven” 34:27 – 34:35).

Gryla is summoned to the Spellman’s house to gather up her children, affectionately called the Yule Lads; however, Gryla finds out that Sabrina’s aunt Zelda is hiding baby Leticia<sup>14</sup>, a baby that does not belong to Zelda. Gryla claims that she has more of a right to the child than Zelda does; because she has been a mother before, and Zelda never has. Sabrina’s mother, Diana, appears and claims that she will decide who gets the child. She has the authority to speak given to her by Saint Lucia and the Demon Lucy<sup>15</sup>. Diana decides that baby Leticia should be placed in a circle, and Gryla and Zelda will stand on either side

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<sup>13</sup> The character of Gryla fits in with the motif of women who steal and threaten children. An example of one such figure is Lilith, who is also featured in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. This motif is further explained in *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature a Handbook*. See “Works Cited” for more information.

<sup>14</sup> Leticia is the daughter of Faustus and Constance Blackwood. Zelda is hiding Leticia from Faustus after the death of his wife Constance because she believes that Faustus will harm her because he was expecting twin boys, and one of the children ended up being a girl.

<sup>15</sup> Another interesting approach to examine both biblical narratives and their adaptation in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* would be to look at how the stories represent motherhood and what it means to be a mother both in biblical times and in the modern-day (2019). The story of Saint Lucy would come into play in this type of analysis because Lucy’s first interaction with faith and God, according to the Christian tradition, is through praying for the recovery of her mother as a child. The same saint that appeared to tell her that her mother would be saved is also the person who told her she would die a martyr (Savary 81).

of the circle. Gryla and Zelda need to hold onto one of the baby's arms, whoever pulls the baby out of the circle can claim the child. Zelda stops the proceedings by stating that she cannot harm the baby. Diana decides that the baby belongs to Gryla. Gryla leaves the Spellman's house, and Diana and Sabrina admit that they had a plan all along. Sabrina placed an enchantment on a teddy bear that made it appear to be Leticia. They replaced the real baby with the teddy bear before the whole proceedings began ("Chapter Eleven" 37:59 – 42:05).

### **Scarce Resource Theory in 2 Kings 6:26-29 and CAOS**

The passage 2 Kings 6:26-29 is set during a famine; because of this, the violent act of eating children can be examined through the lens of scarce resource theory. Hector Avalos proposes the theory that religions cause scarcity. He states that "most violence is due to scarce resources, real or perceived. Whenever people perceive that there is not enough of something they value, then conflict may ensue to maintain or acquire that resource" (555). These scarce resources can be tangible or intangible and can cause violence within a group or violence between two or more groups. Avalos argues that "when religion causes violence, it often does so because it has created new scarce resources" (555). In this case, religion does not cause violence but is something the people turn to rectify the violent act. In the passage, the king tells the woman that the Lord will help her. There is no human intervention in the situation that has arisen, due to a lack of food the woman saw eating their children as the only option; the scarcity of food resulted in violence. Another scarce resource could be God's intervention; there is no help provided even though the king said that the Lord's help was essentially her only option.

The series *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina as a whole* takes a different approach to scarce resources than the biblical passage 2 Kings 6:26-29. While the theme of scarce resources does not appear in the Christmas episode, it does appear in Season three. It is important to discuss this instant of scarce resources because it demonstrates that religion and scarce resources are not inherently intertwined. Season three of *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* posits that while religions can cause situations of scarcity, these situations are seen as fabrication through the realization that these “scarce” resources actuality exists in multitudes. Within the world of *CAOS*, scarcity is linked to the leadership of Father Blackwood and the worship of the Dark Lord, Lucifer. A situation of plenty arises when the Coven moves away from the worship of Lucifer and instead recognizes the power they have within themselves. Under the leadership of Father Blackwood, group privileging and access to power are perceived as scarce resources, yet, under the new leadership of Zelda Spellman, power is available to all with no limitations, and group privileging is destroyed through increased respect of individuality.

The scarce resource of group privileging exists between the witches that belong to the Coven of the Church of Night and the Hedge Witches, witches that the Church of Night has historically rejected. Group privileging “refers to the idea that certain groups have privileges and rights not granted to those outside the group. As such, those privileges become a scarce resource to outsiders” (562). In the realm of *CAOS*, Father Blackwood, the head of the Church of Night, determined which witches became a part of the Church of Night, thus deciding what witches can enter into the Coven. For all witches, a coven represents a familial community where they are valued, protected, and can participate in various religious rites. The witches who are not allowed into the Coven are left to survive

on their own in what can only be described as the wilderness and are outcast and deemed Hedge Witches.

In “Chapter Twenty-Six: All of Them Witches,” the audience is given more background information on several Hedge Witches including, Pesta, the witch of pestilence and disease, Gryla, the dark ages witch who controls the Yule Lads, Sycorax, a river witch, and Mambo Michele Marie LeFleur, a voodoo priestess (who technically is an occultist but included with the Hedge Witches). Under the leadership of Father Blackwood, these Hedge Witches were seen as undesirable and not worthy of joining the Coven of the Church of Night. While the Coven witches never state outright why the Hedge Witches were not accepted, it is clear to the audience that these witches have very particular sets of powers. The possession of these powers caused a rift between the Coven and the Hedge Witches. These Hedge Witches derive their power from other sources besides The Dark Lord Lucifer, thus making them a liability for the power structure of the Church of Night.

Under the new leadership of Zelda Spellman, the witches recognize that they have been manipulated by a male figurehead. This manipulation has not just occurred for these generations of witches; it has been forced upon witches since the creation of The Church of Night. They realize that there is more in common between the groups than they were initially led to believe. The witches recognize that all witch women who should be able to follow their own path, a path where they chose who are in their coven, not have it determined by a male leader. In “All Them Witches,” Mambo Marie tells the witches that they do not need to fight among themselves because “that is what men do” she states, “but we are women, n’est-ce pas? Witch women. We can do more than fight, can we not” (“Chapter Twenty-Six” 2:19 – 2:45). While the arguments that these women make as to

why they should band together mostly center around the idea of women helping and lifting out other women, they do not exclude men from participating in this new group. All witches are welcome no matter where they draw their power from. This new ideology of inclusion destroys the idea of group privileging amongst witches.

Another scarce resource that is developed by worshipping The Dark Lord Lucifer is power. The witches who belong to the Coven of the Church of Night believe that Lucifer is the one who grants them access to their witch powers. They also believe that Lucifer has the ability to take away these powers at any time, especially when he is unhappy with them. However, it is proven to be a false belief because the Hedge Witches draw their power from a different source, and Zelda Spellman finds that source while traveling through limbo. In “Chapter Twenty-Seven: Judas Kiss,” Zelda is shot, causing her to enter into limbo, a state where she must journey through to get back to the land of the living. In this realm, she is guided by her dead brother, Edward, to locate the true source of all witches’ power. Edward informs Zelda that he will guide her and follow her through this state so that she may find her own path. Edward takes Zelda through various points of her life, the past, present, and future.

Edward takes Zelda to her past, where she is shown an encounter with Father Blackwood when they were children studying in the Academy. In this memory, Zelda picks up a piece of paper with a new moon on it, which Blackwood tore out of a book and refused to show the young Zelda. Zelda is then taken to the present. In this scene, she is shown the day when Sabrina arrived on her and Hilda’s doorstep. Sabrina was dropped off in a basket; in this basket, there is a blanket embroidered with a half-moon. Finally, Zelda is shown her death, surrounded by many witches. On the wall, there are three images of the moon, the

new moon, the half-moon, and the full moon. Zelda recognizes that these images of the moon represent “madden, mother, and crown,” which are the phases of every witches’ life (“Chapter Twenty-Seven” 14:46 – 16:02, 23:53 - 26:30, 36:50 – 37:37, 47:10 – 49:05). This sequence demonstrates that Father Blackwood knew about the source of witches’ power, yet as High Priest of the Church of Knight, he continued to perpetuate the idea that witches had to rely on the Dark Lord and thus Father Blackwood’s guidance to have power. Father Blackwood and the Dark Lord worked together to maintain the ruse that witches had to participate in this religion of scarcity to have access to their powers. Yet, through Zelda’s realization, she knew that this was not the case. The presence of the moon motif in all of the stages of Zelda's memory also demonstrates that the signs of Hecate and the true source of witches' power were always present. However, no witch was ever taught to look for them, and thus they never knew what they meant. A religion of plenty was always an option. This option was hidden from the witches because the leaders of the Church of Night and Lucifer wanted to create a religion of scarcity.

In “Chapter Twenty-Eight: Sabrina is Legend,” Zelda, through the revelation of the phases of a witch’s life, realizes that the witches can call on the Triple Goddess, Hecate, as a source of power. This power is not literally drawn from the goddess Hecate but the lineage that all of the witches belong to. Zelda proclaimed that even when she did not recognize the power of Hecate, Hecate was always there to help her and to guide her. Hecate is the mother of all. When the witches recognize that they can connect with their power through Hecate, they are actually realizing that their power derives from their ancestors, all the maidens, mothers, and crones that have come before them. When the witches call on Hecate, the three-in-one, they “call on all witches stretching back from the

beginning of time to the end of days,” which means that they are calling on themselves. The witches recognize the “powers that have been denied to them” by the power structure of the Church of Night. After this realization, Zelda makes it clear that all the witches will join together under the new name The Order of Hecate, where they will worship the three-in-one (“Chapter Twenty-Eight” 25:26 – 29:15).

There was never a reason for fighting amongst the witches because they all draw their powers from the same source, themselves. Power was perceived as scarce because the witches were trained to believe that Lucifer and their participation in the Church of Night determined how much power the witches received. Blackwood’s knowledge of the true source of witches’ power and Lucifer’s manipulation of witches worked together to project the idea that Lucifer controls the source of power and only Father Blackwood can mediate between the witches and Lucifer in a manner that would facilitate the flow of that source of power. Lucifer and Father Blackwood create a religion where scarcity formed the backbone. Scarcity is not inherent nor to the religion or to the religion of the witches; it is a byproduct of corrupt power structures and leaders. Religions can create a system of plenty, but it depends on the leadership that is in charge. Zelda Spellman was guided by the spirit of her brother Edward to discover the true source of the witches’ power. This source is not something that can be controlled by anyone; it is an open stream of power that can be accessed by all witches. Avalos’s theory that religion and scarcity are intertwined needs to be complicated by an examination of the leadership that perpetuates religious ideas and ideologies.

While the religion displayed in *Sabrina* may be a fictional religion, it opens up a broader discussion on the possibility of a religion that does not operate on the grounds of

scarce resources but instead offers its followers a religion of plenty. It also provides another angle in which to explore the theory of scarce resources. Is it the religion or the religious leaders that create scarcity? Is the idea of scarcity created only to keep control of the followers of the religion? It creates an environment where there is a clear hierarchy of control, and to maintain this control scarcity must be the focal point of the religion. If this new theory were tested against modern religions, would Hector Avalos's theory that religion causes scarcity still hold true? Or would it need to be complicated in terms of power and power structures?

### **Direct Violence and the Threat of Violence in 1 Kings 3, 2 Kings 6, and *CAOS***

The theme of violence is prevalent in both the biblical depictions of the narrative as well as how the television series presents the narrative. Johan Galtung has defined "violence as avoidable insults to basic human needs, and more generally to life, lowering the real level of needs satisfaction below what is potentially possible" (292). Galtung also points out that threats of violence also fall into his general definition of violence. Violence according to this definition is contested which is a concept further discussed by David Riches. It is clear that threats of violence are being made against the child in the 1 Kings 3:16 -18 narrative. In the biblical narrative, it is the King who threatens to harm the child by dividing it in two. In the television adaptation, both Zelda and Gryla are participating in an event that will potentially harm the child. The point of the threat is to discover who finds the violence to be too extreme and only cares for the life of the child.

Galtung's examination of direct violence is useful to the analysis of the violence committed in these narratives. Direct violence is committed in the form of cannibalism. Both Gryla and the women of the biblical narrative of the famine kill and eat a child. This

type of violence falls under the category of not only direct violence but also the violence that stems from a survival need which leads to killing (292). This in no way justifies the killing but provides a foundation of discussion. The killing and eating of the child can also be examined through the lens of cultural violence. Though cannibalism is not accepted in the text of the biblical narrative it is accepted in the Church of Night. In a previous episode in the series, "Chapter Seven: Feast of Feasts" cannibalism is considered a normal practice where witches of the coven hope to be chosen as the "Queen of the Feast" who will eventually be sacrificed and eaten. This type of violence is accepted by the witches and warlocks of the coven. As Galtung states "cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right or at least not wrong" (291). These acts of violence are "legitimized and thus rendered acceptable in society" (292).

David Riches discusses specific threats of violence and violence against the very young. In his view "the immediate response called forth by threats of hurt stems more from the anticipation of what such threats signify (namely, actual physical hurt) than from the threats themselves" (Aggression 293). This is especially true in both forms of the threat to cut or rip the child in half. The threat is not the reason the women react but the fear that their child may be harmed due to the action the threat authorizes. Riches also mentions violence against the very young and says that the term "cruelty" is better equipped to discuss this type of violence (294-295); however, because the witches see violence as normalized the violence cannot adequately be discussed under the term cruel. Violence against the children in the narrative of the television series does not speak in terms of "helplessness and defenselessness" (294-295). The child as the target for violence is not highlighted in either story and the most important aspect of the story is that the woman

whose child has been harmed or will be harmed has been wronged by another woman and needs the assistance of a higher authority to set the situation right<sup>16</sup>. Riches' definition of violence from another article may be more helpful in examining situations in both the biblical and television narratives.

Riches also discusses violence in more broad terms in his article *The Phenomenon of Violence*. He defines violence as ““the intentional rendering of physical hurt on another human being”” (4). This is quite a broad definition that could do with some sharpening which he does later on in the piece. Riches redefines violence as ““an act of physical hurt deemed legitimate by the performer and illegitimate by (some) witnesses”” (8). Riches' definition relates to his theory of the triangle of violence in which he examines situations through the lens of the perpetrator of violence, the victim of the violence, and the witnesses. This is a useful way to examine how the situations of the biblical narratives have been manipulated to suit the storyline of the television show.

### **Triangle of Violence in 1 Kings 3, 2 Kings 6, and CAOS**

In David Riches' discussion of the victim triangle, he posits that “‘violence’ is very much a word of those who witness, or who are victims of certain acts, rather than those who perform them” (“The Phenomenon of Violence” 3). This is an interesting concept when applied to biblical narratives. In the case of the woman whose child is to be cut in half, she sees the act as violent; however, the other woman and the king do not. This fits with Riches' analysis of the situation, but in the case of the narrative involving cannibalism,

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<sup>16</sup> In his article David Riches also discusses violence perpetrated by sorcery and witchcraft. While this may appear to be a useful portion of his essay to examine the violence perpetrated in the television series Riches argues that violence is only attributed to magic after the act has been committed (“Aggression” 293). This is not the case in the television series as all the characters that are present for the scene in the episode that contains the biblical stories believes in the existence of magic at the moment as does the audience through the concept of suspension of disbelief.

the act of violence is not the killing and eating of the child, the violent act is seen as the breaking of the pact. This type of violence does not fall under any of the categories of violence, but it is a disruption of the social order and a break in the expectations of the parties. The violence of this kind falls under the idea that "violence is a concept which can easily be maneuvered into an ideological ambiance, coming particularly to symbolize moral impropriety in a range of actions and policies" (4). The violence in the 2 Kings 6 narrative as well as in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is violence that stems from the disrespect of social orders and the morals surrounding the follow through of a pact.

In 1 Kings 3:16-18 the performer of the violence is the King, or it could be the person that he orders to cut the baby in half. The victim is not only the child who will be cut in half but also the true mother of the child who will inevitably hurt, though not through direct physical action. The witness would be the women and the other members of the court. The witnesses who are courtiers could be on the side of the King and see the violence as legitimate because it is violence decreed by the King. The story also does not mention another character speaking out against this violence. The woman whose child is already dead also sees the violence as legitimate because her goal is to make sure that no one can have the baby. She even states that the child "shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it" (1 Kings 3:27). When the story is transported into the television series legitimacy and illegitimacy become more complicated. Diana, Gryla, Zelda, and Hilda all see the trial as legitimate initially. Sabrina questions her aunt Zelda's actions but does nothing to stop the proceedings. Zelda then decides the violence is illegitimate and ends the trial. Diana then declares that the child now belongs to Gryla and Sabrina agrees. Zelda and Hilda question Sabrina's actions as they see the outcome and the violence as illegitimate. Sabrina then

reveals that the real child is safe. This complicates matters as Sabrina and Diana knew there was no danger, thus they allowed the possibility of violence and perpetrated threats of violence, though they saw the actions as illegitimate proven by their plan to switch out the baby. However, Zelda and Hilda were not in on the plan thus their agreement and initial actions prove that they saw some legitimacy in the violence done against Leticia. The switching of the child which illuminated the real threat of violence and the presence of witnesses changes the valence and how the audience interprets the narrative. This scenario also fits into Riches' explanation that the witnesses and the performers can change their opinions on the situation. He states that "witnesses may come to accept the performer's view of things or may come to detract from this view; performers may come to accept the opinions of detracting witnesses – and cease or modify the act they are perpetrating" (9).

The story of 2 Kings 6:26-29 is an entirely different beast. The cannibalism that occurs is seen as legitimate by the performers and the witnesses in both the original narrative and the television adaptation. The performers and the witnesses are the same, in the biblical narrative they are the two women and in the television series they are Gryla and another witch. Both women in both narratives see the eating of the children as a necessary step in survival. The wronged women are not mad that they ate her child but the fact that they did not eat the other woman's child. The emphasis is on the betrayal of the women. During the retelling of the narrative in the biblical story, the witness is the King. In the narrative, the King makes no judgment directly to the woman; he only rips his clothing. The woman is still wronged, and the king passes no judgment if the cannibalism is legitimate or illegitimate. In the television series, the story of Gryla and how she and another witch ate her son is retold by Zelda, it appears that the story is seen as legitimate

according to witch lore, Zelda makes no comment to contest the cannibalism in the story. However, Sabrina is appalled by the acceptance of cannibalism in the witch's society. Gryla may also not see the actions as totally legitimate as she has spent the last thousand years trying to replace her lost son. There are two possible reasons for this; Gryla may see the initial eating of her son as legitimate, but because the pact was not upheld, she must rectify the situation by herself which involves replacing her son, or Gryla sees the whole situation as illegitimate and only participated out of desperation. The decision is left up to the audience of the television show as Gryla never brings the incident up herself.

### **Negative/ Positive Valence and Audience Perception**

According to modern sensibilities the killing and eating of children and the tearing or cutting children into pieces whether through direct physical action or a threat is not accepted and would be considered as illegitimate by the audience of the biblical narratives. However, there is some suspension of disbelief when watching a television show and even when reading biblical narratives<sup>17</sup>. When viewing *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, the audience suspends their disbelief that magic exists, and the audience can also suspend their disbelief that cannibalism is an illegitimate form of violence. It is also easy for the audience to understand the point of view of the performer of violence in both the biblical narrative of cannibalism and television version. In the biblical narrative of the child being cut in half the audience is drawn to side of the wronged mother and see the violence as illegitimate; however, in the television version, the audience is drawn to side with Diana not only because she comes across as an authoritative figure that can be trusted, but all of the other

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<sup>17</sup> In the case of the television series, the suspension of disbelief stops when the show ends, and the screen goes black. However, regarding the bible, the suspension of disbelief is maintained, and an outsider's view of religion depends on if they are sympathetic to this suspension or not.

characters in the scene side with her. The audience has no reason to believe that Diana has any ill intentions. The audience's reaction is justified when they find out that Leticia is safe; however, the audience of the biblical narrative never receives this relief.

The biblical narratives take on an overall negative valence as the audience is led to be shocked by the violence perpetrated against the children as well as the women. The audience is led to believe that this violence cannot and should not be justified. This valence changes to positive when the biblical narratives are transported into the television series. The audience is led to believe that the actions of Diana, Gryla, and the other characters are justified and any violence that occurred to the child is justified and legitimate. The television show is able to pull this off because while viewing a television series "the audience enjoys the essence of an ancient literary work or myth distilled to its most basic narrative and archetypal elements that resonate most powerfully with the modern world" (Cyrino 8). The show finds other themes more important for the audience such as the bible. The television series decided to let violence and its justifications fall to the background. As Cyrino states "television producers can take a more modern, innovative approach to the timeless themes and characters" of classic literary works such as the Bible (8). The director of *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* successfully changes the valence of the biblical narrative from negative to positive.

Due to the acceptance and the positive valence that violence takes on in the series *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, the audience may walk away with the idea that religion and violence are intertwined, and violence is even accepted as a natural aspect of religion<sup>18</sup>. While the characters are witches, elements of Christianity can be seen

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<sup>18</sup> This conclusion comes from only examining how the audience would interpret the connection between religion and violence after they have finished watching "Chapter Eleven: A Midwinter's

throughout the show irrespective of the use of biblical narratives. The members of the coven must partake in baptism; the witches belong to a church, the leader of the church is called Father Blackwood, Satan, Lilith, Beelzebub, and Adam are characters, references to Christianity abound. Because of this, audiences subconsciously or consciously could link this show to both Christianity and religion in general, which in turn could cause them to link together the ideas of religion and violence.

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Tale.” The audience may come to a different conclusion after they completed the third season of the series, as explained above in the section on scarce resource theory. I would argue that *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* becomes more nuanced in its depictions of religion and violence. However, this is not discussed in this thesis project. If the project were to expand and include all seasons on each television series, then this increased nuance would be discussed.

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## A Path to Armageddon: A Case of Eschatology and Television Media

### Introduction

As mentioned in chapter two, there are numerous television series that do not shy away from using biblical themes, narratives, and characters. While television series *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* and *Ares* do not use religion as their main theme, shows like *Good Omens* and *Warrior Nun* do. The following two chapters deal with shows that use religion, specifically Christianity, as their main plot theme. *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* used specific biblical narratives to form the plotline of an episode of a television series; the case of *Good Omens* is similar to this as it pulls from a religious text, but it does so on a larger scale. The first season of *Good Omens* focuses on the birth of the Antichrist, the lives of the Angel Aziraphale and the Demon Crowley, and the lead-up to the battle of Armageddon. The show uses themes and imagery from the book of Revelation from the New Testament.

The apocalyptic theme of *Good Omens* is a part of a genre that has become “a staple of North American culture” (Rindge 338). Many television shows and movies “assume that potential viewers have a basic understanding of what a cinematic apocalypse will entail” (338). One of the main aspects of an apocalyptic film is that it will “include violence on a massive and spectacular scale” (338). Also, “apocalyptic films often reflect (and fuel) social anxieties,” which is why authors often change details to reflect what people care about during the time that the television series is being produced. For example, in *Good Omens*, instead of one of the Four Horsemen of the apocalypse representing pestilence, they represent pollution caused by consumerism. While not all cinematic apocalypses include a religious element many of them do.

*Good Omens*' approach to a religious cinematic apocalypse is different in the sense that the show challenges the audience's preconceived notions of angels and demons, good and evil, and whether or not everything has to exist in a world that is determined to support binary thinking. One of the main questions the show asks its audience to consider is who participates in violence, do only certain beings participate, and is violence always necessary? These questions as well as the overall framework and elements of the show can be further explored through Galtung's theory of violence, David Riches' concepts of the triangle of violence, symbolic violence, and mental violence, and Russell T. McCutcheon's discussion of myth.

### **The framework of *Good Omens***

*Good Omens* is an Amazon Original Series that follows the lives of the demon Crowley and the angel Aziraphale from the dawn of creation with Adam and Eve up until the present day (2018). In episode one, "In the Beginning," Crowley and Aziraphale discuss where they fit into the grand scheme of things. Aziraphale, being an angel, believes that he is supposed to function in the world on the side of good. Crowley, on the other hand, feels he is defined by the fact that he is "fallen" and a demon, thus he should function in the world on the side of evil. The audience is further led to believe this is the case because he is depicted in the Garden of Eden as the snake. While Crowley and Aziraphale claim to only be acquaintances, but their actions state otherwise. Throughout history, they have come to each other's rescue. Episode three, "Hard Times," takes the audience through some highlights from Crowley and Aziraphale's relationship. Crowley and Aziraphale meet at the Globe Theater; the two mention that they made an arrangement some time back where they agreed to some of each other's work so that they could save time and travel.

Essentially, a demon sometimes does good deeds or miracles, and sometimes an angel does evil deeds or miracles. This arrangement demonstrates that Crowley and Aziraphale do not fit into the binary model of good and evil. They understand that there is more complexity in the world. They also do not believe that they are beholden to what the other angels and demons believe to be “The Great Plan” that was set out by God.

The time eventually comes to prepare for Armageddon. The demon Crowley is tasked by Satan with delivering the baby Antichrist to a hospital in England. The hospital is chosen because it is run by a group of Satanic nuns who belong to the Chattering Order of St. Beryl. The Antichrist is supposed to be given to the wife of an American diplomat. However, there is a slight mix-up caused by Sister Mary and Sister Theresa; the baby Antichrist is instead delivered to a local woman, Mrs. Young, who came into the hospital to give birth a couple of weeks early. Mr. Young ends up naming the child Adam. The demon Crowley, after he delivered the Antichrist to the nuns, makes a pact with Aziraphale to monitor the child to see if they can stop him from becoming the all-powerful Antichrist that is supposed to start Armageddon. Crowley and Aziraphale do not want the world to end because they enjoy their lives on Earth, and they can continue to live unmonitored by their respective head offices. Because of the mix-up in the hospital, the real Antichrist is able to live a quiet life in the small English town of Tadfield without the intervention of Crowley and Aziraphale. This causes problems for both the demons and angels because they want Armageddon to go off without a hitch.

In addition to the main story of Crowley, Aziraphale, and the Antichrist, the television series also contains a “side story”. This “side story” involves Newton Pulsifer, Anathema Device, Agnes Nutter, Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery Pulsifer, and Sargent

Shadwell. In Lancashire, England, in 1656, Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery Pulsifer, a Witchfinder, is set to kill the town witch Agnus Nutter. Witchfinder Major Pulsifer succeeds in killing Agnus Nutter by burning her at the stake but not before she created a book of prophecies called *The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter*. The book is handed down to Agnes' great-great-great-great-great granddaughter Anathema Device who is supposed to save the world. Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery Pulsifer's great-great-great-great-great grandson Newton Pulsifer is supposed to stick to his Witchfinder heritage and find Anathema Device. Newton Pulsifer finds out his heritage after he stumbles upon Witchfinder Sargent Shadwell who is the last officer of the Witchfinder army. Newton and Anathema end up acting out Agnus Nutter's prophecies to the letter and help to save the world from being blow up.

Most of the plot for *Good Omens* is pulled from Revelation, which is the last book of the New Testament. Neil Gaiman, the creator of *Good Omens*, does take creative liberties with the story; however, there are elements to the show that have clear connections to Revelation. Revelation uses symbolic imagery to depict “the coming battles between the forces of God and the Lamb and their adversaries, who are imagined ... to be the entire Roman Imperial apparatus and anyone who participates in this Imperial system, as well as the spiritual forces that are believed to undergird this system” (Schedtler 151). *Good Omens* uses this general framework of a battle instead of having God and his angels battle the Roman Imperial apparatus; this group is replaced by Satan and his demons. This helps develop the idea that Armageddon is a battle between heaven and hell, angels, and demons, and good and evil. While the Antichrist is not mentioned in Revelation, the chapter plays a central role in *Good Omens*. It is the Antichrist in combination with the Four Horseman

that brings about Armageddon. Gaiman pulled the idea of the Four Horsemen of the apocalypse from Revelation 6:1-8 and 19:11-16, the idea of angels destroying the earth and humankind from Revelation 7:1-3, 8:7-13, 9:13-19. Most likely, Gaiman was able to craft the idea of the Four Horseman and the demons being on one side of the battle and angels and God on the other side from Revelation 19:19-20. Though not included in the framework of Revelation, according to the television series, on the Antichrist's eleventh birthday, a Hell Hound will appear to him. Once the Antichrist names the Hell Hound, he will come into his full power and that will be the catalyst to start Armageddon as well as the gathering of the Four Horseman<sup>19</sup>.

*Four Horseman: Revelation 6:1-8*

Then I saw the Lamb open one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures call out, as with a voice of thunder, "Come!"<sup>2</sup> I looked, and there was a white horse! Its rider had a bow; a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering and to conquer.

<sup>3</sup> When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature call out, "Come!"<sup>4</sup> And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another; and he was given a great sword.

<sup>5</sup> When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature call out, "Come!" I looked, and there was a black horse! Its rider held a pair of scales in his hand,<sup>6</sup> and I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's pay, and three quarts of barley for a day's pay, but do not damage the olive oil and the wine!"

<sup>7</sup> When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature call out, "Come!"<sup>8</sup> I looked and there was a pale green horse! Its rider's name was

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<sup>19</sup> The biblical passages in this chapter are not explored in further depth as they are in the chapter discussing *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* because *Good Omens* does not rely on the passages in the same way. The episode of *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is built on two biblical narratives. *Good Omens* is influenced by the themes, characters, and motifs of *Revelation*. The inclusion of these biblical passages is to aid the reader in understanding where Neil Gaiman drew his inspiration and how if the audience recognizes this inspirational material, they may easier link the television series to Christianity and religion as a whole.

Death, and Hades followed with him; they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, famine, and pestilence, and by the wild animals of the earth. (NRSV Revelation 6:18)

*Four Horseman: Revelation 19:11-16*

<sup>11</sup> Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. <sup>12</sup> His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself. <sup>13</sup> He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. <sup>14</sup> And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. <sup>15</sup> From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. <sup>16</sup> On his robe and on his thigh, he has a name inscribed, "King of kings and Lord of lords." (Revelation 19:11-16)

*Angel Participation in Armageddon: Revelation 7:1-3*

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth so that no wind could blow on earth or sea or against any tree. <sup>2</sup> I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage earth and sea, <sup>3</sup> saying, "Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads." (Revelation 7:1-3)

*Angel Participation in Armageddon: 8:7-13*

<sup>7</sup> The first angel blew his trumpet, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were hurled to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

<sup>8</sup> The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea. <sup>9</sup> A third of the sea became blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

<sup>10</sup> The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. <sup>11</sup> The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many died from the water, because it was made bitter.

<sup>12</sup> The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light was darkened; a third of the day was kept from shining, and likewise the night.

<sup>13</sup> Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew in midheaven, “Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!” (Revelation 8:7-13)

*Angel Participation in Armageddon: 9:13-19*

<sup>13</sup> Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, <sup>14</sup>saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” <sup>15</sup> So the four angels were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, to kill a third of humankind. <sup>16</sup> The number of the troops of cavalry was two hundred million; I heard their number. <sup>17</sup> And this was how I saw the horses in my vision: the riders wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur; the heads of the horses were like lions’ heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. <sup>18</sup> By these three plagues a third of humankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. <sup>19</sup> For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they inflict harm. (Revelation 9:13-19)

*Angels vs Demons: Revelation 19:19-20*

<sup>19</sup> Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against the rider on the horse and against his army. <sup>20</sup> And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed in its presence the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. (Revelation 19:19-20)

**Galtung’s Theory of Violence and *Good Omens***

Johan Galtung defines “violence as avoidable insults to basic human<sup>20</sup> needs, and more generally to life, lowering the real level of needs satisfactorily below what is potentially possible” (292). The most important aspect of this definition is that there is another option because the violence is avoidable; thus, there will be some people that

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<sup>20</sup> For this television series, demons, angels, and humans all have the same “basic needs” and have the same value.

contest the violence that is being done. In *Good Omens*, both Crowley and Aziraphale do not believe that violence should be done to the Earth or humankind. Not only do they contest the violence, but they also actively work to stop the violence from occurring. Aziraphale, in the first episode, reports to his head office in Heaven, specifically Gabriel, Archangel Michael, Uriel, and Standalone, and tells them that the Antichrist is “being influenced towards the light”. The angels tell him that he is doing excellent; however, they will understand when he fails to bring the Antichrist toward the light because his efforts are doomed and that “wars are to be won. Not avoided” (“In the Beginning” 38:02 – 38:50). Aziraphale is deeply upset because the angels are not doing anything to stop the war, and Aziraphale does not believe it is their job to fight but to stop the fighting. Both Crowley and Aziraphale repeatedly voice their concerns about the impending war and destruction and even attempt to permanently halt Armageddon even though they believe that they have to use a “small” amount of violence to do so.

Crowley and Aziraphale are not the only ones who contest the use of violence in *Good Omens*. Newton Pulsifer does not believe that it is necessary to kill witches. Sargent Shadwell is tasked by Crowley and Aziraphale to follow Adam and kept an eye on him because Shadwell has a junior office underneath him; he pushes the task off to Newton Pulsifer. In episode four, Sargent Shadwell expects Newton Pulsifer to use the weapons he is being provided. Newton tries to not take the thumbscrews and firelighters. Newton is not comfortable with the idea of torturing those who are suspected of being a witch, nor does he wish to participate in burning anyone. Sargent Shadwell believes that violence against witches is necessary because the Witchfinder army is protecting all of England. He finds nothing wrong with the torture and burning of witches and expects everyone who is a

Witchfinder to feel the same way. While Newton reluctantly accepts the thumbscrews and highlighters, he never uses them, nor do they appear again in his possession. The audience is expected to side with Newton Pulsifer and his rejection of violence because they have already established an empathetic bond with Anathema and support her role in stopping Armageddon.

Galtung's definition also discusses situations of direct violence, and there are plenty of examples of direct violence in *Good Omens*. Unsurprisingly, most of the violence is done by demons though occasionally the angels do get involved in the action. The first example of direct violence is done by the first Horseman, the Horseman of War. In "no man's land," North Africa, there is a peace treaty in a former war zone. However, War shows up and causes the negotiations to go south. The three parties involved get into an argument of who signs the treaty first; they all draw their guns. In the middle of all this, War is delivered a sword. The deliverance of the sword causes the three parties and their companions to open fire and kill everyone at the meeting ("The Book" 4:08 – 6:17). War's presence causes the people around her to engage in violence; all of the violence that War is involved in contains guns and other military-grade weapons. While War herself does not participate in direct violence, those who she influences with her presence does. Because War is a part of the demons and she is supposed to bring about Armageddon, the violence that she creates is seen as unacceptable violence. Part of bringing the Four Horsemen together involves them being delivered a unique item by a postman. To bring about the final Horseman, Death, the postman must find a way to contact them. To contact Death, the postman must be dead; to do this, he steps out into oncoming traffic and gets hit by a truck. The postman's death is seen as a necessary death to start Armageddon, and he also

does not hesitate to kill himself because of his dedication to his job. The postman believes he must deliver every package, even if it results in his death. For those who wish to see Armageddon come to fruition, this death is simply a part of the “Great Plan” (“Saturday Morning Funtime” 11:40 – 13:00).

Crowley also performs acts of direct violence to both demons and plants. Crowley in his flat keeps various green plants. According to God, the narrator, Crowley keeps “the most luxurious, verdant, and beautiful plants in London” (“The Book” 21:32 – 23:04). However, Crowley yells at his plants and demonstrates that any plant that has any imperfection will be thrown away down the garbage disposal chute. While it may not appear at first glance to be a form of violence on the level of killing another human, the plants are sentient and can understand what Crowley is doing. When he speaks, the plants quiver in fear and cry out when he throws their friend down the garbage disposal. The plants live in a constant state of fear because they know that they could be the next plant that Crowley rips to shreds. Crowley’s violence toward the plants is portrayed to the audience as a joke, and their deaths are not seen as either negative or positive. Even though they are sentient their deaths are justified because it is what keeps the other plants in check. Crowley also engages in direct violence against his fellow demons. In episode 4, Crowley sets up a trap for Duke of Hell Ligur and Duke of Hell Hastur. The two demons are coming after him because he lied about the Antichrist being the son of the American diplomat. This caused the demons to run behind on their tasks to bring about Armageddon. As Ligur and Hastur enter his flat, Crowley has set up a bucket of Holy Water that will fall on the head of the first demon to walk through the door. Crowley knows that if Holy Water touches a demon: it will cause them to melt. Duke of Hell Ligur is the first to enter the door, and

thus, is melted away. Duke of Hell Hastur is extremely upset by Crowley's actions and understands that it could have been him. Hastur is shocked that another demon would use Holy Water on a fellow demon. Crowley sees the use of Holy Water as necessary because he was defending himself from what Ligur would have done to him if he got through the door unharmed (“Saturday Morning Funtime” 34:30 – 38:15). Aziraphale does not tend to participate in violent acts on-screen; given the pact that he has with Crowley, the audience can assume that he has participated in violent acts, but they have happened in the past. The one act of violence that the audience does know about is that he used his powers as an angel to cause a miracle where a bomb would be dropped on a group of Nazis during World War II (“Hard Times” 17:30 – 24:00). This one viable use of direct violence is coded as a positive use of violence from an angel because the bomb only killed Nazis, and the audience does not side with Nazis.

Adam, the Antichrist, is also involved in situations of direct violence. Adam, while trying to save the whales, created the Kraken. The Kraken attacks whaling ships, even ships that have not published what they are doing. The Kraken takes down these ships as well as the sailors on them (“Saturday Morning Funtime” 18:50 – 19:50). The violence done to these ships and the killing of their crew is seen as positive acts of violence because it is violence that saves the whales from humans. The killing of whales is framed as a negative act of killing. However, Adam does participate in direct violence that the audience perceives as negative violence. In episode four, Adam uses his new powers to control his friends, Pepper, Wensleydale, and Brian, bodies. After Adam hears the voices tell him, “make it happen, make it real,” he decides that he does not want his friends to leave him and go home for lunch. He wants them to be by his side when he makes the world a better

place and restarts everything. Adam tells his friends that there is nowhere else to go, he uses his demon powers to make it so that they cannot move, in fact, they have to walk with him. As Adam explains what he is going to do to the world, Adam gets frustrated that his friends keep telling him to stop, so he takes away their mouths (“Saturday Morning Funtime” 32:40 – 33:30, 42:00 – 43:03, 48:25 – 48:45). This causes them to start to cry as Adam continues to yell at them that they need to be having fun. Adam then uses his powers to give them their mouths back and forces them into a smile. Pepper tries to explain the Adam that they no longer want to be friends with him, and Adam lets them walk away. Adam has become too frightening for even the Hell Hound, and he runs away with Pepper, Wensleydale, and Brian. The abandonment by his friends and his dog causes Adam to become so stricken with grief that his powers fade from his body. Adam realizes that what he has done to his friends is wrong, and the chain of events that he has started needs to be stopped (“The Doomsday Option” 31:48 – 35:55). Adam’s violence towards his friends is viewed as negative violence. The audience sides with the children and does not Adam to hurt them. After the fact, when the power fades from Adam, he also understands that his violence against his friends was not something he should have done.

The group of angels from the “head office” also participate in direct violence. The angels visit Aziraphale and try and make him choose what side he wishes to fight on. Sandalphon punches Aziraphale in the stomach, and Uriel grabs him by his jacket and shoves him up against a wall. Aziraphale contests this violence because he does not think angels should be violent. After all, they are “the good guys.” Aziraphale believes that this kind of violence should be reported to someone higher in the angel organization, namely God. However, the angels believe that God would not even talk to Aziraphale (“Saturday

Morning Funtime” 40:25 – 41:50). After Aziraphale and Crowley help to stop Armageddon, the angels come back down to Earth to kidnap Aziraphale and take him to a trial in heaven. Aziraphale’s trial and punishment will be discussed below.

One final act of direct violence is committed by Pepper, Brian, and Wensleydale, who kill three of the Four Horsemen. During the final battle, Pepper faces off against War. War taunts Pepper and tells her that she is a little girl who should go home to play with her dolls. Pepper responds that she “does not endorse everyday sexism.” Pepper then stomps on War’s foot and steals her flaming sword. Pepper uses it to light War on fire, who then disappears in a flaming ball of fire. Pepper drops the flaming sword, and Brian picks it up. He uses it to stab Pollution who melts into a pool of oil. Brian drops the sword, and Wensleydale picks it up and tries to stab Famine, but Famine grabs the sword before Wensleydale can push it into his body. The Hell Hound comes to Wensleydale’s aid and bites Famine’s leg, which allows Wensleydale to fully stab Famine, who disintegrates into a cloud of black ash. Because the deaths of War, Pollution, and Pestilence are necessary to stop Armageddon, and they represent generally frowned upon aspects of human life, the audience sides with Pepper, Brian, and Wensleydale that this act of violence is not only accepted but necessary (“The Very Last Day” 10:50 – 15:00).

Galtung also posits that “cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, and even feel, right or at least not wrong” (291). These acts of violence are “legitimized and thus rendered acceptable in society” (292). Within the realm of the demons, violence against lesser demons is accepted. Crowley’s violence against The Duke of Hell Ligur is not an accepted act of violence because Crowley and Ligur are supposed to be on the same level within the demon organization. In episode four, the Duke of Hell

Hastur is going over plans for Armageddon with a lesser unnamed demon the demon makes a joke that Hastur does not understand at the moment, so he chokes the demon and uses his powers to set him on fire and disintegrate him. Another demon who looks just like the lesser demon that Hastur disintegrated takes the other demon's place and continues with the Armageddon briefing. The next demon brings up Crowley, which angers Hastur, so he sets the second lesser demon on fire and disintegrates him. The third and final demon that is present steps forward and takes his place to continue the briefing ("Saturday Morning Funtime" 22:25 – 24:55). Hastur's use of violence against the lesser demons is not seen as out of the ordinary None of the lesser demons mention the death of the previous demon, nor do they skip a beat in picking up the briefing on Armageddon. It also appears that three lesser demons are present just in case Hastur wants to kill them, as they serve no other purpose but to take the spot of the one that dies before them. The lesser demons, though they may not want to die, still do their job, and say nothing against Hastur. While these deaths are supposed to be seen as comedic, the audience still does not agree with the way Hastur treats the people around him, especially Crowley who the audience is supposed to empathize with. The deaths of the lesser demons are seen as unnecessary and cruel.

### **Riches' Triangle of Violence and Good Omens**

All of the situations of direct violence are not just between the doer of violence and the receiver of violence, oftentimes there are people who witness these acts. Each actor in the situation of violence had their own view of these actions and whether or not the violence can be justified. According to Riches, violence "is very much a word of those who witness, or who are victims of certain acts, rather than those who perform them" ("Phenomenon of Violence" 3). The performer of the act of violence would not call their actions violent;

instead, they might use other terms to describe their actions. Riches also points out that “witnesses may come to accept the performer’s view of things or may come to detract from this view; performers may come to accept the opinions of detracting witnesses – and cease or modify the act they are perpetrating” (9). All of the instances of violence within *Good Omens* can be explored through the triangle of violence; however, three examples demonstrate the complexities of violent situations.

In episode one, after the Antichrist has left the hospital with Mr. and Mrs. Young and the American diplomats have left the hospital with their baby, The Duke of Hell Hastur appears at the hospital. Hastur informs the nuns that their order has been dissolved because they have completed their one task, to deliver the baby Antichrist to the American diplomats. The nuns, who were expecting a reward, do not agree with Hastur dissolving the order. Hastur then kills Sister Theresa Garrulous because she will not stop talking. Mother Superior is given a choice by Hastur, tell the other nuns that the order has been dissolved or to have all the nuns perish in a fire. Without giving Mother Superior a chance to decide, Hastur lights the hospital on fire. The nuns are shown screaming and running out of the hospital, and Sister Theresa Garrulous is shown dead on the ground (“In the Beginning” 32:37 – 33:33). In this situation, the perpetrator of violence is Hastur, the victims of violence are Sister Theresa Garrulous and the other nuns, and the witnesses are Mother Superior and the audience. Hastur does not believe that killing Sister Theresa Garrulous is violence he sees it as a means to an end, to get her to stop talking. Hastur also needs to dissolve the order, and because the nuns protested, he needed to create a situation that would make them vacate the hospital even if some nuns got injured in the process. The victims, Sister Theresa, and the nuns would classify Hastur’s actions as violent. Sister

Theresa protested the dissolving of the order and would protest her death if she could. The other nuns who run from the burning hospital would consider Hastur's act as violent because they were expecting a reward, and instead, their home and work were set on fire, and they were forced to flee. The audience and Mother Superior side with Sister Theresa and the other nuns. The audience knows that the sisters did not complete their task correctly, but Hastur does not. There is no reason given for the dissolution of the order of nuns and Hastur's quick use of violence without given Mother Superior a moment to tell the other nuns in the hospital that the order has been dissolved. Hastur was hasty and impatient, which resulted in his use of violence which is viewed negatively.

The second example involves Agnes Nutter as the perpetrator of violence as well as a victim of violence. Adultery Pulsifer is both the perpetrator of violence as well as the victim of violence. The villagers are both perpetrators and witnesses, and the audience is a witness. In episode two, Adultery Pulsifer visits Lancaster, England, to kill Agnes Nutter for being a witch. Agnes is waiting for Adultery Pulsifer to take her to burn at the stake. When Adultery Pulsifer arrives at her cottage with the rest of the villagers, she walks out of her cottage and the villagers and Adultery Pulsifer follow her. Agnes gets on the pile of wood and lets Adultery Pulsifer tie her to the stake. Adultery Pulsifer and the rest of the villagers lay their torches on the fire. Once the fire reaches Agnes, a large blast occurs, killing everyone in the village, including Adultery Pulsifer. Later on, a note is found in Agnes' cottage that mentioned she had "concealed 50 pounds of gunpowder and 30 pounds of roofing nails" in her petticoats ("The Book" 8:00 – 13:23).

Agnes is both a perpetrator of violence and a victim; she knew that Adultery Pulsifer and the townsfolk wanted her to burn at the stake for being a witch. She accepted

her fate because she knew it was how things had to be according to the prophecies she had written down. However, she did not want to be taken out alone; thus, she made herself into a living bomb killing everyone around her. Adultery Pulsifer is both a perpetrator of violence and a victim; he specifically traveled to the village with the intent to kill Agnes Nutter, tied her to the stake, and was the first person to lay down his torch on the pile of wood that would burn and kill her. He is also a victim of Agnes' violence because he was killed in her bomb blast. The villagers are both perpetrators of violence and victims, they wanted Agnes Nutter to burn at the stake, and they all placed their torches on the pile to light her on fire. However, they too were killed by Agnes' bomb. Agnes sees her own death at the stake as necessary because it is one step in fulfilling the prophecies that she laid out in her book; she willingly walks to her death and does nothing to stop it. Adultery Pulsifer sees Agnes' death as necessary because she is a witch and he is a Witchfinder; thus, he is just doing his job. The villagers see Agnes' death as necessary because she is a witch, and witches get burned at the stake. On the other hand, Adultery Pulsifer and the villagers would not see their deaths and Agnes' bomb as necessary because they do not believe that they had done anything wrong. Agnes sees the death of the villagers as a warning for those who "meddle with things they do not understand." The audience knows that this works in her favor because people from other towns wondered if the killing of the villagers was an act of God or Satan. The audience is left in confusion because Agnes had to die for her prophecies to be true; her death could be seen as a positive thing because it sets the plans of her great-great-great-great-great granddaughter saving the world into motion. However, the audience is forced to ask if there was another option. The audience is also left unsure if the deaths of the villagers is a positive or negative event because nothing comes out of

their deaths that is tangible to the viewer. Agnes Nutter and her prophecies are kept hidden by her family, so her message does not spread. The death of Adultery Pulsifer and the villagers could be interpreted as gratuitous violence.

The final example involves Crowley and Aziraphale as the victims, the Demons, and the Angels as the perpetrators of violence, and the Angels, Demons, and the audience as witnesses. After Crowley and Aziraphale help to successfully stop Armageddon, the demons kidnap Crowley, and the angels kidnap Aziraphale and hold “trials” for them because they have wronged Heaven and Hell. No trial is actually held because the demons and angels have already decided the Crowley and Aziraphale need to be punished, which means they need to be sentenced to death. In Hell, Crowley is brought before Beelzebub, who is acting as the judge, and Hastur as the prosecutor, Crowley has no one for his defense. Crowley is sentenced to death by Holy Water on the charge of being a traitor and murdering a fellow demon. Beelzebub asks the rest of the demons in the audience what their verdict is, and they chant “guilty.” The demons believe that the punishment fits the crime; Crowley is to be submerged in a bathtub filled with Holy Water, which the demons know will kill him permanently. The Holy Water is brought down to Hell by Archangel Michael, who is cooperating with demons because the angels are also furious that Armageddon did not take place. Aziraphale, in heaven, is put on trial for being a “renegade angel” and one act of treason that averted the war. Gabrielle argues that Armageddon was part of the greater good and that it would settle the ongoing fight between Heaven and Hell. Gabrielle informs Aziraphale that his punishment is to be burnt in the flames of hell, which have been brought up to heaven by the unnamed lesser demon. Gabrielle and the rest of the angels know that the fires of hell will kill Aziraphale.

Crowley enters the tub of Holy Water, and nothing happens to him; he frightens the demons by splashing around and requesting a rubber duck. Aziraphale enters the flames of hell and is unharmed; he can even blow fire at the angels, though it does not harm them. The angels and the demons decide that they do not know what category Crowley and Aziraphale belong to. The angels and demons decide that Crowley and Aziraphale are allowed to live their lives out on Earth so that they do not have to deal with them. Unbeknownst to the angels and the demons, Crowley and Aziraphale survived their respective tortures because they had switched places (“The Very Last Day of the Rest of Their Lives” 32:30 – 36:26, 42:35 – 45:46). While the demons and the angels see Crowley and Aziraphale’s deaths as necessary, Crowley and Aziraphale do not agree, and they do everything in their power to make sure that they do not die. The audience also agrees with Crowley and Aziraphale believing that their deaths are acts of negative violence; they helped save the Earth and humanity after all. The audience feels relieved when Crowley and Aziraphale survive their respective trials and get to live their lives happily together on Earth.

### **Mythmaking in *Good Omens***

The overall violence of Armageddon is justified by the angels and the demons because they believe that they are all acting in accordance with “The Great Plan” that has been set out by God. This plan can be considered a myth, and thus the angels and the demons are continually involved in mythmaking which allows them to justify their use of violence. Mythmaking is important in the world of *Good Omens*. Without mythmaking and the constant reinforcement of those myths, the characters would not feel their desire to participate in the coming Armageddon or their desire to bring it about. Russell T.

McCutcheon points out that myth can be understood as “ordinary human means of fashioning and authorizing their lived-in and believed in ‘world’” (200). McCutcheon also suggests that myths should be reconceived as “mythmaking,” which denotes an “ongoing process of constructing, authorizing, and reconstructing social identities or social formations” (202-3). McCutcheon states that “social formation by means of mythmaking is nothing other than the reasonable response to the inevitable social disruptions, contradictions, and incongruities that characterize the ordinary human condition” (206).

While many Christians believe that God is omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence, it appears that the angels are not beholden to these principles. They have been taught a plan, and even if that plan involves the destruction of the Earth and all humankind at their hands, they have come to accept it as part of “The Great Plan,” and thus, their violence is justified. Also, Aziraphale and the angels have been taught that God’s plans are ineffable; thus, no one can judge them (“The Book” 1:58 – 2:40). They can only follow their role, as if their lives are a play and the script has already been written, they should not stray from their designated roles. Crowley, on the other hand, does feel like he can question God’s plans; he does not understand the purpose of bringing about Armageddon and feels like he has the power to stop it, even if the demons are the ones that are supposed to aid in bringing it about. Crowley believes that God should not test the humans till destruction or the end of the world (“Saturday Morning Funtime” 9:00 – 9:25). The angels are looking forward to the war that is coming, and they find no problem with the fact that Aziraphale lost track of the Antichrist. Aziraphale makes multiple attempts to reason with the angels that they should be fighting to stop Armageddon. Gabrielle repeatedly that Armageddon is occurring right on time, and what the angels can do is fight.

Aziraphale tries to reason and says that there does not have to be a war, but Gabrielle replies, “of course there does. Otherwise, how would we win it?” (“Saturday Morning Funtime” 4:54 – 5:02). Aziraphale, who is frustrated with Gabrielle, goes above his head to talk to Metatron, who is the “voice of the Almighty.” Metatron informs Aziraphale that “the point is not to avoid the war. The point is to win it” (“Saturday Morning Funtime” 49:00 – 52:05). The angels and even the voice of God continue the narrative that Armageddon is necessary and their violence in war is not actually violent because it is a part of God’s plan, “The Great Plan.” Any violence that is done in the name of “The Great Plan” is acceptable for those who believe in the "Great Plan". Those who do not believe in the myth of “The Great Plan” do not interpret violence in the same way.

### **Symbolic Violence (Threats of Violence) and *Good Omens***

According to David Riches, another subset of violence is symbolic violence, which also includes “threats of violence”. For those on the receiving end of “threats of violence,” the situation is unpleasant (“Aggression, War, Violence” 293). The threat of violence can sometimes culminate in direct physical violence, or it can remain a threat. This form of violence can also be contested by the witness and the receiver of the violence. In *Good Omens*, Armageddon is a very real threat to humans and the Earth. The threat looms over everyone’s head even though only certain people know about it. Newton Pulsifer, Anathema Device, Aziraphale, and Crowley all feel the threat of destruction that looms over their heads and do everything in the power to stop it. Newton Pulsifer and Anathema Device are the ones who disarm the nuclear codes so that war on all humankind would not start. All four characters feel the threat of impending doom and do not agree with its presence.

To end the pending nuclear war and Armageddon, Aziraphale, Crowley, Sargent Shadwell, Madame Tracy, Pepper, Brian, Wensleydale, and Adam must break into a military airfield in England. After the children get through the front gate, the army guard runs after them with his gun drawn. When Madame Tracy, Sargent Shadwell, Aziraphale, and Crowley try to get in after the children, the army guard walks at them gun drawn. Aziraphale is not willing to wait for the man to put his gun down, so he miracles him away (“The Very Last Day of the Rest of Their Lives” 2:15 -2:40). While the army guard does threaten everyone with his weapon, the danger is not felt by the audience. A gunshot would not harm Aziraphale and Crowley, and they are protecting Madam Tracey and Sargent Shadwell. Also, if anything were to happen and they did not want it to, they could use their powers to create a miracle and bring the person back to life or heal them if they get shot.

One final instance of threats of violence is when Crowley proposes to Aziraphale that they kill the antichrist before the Hell Hound arrives (“Hard Times” 51:00 – 52:00). While they do not initially go through with this plan, they arrive at the airfield, Aziraphale, in the body of Madam Tracey, points the gun at Adam and fires; however, Madam Tracey takes control of her body and diverts the gun. This is a threat of violence because Adam can turn the gun into anything he desires and does not feel threatened by the gun pointed at him. The audience also does not believe that Crowley could kill Adam because he has been saying that he does not kill children. The threat would have appeared more credible if Crowley were holding the gun.

### **Audience Perception: The Nuance of “Violent” Roles**

The audience is not shocked by the amount of violence that is present in *Good Omens*, in fact, they expect it because it is part of a traditional apocalyptic narrative. What

is shocking for the audience is that the violence used by individuals in the television series is contested. The nuanced portrayals of Crowley and Aziraphale are refreshing. These characters do not believe in the binary of good and evil; they believe that they can be a little bit of both. In addition to the break from the binary, it is also shocking for the audience to see angels who want the destruction of the world and are not willing to try and save it. Angels are supposed to be good and benevolent, but in the series, they are never depicted as doing anything but violence or asking for violence. As Breed explains, “Apocalyptic tests ... can re-frame the world, re-narrate history, and offer glimpses of alternative realities” (Breed 254). The use of the apocalypse as the theme of *Good Omens* causes the audience to use their imagination and to think beyond the conventional aspects of what the apocalypse is supposed to be like. The audience is forced to confront any preconceived notions of violence and the battle between good and evil that they might have. The audience should side with the demon Crowley and the angel Aziraphale; the show is set up in a way that the audience is supposed to empathize with these characters and their mission to save the world, even if it starts out as a selfish endeavor. Crowley’s character, in particular, challenges the audience; he forces the audience to confront their own definition of evil and demon. Crowley does not buy into the idea of the traditional role of a demon; he states, “I didn’t mean to fall. I just hung around the wrong people” (“The Book” 3:50 – 3:57). The audience must reconcile this with their prior knowledge.

While the other television series that have been discussed can reinforce the idea that religion and violence are deeply intertwined, *Good Omens* challenges the audience to have a more nuanced reading of the situation. Perhaps not everyone who participates in religion believes that violence is necessary or good. Perhaps, those people that we assume

are good or should be good given their title are not. The audience is left with more questions than answers, and that could be beneficial as it forces the audience to sit with the show long after the screen has turned black.

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## The Power of the *Halo*: A Case of Deception in Television Media

### Introduction

*Warrior Nun* puts itself in direct conversation with how people look at the Catholic Church<sup>21</sup>. The television series does not shy away from its use of religious themes, characters, or motifs. The television series wants its audience to interact directly with religious texts. For the show, passages from both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament are used as titles for the episodes. However, the passages never appear in the television series itself; there is no title card for the episodes. An audience member who is interested in finding out the biblical passage and how it relates to the narrative of the episode must do their own research and engage with the primary source. While the audience experiences religion in the context of the television series, if they so choose to find what the title of the episodes says, then they will engage in a religious primary source on its own. The audience member can examine the passage in the context of the show, or they can examine it as a religious source, it depends on the intentions of the audience member. It is interesting to note that not all of the passages used contain violence.

The passages containing violence are Ephesians 6:1, 2 Corinthians 10:4, and Revelation 2:10. Ephesians 6:1 states, “put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (*NRSV*). This verse can be interpreted in the

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<sup>21</sup> Anytime violence is legitimated, it is within the realm of the television series, and it does not reflect Catholic theology, morals, or culture. Because the television series uses Catholicism as a muse and backdrop, the audience may confuse the two, but that does not mean that the television series speaks for the religion. I am not conflating the series’ representation of Catholic religious traditions with actual Catholic traditions; it is striking that legitimated in the show would not be legitimated by the actual religion. A further discussion of the television series would include an examination of what the show represents as Catholic doctrine versus what the actual Catholic doctrine would say.

context of war as the passage is a command to put on armor and stand against someone or something that is perceived to be the opponent in the battle of good versus evil. In the context of the show, this interpretation is bolstered because there is a battle that is the backbone of the narrative of the television series. 2 Corinthians 10:4 states, “for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments” (*NRSV*). This passage can also help to contextualize the battle that the nuns are engaged in. Finally, Revelation 2:10 states, “do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (*NRSV*). The usages of these passages work to highlight that not only does the show utilize violence as a theme, a plot device, and part of the narrative, the religion that they are engaging with is a “violent” religion.

*Warrior Nun*'s approach to portraying violence is more akin to a comic book or superhero action film. By portraying the violence as part of a cosmic battle between demons and demon fighters, the television series sets itself up to include action-packed battle scenes and heavenly charged weapons. This type of violence is justified for the audience because it is “battle violence” and a battle that most people already believe to be occurring, one of good versus evil. In addition to the cosmic battler, the show also includes a battle between “the Church” and those who participate in the religion of “Church,” or in other words, believers versus the administration. The audience is led to question the intentions of the organization and whether or not the nuns would be better without the men in charge. The themes of religion and violence can be further explored through Galtung's theory of violence, David Riches' concepts of structural violence and non-physical

violence, the triangle of violence, Russell T. McCutcheon's discussion of myth, and Hector Avalos' concept of scarce resource theory.

### **The Framework of *Warrior Nun***

*Warrior Nun* follows a nineteen-year-old quadriplegic orphan, Ava Silva, who dies and ends up in the church associated with the orphanage's morgue. The Sister Nuns (Shotgun Mary, Beatrice, Camila, and Lilith) embroiled in a battle with armed mercenaries, enter the morgue with their injured leader Warrior Nun Shannon. Shannon has been fatally wounded by Divinium and makes the decision that they need to remove the *Halo* from her back. The *Halo* is a divine artifact that provides special powers and the ability to save people from demons to anyone who has it embedded in their back. After the nuns remove the *Halo* from Shannon's back, she dies. Unfortunately for the group, the armed mercenaries make their way into the church, and a nun makes the quick decision to protect the *Halo* by inserting it into Ava's corpse. The *Halo's* power brings Ava back to life, and she is no longer a quadriplegic. Given back the use of her arms and legs, Ava runs away from the church to explore Andalusia, Spain, where she has been living since the car accident that killed her mother and paralyzed her while they were on vacation. Father Vincent and the nuns later realize that Ava's body is missing from the church morgue. They know that the *Halo* is not only missing but also in the body of a non-believer, and they must get it back. Ava does not want to be a part of the nuns; she wants to experience life and feels like the order is another prison, like her bed in the orphanage. Father Vincent tries to convince Ava to join the order by telling her about the original Halo Bearer, Arealia, and how the Order of the Cruciform Sword (OCS) came to be. Ava's journey to acceptance and finding out what she needs to do as the new Warrior Nun is short but arduous.

Ava's path is complicated by Shannon's fear that something was wrong in the Church. Shotgun Mary takes up Shannon's mission to discover what the Church is hiding. Mary enlists the help of Ava to get into a secret chamber behind Shannon's room in Cat's Cradle, the headquarters for the Sister Nuns. In the room, Ava discovers the diaries of former Warrior Nuns; the last entry in the book belongs to Shannon. According to the diary, the Church has been hiding Adriel's bones under the Vatican City, and these bones allegedly anchor demons to Earth. Due to Mary's suspicion that Cardinal Duretti killed Shannon because she discovered the Church's secret, the Sister Nuns believe that Cardinal Duretti will claim the bones and use their power for his own personal gain. Their suspicions are further reinforced when Cardinal Duretti relocates Sister Beatrice and Father Vincent for what the audience presumes, not bowing down to his will. Cardinal Duretti also brings a group of Sister Nuns to Cat's Cradle that have been rejected by Mother Superior, who deemed them not worthy of joining the Order of the Cruciform Sword. Cardinal Duretti does not care that they have been rejected because he knows that they will follow his orders. The Sister Nuns and Ava devise a plan to retrieve the bones from the Necropolis, the catacombs under Vatican City, so that Duretti can never get his hands on them. To retrieve the bones, the Sister Nuns must find a map of the Necropolis. Father Vincent, with the help of Shotgun Mary, is able to retrieve a map. On the day that a new pope is to be chosen in Vatican City, the Sister Nuns decide to enact their plan. Cardinal Duretti is on guard and has stationed the rejected sisters around the Vatican so that if the Sister Nuns show up to interrupt him from become Pope, the rejected sisters can stop them. The Sister Nuns must take out security guards and fight the rejected sisters to get Ava down to Adriel's tomb. Ava is able to phase through the walls of the tomb. While inside the walls, Ava notices

Tarask skeletons that are made from Divinium and questions why they are encased there or if they became trapped. Ava finally makes it inside the tomb: only to discover that there are no bones, only a man. Ava realizes that Adriel himself has been trapped in the tomb and was not made mortal when he gave up his *Halo* as the legend stated. Adriel also tells Ava the true story behind the Order of the Cruciform Sword, and it does not match the tale told by the OCS or Father Vincent. Adriel tries to take the *Halo* back from Ava but is unsuccessful. The final scene of the season foreshadows a great battle between Adriel, the Sister Nuns, and Ava in the full role of Warrior Nun.

A quote from the first episode, “Psalm 46:5,” said by Father Vincent, contextualizes the television series, as well as the story arch for the first season. Father Vincent is in a bar, and the bartender tells Father Vincent it may help if he shares what is on his mind. Father Vincent replies,

“What if I told you that Demons were real? That they were among us? Some are ethereal monsters that feed off our souls and push us to do evil. Others are beasts from Hell that could slice you in half with a single swipe of their claw. You would nod your head and say you understand because I’m a priest. You expect me to say these things. Things that might be metaphorical and not literal. But what if I weren’t a priest? What if I told you all this as a layman? You would think that either I was a madman or a prophet. And these days, it’s very hard to believe in prophets” (“Psalms 46:5” 46:00 -47:43).

### **Galtung’s Theory of Violence and *Warrior Nun***

*Warrior Nun* does not lack examples of violence, from one-on-one violence, violence done to many, and violence in the context of battle; *Warrior Nun* shows different types of violence. To understand the examples of violence on a deeper level: a definition is necessary. Johan Galtung defines “violence as avoidable insults to basic human needs, and more generally to life, lowering the real level of needs satisfactorily below what is

potentially possible” (292). Because violence is avoidable and people choose to participate in violence, the use of violence can be contested. Galtung also points to what is known as direct violence, which is violence that causes physical injury to the receiver of violence. Direct violence in *Warrior Nun* can be broken down into three categories, violence done by humans, violence done by demons, and violence done in the context of a battle.

### *Violence Done by Humans*

Because the nuns belong to an order that was founded to fight demons in their various forms as part of their mission, they participate in various violent scenarios. Some of the violence is done to outsiders of the group, and other times, the nuns fight amongst themselves. Shotgun Mary, in retaliation for the death of Sister Shannon, goes after the mercenaries that were hired to kill Shannon. Mary finds one of the men hired for the job in an alleyway. She not only beats him with a pipe, but she also threatens to slice open his arm from his wrist to his armpit (“Proverbs 31:25” 14:15 – 15:46). Shotgun Mary also finds Blair Macready, the head of the mercenaries, and takes him to a cliff to question him about his mercenaries and the attack against the nuns. Macready explains that he did not know the crate containing Divinium was rigged to explode. He informs her that the person who rigged the crate knew what they were doing if it only hit one target, Warrior Nun Shannon. Macready makes the statement that Mary would not kill him because she is a nun, but he was mistaken. Mary hands Macready his gun and turns around to leave, Macready gets up to go after her but turns she shoots him, and he falls over the cliff (“Ephesians 6:11” 8:40 – 10:28). The violence that Mary does against the mercenaries is justified for Mary because they killed her friend, even if they did not directly pull the trigger. For the audience, the violence against the first mercenary in the alleyway is portrayed as justified

because Mary was able to get the information she needed to find Macready. However, the audience does not know if Mary needed to slice the man's arm to obtain it because the scene cuts away. Mary's killing of Macready is seen as excessive; she did not have to hand him his gun back; she could have left him on the cliff alive. Instead, she chooses to hand him his gun, knowing he would try and shoot her. Because Macready aimed his gun at her and was intending to shoot, her killing of him could be considered self-defense; had she not created the situation to be able to justify his death. In episode four, Mary enters into confession with Father Vincent; Mary explains that she does not feel sorrow because she "killed a man who was gonna kill" her ("Ecclesiasticus 26:9-10" 21:00 – 21:18). While the audience is supposed to side with Mary, they were privy to the entire encounter and question if Macready would have killed Mary if she did not hand him back his gun.

Sister Lilith is also involved in many scenarios of violence, particularly toward Ava. Lilith clearly resents Ava because she is the new Halo Bearer. Lilith was next in line for the *Halo* and would have gotten it if the nuns were not attacked and they had not hidden the *Halo* inside Ava. Lilith takes her anger out on Ava several times during the series. In episode three, Ava is taken to train with Mother Superior who is supposed to teach her how to fight. Lilith is her sparring partner and is harsher with her than she needs to be. Lilith is purposefully hitting Ava with a wooden stick without giving her a chance to prepare or become fully engaged in the lesson. Lilith also knows that Ava only regained the use of her arms and legs a couple of days ago; this puts Ava at a distinct disadvantage fighting against Lilith, who has been training as a Sister Nun for years. Lilith gets on top of Ava and stabs her in the back through the *Halo*. The *Halo* kicks in to protect Ava and allows the stick to pass through her and not feel pain as it hits her. Lilith is insulted by this

and continues to hit Ava repeatedly even though the blows do not land. Mother Superior has to step in to stop Lilith (“Ephesians 6:11” 14:30 – 17:56). While the audience understands Lilith’s frustration for not receiving the *Halo*, her treatment of Ava is seen as unnecessary. Lilith is acting out of anger and does not want to truly help Ava become the best Warrior Nun that she can be. Instead, Lilith is looking to physically harm Ava as a form of revenge. The audience’s view is further confirmed when Mother Superior steps in to break up the fight; not even the teacher believes Lilith is trying to help Ava learn to fight. Later on, in the episode, Lilith again tries to train Ava, this time without supervision. While explaining how Divinium works to Ava, Lilith slices Ava’s arm. Lilith knows that Ava will be harmed by a slice from the Divinium sword, and it will take her a while to heal (“Ephesians 6:11” 27:30 -28:48). Lilith may believe that she is demonstrating the dangers of Divinium to Ava by slicing her; the audience does not agree with Lilith’s approach. Telling Ava would have been sufficient, given that Ava knows Warrior Nun Shannon was killed by Divinium shrapnel. In episode five, Lilith has stopped trying to train Ava how to be a Warrior Nun and has switched gears to try and remove the *Halo* from her. On the streets of Andalucía, Lilith finds Ava and tries to get the *Halo* back by killing Ava. Lilith slices deeply into Ava’s arm knowing this will leave Ava defenseless, Lilith attempts a killing blow, but Shotgun Mary finds Lilith and stops Lilith’s blade from getting near Ava (“Matthew 7:13” 0:00 – 0:55). Killing Ava to obtain the *Halo* is seen by the audience and Mary as negative violence. The audience cannot see a purpose for this other than Lilith getting to have the *Halo*. The audience does not perceive this as a valid reason to justify the violence against Ava. The audience’s views are confirmed when in episode eight, Lilith

tells Ava that she recognizes her violent actions toward Ava were wrong, and she believes that she let Cardinal Duretti play on her pride (“Proverbs 14:1” 25:20 – 25:42).

The Sister Warriors also perform acts of violence because they are directed to do so by their superiors. The Sister Warriors are tasked by Cardinal Duretti to break into Dr. Jillian Salvias’ laboratory, ArqTech, to “take back” the Divinium that she has “stolen”<sup>22</sup> from the Church. The nuns know that they will encounter guards in the laboratory and will have to incapacitate them in some manner. Sister Camila voices her concerns about the missions stating that she is surprised that Cardinal Duretti would send the nuns to break into a private business. Camila understands that their mission is to be understood as a retrieval. Sister Beatrice also does not agree with Cardinal Duretti’s objective and believes that what he is asking them to do does not fit within the bounds of the OCS. Sister Lilith explains that it is not their place to question the Cardinal and that they would complete their mission. Camila and Beatrice eventually side with Lilith because they agree with how Cardinal Duretti justifies the mission. He believes that Dr. Jillian Salvias is doing violence against the Church because she is melting down the Armor of Adriel, which is made of Divinium, and that is a blasphemy that she needs to be punished for. Getting into the laboratory, the nuns do not harm any of the guards permanently, they knock them out with a tranquilizer. Getting out of the laboratory however, the alarms are triggered, and more guards appear where the nuns are. The other nuns leave, and Beatrice is left alone to fight at least five guards. Beatrice physically injures all of the guards (“Ecclesiasticus 26:9-10”

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<sup>22</sup> Stolen her is a term that Cardinal Duretti would use, but the audience would not agree with him. Julia Salvius obtains Divinium by uncovering lost artifacts from the church. Salvius pays for archeological digs in an effort to find and keep pieces of Divinium. Cardinal Duretti believes that the Church can reclaim any Divinium that is found because it once belonged to the Church.

25:50 – 34:40). The nun's violence against the original group is justified because they believe that they need to retrieve the Divinium that Dr. Jillian Salvius has. The violence that Beatrice does against the second set of guards is justified because it is an act of self-defense and the only way that she can get out of the laboratory is to injure the guards so that they cannot go after her. While the nuns justify their violence, the audience does not. The audience is led to believe that Cardinal Duretti is not actually acting in the best interest of the Church but for his own personal gain. This use of violence is contested but it does not mean that the audience views the girls' actions as negative. Instead, the audience places the blame on Duretti.

Dr. Jillian Salvius is also involved in direct actions of violence. Ava visits Dr. Jillian Salvius because she wants to study the *Halo* scientifically. Ava is skeptical of what she learns from Father Vincent and the other nuns and wants to find an alternative way to learn about the *Halo*. Because Dr. Salvius already studies Divinium, Ava believes that Dr. Salvius can help her learn more about what the *Halo* can do and what she can do with the power of the *Halo*. Dr. Jillian Salvius tells Ava that in order to study the *Halo* Ava needs to be hooked up to an apparatus. However, Ava does not know that Dr. Salvius has hooked her up to the portal that Dr. Salvius has in the basement of her lab in an effort to see if Ava can power it. This ends up hurting Ava because Dr. Salvius is trying to draw too much power for the *Halo*, and it is draining Ava ("Ephesians 4:22-24" 10:30 – 12:55). Everyone involved in the incident understands that Dr. Salvius' actions were wrong. Dr. Salvius apologizes to Ava for hurting her and explains what she was trying to do after Ava finds the portal. Ava contests the use of violence against her. Ava trusted that Dr. Salvius would help her research the *Halo* and instead, Dr. Salvius betrayed that trust for personal gain.

Father Vincent also participates in acts of direct violence on screen. To determine where Adriel's bones are kept, the nuns and Father Vincent must find a map of the Necropolis that was commissioned by the Medici family. This scroll is not in a public collection, so Father Vincent and Mary must locate it. Father Vincent knows an art dealer who may know its whereabouts. He takes Mary to pay the man a visit. Father Vincent informs Mary that he knows him from another life, foreshadowing that Father Vincent will not be acting in a manner that Mary has been accustomed to. The bodyguard does not want Vincent and Mary to go into the auction house to see Esteban, the art collector. Vincent breaks the bodyguard's fingers, pushes him into the building, and Mary follows. The art dealer is so frightened of Vincent that he gives them the name and address of the person who has the map. They arrive at the house, and Vincent and Mary threaten the owner with shotguns. The man complies and lets them take the map. Mary, who used similar tactics on the mercenaries, does not contest Vincent's use of violence ("Proverbs 14:1" 10:11 - 11:18, 20:12 - 20:35, 23:11 - 24:30). The audience is also led to believe that the Sister Nuns need to take possession of Adriel's bones before Cardinal Duretti gets his hands on them and claims their power for his use. Because the audience is led to believe this is the case, Vincent's use of violence is accepted as it is necessary in order to stop Duretti.

The Sister Warriors also have access to the diaries of past Warrior Nuns. These diaries contain detailed accounts of violence done by former Warrior Nuns. In episode eight, Sister Beatrice reads an entry in the diary from a Warrior Nun named Sister Melanie. She was a Warrior Nun during World War II; she was put in a concentration camp for being gay. Melanie became the Warrior Nun after escaping the camp. After her escape, she wanted to attack the Nazis but was told by the Mother Superior of her time that it was not

a part of the OCP's mission. However, one day, Melanie passed by a group of Nazi officers in a pub. The officers saw the numbers on her wrist, and they attacked her. She drew the Divinium Sword and killed them all but one. The man was too far away and had her gun drawn on her. She activated the *Halo* and emitted a blast that melted the gun's bullets as well as the officer. Melanie herself, in the diary passage, does not see that this act of violence was appropriate. She explains that her attack came from anger ("Proverbs 14:1" 17:00 – 20:08). While this is a self-reflection if one Warrior Nun does not find it acceptable to use violence out of anger, should that principle be applied to everyone in the OCP? While some audience members may use this story to reflect on Shotgun Mary's actions, it is not likely because the episodes are too far apart. Though if they did, Mary's actions would be further seen in a negative light. More likely, the audiences would judge the actions following this passage through the lens of Melanie's example.

### *Violence Done by Demons*

The humans are not the only ones participating in violence. The Tarask is a demon that the members of the OCS believe to be hunting on Earth for the *Halo*. At the end of episode one, the Tarask demon, while trying to track down the *Halo* and retrieve it for Hell, finds Shannon's dead body. Out of anger or frustration, the Tarask rips Shannon's back to shreds because the *Halo* is no longer there ("Psalms 46:5" 48:00 – 48:15). In episode five, while Lilith is trying to take the *Halo* from Ava, Ava activates the *Halo*'s power. The surge of power attracts the Tarask demon. The Tarask goes to attack Ava; Mary tries to stop the Tarask with Divinium bullets from her gun; however, the Tarask is not fazed by the bullets. Lilith knows that Ava does not have the training to fight the Tarask, so she tries to use the Divinium sword to disable the Tarask. While Lilith is running toward the Tarask, the

Tarask impales in her stomach. After the Tarask impales Lilith, it vanishes with Lilith still attached to its claw (“Matthew 7:13” 37:20 – 42:00). The nuns see the violence done to their sisters as a negative use of violence but the violence they use against the Tarask is justified. The nuns believe that it is their duty to fight demons, and the audience buys into their mission. Thus, the audience aligns with the nuns’ justification for their violence and agree that the Tarask’s use of violence is contested.

### *Battle Violence*

Much of the violence that occurs in *Warrior Nun* can be contextualized as “battle violence.” Battle violence is violence that occurs inside a situation that both or one party would consider a “battle.” In all of these cases, each side believes that they are fighting for the “right” cause, and they must defeat the other side to preserve order or complete a directive. The plot of the first season of *Warrior Nun* can be contextualized as a battle. Within this battle, people change sides and change their minds on who is fighting for the “right” cause. Because of this, the audience picks a character they side with rather than a cause. Belonging to a cause creates a culture within the group of people who consider themselves to be fighting on the same side. According to Galtung, “cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, and even feel, right or at least not wrong” (291). These acts of violence are “legitimized and thus rendered acceptable in society” (292). The Sister Nuns justify their use of violence because, according to the culture of the OCS, fighting is a necessary aspect; thus, its use is justified.

One battle in *Warrior Nun* involves the fate of Ava. On one side, there are those who wish to give Ava a chance to accept her new role (Father Vincent and Shotgun Mary), and the other side is willing to risk killing Ava by removing the *Halo* and giving it to the people

they believe deserve it (Cardinal Duretti and Lilith). Over the course of a couple of episodes, Lilith and Mary not only argue about what should be done to and with Ava, but they also get into physical altercations, many of which have been described above. Their fighting comes to a head in episode five when they have both drawn their lines in the sand. Lilith does not believe that Ava will give up the *Halo* willingly and has decided that the only way to retrieve the *Halo* is to kill Ava or forcefully take the *Halo* out of her back. Ava has decided to run away from Andalucía because she fears for her life. Lilith and Mary, who have been trailing Ava, know that she has boarded a ferry to Africa. Lilith and Mary separately find their own means to get them to Africa. On the docks in Africa, Lilith and Mary get into another physical altercation. Mary and Lilith exchange punches, kicks, and other close combat maneuvers. The only reason that Mary and Lilith put their fight on pause is that the ferry has docked, and they both need to catch Ava as she disembarks. However, Ava does not get off the boat in Africa; rather, she stays on the boat as it turns around back to Spain. Because of this, Lilith, and Mary board the boat and travel back to Andalucía. They find each other again in the bathroom and continue their fight. Eventually, Mary overcomes Lilith and handcuffs her to a bar in the bathroom. Mary leaves Lilith and finds Ava on the boat and tries to talk Ava into going back to Cat's Cradle that she can help her. Unfortunately for Mary, Lilith has broken free of the handcuffs and still wants to kill Ava. While Mary and Lilith are bickering, Ava runs off the boat, Lilith and Mary pursue her. Ava runs into a warehouse on the docks back in Andalucía. Lilith gets into the warehouse first; the rest of the scene is described above and ends with Lilith impaled by the Tarask ("Matthew 7:13" 19:57 – 24:00, 30:00 – 30:58, 37:20 – 42:00).

Mary and Lilith both believe that they are on the “right” side of the argument. Mary has been tasked by Father Vincent to bring Ava back to Cat’s Cradle so that she can be trained to be the next Warrior Nun. Mary agrees with Father Vincent; she wants to give Ava a chance and does not support the idea that Ava should be killed just because she was not the next in line to be the Halo Barrer and she is a nonbeliever. On the other hand, Lilith is following the order of Cardinal Duretti who believes Lilith should have the *Halo* and that it is justified to kill Ava in order to retrieve it. According to Cardinal Duretti, the sin of killing Ava might be forgiven if Lilith was able to retrieve the *Halo* and bring it back to the Church (“Ecclesiasticus 26:9-10” 18:14 – 20:07). Lilith and Mary are following the directives of a higher authority in the OCS, each believing that the man they are listening to has the authority and the better interpretation of the situation. The audience, however, sides with Mary and Father Vincent. As explained above, the audience cannot see a purpose for killing Ava other than Lilith getting to have the *Halo*. The audience does not perceive this as a valid reason to justify the violence against Ava. The audience also does not justify Lilith’s use of violence toward Mary since Mary is trying to save Ava’s life. The audience does see Mary’s violence against Lilith as justified because Mary is only participating in the violence to stop Lilith from murdering Ava.

Another example of battle violence involves Ava, Mary, and a man possessed by a Wrath demon. In episode six, Mary takes Ava to a town that was attacked by Wrath demons and tells her the story of how Shannon and the Sister Nuns helped rid the town of demons. Ava, with the help of Mary, gets the chance to take a Wrath demon out of a man. The Wrath demon possesses the body of a man and uses it to fight Ava and Mary. Mary tells Ava that to get the Wrath demon to exit the man’s body, she needs to “make the host nonviable,”

which means Ava needs to hurt the man and damage his body. Ava hits the man hard with a piece of raw meat, as it was the only “weapon” in the deli shop where they discovered the man. Once the Ava has sufficiently beat the man’s body, the Wrath demon exits the body of the man. Ava then stabs the Wrath demon with a Divinium knife, and it disappears and presumably goes back to Hell (“Isaiah 30:20-21” 39:00 – 42:00). Mary and Ava justify harming the possessed man because it frees him from the possession of the Wrath demon. The audience agrees with Ava and Mary because the demons are harming the people far more than they are when they remove the Wrath demon. The stabbing of the Wrath demon is also justified because it sends the demon back to hell where Mary, Ava, and the audience believe it belongs.

### **Riches’ Triangle of Violence and *Warrior Nun***

Another example of “battle violence” can be explored by the concept of the triangle of violence. In David Riches’ discussion of the victim triangle, he posits that “‘violence’ is very much a word of those who witness, or who are victims of certain acts, rather than those who perform them” (“The Phenomenon of Violence” 3). He states that “witnesses may come to accept the performer’s view of things or may come to detract from this view; performers may come to accept the opinions of detracting witnesses – and cease or modify the act they are perpetrating” (9). According to Riches, “a particular act will very likely have several explicit purposes, one of which will probably predominate and will therefore give the act its primary sense of reason” (5). In this example, Ava, Shotgun Mary, Sister Crimson, and Beatrice are the victims of violence; Sister Crimson, Shotgun Mary, Beatrice, and Ava are the performers of violence, and Ava, Beatrice, Shotgun Mary, and the audience are the witnesses.

In episode seven, while Ava is trying to retrieve the items that Warrior Nun Shannon left in a hidden room in her living quarters at Cat's Cradle, Mary is on guard to make sure that no one sees what they are doing. While Mary is waiting for Ava to return from the secret room, Mary is caught off guard by Sister Crimson, who gets her in a chokehold. Mary fights back, hitting Sister Crimson in to get free of her grasp. Mary is stabbed by Sister Crimson in the thigh. Ava phases out from the hidden room, and Sister Crimson hits her in the face with a nunchaku. Sister Crimson goes to hit Mary while she is down, but Beatrice arrives and stops the blow. Beatrice continues to fight with Sister Crimson. Beatrice knows all the maneuvers that Sister Crimson is going to try because of their and from their previous battle during training. Beatrice does not let Sister Crimson land one blow on her. However, during the fight, Crimson gets the chance to fire off a rifle filled with buckshot. This shot would have killed Beatrice, but Ava uses the power of the *Halo* to disperse the spray so that it does not hit Beatrice. Because the blast from the *Halo* is so strong, Beatrice, Mary, and Sister Crimson are thrown against the wall ("Ephesians 4:22-24" 30:20 – 32:32).

Ava is a receiver of violence, a perpetrator, and a witness. Ava is a receiver of violence because she was ambushed by Sister Crimson after she exited the secret room. Sister Crimson's blow to Ava's nose left it cut open and bleeding. Ava is a perpetrator of violence because the blast from the *Halo* caused Mary, Beatrice, and Sister Crimson to hit the walls of the room. The blast also causing Sister Crimson to be knocked unconscious. Mary and Beatrice received little to no injury due to the blast. Ava is a witness of violence because she witnesses the battle between Sister Crimson and Mary as well as the battle between Beatrice and Sister Crimson. Beatrice is a receiver of violence, a perpetrator, and

a witness. Beatrice was thrown against the wall by Ava's blast, making her a receiver of violence. Beatrice was also the intended target of Sister Crimson's violent acts; while Sister Crimson did land some blows, they were not the blows she intended because Beatrice was able to block them. Beatrice also witnessed Sister Crimson's battle with Mary and everyone being thrown against the wall by Ava's blast. Mary is a perpetrator of violence, a receiver of violence, and a witness. Mary is a perpetrator of violence because she fights back against Sister Crimson. She is a receiver of violence because Sister Crimson initiated a battle with her. Mary is a witness to the violence that Sister Crimson does against Ava and Beatrice, as well as the violence that Ava does to everyone with her blast. Finally, Sister Crimson is a receiver of violence and a perpetrator. Sister Crimson initiated the violence against Mary; without Sister Crimson's initiation, the violence would not have occurred. Sister Crimson also chooses to attack Ava and Beatrice. Sister Crimson is also a receiver of violence in her battle with Mary, her battle with Beatrice, and because of Ava's blast.

Ava, Mary, and Beatrice all side together; they believe that Sister Crimson's use of violence is not justified. Sister Crimson believes that her violence is justified because Mary, Beatrice, and Ava are trespassing because they are no longer allowed in Cat's Cradle. Beatrice is supposed to be on her way to her reassignment; Mary is no longer accepted because Father Vincent has been reassigned; and Ava is not respected by Father Duretti; thus, Duretti wants the rejected sisters to capture Ava so that the *Halo* can be retrieved from her back. In Sister Crimson's mind, she is simply following a directive given to her by a superior. While Mary and Beatrice are affected by Ava's blast, they do not view this violence as unjustified. Ava's blast saved Beatrice from the buckshot in Sister Crimson's gun; whatever damage Mary and Beatrice sustained from the blast is accepted as collateral

damage. Ava, Mary, and Beatrice all see Sister Crimson becoming unconscious as necessary because it allows them to escape the room, and it stops Sister Crimson from inflicting any more damage. The audience sides with Ava, Mary, and Beatrice. While the audience knows that Ava, Mary, and Beatrice are trespassing, the trespassing is justified because they need to figure out what message Warrior Nun Shannon wants them to know. There is no other alternative but to enter Cat's Cradle and find the secret room that Shannon used to phase into. The audience also does not agree with Duretti's plan to kill Ava to retrieve the *Halo*; because of this, any violence that Mary and Beatrice use to protect Ava; and any violence Ava uses to protect herself is justified.

### **Threat of Violence/ Desire for Violence and *Warrior Nun***

In addition to the use of direct violence in *Warrior Nun*, there are also plenty of threats of violence. These threats of violence, like direct violence, can also be contested. David Riches called threats of violence “postured threat of hurt” (“Aggression, War, Violence” 293). According to Riches, these threats are unpleasant and “invite a fairly immediate response” (293). People react not because of the threat itself but from the “anticipation of what such threats signify (namely, actual physical hurt)” (293). However, to cause a reaction in the recipient, the recipient has to be present, and that is not always the case. When applying this concept to television series, the audience takes the place of the true recipient of the threat. The audience then forms a reaction to the threat of violence.

Many of the threats of violence are between Cardinal Duretti and Dr. Jillian Salvius. After Cardinal Duretti finds out that Dr. Salvius has been collecting Divinium and has no intention of giving it to the Church, Duretti declares war on Dr. Salvius. In episode four, Cardinal Duretti appears before the nuns at Cat's Cradle and tells them they are at war, and

this war is now a part of the mission of the OCS. Duretti informs the nuns that the melting down of Divinium, which Dr. Salvius is doing, is a blasphemy and needs to be stopped (“Ecclesiasticus 26:9-10” 15:20 – 16:30). Without knowing what Cardinal Duretti has told the nun, Dr. Salvius believes that Cardinal Duretti has started a war with her because Blair McCready is found dead. The audience knows that Shotgun Mary killed Blair McCready for being involved in the death of Warrior Nun Shannon, and the audience knows that it is impossible for Dr. Salvius to know this. Dr. Salvius believes that McCready’s death falls in line with the idea that “the Church has been killing heretics for centuries”. Kristian Schaefer warns Dr. Salvius that if she openly opposes the church, then she is likely to start a war. Dr. Salvius tells Kristian that they are already at war (“Ecclesiasticus 26:9-10” 38:33 – 39:17). In episode five, Dr. Salvius holds a press conference where she tells the Church to stop the hostility toward her. Duretti sees this as confirmation of a declaration of War. Father Vincent does not think that Cardinal Duretti is acting in the best interest of the Church by going after Jillian Salvius (“Matthew 7:13” 4:00 – 7:16). Dr. Salvius never acts on her threats and does nothing to the Church in retaliation for the “killing” McCready. However, Duretti sends the nuns into Dr. Salvius’s lab to retrieve the Divinium. Cardinal Duretti’s threats are contested by Father Vincent and the audience. Because Cardinal Duretti is portrayed as selfish in the series, the audience does not trust that he is retaliating against Dr. Salvius because it is blasphemous to melt Divinium; the audience suspects that there is some other underlying cause for Duretti’s actions. The audience also knows that Dr. Salvius does not have the correct information, and thus her threats come from a place of misunderstanding. The audience contests Dr. Salvius’s threats because they are not based on fact.

Cardinal Duretti is also involved in another threat of violence against the Sister nun, and it comes in the form of a directive. According to Sister Crimson, “if any dismissed personnel return, they’re to be removed immediately” (“Ephesians 4:22-24” 26:00 – 26:40). The dismissed personnel are Beatrice, Father Vincent, and Shotgun Mary. Sister Camila, who eventually sides with the dismissed personnel, responds, “surely he didn’t mean with violence,” and Sister Crimson responds, “by any means necessary. His words, not mine” (“Ephesians 4:22-24” 4:22-24” 26:00 – 26:40). The audience sees this as a threat against Beatrice, Mary, Father Vincent, and Ava even though the group does not know about the threat. The audience sees the threat as a contested threat of violence because there was no reason to dismiss them other than Duretti wanted to consolidate his power.

### **Structural Violence and *Warrior Nun***

Some violence in *Warrior Nun* can be examined through the lens of structural violence. According to David Riches, violence can stem from a structure or institution. He explains that “the notion that violence inheres in social structures, especially ones with marked hierarchy, is often presented as a balance to view the only individuals commit violence” (“Aggression, War, Violence” 294). However, Riches also notes that “more focused than the idea of structural violence is the notion that violence institutionally inheres in social roles implying the *organization and direction of physical hurt*” (294). Individuals can choose to recognize the singular person committing an act of violence, or sometimes people focus on the larger institution. David Riches also notes that the system is “*dependent on individual actions*” (“Aggression, War, Violence” 294). In the case of *Warrior Nun*, both The Church and the people who belong to The Church are seen as agents of

violence. Yet, on closer examination, “the Church” has not participated in violence; in every instance that the Church is blamed, a single actor can be identified.

In episode five, Sister Beatrice and Cardinal Duretti have a conversation about the will of the Church versus the will of God. In the conversation, Cardinal Duretti attempts to find out if Sister Beatrice will be unconditionally loyal to him. However, Sister Beatrice proves that she understands the difference between the Church and a single man. Cardinal Duretti believes that Sister Beatrice is someone who is “dedicated to supporting the chain of command.” Beatrice responds that she is loyal and that the head of the chain of command is God, and that is who she is loyal to. Duretti wants to know if Sister Beatrice “will remain faithful to the will of the Church.” Sister Beatrice informs Cardinal Duretti that she will remain “faithful to God” (“Matthew 7:13” 15:12 – 17:18). Sister Beatrice understands that Cardinal Duretti is interchanging himself with the Church in their conversation, and she makes it clear that she will not support one man but will do what she believes is right according to her faith in God. The audience detects what Cardinal Duretti is implying and can separate the Church from Duretti. Cardinal Duretti is using the power of the structure of the Church to justify his personal mission which does involve violence.

The audience already knows that Cardinal Duretti uses his powerful position in the Church and the Church’s hierarchical structure to change things to benefit himself. However, the series continues to reinforce this narrative. Duretti uses his power to relocate Father Vincent to Florida and Sister Beatrice to Malaysia, where there is no chapter of the OCS. By doing this, he is essentially removing Beatrice from the Order of the Cruciform Sword (“Ephesians 4:22-24” 8:50 – 10:08). The audience knows that Beatrice is being punished for the conversation that she had with Duretti recounted above. In addition,

Duretti brings in his own personal group of Sister Nuns, who he knows will follow his every directive. Duretti says that he is making changes for the good of the OCS, but the audience feels as though he is making changes in the name of the Church, but the changes only benefit himself. Shotgun Mary also recognizes that Duretti is using the structure of the Church to justify his actions. In episode seven, Mary confronts Mother Superior about why she is allowing Cardinal Duretti to make changes that do not help the OCS. Mother Superior tells Mary that she serves the Church, and that is why she is doing what she is told to by Duretti. Mary counter's Mother Superior's logic and says that Duretti is not the Church; he is just a man "who puts himself before anyone, including God" ("Ephesians 4:22-24" 16:30 – 18:20). Because the show pushes the narrative that structures are not, in fact, the root of violence, people are, the audience forms a nuanced opinion of religion and violence.

### **Scarce Resource Theory, Violence, and Power in *Warrior Nun***

Another way to analyze the violence in *Warrior Nun* is through Hector Avalos's scarce resource theory. According to Avalos, "most violence is due to scarce resources, real or perceived... people perceive that there is not enough of something they value, then conflict may ensue to maintain or acquire that resource" (555). Avalos also remarks that "when religion causes violence, it often does so because it has created a new scarce resource" (555). There are two scarce resources in *Warrior Nun* that cause violence to occur, the *Halo* and Divinium, or the armor and bones of Adriel. According to the myth that was constructed by Areala and Adriel and perpetuated by the religious system, there is only one *Halo*. There is also only one source of Divinium, Adriel's armor. Both of these scarce resources are believed to come from Adriel. The violence against Ava by Lilith to

retrieve the *Halo* can be contextualized as Lilith fighting to retrieve the scarce resource that the OCS has created. Cardinal Duretti's threats of war against Dr. Salvius can also be contextualized as a battle over the scarce resource of Divinium. While Cardinal Duretti contextualizes Dr. Salvius's actions as a blasphemy, the audience can understand that it is a threat of war over who possesses the scarce resource of Divinium. The Tarask that comes to Earth searching for the *Halo* who ends up killing and harming people along the way is also performing violence to obtain a scarce resource. The audience is forced to question if Adriel had not given the *Halo* to Areala, would the violence of the television series occur.

### **Non-physical (Mental) Violence and Warrior Nun**

Another form of violence that is present in *Warrior Nun* is non-physical violence or mental violence. In the series, Ava is made to feel like she is worthless and that her existence is a burden on those around her. According to Riches, mental violence consists of “inflicting upon another of a deleterious psychological impact” (“Aggression, War, Violence” 294). In episode three, Mother Superior tells Ava that she has her file from the orphanage. In the file, the nuns, or more specifically Sister Frances, reported that Ava killed herself. The report states that she overdosed on pain medication. Ava notes that she could not feel anything below her chest and so she would not need pain medication. However, Mother Superior tortures Ava with these “facts” and says that it is a part of who she is and that her suicide proves that she is weak. Later in the episode, Sister Beatrice talks to Ava and tells her that Mother Superior is “just messing with her head” because that is what she does to all the Sister Warriors (“Ephesians 6:11” 35:02 – 37:50). Mother Superior believes that making Ava confront her suicide will help her come to terms with it. However, it only causes Ava more pain. Mother Superior believes the file more than she believes Ava which

further reinforces the idea that Mother Superior wants to break Ava and the other Sister Nuns she trains mentally. While the audience does not, at this point, know what happened to Ava to result in her death, they still do not side with Mother Superior. Mother Superior's mental torture of Ava is contested by the audience as well as by Ava.

In episode four, the audience learns about Ava's past and how she was taken care of in the orphanage. While Ava was under the care of Sister Francis, Sister Francis treated Ava horribly. Sister Francis constantly reminds Ava that she is a burden: but Ava cannot take care of herself because she is a quadriplegic<sup>23</sup> and is supposed to be in a place where people will take care of her. Sister Francis taunts Ava and says that she never lifts a finger around the orphanage: but Sister Francis knows this is impossible because Ava cannot lift a finger because she is paralyzed. Sister Francis knew that Ava would age out of the orphanage, and Ava would not have anyone to take care of her and so in an "act of mercy," Sister Francis injected her with too much pain medication; and it killed her. In the episode, Ava realizes that Sister Francis, now that she does not have Ava to "take care of," her next target is Diego. Ava catches Sister Francis in the act of killing Diego. After Ava stops Sister Francis, she asks how many children Sister Francis has killed, and Francis says she lost count. Sister Francis thinks she is a "savior" that gave the children back to God and saved them from their pain ("Ecclesiasticus 26:9-10" 2:26 – 3:00, 23:05 – 24:00, 34:40 – 38:00). Sister Francis constantly berating and degrading Ava caused Ava to internalize those words. Ava's mental health was not taken care of in the orphanage;

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<sup>23</sup> Ava's physical condition of being a quadriplegic can also be explored through the intersections of ableism and structural violence. Ingrained in Sister Francis's notion of a worthy person is that they must have the function of all of their limbs and be able to help out in the orphanage. Sister Francis demonstrates internalized ableism, and her internal feelings could reflect the organization as a whole.

instead, she was mentally tortured by Sister Francis. Sister Francis's mental violence turned into physical violence, and not just in the case of Ava. The audience does not agree with Sister Francis's actions; she was supposed to take care of Ava and the other orphans as they had no one else to do so. In addition, Ava was a quadriplegic and needed someone to help her accomplish daily tasks. Instead of having empathy for Ava's situation, Sister Francis held contempt. The audience is forced to wonder why another nun in the orphanage was not assigned to take care of Ava.

### **Mythmaking to Justify Violence in *Warrior Nun***

The “myth” of the founding of the OCS and the origin of the *Halo* works to justify much of the violence done within the television series. It frames the Sister Nun’s actions as justified because their actions are part of a larger mission. According to Russel McCutcheon, myth can be understood as “ordinary human means of fashioning and authorizing their lived-in and believed in ‘world’” (200). McCutcheon also suggests that myths should be reconceived as “mythmaking,” which denotes an “ongoing process of constructing, authorizing, and reconstructing social identities or social formations” (202-3). McCutcheon states that “social formation by means of mythmaking is nothing other than the reasonable response to the inevitable social disruptions, contradictions, and incongruities that characterize the ordinary human condition” (206). The myth of the *Halo*, which creates the backbone for the Order of the Cruciform Sword, fits into the understanding that myths are made by humans and that mythmaking is an “ongoing process of constructing, authorizing, and reconstructing social identities or social formations” (McCutchen 202-3).

According to the standard myth of the OCS, Areala, an orphan, found God and fought in the First Crusade in God's name. She was a fearless warrior who was killed in the battle. However, the angel Adriel, a messenger from God, came down to Earth and gave her his *Halo*. This was a sacrifice on Adriel's part because it made him human. The Order of the Cruciform Sword was created by Areala to fight demons who came to Earth. According to the myth, whoever bears the *Halo* becomes the Champion, the Warrior Nun, and the other nuns in the order are called Sister Warriors. The Warrior Nun can hunt down and kill demons because the *Halo* gives the bearer the ability to see them. The Tarask of Golden Legend is the demon who killed Areala. Still having some life within her, Areala called for the next sister in line so that the Halo could be transferred to the next Warrior Nun ("Ephesians 6:11" 1:45 – 6:19). This myth sets up the idea that the *Halo* is a gift from an angel, that the Warrior Nun in her last breath must choose to give up the *Halo*, and that there is a rightful line of succession for the *Halo*.

However, more of the myth is discovered in the book that Ava retrieves in episode eight. According to the book, Adriel, by giving up his halo, was turned mortal and died. "His remains were placed in a tomb of honor at the center of the Necropolis, an ancient city of the dead." People felt power coming from the tomb, and so it "became a place of pilgrimage [where] some people brought the sick and dying, who it was said were healed." The book states that "the power from the tomb could be used for good or evil." The Sisters of the Order of the Cruciform sword locked away Adriel's remains in a stone crypt because they believed the energy emitted by the bones was too powerful. The tomb was buried due to the weather over time, and Vatican City was eventually built over the tomb. The bones have the power to anchor demons in the world, and according to Shannon's notes, the

church knew this was the case. According to the book, “he who bears the Relic of Adriel shall be the Lord of Demon kind”. The sisters ask Father Vincent if he had heard this story before. He replies that it is “a devil’s bargain to keep people reliant on the Church. As long as there is darkness in the world, people will turn to us for light” (“Proverbs 14:1” 0:00 – 4:36). This portion of the myth reinforces the idea that the Church participates in structural violence and is willing to have evil exist in the world and for people to get hurt by it all so that they can remain powerful. Mary, Beatrice, Ava, and Camila believe that Duretti knew about this and wants to retrieve the bones so that he can claim the power for himself. This portion of the myth also works to justify the violence of the Church for those who believe the Church should remain in power by any means possible.

In episode ten, Ava is told the true history of how the Order of the Cruciform Sword came to be and what the *Halo* actually is. While in the tomb, Adriel touches Ava, and Ava lives through the true story of Areala in a vision. In this vision, Areala is dying on the battlefield during the Crusades; Adriel appears out of thin air and is followed by a Tarask. The Tarask is after the *Halo*. Adriel kills the Tarask in front of the other soldiers. The soldiers believe that Adriel is an angel and a devil slayer. Adriel tells the soldiers that he can save Areala as long as they agree to fight demons for him. However, the audience knows that when the *Halo* is in human skin, its energy is dampened. Adriel puts the *Halo* in Areala to stop demons from coming after him. Areala knows that Adriel is not an angel and created his armor, what the Church considers to be a holy relic, out of the melted down skeleton of a Tarask. Adriel threatens to take away the *Halo* from Areala if she does not keep his secret. Areala agrees to keep his secret and forms the Order of the Cruciform Sword (“Revelation 2:10” 19:30 – 26:55). Ava and the audience come to realize that the

OCS was founded on a lie. None of the violence that was committed by the OCS since its founding is justified. The audience is also left to wonder if the Tarask is a demon at all or if it is an angel or some other celestial being. This realization calls into question the premise that the Sister Nuns have been working from and if any violence, even from Mary, Beatrice, Camilla, and Ava can be justified even though those are the characters that the audience sides with through the series. The audience may still justify their use of violence because Mary, Beatrice, Camilla, and Ava could not have known they were being lied to and were doing what they believe to be right. The audience may feel compassion for their situation. However, the audience still does not side with Cardinal Duretti and the rejected nuns because they still believe his motivations were personal gain.

### **Audience Perception: Structural versus Individual Violence**

The audience is bombarded by all of the violence and the different types of violence in *Warrior Nun*. First, the audience must get over their preconceived notions of what it means to be a nun in the Roman Catholic Church. Out of all of the television series that have been discussed thus far, *Warrior Nun* contains the most violence as well as the most varied forms of violence. *Warrior Nun* is also the only show to engage directly with a specific religious group. However, the audience, even though they may be tempted to apply the violence in the series to the broader category of religion many may not. Because the show works hard to show that institutions and social structures are not the reason for violence, individuals are, the audience can interpret that one individual and their actions do not represent the Church as a whole<sup>24</sup>. In the series, every time the Church is labeled by

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<sup>24</sup> While it is possible for the audience to not blame the social structure for violence, people come to the television series with their own interpretations and connections to religion. Because *Warrior Nun* directly engages with the Roman Catholic Church, some individuals will come already

the characters as the locus of violence, the audience knows that an individual character performed the violent act. *Warrior Nun*, and its use of violence can cause the audience to question figures that are in power. Cardinal Duretti's true intentions were never clearly revealed to the audience though they still assume that he is still climbing the ranks of the Church for personal gain. In the last episode, it was revealed that Father Vincent was not trying to help the OCS, instead he has been helping to coordinate Adriel's escape from the tomb. The audience is led to then question the intentions and actions of all those who hold positions of power. *Warrior Nun* also demonstrates various forms of violence that can happen, it does not just have to be direct violence. The audience is given the chance to consider what types of violence they recognize and how they work to justify each type of violence and question if the type of violence matters in their justification. The audience is forced to examine if religion and violence are really intertwined.

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blaming the church as well a priest figures for violence. These interpretations may not change after watching the show, especially since the show deals with a fictional representation of the Catholic Church.

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## Conclusion

Through the four case studies of *Ares*, *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, *Good Omens*, and *Warrior Nun*, we can see that television series that use the themes of religion and violence both challenge and work to reinforce "common" views of organized religion. To determine what the creators, showrunners, and directors are up to, the audience must parse through the series' use of the themes to recognize the series' interpretation of the themes to come up with their own understanding and opinions. There are plenty of television series that utilize the themes of religion and violence that can be explored using the method established in this work. However, the four case studies chosen demonstrate that not all interpretations inherently link the themes of religion and violence together. Upon further examination, the television series are more nuanced in their approach to the theme of religion, and their use of violence is not always negatively perceived by the audience. The series also asks the audience to consider who is doing the violence, why are they participating in violence, and who is condoning the violence, and none of these questions can be answered simply.

The Netflix Original Series *Ares* leads its audience to believe that Rosa and Jacob were taken advantage of by the society and should not be held accountable for their actions. However, the audience understands that while the structure of the society may justify and even make violence feel normal, Rosa and Jacob chose to join a society that expected them to commit violent acts, so they must recognize the consequences of their actions. Ultimately, Rosa and Jacob are understood by the audience to be culpable for their actions. Also, the audience may have sympathy for how Carmen was mentally abused by her father, Mr. Zwaneburg, and how he and the rest of the upper echelon of Ares society created an

environment and a society that mentally tortured its members. The audience mostly focuses on the fact that underlying most if not all of the direct violence in the series is mental violence. The audience can accept the direct violence that occurs under the structure of Ares, but the audience can never accept the mental violence done within the society. The audience's preconceived notions of "cult" are reinforced because they side with those members of the society that have been mentally manipulated. Focusing on mental violence reinforces the mindset that organized societies that worship a deity are nefarious. Audience members that can link the ideas of cult and organized religion together can project the negative feelings that have toward cults onto religion as a whole. The series does nothing to combat these possible connections, thus leaving their audience to question if religion is violent.

The Christmas special from the Netflix original series *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* leads the audience to accept the positive valence of violence that the biblical narratives take on in the episode. Even though the biblical narratives have been taken out of the context of the Hebrew Bible, the show places them within the religion of the Church of Night. While the characters in the series are witches, elements of Christianity including, baptism, religious figures, and other Christian stories, can be seen throughout the show. Because of this, the audience subconsciously or consciously could like this show to both Christianity and religion in general, which in turn could cause them to link together the ideas of religion and violence. However, as noted in the chapter, the rest of the series challenges the audience and the notion that religion and violence are inherently intertwined. The audience is forced to recognize that certain figures are responsible for the violence done in the television series. Father Blackwood creates and reinforces a religion that is with

violence; however, when Zelda Spellman is in charge of the coven, violence amongst the members is not as prevalent. The audience must question if religion is violent or are certain members of religious groups violent.

The Amazon Original Series *Good Omens*, from the get-go, challenges its audience's views of religion. While the other television series that have thus far been discussed can work to reinforce the idea that religion and violence are deeply intertwined, *Good Omens* takes a more nuanced approach. *Good Omens* challenges the idea that religions are monolithic and that everyone who participates in the same religion thinks the same way. The demon Crowley and the angel Aziraphale are within the same religion as the rest of the demons and angels; they do not blindly agree to everything everyone else agrees with. The audience is forced to question if everyone who participates in religion believes that violence is necessary or good. The audience also must confront the idea that not everything is as simple as it appears. Those people that we assume are good or should be good given their title are not, and those who are supposed to be evil do not want to be. While the audience is left with more questions than answers, this situation is beneficial as it forces the audience to sit with their preconceived notions and try to reconcile them with the ideas that the show has presented. While the audience may already believe that religions are violent, *Good Omens* challenges that notion.

The Netflix Original Series *Warrior Nun* challenges the audience throughout the entirety of the series. At times, the audience may be tempted to say that religion is definitively violent, and nuns would be better off if they did not participate, while other times the audience may be tempted to say that it is not the religion; it is the people in positions of power that are the problem. The television series works hard to show that

institutions and social structures are not the reason for violence; individuals are. The audience understands that the actions of individuals do not represent the Church as a whole. While the Church is portrayed by the characters as its own entity, every time the Church is labeled as the locus of violence, the audience knows that an individual character is the one who performed the violent act. The audience must question if religions are violent or if some people are violent and they use religion to justify their actions.

These television series should not be disregarded because they are part of the “popular culture,” as they can provide valuable insight into how people engage with religion in non-formal ways. Because we live in an era of media, media should be another area that religion scholars explore. Even though the television series do not always explore “real” religions, people can still use their portrayals to inform their ideas and opinions on the subject. The television series are also complex and nuanced in their portrayals; the shows never simply say that religion is: good or bad, violent, or benevolent, beneficial, or harmful. These are some layers that can be examined and interpreted. The series also do a good job at highlighting that even though structures exist that support the goals of individuals, it is ultimately the individual that needs to be held accountable. This is a particularly interesting move as it can demonstrate to the audience that blaming a single entity leads nowhere, and it is important to get at the root cause of violence. Perhaps series that do this will aid in the conversations that just because an individual performs an act of violence in the name of a religion, it does not mean that this one person represents the religion as a whole nor does everyone within that religion agree with the person who performed the violent act. Exploring television shows opens up a new avenue of exploration for religious scholars and provides a new foray into popular culture.

## Further Research

All of the television series discussed in this thesis project have women performing violence. Most of the scholarship available discusses women as victims of violence; there is a relative lack of scholarship on women as perpetrators of violence. The fourth volume of *Cambridge World History of Violence*, which focuses on the 1800s to the present, does not contain a chapter discussing women as perpetrators of violence. They do, however, have a section dealing with “intimate and gendered violence.” This lack of scholarship attests to the future work that must be done in the field. In addition to the lack of scholarship in the field of religious studies, there is a lack of scholarship that discusses women who perform violence as exerting power. Oftentimes, when women are portrayed as perpetrators of violence, they embody a femme fatale role. Women who perform violence, especially in the media, are exoticized and eroticized (Minowa 210). Many “current images that appear empowering to women are still dependent on the male gaze, and are, consequently, less liberatory for women than they may seem to be initially” (210). Women who perform acts of violence are often portrayed in nonrealistic clothing that suits the male gaze. For example, women in violent video games are often clothed in skimpy outfits that logistically would not work in battle. In a 2018 interview with *Elle*, Elizabeth Olsen, who plays Wanda Maximoff in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, spoke about how her costume revealed her cleavage for no reason. Olsen remarked that she was the only one that had cleavage showing, and it became a joke because the team did work to evolve her costume (Blyth). Olsen's character is one in a long line of characters that while portrayed as violent are still fulfilling a gender role of being sexy. While the sexualization of violent women has been

explored, the violence done by women who are not portrayed as sexual objects needs its time in the light.

New scholarship needs to be developed to discussing the changes in how women who perform acts of violence are portrayed. In *Ares*, the women who perform violence are not doing so for those around them or the audience members who may find them attractive; they are not sexualized. The women in *Ares* society are performing acts of violence to get ahead socially, to get better jobs, to earn more money, to rank higher in the society. There is an element of female empowerment involved; while the violence cannot be condoned, their drive for success is admirable. In *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, the character of Sabrina is not only fighting for her independence; she also fights to save the town on Greendale on multiple occasions. The other female witches also fight against the religious system that wishes to oppress them, and they discover a religion through female empowerment. In *Warrior Nun*, Ava constantly fights for her independence and does not let anyone force her into a situation she is uncomfortable with. The other Sister Nuns also engage in violent acts to break free from the system that aims to use them and their loyalty for personal gain. Finally, in *Good Omens*, Anathema Device also engages in violence for the ultimate goal of saving the world. These women engage in violence to protect themselves and to gain autonomy. A question that we must ask is, why must these women resort to violent acts to achieve these goals? Can these images be empowering if the women did not use violence, or is the violence necessary to demonstrate power? These are only some of the questions that should be explored further. There needs to be further study on when and how empowered women use violence to free themselves and those around them.

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