

## Constructing Religious Martyrdom

Martyrdom is a phenomenon common to many of the world's religious traditions. But why? In this study, John Soboslai offers insights into the practices of self-sacrifice within specific sociopolitical contexts. Providing a new understanding of martyrdom through the lens of political theology, he analyzes discourses and performances in four religious traditions during social and political crises, beginning with second-century Christianity in Asia Minor, where the term "martyr" first took its meaning. He also analyzes Shi'a Islam in the 1980s, when "suicide bombing" first appeared as a strategy in West Asia; global Sikhism during World War I, where martyrs stood for and against the British Raj; and twenty-first-century Tibetan Buddhism, where self-immolators used their bodies in opposition to the programs of the People's Republic of China. Presenting a new theory of martyrdom linked to constructions of sovereign authority, Soboslai reveals common features of self-sacrifice and demonstrates how bodily performances buttress conceptions of authority.

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## A Cross-Cultural Study

JOHN SOBOSLAI  
*Montclair State University*



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## Abbreviations of Ancient Sources

<i>Ac. Justin</i>	<i>Acts of Justin and His Companions</i>
<i>Ac. Scilli.</i>	<i>Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs</i>
<i>Clement, Strom.</i>	<i>Miscellanies</i>
<i>Eusebius, Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>Ign. Eph.</i>	<i>Ignatius, To the Ephesians</i>
<i>Ign. Magn.</i>	<i>Ignatius, To the Magnesians</i>
<i>Ign. Phil.</i>	<i>Ignatius, To the Philadelphians</i>
<i>Ign. Poly.</i>	<i>Ignatius, To Polycarp</i>
<i>Ign. Rom.</i>	<i>Ignatius, To the Romans</i>
<i>Ign. Smyr.</i>	<i>Ignatius, To the Smyrneans</i>
<i>Ign. Tral.</i>	<i>Ignatius, To the Trallians</i>
<i>Iren. Ad. Haer</i>	<i>Ireneaus, Against Heresies</i>
<i>Josephus B.J.</i>	<i>Jewish War</i>
<i>Justin Martyr, 1 Apol.</i>	<i>First Apology</i>
<i>Justin Martyr, 2 Apol.</i>	<i>Second Apology</i>
<i>Mart. Carp.</i>	<i>Martyrdom of Carpus, Papyrus, and Agathonike</i>
<i>Mart. Lyons</i>	<i>Martyrs of Lyons or Lugdunum</i>
<i>Mart. Pionius</i>	<i>Martyrdom of Pionius</i>
<i>Mart. Pol.</i>	<i>Martyrdom of Polycarp</i>
<i>Mart. Ptol.</i>	<i>Martyrdom of Ptolemaeus and Lucius</i>
<i>Minucius Felix, Octav.</i>	<i>Octavius</i>
<i>Philo, Legat.</i>	<i>On the Embassy to Gaius</i>
<i>Plato, Phaed.</i>	<i>Phaedo</i>
<i>Pliny, Epist.</i>	<i>Letters (Epistulae)</i>
<i>Tertullian, Apol.</i>	<i>Apology</i>
<i>Tertullian, De anim.</i>	<i>On the Soul</i>
<i>Tertullian, Fug.</i>	<i>On Flight in Persecution</i>