

**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF SACRIFICE IN
CHRISTIANITY AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project work was carried out by Oghenechohwuko Blessing OBOH with matriculation number **ART2101154** in the Department of Religions, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City under my supervision.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty for grace and strength, and to my parents,
Rev Dr Samson Oboh and Mrs Esther Oboh.

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ABSTRACT

The research offers a comparative analysis of the concept of sacrifice in Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR), examining their theological foundations, ritual expressions, and moral implications. The study investigates how both religious systems conceptualize sacrifice as a medium of communication between the divine and humanity, while also identifying the points of convergence and divergence in their practices and beliefs.

Using a descriptive and analytical method supported by secondary sources such as theological texts, scholarly journals, and Research Gate materials, the research reveals that both Christianity and ATR view sacrifices as a vital expression of faith, gratitude, and reconciliation.

The study concludes that while both traditions differ in their theological orientation - Christianity being redemptive and eschatological, and African Religion being restorative and cyclical - they share a common vision of sacrifice as a means of achieving peace, moral renewal, and divine communion. The research recommends promoting Interreligious dialogue, contextual theology, and ethical reinterpretations of sacrifice that emphasizes compassion, justice, and ecological responsibility in modern society.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the Study

Sacrifice is a fundamental concept in many religious traditions, Including Christianity and African Tradition Religions. Sacrifice is the heart beat of every religious ritual it is the means through which religious adherents / practitioners access their God or gods. It has become the dominant paradigm by which scholars of religion analyze and evaluate religious rituals in all religions of the world. It is a universal phenomenon and it exists everywhere where there is religion. Sacrifice is among the numerous elements of worship through which man expresses himself to higher beings of worship. Sacrifice often involves giving up something valuable to show respect, ask for help, or to make peace with a higher power. Both Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR) see sacrifice as a way to connect with the divine, but they understand and practice it differently.

In Christianity, sacrifice plays a big role in how people relate to God. Sacrifice is understood as a central aspect of God's plan for humanity, culminating in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Sacrifice were offered to God as a way of approach to God, finding acceptance before Him by means of an acceptable substitute offered both in the Old and New Testament of the Bible. In the Old Testament, people gave animal sacrifices to ask for forgiveness or to thank God. These offerings were done by Priest and often involved sheep, goats, and bulls. In the New Testament, the idea of sacrifice changes. Christians believe that Jesus Christ gave his life as the final and

perfect sacrifice. His death on the cross is seen as a way to take away the sins of the world. Because of this, Christians no longer need to offer animals. Instead, they remember Jesus' sacrifice through prayer, worship, and the Holy Communion (also called the Lord's supper) which uses bread and wine as a representation of His body and blood.

A close look at the concept of sacrifice in Christianity and African Traditional Religion, reveals that there are some similarities between the two religions. Sacrifice in both religions is meant to bring men closer to God or the deity, it is a way to reach out to God or the spiritual world, both religions use sacrifice to deal with wrongdoings. In both religions, sacrifices often involve living things (like animals) or precious items (like food or drinks), this shows that the gift is serious or meaningful.

Sacrifices in both religions follow certain traditions and are often performed by special people such as, priest, pastors, or religious leaders. In short, both Christianity and ATR believe that sacrifice is important for keeping peace with God or the spiritual world and for showing love and respect. In as much as there are similarities, there are also differences between these religions concept of sacrifice, in how they understand and practice it.

This comparative study aims to explore the concept of sacrifice in both Christianity and African Traditional Religion. This study aims to contribute to the existing knowledge on sacrifice in Christianity and ATR, exploring the theological, cultural and philosophical underpinnings of the concept. The findings of this study

can inform inter-religious dialogue, cultural exchange, and mutual understanding between Christians and adherents of ATR. This background provides a brief overview of the significance of sacrifice in both Christianity and ATR, highlighting need for comparative analysis and the potential benefits of such study.

1.2. Clarification of Terms

1.2.1. Sacrifice: Sacrifice is the act of offering something to a deity as an expression and manifestation of one's total dependence on that deity (James, 1933).

1.2.2. Comparative Study: A systematic method for comparing two or more items to identify their similarities and differences. A research methodology used to compare and contrast the similarities and differences between two or more phenomena, in this case the concept of sacrifice in Christianity and African Traditional Religion.

1.2.3. Christianity: A monotheistic Abrahamic religion based on the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1.2.4. African Traditional Religion (ATR): It is the ensemble of indigenous beliefs and practices through which African people interpret reality, order communal life, and engage the sacred - largely transmitted orally via myth, proverb, ritual, dance, and festival (Mbiti, 1990; Opoku, 1978). It is not a single creed, but a family of traditions that share resonant themes while remaining locally specific (Olupona, 2014).

1.3. Statement of the Problem

Despite the significance of sacrifice in both Christianity and African Traditional Religion, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding and dearth of comparative analysis of the concept in these two religious traditions.

This study aims to carry out a comparative analysis of the concept of sacrifice in Christianity and African Traditional Religion in order to ascertain the similarities and differences. Sacrifice is a key practice in both Christianity and African Traditional Religion, but the meaning, purpose, and methods of sacrifice differs greatly between the two. By filling this gap, an awareness will be created, and a better understanding and respect between the two traditions will be promoted. The concept of sacrifice in Christianity and African Traditional Religion compare in so many ways, in that there are lots of similarities in them, and at the same time there are differences between them too.

1.4. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to conduct a comparative study of the concept of sacrifice in Christianity and African Traditional Religion (using Edo state as a case study), in order to ascertain the points of divergence and convergence. The objectives of this study are;

- i. To examine the concept of Sacrifice.
- ii. To understand the biblical concept of Sacrifice.
- iii. To ascertain the concept of Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion.
- iv. To compare the concept of Sacrifice in Christianity and African Traditional Religion.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The significance of this comparative study of the concept of sacrifice in Christianity and African Traditional Religions, has the following significance;

- i. This study is important because it helps to deepen the understanding of how sacrifice is viewed and practiced in both Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR). By comparing the two, it brings out the similarities and differences in their beliefs, practices, and meanings of sacrifice. This can promote mutual respect and tolerance among people of different religious backgrounds.
- ii. The study also contributes to religious education by providing useful knowledge for students, teachers, and researchers. It encourages dialogue between Christianity and African Traditional Religion which can lead to peaceful coexistence and better relationships in communities where both religions are practiced.
- iii. Furthermore, the study helps Christians and adherents of ATR to reflect on the role of sacrifice in their daily lives and spiritual growth. It highlights the cultural and religious values attached to sacrifice and how these values shape the behaviour and worldview of the people.
- iv. By exploring the concept of sacrifice in Christianity and African Traditional Religion, the study aims to make meaningful contribution to theological scholarship, religion and religious practices. It is also to make contributions to

various aspects of Christian life and traditional practices, from personal spirituality to academic discourse.

1.6. Scope of the Study

This study will focus on the concept of sacrifice in Christianity and ATR, examining the relevant rituals and practices carried out in these religions in relation to sacrifice, with a specific emphasis on the biblical and traditional African understandings of sacrifice. It also compares how each religion views the role of sacrifice in worship, spiritual life, and community well-being.

1.7. Methodology

This study employs a descriptive and analytical approaches in its attempt to understand the concept of Sacrifice in both Christianity and African Traditional Religion. Secondary sources include scholarly articles, books and online materials. The primary data will be gathered through an in-depth interview of some respondents in Edo state.

1.8. Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters, each chapter with its specific content. Chapter One is the General Introduction, it consists of the Background to the Study, Clarification of Terms, Statement of the Problem, Aim and Objectives, Significance of the Study, Scope of Study, Methodology and Division of the Work. Chapter two dissects the concept of sacrifice, an overview of Christianity, an overview of ATR, and the theoretical framework for understanding sacrifice. Chapter three covered Sacrifice in Christianity and ATR. Chapter four dealt with the

presentation and analysis of findings from Christian perspective, African Religious perspective, and a Comparative analysis. Chapter Five encompasses the Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept of Sacrifice

Sacrifice is the heart beat of every religious ritual. Sacrificial rites exist virtually everywhere there is religion, it is a universal phenomenon. The idea of the practice of sacrifice is as old as man's existence on earth. Every religion of the world subscribes to the rites of sacrifice as a core aspect of their worship; either ancient or modern. Sacrifice is among the numerous elements of worship through which man expresses himself to higher beings of worship. Awolalu stated that every act of worship has distinct element, he enumerated the prominent among these elements; liturgy, sacrifice, cultic functionaries, and sacred places, as most significant aspects of worship in all religions.

The secular meaning of sacrifice denotes the giving up of something valuable or important for somebody or something considered to be of more value or importance. In religious terms; Sacrifice implies a gift offered by an inferior to a

superior. It is a tribute paid by the dependent to his lord, an offering to deity. It could be an offering with or without blood.

Etymologically, the term sacrifice is derived from two Latin words, 'sacre' which means 'holy' and 'facere' which appropriately translates, 'make'. They both form 'sacrificium' to mean 'sacrifice' this Latin rendering originally connotes something made holy or sacred. Sacrifice is a ritual act in which a consecrated offering is made to a god or other spiritual beings in order to establish, perpetuate, or restore a sacred bond between humanity and the divine.

Abe's work; Sacrifice involves the destruction of a victim for the purpose of maintaining or restoring a right relationship of man to the sacred order. 'Awolalu' summarily 'Sacrifice is an art of making an offering (animal or vegetable life, of food, drink, or of any objects) to a deity or spiritual being. In other words, an offering of any kind laid on the altar or otherwise presented to a deity or divinity for definite purpose.

The English word sacrifice has several different but related meanings in ordinary usage, both in the Global North and in Africa. According to Lexico.com (2022), it can mean; 'an act of slaughtering an animal or person, or surrendering a possession as an offering to a deity' - 'Christ's offering of Himself in the Crucifixion,' 'the Eucharist regarded either (in Catholic terms) as a propitiatory offering of the body and blood of Christ or (in Protestant terms) as an act of thanksgiving,' and 'an act of giving up something else regarded as more important or worthy', for Adjakpey, writing about the Ghanaian-Ewe. 'Sacrifice is the act of

offering something to a deity as an expression and manifestation of one's total dependence on that deity' (James, 1933). Sacrifice is expected to prevent impending disaster or calamity. Mbiti is of the opinion that sacrifice involves destruction of life to present the victim in part or whole to the spirit offering, on the other hands it does not involve killing or destruction, rather a form of presentation of valued objects as a token of love and devotion. Across different cultures and belief system, sacrifice has been used as a means of expressing devotion, gratitude or seeking favour from the divine (Lincoln, 2016).

It is not easy to determine categorically what the very origin of sacrifice was, but the essential basis remains that sacrifice was and is natural to man.

2.1.1 Sacrifice in Christianity

In Christianity, sacrifice is fundamentally understood as substitutionary atonement - the offering of a perfect substitute on behalf of sinners. In the Old Testament, this includes the ritual sacrifices of animals (e.g. sin offerings, burnt offerings, peace offerings) intended to restore relational fellowship between God and humanity. The sacrificial system as outlined in books such as Leviticus and Exodus, frames sin as incurring divine judgement, remedied through prescribed sacrificial rites. In Christian theology, these rituals prefigure the ultimate sacrifice; the death of Jesus Christ, who takes the penalty of sin upon Himself, reconciling humanity with God, and is viewed as an ultimate act of love and redemption.

This theology emphasizes two dimensions;

- i. Punitive substitution; Christ bearing the sin and suffering of humanity.

- ii. Restorative substitution; His death rebuilding the broken relationship between God and humankind- which fulfills and transcends the Old covenant sacrificial system.

Sacrifice to the one God was an important feature of Jewish religion in the first century [Ex.22;20]. NT authors occasionally command believers to become sacrifices to God (Romans 12: 1, 15; 15-17, Hebrews 13;15 1Peter 2;5) and Christ is said to have offered Himself sacrificially to God [Heb.9;14, Eph. 5;2]. New Testament texts [e.g. Romans, Hebrews] invites believers to offer themselves as ‘living sacrifice’ [Romans12;1], indicating an ethic of personal devotion and spiritual worship beyond physical offerings. The Christian understanding of sacrifice, is rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ, and takes on a different dimension (Hills, 2017).

2.1.2 Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion (ATR)

African Traditional Religion conceptualizes sacrifices as the ritual means of maintaining reciprocity and communion between humans and the spiritual / divine realms. According to Mbiti and other African theologians;

“Sacrifices refer to cases where animal life is destroyed in order to present the animal to God, supernatural beings, spirits or the living- dead”

As far as worship was concerned, God was worshipped in a number of ways among African people. The first form of worship was the use of sacrifices [when animals were killed] and offerings [the presentation of food, animal blood or other items]. These were given to God, the spirits and the living- dead. The spirit of the

living- dead were regarded as intermediaries between God and the people, so that God was seen as the ultimate recipient. In Candomble religion, offerings to spirits are known as ebos, and can consist of food, drink, fowl, and money; when animal sacrifice is not involved, a food offering is termed a comida seca. (Mbiti 1969; p.61,66) goes on to list some of the expressions of worship in African societies. The Igbo-African tradition holds a deep-rooted belief in the inter-connectedness between humans, spirit and deities (Ejizu, 2013). Within this framework, sacrifice serves as a way to communicate and strengthen the bond between the earthly realm and the spiritual realm. It is seen as a reciprocal act, where offerings are presented to deities or spirits in exchange for their blessings, protection, or intervention in human affairs.

Sacrificial acts are embedded within community identity, affirming bonds with gods, ancestors, or spirits. Moreover, sacrifice in African Traditional Religion are largely reciprocal and pragmatic - a transactional giving and receiving within a real - world spiritual economy.

Categories of Sacrifice

1. Thanksgiving Offerings for blessings received.
2. Votive Offerings made in vow-fulfillment.
3. Expiation / propitiation sacrifices to atone for misfortune or divine displeasure.
4. Foundation or preventive sacrifices to ensure success and avert calamities.
5. Substitutionary sacrifices on behalf of a person in danger.
6. Meal and drink offerings, frequently shared communally following libation.

2.2 An Overview of Christianity

The history of Christianity begins with Jesus, an itinerant Jewish preacher and teacher, who was crucified in Jerusalem 'AD 30-33'. His followers proclaimed that He was the incarnation of God and had risen from the dead. In the two millennia since, Christianity has spread across the world, becoming the world's largest religion with over two billion adherents worldwide.

Initially, Christianity was a mostly urban grassroots movement. Its religious text was written in the first century. A formal church government developed, and it grew to over a million adherents by the third century. Constantine the Great issued the Edict of Milan legalizing it in 315. Christian art, architecture, and literature blossomed during the fourth century, but competing theological doctrines led to divisions. The Nicene Creed of 325, the Nestorian schism, the Church of the East and Oriental Orthodoxy resulted. While the Western Roman Empire ended in 476, its successor states and its eastern compatriot-the Byzantine Empire- remained Christian. After the fall of Rome in 476, western monks preserved culture and provided social services. Early Muslim conquest devastated many Christian communities in the Middle East and North Africa, but Christianization continued in Europe and Asia and helped form the states of Eastern Europe.

In the twentieth century, Christianity declined in most of the Western world but grew in the Global South, particularly Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. In the twenty-first century, Christianity has become the most diverse and pluralistic of the world's religions embracing over 3000 of the world's languages.

Christianity arrived Africa in the 1st century AD; as of 2024, it is the largest religion on the continent. Several African Christians influenced the early development of Christianity and shaped its doctrines, including Tertullian, Perpetua, Felicity, Clement of Alexandria, Origen of Alexandria, Cyprian, Athanasius and Augustine of Hippo. In the 4th century, the Aksumite empire in modern-day Ethiopia and Eritrea became one of the first regions in the world to adopt Christianity as its official religion, followed by the Nubian kingdoms of Nobatia, Makuria and Alodia and several Christian Berber kingdoms.

African Christianity thrived long before white men arrived. Christianity initially travelled in three directions from Jerusalem; west into Europe, east into Asia, and south into Africa. Christianity has been established in Ethiopia for at least 1600 years.

Christianity first arrived in Nigeria in the 15th century via Portuguese missionaries, but significant growth didn't occur until the 19th century with the arrival of British missionaries and the return of freed slaves who helped spread the faith. The church of England established its first mission in 1842, leading to the eventual formation of the Anglican Communion of Nigeria in 1979. Today Christianity is a major religion in Nigeria, with a large portion of the population identifying as Christian, particularly in the Southern and central regions.

2.2.1 Sacrifice in Christianity

Sacrifice is a classic theme in African theology. From Augustine's profound discussion of the notion in *De Civitate Dei*, to the images of the Lamb of God in

Ethiopian illuminated manuscripts, to the invocation of the blood of Jesus in Pentecostal prayers, the notion of sacrifice has played an important role in the lives of African Christians. As African theologians have sought to develop concepts of sacrifice that are faithful to the Christian tradition and meaningful in African social contexts, one of the key questions has concerned the relation between African and Christian notions of sacrifice. Answering this question not only involves comparing how ritual sacrifice and sacrificial giving up in African traditions relate to their counterparts in the Old Testament, but also to the cross, the Eucharist and various forms of Christian sacrifice. Such a comparison is further complicated by the fact that sacrifice is a polythetic concept.

The importance of bloodshed in sacrifice did not originate in the Christian tradition. Sacrifice was a major part of the ancient world. The ideas of sacrifice as an atonement found in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) form much of the basis for Christian conceptions of Sacrifice. In the Old Testament, the God-given means of expiation was the sacrificial blood (Young, p.27-28). The idea of a dying God whose sacrifice results in eternal life for followers is also found in Roman mystery religions. Although Christianity took many ideas from Judaism and Mystery cults, Christians developed a unique sacrificial tradition. The idea of sacrifice as a spiritual, self-directed act instead of the offering of animals was one of such distinction. The body itself, with its links to the body of Christ, remained very important to Christians. Their forms of sacrifice focused on the bodies of its members as a living sacrifice.

Christians understand Christ's death on the cross to be a necessary atonement for the sins of mankind. In the first generation after Jesus' death, the apostle Paul wrote; 'for I delivered unto you first of all, that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again on the third day.' "1 Corinthians 15:3-5". Christ's death was the final sacrifice which superseded the need for animal sacrifices offered in the past by the high Priest.

2.2.2 Historical and Theological Background

Christianity emerged from Second-Temple Judaism, reinterpreting Jewish sacrificial systems in light of Jesus the Messiah. According to Hebrews (especially chapters 9-10) Jesus' crucifixion represents the ultimate, once-for-all sacrifice, fulfilling and replacing the repetitive Old Testament's sacrifices [e.g. sin offering, burnt offerings] by achieving perfect atonement for sins. When African theologians use the concept of sacrifice in relation to Hebrew and African traditions, it includes a range of practices that do not necessarily have a single feature in common. Nevertheless, within this variety of approaches, the sacrifice of Christ is the key to their understanding of sacrifice. For them, Christ's offering of himself - not just in the Crucifixion but throughout his life - is the true and Universal sacrifice that ends and fulfills all sacrifice. In the process, it integrates meanings of sacrifice from both Hebrew and African traditions and continues to shape Christian sacrifice today. The Eucharist, often called a 'bloodless repetition' memorializes Christ's sacrifice and

occupies a central liturgical role across various traditions, though its interpretation varies between Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant communities.

2.2.3 Theologies of Atonement and Sacrifice

Christian thought offers several atonement frameworks, most notably penal substitution, satisfaction, moral example, and participatory transformation.

- a. Penal Substitution:** Christ bears humanity's punishment, satisfying divine justice and enabling forgiveness. This model is particularly influential in Reformed and evangelical circles.
- b. Satisfaction Theory:** Rooted in Anselm and later Medieval theology, this view emphasizes that Christ's voluntary suffering and self-offering balance the moral offense against God's honor and justice.
- c. Moral-Exemplar Model:** Emphasizes Christ's sacrificial obedience as an ethical example, inspiring believers towards self-giving love and service.
- d. Spiritual Participation/Transformation:** Explored by scholars like Robert Daly, this approach highlights progressive spiritual displacement- from divine gift, through Christ's self-gift, toward human response manifested in love, justice, and ethical action.

2.2.4 Pauline and New Testament Perspectives

The Apostolic writings, especially those attributed to Paul, frame Christian life itself as sacrificial. Believers are called to present their bodies as living sacrifices [Romans 12;1], participating in Christ's sufferings [Philippians 2;17; Colossians 1;24] as ongoing spiritual worship. The First Letter of Peter echoes this,

asserting that Christ ‘ bore our sins’ through his cross - a definitive redemptive act enabling transformative communion with God.

2.2.5 Catholic and Orthodox Dimensions: Redemptive Suffering and Reparation

Catholic theology incorporates concepts like redemptive suffering, teachings that human suffering united with Christ’s Passion can participate in divine grace for others or the broader church body [e.g. Colossians 1;24]. Likewise, reparation theology holds that Christ’s sacrifice satisfies divine justice and inspirationally invites believers to align suffering with sacrificial services.

2.2.6 Sacrificial Language in Worship and Ethics

- i. Eucharistic Sacrifice: The sacramental language of holy communion frequently frames participation as joining in Christ’s self- offering. Roman doctrine views it as a real, though unbloody, sacrifice; whereas many Protestant perspectives stress its memorial and symbolic dimensions, emphasizing that Christ’s sacrifice needs no repetition.
- ii. Ethical Sacrifice: Across denominations, Christians are urged to sacrificially serve others - mirroring Christ’s self-giving -as intrinsic to spiritual life and worship.

2.3 An Overview of African Traditional Religion

African Traditional Religion (ATR) is the ensemble of indigenous beliefs and practices through which African peoples interpret reality, order communal life, and engage the sacred - largely transmitted orally via myth, proverb, ritual, dance,

and festival (Mbiti, 1990; Opoku, 1978). It is not a single creed but a family of traditions that share resonant themes while remaining locally specific (Olupona, 2014).

African Traditional Religion has a history stretching back to prehistoric times, predating the arrival of Christianity and Islam in Africa. It is a diverse set of belief passed down through oral tradition, with ancestors, and a worldview that integrates spirituality into daily life. The historical suppression by colonizers led to a negative perception of these religions, but they have shown remarkable resilience and continue to influence millions of people today.

As the indigenous spiritual beliefs of Africa, these traditions emerged with the continent's human civilization, potentially as far back as 200,000 BCE. Due to their prehistoric origins, a formal written history does not exist. Instead, beliefs, stories, and rituals have been passed down through generations via oral traditions.

Before the spread of Islam and Christianity, these traditions were the dominant religious systems across the continent, shaping cultures and daily life. During the colonial period, these religions were often suppressed and viewed negatively by outsiders. Despite historical suppression, African Traditional Religion has endured and continues to be a significant spiritual force, influencing both traditional beliefs and the practice of other religions in Africa.

2.3.1 Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion

In African Traditional Religion, sacrifice is a central ritual by which communities maintain, restore, or celebrate right relations among humans, ancestors,

divinities, spirits, and the Supreme Being. It operates within a holistic worldview where religion, ethics, health, ecology, and social order interpenetrate (Mbiti, 1990; Magesa, 1997; Olupona, 2014).

For Metu (1988), 'African Traditional Religion is strictly linked with rituals, which are expressed in sacrifice, since its only in sacrifice that the Supreme Being is reached and the gods and lesser divinities, appeased for man's peaceful existence in the world'. Therefore, Sacrifice is an essential part of African Traditional Religion and it simply means the offering of the life of some object, animals or person to the divine being or beings. It is a means of contact or communion between the divine being and man which serves as the best means through which man maintains an established relationship between him and his object of worship. Sacrifice is equally seen as the powerful means used by man to affect the supernatural powers to have interest in human affairs in terms of granting man favours asked as man gives the divinities their dues. It is on this note that Gbenede (1997) in Aniekan Etim Nana, also recognized sacrifice in African Traditional Religion as; One of the elements of worship in which material things like cow, goats, fowls, rice, yam, kola nuts etc, are offered to the Supreme Being or through His agents, for good relationship, harmony and communion to heal the wound of trouble and to expect response.

Again, Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion is that ritual means through which its members commune and communicate with God and other supra-sensible beings by means of transformed symbolic objects or victims. Such transformed symbolic objects of sacrifice could either be totally destroyed or permanently

dedicated to God or His agents, or left to roam about in the wild. Whatever form it takes, the traditional African donates himself to the deity by means of a gift which is ritually transformed either by immolation or oblation. Sacrifice is an act of religion, a form of prayer in which animals or products of the land may be offered.

2.3.2 Theological Rationale for Sacrifice

Sacrifice expresses recognition of divine sovereignty, gratitude for life and fertility, and the quest for harmony after breach (sin, taboo violations, misfortune). It is not ‘bribery’ but covenantal exchange- gift, thanksgiving, propitiation, expiation, or dedication-ordered toward communal well-being and cosmic balance (Idowu, 1973; Opoku, 1978; Ray, 2000). Sacrifice is the key medium for restoring/maintaining harmony between communities and the spiritual order.

2.3.3 Types and Intentions

- i. Thanksgiving / First-fruits: Offered at harvest or after deliverance, affirming dependence on divine benevolence (Opoku, 1978; Mbiti, 1990).
- ii. Propitiatory / Appeasement: Seeks favour or turns aside displeasure to restore equilibrium (Idowu, 1973; Ray, 2000).
- iii. Expiatory / Atonement: Addresses moral breach or ritual impurity in the person/lineage (Magesa, 1997; Parrinder, 1976).
- iv. Votive / Dedication: Fulfills a vow or consecrates persons/objects to sacred service (Opoku, 1978).

- v. Communal/Cycle rites: Seasonal and life-cycle sacrifice [birth, initiation, marriage, installation] embed individuals in lineage and land (Mbiti, 1990; Turner, 1969).
- vi. Foundation/preventive (ritually securing new ventures): Scholars stress that these acts are communal and pragmatic - success is measured by restored well-being and social peace.
- vii. Substitution sacrifice: It is the use of another victim or object to redeem oneself, to escape the wrath of the gods. Sometimes, when someone is believed to be under the wrath of a divinity or some evil spirits, which could end in the death of the individual, an animal may be offered to take the place of the said victim.

2.3.4 Media and Materials of Offering

ATR distinguishes blood sacrifice [livestock, game, fowl] from bloodless offerings [grains, yam, kola nut, palm wine, oil, salt, cloth]. Choice of medium is symbolic and contextual (e.g. goats for cleansing, kola nut for hospitality and truth-telling; libations as speech-acts that ‘feed’ relationships) (Opoku, 1978; Mbiti, 1990; Ray, 2000).

Substitution is common; where blood is not required, food, drink, or symbolic items can represent the worshiper’s gift of self (Idowu, 1973; Magesa, 1997). Selection follows culturally encoded correspondence [e.g. color, sex, age of animal] and moral fitness [unblemished victims]. Shared meals after sacrifice enact reconciliation and solidarity.

2.3.5 Ritual Actors, Places, and Sequences

- i. Actors: Household heads, elders, priest-specialists, diviners, herbalists; the choice depends on the rite's gravity and lineage protocols (Opoku, 1978; Mbiti, 1990).
- ii. Places: Family shrines, ancestral stools, sacred groves, riverbanks, crossroads, market shrines-spaces that mediate social memory and sacred presence (Olupona, 2014; Ray 2000).
- iii. Sequences: Divination/diagnosis - purification [water, herbs, abstinence] - spoken intention - offering/libation - distribution [communal meal, shrine portion, earth portion] - blessing/benediction. Speech [prayer, praise-names, proverbs] is integral; words 'carry' the sacrifice (Idowu, 1973; Turner, 1969; Magesa, 1997).

Recipients and Mediators

While many people acknowledge a Supreme Being, day-to-day sacrificial rites are typically directed to divinities and ancestors, who are viewed as proximate custodians and channels to the High God. Priests, priestesses, diviners, and household heads mediate these rites, selecting the rite and offering appropriate to the offence or intention.

2.3.6 Ethic, Social Meaning, and Structure

Sacrifice is morally framed; only properly acquired animals/produce, offered with integrity, are acceptable; wrong doing pollutes offerings and community (Magesa, 1997; Gyekye, 1996). Redistribution - sharing sacrificial meat/food-reinforces kinship, care for vulnerable members, reconciliation, and restorative

justice (Mbiti, 1990; Ray, 2000). Taboos [e.g. species/sex/age of animals, ritual timing] protect both moral order and local ecologies (Olupona, 2014; Gyekye, 1996). Typical structure includes consecration, invocation, immolation/presentation, communication [prayer/libation], and purification. Efficacy hinges on right intention, ritual correctness, and the moral standing of participants; many traditions articulate ethical guidelines [who may offer, what counts as acceptable, prohibitions on abuse].

2.3.7 Continuity, Adaptation, and Hybridity

Across regions [Yoruba, Akan, Igbo, Shona, Zulu, etc.], sacrificial logics persist yet adapt; some rites become symbolic [libations, offerings of produce] others are reinterpreted within Christian/Islamic settings or civic commemorations. What endures is the grammar of gift-gratitude-repair-communion aimed at flourishing and balance (Mbiti, 1990; Olupona, 2014; Magesa, 1997).

CHAPTER THREE

3.0. SACRIFICE IN CHRISTIANITY AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

3.1 Sacrifice in Christianity

The study of sacrifices in postmodern Christianity seems to be an obsolete and outdated task. However, since ancient times, sacrifice has been a sacred ritual in nearly every religion. Sacrifice plays a crucial role in understanding the values and principles of practices of religion, especially in Christianity. In support of the above,

Kalengyo (2009, p.302) declares that the Christian understanding of sacrifice has not been clarified to indigenous societies which have been practising sacrifice in the traditional religions.

In the context of the Old Testament, sacrifice is a religious act of offering an object in the form of an animal or cereal to honour the Divine being (Dunnill 1992, p.38-71). In the context of the Israelites, sacrifice were donated to Yahweh and sacrificial rites did not as such differ from those of other tribes such as the Canaanites (Anderson 1987, p.3, 23). An object is usually offered, namely animals such as bulls, cows, sheep, goats and domesticated birds or cereals such as wheat. Ancient tribes such as the Canaanites believed that their gods ate these sacrificial meals; Israelite sacrifices dedicated to Yahweh were unique, because Yahweh did not consume the food (Anderson 1987, p.3, 14). When the Israelites made sacrifices, the motive was expiation, communion, and tribute to Yahweh (Ashby 1988, p.31-43). Depending on the motive, Israelites practised sacrifices such as cereal offering, peace, sin, communion and burnt offering (Lev. 1-5, Adeyemo 1997, p.34; Eberhart 2004, p.448).

These sacrifices continued to be practiced even in the time of Jesus. Nevertheless, after AD 70, the practice of sacrifices by the Jews in Jerusalem ceased and was replaced with prayer and praise cults (Ashby 1988, p.52). According to Young (1975, p.10-21), after AD 70, the church began to spiritualise sacrifice and reject the actual practice of sacrifices on the grounds that the death of Christ was understood as the perfect and final sacrifice that annulled all other sacrifices.

Israelites sacrifices were allowed by Yahweh, hence directed to Him. Later on, after the crucifixion of Jesus and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, the church abstained from ritual sacrifices and used a spiritual language [Rm. 12:1; 1Pt. 2:5] with regards to sacrifices.

In Christianity, the idea of sacrifice is inseparably tied to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Unlike in many religious traditions where sacrifices are repeated regularly to appease the divine, Christian faith views Christ's offering on the cross as a once-for-all event that fulfills and surpasses earlier sacrificial systems. This central act is seen not only as a means of reconciliation between God and humanity but also as the foundation for Christian worship and community life. This definitive act is foundational to Christian worship, theology, and communal life, especially as developed in the epistle to the Hebrews [Hebrews 9:11-14] and lived out in Eucharistic worship.

Blood as a Medium of Entrance;

In both the Old and New Covenant, blood was a medium of entrance into the presence of the Lord [Heb. 9:11-14]. To illustrate this, the author emphasized that Christ, like the high Priest of the Old Covenant, had the right to enter into the most holy sanctuary not belonging to this earth [Heb. 9:11, 24]. The reason for this is that Christ's priesthood is perfect, unique, eternal and not confined to the dimensions of the traditional priesthood (Attridge 1992, p.101).

Christ entered into the most holy sanctuary by His own blood (Montefiore 1979, p.153), unlike the Old Testament high priest who had to enter with animal's blood. This entrance into the most holy sanctuary symbolised the entrance into the presence of God, nearness to the reconciled Divinity, spiritual sanctuary, the throne of God or heaven itself (Brown 1976, p.386; Attridge 1989, p.246; Craddock 2004, p.700). In addition, unlike the earthly priests; Christ's entrance occurred once and cannot be repeated. This implies that Christ, as High Priest, will no longer die again to reconcile Us to God (Brown 1976, p.396).

3.1.1 Biblical and Theological Foundations

In Greek NT texts, the following three nouns need to be considered; thusia [sacrifice], doron [offering, gift], and prosphora [offering, gift]; they may be accompanied by verbs such as prophero [to offer]. NT text do not describe sacrificial rituals in detail, and even the three terms of sacrifice are rare. This is a marked difference to the HB/OT with its detailed lists of ritual sacrifices [Lev 1-8; 12; 16], occasions [Exod 34:23; Num 28-29; Deut 16:16] sacred celebrations "Num 28-29", or authorized experts [Exod 28-29; Lev 8-10]. Clearly, the HB/OT has a particular interest in cultic matters and the NT does not. The fact that the NT narratives are set in a time when the Herodian Temple was still intact and its ritual worship operative - and that of some of its authors knew them from first-hand experience - makes this lack of interest even more conspicuous.

Jesus was a Jew who lived towards the end of the second Temple period. He knew about sacrificial rituals and the temple in Jerusalem with its altar; occasionally,

he included both in His proclamation (Hahn 1983, p.61). The Gospels describe how he explains the relation between sacrifice and personal reconciliation, and advises others to offer sacrifices in accordance with early Jewish traditions (Matt 5:23-24, see also 8:4). But apart from the verb that refers to 'bringing' the offering to the temple, no details about the ritual process are conveyed. Instead, the first sentence implicitly suggests that their correct ceremonial performance alone was not sufficient, and that the offerer must also procure reconciliation and establish peace within their social environment (Hahn 1983, p.62).

The New Testament present sacrifice as redefined in Christ. The Old Testament system of animal offerings- burnt offerings, sin offerings, and peace offerings - was intended as a way of maintaining covenant fellowship with God [Leviticus 1-7]. However, Christian scripture teaches that these sacrifices were preparatory symbols, pointing forward to the true sacrifice in Christ. The Epistle to the Hebrews portrays Jesus as both High Priest and perfect victim, whose singular self-offering replaces the repeated sacrificial system of the Old covenant. This New Testament text reframes sacrificial imagery in terms of once-only-efficacy and pivots Christian understanding towards participatory worship centered on Christ's offering. Thus, the Cross becomes the climax of God's saving plan and the ultimate model of obedience, love, and reconciliation. Scholars affirm that Hebrews is the exegetical cornerstone for later reflections on sacrificial finality and sacramental participation (St Andrews Encyclopedia on Eucharistic sacrifice).

3.1.2 Sacrifice in Hebrews

The letter to the Hebrews has various explicit references to Jesus Christ as ‘sacrifice’. For this purpose, Hebrews offers a detailed [albeit slightly modified] description of the tabernacle as backdrop of the cultic scenery [Heb 9:1-5] and of the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement [9:6-10]. Key in this overall exposition is the audacious combination of heterogeneous elements of the temple cult. As one of the latest NT texts (Karrer 2002, p.96-98; Eisenbaum 2005), Hebrews is influenced by the Hellenism of the Jewish diaspora communities in lower Egypt with preference for middle Platonism, and by the ubiquity of Rome’s sacrificial cult (Nasrallah 2011).

In Hebrews, Jesus is first introduced as a high Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, who does not perform priestly duties for a limited time at the earthly sanctuary but for eternity in the heavenly tabernacle [Heb 4:14-5:10; 8:1-4]. Through the assignment of the priestly role, Hebrews succeeds in proposing a physical representation of Christ’s mediation in heaven. Second, the functions of the Priest and sacrifice are merged: the high priestly Jesus who initially offers prayers and supplications [5:7] ultimately offers himself ‘once for all’ as a ‘sacrifice’ or ‘offering’ [7:27; 10:10]. Hebrews 9:6-14 draws on the two rituals of the annual Day of Atonement [Lev 16] and of the red heifer [Num 19], only to combine them in Heb 9:18-19 with the Mosaic covenant ritual of Exodus 24: 1-8 (Green 2017, p.13). The rituals there are interpreted as affecting purification, which is in turn equated with forgiveness [Heb 9: 22]. This peculiar combination creates a cognitive and logical dilemma. However, the author’s narrative is more interested in focusing all

key parameters of early Jewish temple worship on Jesus alone (Lohr 2005, p.471-475; Eberhart and Schweitzer 2019).

In Hebrews, the motif of the high priest who sacrifices himself refers specifically to the death of Jesus. For some scholars, this is the meaning of all NT passages about the ‘sacrifice’ of Jesus (Beckwith 1995b). With that understanding, all NT passages about the ‘Sacrifice’ of Jesus convey approximately the same christological message, with a focus on the crucifixion.

In Hebrews, however, the motif of sacrifice itself is fused with that of ‘blood’. Nowhere else in the NT are both of these terms used as abundantly with reference to Jesus as in Hebrews.

3.1.3 Theological Interpretations of Sacrifice

In Christianity, the theological interpretation of sacrifice is centered on the atoning death of Jesus Christ, who is seen as the ultimate sacrifice that redeems humanity from sin by acting as a substitute for the sins of humankind. This is a fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system, and it calls believers to respond by offering their own lives as a ‘living sacrifice’, involving acts of devotion, service, and a willingness to give up control to God.

Christian Theology has developed different interpretations of what Christ’s sacrifice means;

- i. **Substitutionary / atonement model:** Drawing on Anselm and later Reformation theology, Christ died in place of sinners, bearing the punishment they deserved, thereby satisfying Divine justice, so forgiveness can be granted.

Christ the 'righteous', suffered and died for the 'unrighteous', bearing the penalty of sin on their behalf to bring them to God.

- ii. **Christus Victor model / Ransom Theory:** The cross is understood as a victory over sin, death, and the powers of evil, liberating humanity from bondage. A view prevalent in the early church as developed by Aulen.
- iii. **Moral influence / Exemplar model:** Abelard and modern interpreters emphasizes Christ's sacrificial love as a powerful example that transforms human hearts and calls them to imitate His selflessness.
- iv. **Reconciliation:** His death bridges the gap between a holy God and sinful humanity, reconciling them and re-establishing a relationship that was broken by sin.
- v. **Fulfillment of the Old Testament:** Jesus' sacrifice is considered the perfect and final sacrifice that made the Old Testament sacrificial system unnecessary. The Old Testament system foreshadowed this ultimate atonement and was a way for people to approach a holy God.

These perspective are not mutually exclusive; together, they enrich Christian understanding of sacrifice as both a divine initiative and a call to moral transformation.

3.1.4 Eucharist as Sacrificial Memorial and Participation.

In Christian liturgy, particularly within Catholic and Orthodox traditions, the Eucharist is embraced as a 'sacrificial mystery' - not a repeated killing [more than a symbolic meal], but a **sacramental re-presentation** of Christ's one sacrifice,

making it present to the worshipping community, it is known variously as Mass, Eucharist, Holy Communion, Breaking of Bread, or the Lord's Supper. This understanding is grounded in official teachings, such as the Catechism, which states the Eucharist 'makes present the same and only sacrifice offered once for all on the cross'. The St Andrews Encyclopedia further grounds Eucharistic theology in biblical mandates '[Do this in remembrance of me]' and Hebrews sacrificial typology.

Protestant traditions vary- some emphasizes the Eucharist as a memorial of Christ's death (Zwinglian view), while others affirm a spiritual presence (Lutheran and Reformed traditions). In all cases the Eucharist embodies thanksgiving, remembrance, and communion with Christ, highlighting the continuing relevance of sacrifice in Christian devotion.

Additionally, mimetic theory commentators argue that, unlike 'archaic' sacrificial systems which enacted scapegoating violence, the Eucharist establishes true peace by revealing the crucified victim as divine, thereby stopping mimetic cycles of violence.

3.1.5 Ethical and Spiritual Dimensions: 'Living Sacrifice'

Beyond liturgical rites, Christianity expands the concept of sacrifice to everyday ethical living. The Apostle Paul characterizes Christian vocation as offering ones self to God; 'present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God' [Romans 12;1], reflecting a holistic commitment rooted in divine mercy.

This metaphor shifts the focus from ritual offerings to ongoing, faithful living in the world. Acts of charity, forgiveness, and self-denial are understood as concrete expressions of sacrificial living. In this sense, Christian sacrifice balances between the historical event of Christ's passion and the ongoing ethical demands placed on His followers.

Christians are called to offer themselves as a 'living sacrifice', which means dedicating their entire lives - including time, energy, and possessions - to God as an act of worship. This involves imitating Christ by taking up one's 'cross' and sacrificing comfort for the sake of others and God's work.

Beyond the offering of one's life, Christians can also offer sacrifices of praise and thankfulness for what God has done. The value of a sacrifice is not determined by its size, but by the extent of the personal self-giving and devotion it represents, even if it seems small.

Spiritual Dimension

- i. Ultimate Atonement: The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is considered the ultimate, once-for-all atonement for sin, making previous animal sacrifices obsolete.
- ii. Model for believers: Jesus's sacrifice serves as a divine example of humility, obedience, and love, which Christians are called to emulate.
- iii. Living sacrifices: Christians are spiritually called to offer their 'whole lives' as a 'living sacrifices' to God, involving a willingness to give up personal desires for a higher, God-centered purpose.

- iv. Spiritual growth: This process of daily surrender helps to refine faith, shape character, and foster a deeper relationship with God.

Ethical Dimension

- i. Service to others: The ethical application of sacrifice involves sacrificing one's own comfort and desires to serve others, reflecting Christ's example.
- ii. Moral living: Living an ethical and moral life, guided by Christian teachings, is viewed as an act of worship and a way to serve Jesus.
- iii. Self-giving: This ethical commitment is about a 'self-giving' action, such as using one's time, money, or talents to spread the gospel, glorify God, and act generously towards others.
- iv. True worship: The sacrifice God ultimately desires is not a ritualistic offering but a life surrendered to Him, characterized by a 'broken spirit and a repentant heart'

3.1.6 Denominational Perspectives

- a) Catholic and Orthodox traditions: It emphasizes the Eucharist as sacrificial worship, linking it closely to Christ's once-for-all offering. Eucharistic sacrifice as the representation of Christ's one offering, maintaining a strong sacramental and cultic dimension.
- b) Anglicanism: Maintains a middle ground, affirming both memorial and sacrificial aspects of the Eucharist.
- c) Protestant Denominations: They stress Christ's sacrifice as sufficient and unrepeatable, with the Lord's Supper serving as remembrance, proclamation,

communal thanksgiving, moral transformation and fellowship rather than sacrifice in the strict sense. Symbolic act of remembrance [memorialism] rather than sacrificial, [commonly held by Baptists, Pentecostals, and many non-denominational churches].

Despite differences, all traditions affirm that the heart of Christianity lies in Christ's sacrificial love and the believer's response in faith and devotion.

3.1.7 Ecclesial and Missional Dimensions

Some recent theological reflections propose a broader ecclesial conception of sacrifice. For example, 'Schlesinger', drawing on 'Augustine and Aquinas', describes Christian sacrifice as acts offered in and through Christ across three domain; Eucharistic worship [Mass], Evangelism [Mission], and Ecumenical unity [Ecumenism] - expressing the Church's self-giving love and fellowship with God and others.

3.1.8 Societal and Missionary Significance

The concept of sacrifice remains foundational for Christian ethics and social engagement. Christ's self-offering continues to inspire movement for Justice, reconciliation, and service, reflecting the sacrificial motif beyond ritual into transformative action. This theology also sustains ecumenical dialogue, serving as a bridge across doctrinal differences. Today, the concept of sacrifice in Christianity remains powerful in guiding moral behaviour and shaping social values. It inspires movements of social justice, humanitarian services, and reconciliation, reflecting Christ's self-giving as a model for responding to modern challenges. In ecumenical

dialogue, the theme of sacrifice continues to bridge denominational differences, showing its enduring significance for both theology and practices.

3.2 Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion (ATR)

Sacrifice is one of the central pillars of African Traditional Religion (ATR). It is the means by which humans maintain relationships with the divine, the ancestors, and other spiritual beings. In African Traditional Religion, the universe is seen as a relational order in which visible and invisible forces interact, and sacrifice provides the channel of communication, reconciliation, and exchange between these worlds (Mbiti, 1990; Idowu, 1973). Sacrifice is an essential part of African traditional religion and it simply means the offering of the life of some object, animals or person to the divine being and man which serves as the best means through which man maintains an established relationship between him and his object of worship. Sacrifice is equally seen as the powerful means used by man to affect the supernatural powers to have interest in human affairs in terms of granting favours asked as man gives the divinities their dues. It is on this note that Gbenede (1997) in Aniekan Etim Nana, also recognized sacrifice in African Traditional Religion as ‘one of the elements of worship in which material things like cow, goats, fowls, rice, yam, kola nuts etc, are offered to the Supreme Being or through His agents, for good relationship, harmony, and communion to heal the wound of trouble and to expect response’.

Mbiti (1975) distinguished between sacrifice and offerings. ‘The distinction between sacrifice and offering is this; sacrifice involves the shedding of the blood of

human beings, animals or birds; offerings do not involve blood, but concerns the giving of all other things, such as foodstuff, water, milk, honey or money.' This distinction reduces sacrifice to the level of immolation, but it can be broader than just immolation or shedding of blood of the sacrificial victim. While shedding of blood of animals, man or birds is part and parcel of sacrifice, offerings deals with such items as foodstuff, money, wine etc. In African Traditional Religion, blood symbolizes life and so, sacrifice deals with giving human or animal offering, for instance, when the community life or welfare is at stake, like in a case of drought, epidemic, war, raids, erosion, etc. So life could be sacrificed to protect the community. The best are chosen to make sure it will be acceptable. In offerings, it is what people want and are able to give and it serves either for personal, family, or community needs too. Such could be offered in a given place such as shrines, hills, rivers, waterfall, cross-roads, etc.

The offering of sacrifice and what is offered is dependent on the taste of the named divinity and situation at hand and the place it must be displayed vary as well. The item of sacrifice range from material objects, edible materials to human beings. It is the situation that warrants what is to be sacrificed. What is sacrificed may be displayed at cross-roads, at market places, maybe displayed under the ground or sometimes shared among the community of worshipers as a signification of friendship with their divinities. It is the oracle that determines the fate of the victim.

Sacrifice connotes the offering of one's best to mark the high esteem one holds the divinity. In this case, what is normally offered is the life of the victim

signified by blood. It is this issue of blood that led to the sacrifice of human beings in the past as the best man can offer; depending on the situation, to equate the highest regard man has for God. But these days, animals are offered in place of man with the interest on the life of the victim, signified by blood.

It is important that despite the fact that African world is a spiritual world but there are specific places where sacrifices are performed. It is on this note that Opoku (1997), identifies objects and designated places for the performance of ritual sacrifices often referred to as shrines to include; family compounds, village square, thick forests, grooves, caves, bank of rivers and streams, the foot of big and significant trees, the foot of mountains and hills, and so on.

3.2.1 Types of Sacrifices in African Traditional Religion

There are many types of sacrifices in African Traditional Religion. Some of them are;

1. Communion or meal sacrifice - This is done to bring about communion and communication between the deities, divinities with the worshipers. Sometimes the object of sacrifice may just be thrown in an open space while the Officiate enjoys the remaining part.
2. Thanksgiving Sacrifice - Sacrifices offered in gratitude for the gifts received from God, and other divinities or ancestors. This sacrifice is often carried out with the logic that when you appreciate God/gods for what He has done, He would do more.

3. Votive Sacrifice - Sacrifice made to fulfill a vow made to beg a favor from God and other divinities or ancestors. Most times when people are in daring need of something, they often make a vow to god that once the said intention is fulfilled they would offer Him certain gift. Thus, this is a sacrifice done in order to fulfill the said promise.
4. Propitiatory Sacrifice - It is offered for known and hidden offences against the divinities or ancestors to avert their anger, to atone for the wrongs and to restore peaceful relationship. It is a sacrifice of appeasement of pacification.
5. Substitution Sacrifice - It is the use of another victim or object to redeem oneself, to escape the wrath of the gods. Sometimes, when someone is believed to be under the wrath of a divinity or some evil spirits, which could end in the death of the individual, an animal may be offered to take the place of the said victim.
6. Preventive Sacrifice - It is the sacrifice used to chase away the cause of dangers and the effects on the community or individual. It is done as a precautionary measure to ward off or avert evil or misfortune.
7. Foundational Sacrifice - The sacrifice offered at the beginning of important undertakings, such as; marriage, building etc, to protect and grant blessings.
8. Petition Sacrifice - It is a sacrifice offered with list of favours to be granted to petitioner.

There may be other forms of sacrifices in African Traditional Religion; hence, the ones mentioned here do not claim to be exhaustive of the forms of sacrifice in African traditional religion.

3.2.2 Ritual Meaning and Cultural Logic

Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion (ATR) is widely understood as a ritual act that re-configures relationships-between humans and the sacred, between the living and the ancestors, and within social communities. It is not solely about offering something material; rather, it is about enacting a transformation through consecration. ‘Hubert and Mauss’ describes sacrifice as a ritual that modifies the moral state of the offerer and sacred objects, thus serving as a symbolic bridge between humanity and the spiritual realm.

3.2.3 Purpose of Sacrifice

The primary purpose of sacrifice in ATR is to restore balance and harmony. Misfortune such as illness, drought, barrenness, or social conflict are often interpreted as signs of spiritual imbalance. Through sacrifice, individuals or communities seek healing, forgiveness, protection, or prosperity. Sacrifice may also be offered in gratitude for blessings, or as a preventive rites to avert future misfortune (Anyigor, 2022).

‘Ugwu and Ugwueye’ are of the opinion that the primary purpose of sacrifice is to maintain harmony among beings. It is on this note that they said ‘the broad purpose of sacrifice in African traditional religion is the ontological balance existing between God and man, the spirit and man, the departed and the living must

always be maintained and hence the need for sacrifice. When this balance is upset, people experience calamities, misfortune and sufferings'. Thus, sacrifice serves as the best way through which man maintains an established relationship between himself and his object of worship. It is also valued as the most effective means employed by man to influence the divinity to be interested in human affairs.

Right relationship with the divinity as well as his favour will be secured by giving him his dues. Again, in sacrifice, man recognizes the supremacy of these powers/forces over himself and that he must endeavour to maintain a harmonious relationship with them, a relationship that must necessarily implicate a gift tendency to these forces to elicit their favours.

Scholars classify African Traditional Religion sacrifices into four broad functions;

1. Propitiatory / expiatory: To appease spirits or atone for wrongdoing. Addressing breaches like taboo or conflict that upsets spiritual harmony.
2. Petitionary: To request blessings like health, fertility or success. Calling on spiritual help for healing, fertility, protection, or economic success.
3. Thanksgiving: To acknowledge divine favour after harvest or childbirth. Expressing gratitude for blessings, often through communal feasting.
4. Preventive / Protective: To shield against anticipated danger or evil (Arinze, 1970). Securing favour before important undertakings (e.g. building, planting).

These functions may coexist within a single ritual, reflecting the pragmatic and situational logic of ATR practices, as seen among the Sukuma of Tanzania.

3.2.4 Forms and Materials of Sacrifice

ATR sacrifice vary in form and scale. They can involve animals [goats, chickens, cattle], plants/ food items [yam, kola nuts, palm oil], libations [water, palm wine], or symbolic offerings [cloths, beads] they are chosen for symbolic resonance. The choice of material often depends on the spirit addressed, cultural tradition, and the seriousness of the request. Blood sacrifices are considered powerful because blood is viewed as life-force, and are particularly potent in expiatory rites, while food offerings symbolizes nourishment, communion and fellowship (Parrinder, 1969). In many cultures, the ritual killing of an animal stands in as ‘diverted violence’, transforming potential aggression into a sacred

act that reinforces communal bonds rather than destroying life for its own sake.

3.2.5 Mediating Agents and Spiritual Recipients

Sacrificial rites are often carried out by designated ritual experts - diviners, priests, priestesses, or elders - who facilitate communication with the spirit world.

Rituals may be directed toward ancestors, seen as custodians of lineage harmony, or to divinities or natural spirits, depending on the nature of the concern. The recipients of sacrifice vary; the Supreme Being, lesser Divinities, spirits of the land, or ancestors. Most often, sacrifices are directed first to ancestors, who acts as intermediaries, before reaching the higher divinities. In Yoruba belief, for instance, sacrifices to ‘Esu-Odara’ are vital because he acts as an intermediary between humans, other divinities, and the Supreme Being. This reflects the relational

cosmology of African Traditional Religion, where community bonds extend into the spiritual realm (Mbiti, 1990).

3.2.6 Social and Communal Dimension

Sacrifice in ATR is not only a spiritual activity but also a social institution. It strengthens family and community bonds, reinforces moral norms, social norms, reaffirm communal identity and provides a collective response to crises. During communal sacrifices - such as harvest festivals or rituals for rain - the entire community participates, symbolizing unity and collective responsibility before the divine. Thus, sacrifice has both religious and sociopolitical significance (Idowu, 1973; Awolalu, 1979).

3.2.7 Historical Variations and Controversies

Historical accounts reveal that in certain polities, such as the precolonial Dahomey kingdom, public sacrifices could involve human life in highly formalized, ritualized state ceremonies. However, many scholars critique overly sensationalist representations, urging nuanced, contextualized understanding. Today, sacrificial practice in African Traditional Religion has largely shifted towards non-human offerings, with more symbolic and socially integrative rituals.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF SACRIFICE IN CHRISTIANITY AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyzes the findings on the concept of sacrifice in Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR), focusing on how each tradition understands, practices and interprets sacrifice within its theological and socio-cultural frameworks. The discussion builds on the insights from the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and the descriptive accounts of sacrificial practices explored in Chapter Three. The goal is to provide a comparative evaluation that highlights both the points of convergence - shared values and meanings - and the areas of divergence between these two religious systems.

Sacrifice occupies a central place in both Christianity and African Traditional Religion. It serves as a means of maintaining or restoring communion between humans and the divine, but the logic and theology behind it differ significantly. In Christianity, sacrifice reaches its ultimate expression in the self-offering of Jesus Christ, whose death on the cross constitutes a once-for-all act of atonement and reconciliation (Eberhart, 2020). This interpretation is rooted in the New Testament, where Christ's sacrifice is presented as the fulfillment of the Old Testament ritual system and the foundation of the believer's moral and spiritual transformation (Weddle, 2017).

In contrast, African traditional religion views sacrifice as a recurring and dynamic process that sustains balance within the cosmic, social, and ancestral order

(Mbiti, 1990; Idowu, 1973). Through offerings ranging from symbolic gifts to animal sacrifices - worshippers express gratitude, seek protection, and reaffirm their dependence on both visible and invisible forces (Arinze, 1970; Opoku, 1993).

The chapter also draws upon anthropological and theological frameworks to interpret these findings. From an anthropological perspective, sacrifice functions as a social and symbolic system that maintains community cohesion and reinforces shared moral codes (Durkheim, 1912; Awolalu, 1979). From a theological viewpoint, Christians and African Traditional Religion sacrifices differs in ontology and purpose; Christianity's sacrificial act is redemptive and eschatological, while ATR sacrifices are restorative and cyclical, emphasizing continuous relationship with the divine (Eberhart, 2020; Cornille and Connelly, 2021).

The analysis proceeds by comparing key dimensions of sacrifice:

1. The basic and purpose of sacrifice.
2. The mediator and agents involved.
3. The materials and rituals employed.
4. The social and ethical implications.
5. The evolving significance of sacrifice in modern religious practice.

The study also considers how the two systems respond to contemporary challenges such as globalization, inter-religious dialogue, and ecological awareness.

4.2 Findings from Christian Perspective

The study reveals that sacrifice in Christianity is foundational to the entire structure of Christian theology, worship, and ethics. From a biblical and doctrinal standpoint, the concept of sacrifice finds its ultimate fulfillment in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, whose self-offering represents the climax of divine love and redemption. This section presents key findings on the Christian understanding of sacrifice - its origin, purpose, theological meaning, and counting relevance in Christian life and practice.

4.2.1 Theological Foundation of Sacrifice

Christian theology teaches that all Old Testament sacrifices, including burnt offerings, sin offerings, and peace offerings, prefigured the ultimate sacrifice of Christ. The Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb.9: 11-14) interprets Jesus as the High Priest who entered the heavenly sanctuary ‘once for all,’ offering His own blood for the atonement of humanity’s sins. This act marked a decisive shift from the repetition of ritual sacrifice under Mosaic law to a single, sufficient, and eternal sacrifice (Eberhart, 2020).

Scholars such as Weddle (2017) and Eberhart (2020) emphasizes that the Christian notion of sacrifice is not merely ritualistic but profoundly theological - it represents divine self-giving and reconciliation. In this view, sacrifice is an expression of agape [selfless love], where God takes upon Himself the suffering and estrangement caused by sin to restore fellowship with humanity.

4.2.2 Purpose and Meaning of Sacrifice in Christianity

The central purpose of sacrifice in Christianity is atonement - the restoration of the broken relationship between God and humankind (Leviticus 17:11; Romans 3:25). However, it also embodies other dimensions such as thanksgiving, dedication, moral transformation, and worship (Ezenweke and Kanu, 2012).

Through Christ's death, the sacrificial system becomes spiritualized: believers are called to offer themselves as 'living sacrifices', holy and acceptable to God' [Romans 12:1]. This metaphoric sacrifice expresses an ethical call to holiness, love, and service rather than ritual slaughter. Thus, Christian sacrifice transcends physical ritual and becomes a way of life centered on self-denial, obedience, and service to others (Onwuatiegwu and Osigwe, 2024).

4.2.3 Sacrifice in Christian Worship

While the sacrificial death of Christ is viewed as once-for-all, its significance is continually remembered and renewed in Christian worship, especially through the Eucharist or Holy Communion. In this rite, bread and wine symbolize Christ's body and blood, commemorating His redemptive death and celebrating the new covenant (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

The Eucharist thus functions as a memorial and participatory sacrifice, linking believers spiritually with Christ's saving act. Different Christian traditions interpret this in varying ways;

- a. Roman Catholicism sees the Eucharist as a re-presentation [not repetition] of Christ's sacrifice.

- b. Protestant traditions view it as a symbolic remembrance of Christ's atonement.
- c. Orthodox Christianity interprets it as a mystical participation in the once-for-all offering of Christ (Eberhart, 2020; Weddle, 2017).

These variations show the richness and theological diversity of the sacrificial theme within Christianity.

4.2.4 Ethical and Social Dimensions

Christian sacrifice is also deeply ethical and communal. It calls believers to imitate Christ's self-sacrifice through acts of charity, forgiveness, and service. The sacrificial life of Christ becomes a moral paradigm for believers to live sacrificially - serving others, promoting justice, and showing compassion (Philippians 2:5-8).

In many Christian communities, this sacrificial ethos extends to social engagement - caring for the poor, peacemaking, and community building. As Cornille and Connelly (2021) note, sacrifice in the Christian sense moves from the temple to the world, becoming a model of ethical transformation and universal love.

4.2.5 Contemporary Understanding of Sacrifice

In modern theology, scholars emphasize that Christian sacrifice must be interpreted metaphorically and ethically rather than ritually. The idea of 'spiritual sacrifice' now includes prayer, praise, service, and devotion. According to Onwuaturgwu and Osigwe (2024), contemporary Christianity interprets sacrifice as a life of stewardship and self-giving that mirrors Christ's love and extends it to others.

This evolution reflects a shift from physical offerings to existential participation in God's redemptive work. Even though ritual offerings have ceased, the sacrificial principle remains at the heart of Christian spirituality and moral responsibility.

4.3 Findings from the African Traditional Religion (ATR) Perspective

The study reveals that sacrifice in African Traditional Religion (ATR) occupies a central and dynamic role in the religious, social, and moral life of African communities. Within African Traditional Religion, sacrifice serves as the principal medium of communication between human beings, the ancestors and the divinities. It is both a spiritual and social act that maintains the equilibrium between the visible and invisible worlds (Mbiti, 1990; Idowu, 1973). Unlike Christianity, where the act of sacrifice is viewed as a completed, once-for-all event in Christ, ATR conceives of sacrifice as a recurring process essential for sustaining cosmic harmony, communal peace, and individual well-being.

4.3.1 Theological and Cosmological Foundation of Sacrifice

At the core of African Traditional Religion is a relational cosmology in which humans, nature, ancestors, and spiritual beings form an interconnected hierarchy under the Supreme Being (Onwuatiegwu and Osigwe, 2024). Sacrifice operates within this framework as a channel for restoring order whenever imbalance occurs - whether through sin, illness, misfortune, or social conflict.

According to Mbiti (1990), sacrifice are not performed to create a relationship with the divine, but to maintain and renew an already existing one. The

act is grounded in the belief that life is sacred and interdependent; therefore, the vitality of one's existence depends on harmony with spiritual forces. Arinze (1970) further observes that sacrifice expresses reverence, dependence, and reciprocity between humans and the spiritual realm.

4.3.2 Purpose and Meaning of Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion

The purposes of sacrifices in African traditional religion are diverse, reflecting the holistic nature of African spirituality. They include Thanksgiving, appeasement, purification, petition, protection, and restoration (Awolalu, 1979; Idowu, 1973).

- i. Thanksgiving sacrifices are offered after harvests, childbirth, or recovery from illness to show gratitude.
- ii. Propitiatory or expiatory sacrifices aims to atone for moral transgressions or restore harmony after breaking taboos.
- iii. Petitionary sacrifices seek divine favour for success, fertility, or rain.
- iv. Preventive sacrifices are performed to avert misfortune or epidemics.

These diverse purposes reveal that sacrifice in African Traditional Religion is existential and pragmatic, responding to concrete life situations rather than abstract theological ideals (Anyigor, 2022). It is less concerned with eternal salvation and more focused on this-worldly well-being and communal harmony.

4.3.3 Forms and Materials of Sacrifice

Sacrifices in African Traditional Religion vary according to the occasion, the deity or spirit addressed, and the gravity of the request. Common materials include

animals [goats, chicken, cattle], foodstuffs [yam, kola nuts, palm oil], and libations [water, palm wine] (Parrinder, 1969; Opoku, 1993). In some regions, symbolic objects such as beads, cloth, or iron may be used.

The type of sacrifice reflects the social and religious significance of the act:

- a) Blood sacrifice symbolizes life and renewal.
- b) Food offering express communion and hospitality toward spiritual beings.
- c) Libations acts as channels of communication and remembrance of ancestors.

Each material element carries symbolic meaning and is chosen to align with the nature of the deity or the intention of the offerer (Awolalu, 1979).

4.3.4. Mediators and Agents of Sacrifice

Sacrificial acts in African Traditional Religion are typically mediated by priests, priestesses, diviners, or family heads, who interpret the spiritual requirements for each offering (Idowu, 1973). These ritual specialist acts as intermediaries between humans and deities, ensuring that the sacrifices are properly conducted and accepted.

Ancestors also play a crucial role as spiritual mediators who link the living with higher deities. They are believed to possess intimate knowledge of human affairs and serve as protectors of their descendants. As Mbiti (1990) notes, this intermediary structure makes ATR's sacrificial system pluralistic and relational - connecting the human, ancestral, and divine realms in a continuous network of spiritual exchange.

4.3.5 Ethical and Social Dimensions

Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion carries a profound ethical and social implications. It is not a purely individual act but a communal obligation that reinforces social order, kinship, and collective identity (Awolalu, 1979). Through sacrifice, communities express solidarity, seek reconciliation during conflicts, and renew moral codes.

The ethical dimension of African Traditional Religion's sacrifice emphasizes respect for life, hospitality, truth, and justice - values that ensure the maintenance of cosmic harmony (Idowu, 1973). Violations of moral or ritual norms are believed to disrupt this harmony, necessitating sacrificial rites to restore balance. Thus, sacrifice serves both a spiritual and juridical function in maintaining order within the community.

4.3.6 Contemporary Understanding and Transformations

In modern African societies, sacrificial practice have undergone significant reinterpretation due to the influence of Christianity, Islam, and globalization. While some communities have abandoned blood sacrifices, many retain symbolic or simplified forms that preserve traditional meanings (Opoku, 1993; Anyigor, 2022).

There is also evidence of syncretism, where African Christians integrate traditional offerings or libations into Christian worship, particularly during cultural festivals (Onwuatuegwu and Osigwe, 2024). Furthermore, scholars like Deopa and Rinaldo (2023) argue that ATR's sacrificial worldview contributes to environmental and ecological ethics by fostering reverence for nature and sustainable relationships with the environment.

4.4 Comparative Analysis: Similarities and Differences

The concept and practice of sacrifice occupy vital positions in both Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR), yet they differ fundamentally in their theological orientation, ritual expression, and understanding of divine-human relationship. A comparative analysis reveals that while both traditions share a belief in sacrifice as a means of establishing and sustaining communion with the divine, they diverge sharply in purpose, method, and interpretation.

4.4.1 Differences

1. In Christianity, sacrifice finds its ultimate expression in the atoning death of Jesus Christ, which is seen as a once-for-all redemptive act that reconciles humanity with God (Hebrews 9:26-28; Weddle, 2017). This theological interpretation emphasizes divine grace and substitutionary atonement - the belief that Christ's death satisfies the demands of justice and restores the broken relationship between God and humanity (Eberhart, 2020). In contrast, African Traditional Religion conceives of sacrifice as a continuous and relational process, aimed not at redemption from sin in the Christian sense, but at maintaining harmony within the universe - between humans, spirits, ancestors, and the Supreme Being (Mbiti, 1990; Idowu, 1973).
2. From a cosmological standpoint, Christianity presents a transcendent view of God, who acts in history to redeem His creation through a unique and irreversible event - the crucifixion. ATR, however, operates within a holistic and immanent worldview where the spiritual and material realms interpenetrate.

The divine is accessible through intermediaries such as deities and ancestors, and sacrifice serves as the principal medium of interaction and balance (Arinze, 1970; Opoku, 1993).

3. When examined through a ritual and functional lens, both systems attach deep symbolic meaning to sacrifice but employs different materials and methods. Christian worship, especially in liturgical contexts, commemorates the sacrifice of Christ through the Eucharist - a spiritual reenactment that affirms faith and unity among believers (Cornille and Connelly, 2021). In ATR, sacrifices are physical and performative, involving tangible offerings such as animals, food, or libations to express gratitude, seek forgiveness, or restore social harmony (Awolalu, 1979; Parrinder, 1969). These differences highlight how Christianity internalizes sacrifice as a spiritual principle, whereas ATR externalizes it as a ritual obligation integrated into daily life.
4. Ethically and socially, both traditions regard sacrifice as a means of fostering moral order and communal well-being. Christianity views the sacrificial life as imitation of Christ's self-giving love, calling believers to moral purity, charity, and service (Weddle, 2017). ATR, on the other hand, interprets sacrifice as a moral duty that upholds justice, hospitality, and harmony within the community. Violations of social or ritual norms necessitates sacrificial rites to restore moral and spiritual balance (Idowu, 1973; Awolalu, 1979). Thus, while the Christian ethic of sacrifice is inward and redemptive, ATR's ethic is outward and restorative, focusing on the collective rather than the individual.

5. The role of mediators in both religions also demonstrates a major point of divergence. In Christianity, Jesus Christ is the sole and eternal mediator between God and humanity (1 Timothy 2:5), and through Him, believers access divine grace without the need for repeated sacrifices. In ATR, mediation is plural and hierarchical: priest, elders, and ancestors all serve as intermediaries who facilitate communication with the divine (Mbiti, 1990; Onwuaturuegwu and Osigwe, 2024). This structural difference underscores Christianity's monotheistic and transcendental focus versus ATR's relational and communal spirituality.
6. In contemporary times, both traditions are experiencing transformation in the understanding and expression of sacrifice. Christianity increasingly interprets sacrifice metaphorically, emphasizing self-giving service, social justice, and environmental stewardship as expressions of spiritual sacrifice (Eberhart, 2020). Similarly, African Traditional Religions is adapting to modern contexts by retaining symbolic and non-bloody sacrifices while integrating new ethical interpretations that stress peace, justice, and ecological balance (Deopa and Rinaldo, 2023; Opoku, 1993). This evolution demonstrates the resilience of sacrificial thought across cultures, even amid changing religious and social realities.

The comparative analysis thus shows that sacrifice remains a dynamic theological and cultural phenomenon. Christianity spiritualizes sacrifice into a redemptive relationship with God through Christ, while African Traditional Religion

ritualizes it as a continuous negotiation of life and harmony among cosmic forces. Both, however, reveals the universal human quest to maintain communion with the divine, sustain moral order, and affirm the sacredness of life.

4.4.2 Similarities

The comparative analysis of sacrifice in Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR) brings to light several interconnected themes that defines the role of sacrifice in both religious systems. These include atonement and reconciliation, mediation, communal identity, moral obligation, symbolism, and transformation. Each theme reveals how sacrifice serves as a means through which human beings negotiate their relationship with the divine, sustain social order, and express faith and devotion.

1.Atonement and Reconciliation

A central theme that emerges from both traditions is atonement, though each interprets it differently. In Christianity, atonement is rooted in the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection restore the broken relationship between God and humanity (Romans 5:10; Hebrews 9:26-28). The concept emphasizes divine initiative- God's love expressed through Christ's self-offering for human salvation (Eberhart, 2020). This understanding gives Christian sacrifice a spiritual and salvific dimension, portraying it as the ultimate act of grace rather than human effort.

Conversely, in ATR, atonement is relational and cyclical. Sacrifices are offered to appease deities or ancestors when social or moral order has been

disrupted (Mbiti, 1990). The goal is not eternal redemption but the restoration of harmony within the community and the cosmos. Sacrifice here functions as a ritual mechanism for resolving conflicts, healing breaches, and reestablishing balance (Idowu, 1973). Thus, while Christianity locates reconciliation in divine grace, ATR sees it as a communal responsibility achieved through ritual observance.

2. Mediation and Access to the Divine

Both religions emphasize the need for mediation in human-divine relations, but they differ in structure and theology. Christianity teaches that Jesus Christ is the sole mediator between God and man [1 Timothy 2:5], embodying both divine and human nature. His priestly role renders further sacrifices unnecessary, as His death is viewed as a complete and eternal offering (Weddle, 2017). This theological position simplifies access to God through faith and prayer rather than ritual repetition.

ATR, on the other hand, functions through a plural and hierarchical system of mediation involving priests, ancestors, diviners, and community elders (Awolalu, 1979). These mediators interpret the will of the spiritual beings and perform sacrifices on behalf of individuals or groups. The presence of multiple intermediaries reflects the communal and interdependent nature of African spirituality, where the divine is approached through layers of relationship rather than

direct access. Both systems, however, affirms that the sacred is not approached casually but through a structured channel of reverence and order.

3. Communal Identity and Social Cohesion

A recurring theme in both traditions is the communal significance of sacrifice. Christianity conceives of the Church as a spiritual community united by the body and blood of Christ. The Eucharist, which commemorates Christ's sacrifice, reinforces a sense of shared identity and spiritual fellowship among believers (Cornille and Connelly, 2021). Participation in this sacrament symbolizes the unity of the faithful in Christ's redemptive work.

In African Tradition Religion, sacrifice also serves to strengthen communal ties and affirm kinship relations. Rituals are often performed collectively, and the benefits of the sacrifice extends to the entire family or community. As Arinze (1970) notes, the act of offering unites the living with the ancestors and the deities, reaffirming shared values and belonging. Through sacrifice, social harmony is maintained, and moral transgressions that threatens communal balance are addressed. Therefore, while Christianity's communal identity is spiritual and ecclesial, African Traditional Religion is ancestral and socio-religious.

4. Moral Obligation and Ethical Implications

Sacrifice in both systems carries a profound ethical dimension. In Christianity, the concept of self-sacrifice extends beyond ritual to include moral and ethical living-forgiveness, service, and compassion modeled after Christ's example

(Romans 12:1). Christians are called to offer their lives as 'living sacrifice' signifying obedience and holiness rather than ritual offering (Eberhart, 2020).

In ATR, sacrifice embodies moral responsibility within the community. Offenses such as lying, theft, or violations of taboos disturb the social order and necessitate sacrificial rites for purification or reconciliation (Mbiti, 1990; Idowu, 1973). This ritual ethics reinforces the principle that wrongdoings affects not only the individual but the collective, thereby promoting accountability and justice. Both systems thus link sacrifice with moral transformation - Christianity through spiritual regeneration, and African Traditional Religion through ritual restoration.

5. Symbolism and Expression of Faith

Symbolism is another key theme that defines sacrificial acts in both traditions. Christian sacrifice, particularly in the Eucharist, is symbolic rather than material, representing Christ's body and blood as spiritual nourishment. This symbolism shifts the focus from physical offering to inner devotion and remembrance (Cornille and Connelly, 2021). In contrast, African Traditional Religion employs tangible symbols - animals, food, and libations - to communicate reverence and intention. Each material element holds spiritual meaning: blood represents life, kola nut symbolizes unity, and palm wine denotes hospitality (Awolalu, 1979; Opoku, 1993). Both traditions thus use symbolic actions to express the invisible realities of faith and divine communion.

6. Transformation and Continuity

A significant contemporary theme is the transformation of sacrificial practices in response to modernization and globalization. Christianity increasingly interprets sacrifice in social and moral terms, emphasizing humanitarian service, peace-building, and ecological care as expressions of Christ-like self-giving (Eberhart, 2020). Likewise, ATR has adapted to new realities, replacing animal sacrifices in many communities with symbolic acts of offering, such as prayer, song, or community feasting (Deopa and Rinaldo, 2023).

Despite these transformations, both systems maintain continuity with their original intent - the desire to honor the sacred, restore harmony and express gratitude. The evolving understanding of sacrifice in both religions reflects an enduring truth: that the act of giving, whether spiritual or material, remains central to humanity's pursuit of meaning, order, and divine connection.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 EVALUATION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Evaluation

This study has examined the concept of Sacrifice in Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR) focusing on their theological meanings, ritual expressions, ethical implications, and continuing relevance. The investigation began with an exploration of the general concept of sacrifice, followed by a review of Christian and African perspectives on the subject. Through a comparative framework, the study identified both convergences and divergences in how the two traditions understand and practice sacrifice.

In Christianity, sacrifice finds its supreme expression in the atoning death of Jesus Christ, understood as a unique and complete offering that reconciles humanity

with God. This act transcends the need for repeated ritual sacrifices and redefines sacrifices as a moral and spiritual principal centered on love, grace, and self-surrender (Eberhart, 2020; Weddle, 2017). Sacrifice in this context is thus both redemptive and transformative - a call for believers to live sacrificially through faith, obedience, and service.

In ATR, sacrifice is a recurring, communal, and pragmatic act that maintains harmony between the human, spiritual, and natural realms (Mbiti, 1990; Idowu, 1973). Offerings - whether of food, animals, or libations - serves various purposes such as thanksgiving, appeasement, purification, and protection. The practice is rooted in the African worldview of interdependence and relational balance, where every aspect of life is connected to spiritual forces. Unlike the Christocentric orientation of Christianity, ATR's sacrificial system is pluralistic, mediated through priest, ancestors, and deities.

The comparative analysis (Chapter Four) revealed that while both traditions regard sacrifice as vital to human-divine communion, they differ in purpose, meaning, and structure. Christianity emphasizes a once-for-all spiritual sacrifice grounded in divine grace, whereas ATR views sacrifice as an ongoing relational process ensuring cosmic and communal balance. Both systems, however, link sacrifice with ethical transformation, social responsibility, and reverence for the sacred.

5.2 Conclusion

From the findings of this research, it can be concluded that sacrifice remains a central and enduring element of religious experience, bridging the human and divine realms across cultures and traditions. Although Christianity and African Traditional Religion differ in their theological premises, both uphold sacrifice as a vital expression of faith, dependence, and devotion.

In Christianity, sacrifice is fundamentally spiritualized - no longer a physical act but an inner disposition of self-giving modeled after Christ. It signifies reconciliation, divine mercy, and the believer's call to holiness. The Eucharist serves as a symbolic continuation of the sacrificial mystery, uniting the Church in a perpetual remembrance of Christ's redemptive work.

In ATR, sacrifice remains ritualized and communal, maintaining its concrete expression through offerings that sustain social and cosmic harmony. It reflects the African conviction that life is sacred and interdependent, requiring constant balance through reciprocity with the spiritual world. The act of sacrifice is therefore a moral duty, a cultural affirmation, and a means of securing both individual and collective well-being.

Ultimately, both traditions converge on the idea that sacrifice is not merely about loss but about transformation - the surrender of something valuable to achieve greater spiritual and moral renewal. Whether through Christ's redemptive act or the African ritual of offering, sacrifice continues to embody humanity's deepest longing for peace, order, and communion with the divine.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations are proposed:

1. **Promote Interreligious Dialogue:** Scholars and religious leaders should encourage constructive dialogue between Christians and adherents of African Traditional Religion to foster mutual understanding. Recognizing shared moral and spiritual values - such as respect for life, gratitude, and community - can bridge cultural divides and promote peaceful coexistence (Cornille and Connelly, 2021).
2. **Contextual Theology:** Theologians should develop a more contextual Christian theology that appreciates indigenous African religious expression. Integrating aspects of ATR's communal and symbolic understanding of sacrifice could deepen the African Christian experience and make the Gospel more culturally resonant (Idowu, 1973; Mbiti, 1990).
3. **Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge:** Governments, educational institutions, and religious bodies should document and preserve African traditional practices, including sacrificial rituals, as part of cultural heritage. Such preservation contributes to understanding Africa's moral and spiritual worldview beyond colonial misrepresentations (Opoku, 1993).
4. **Ethical Reinterpretation of Sacrifice:** Both traditions should emphasize the ethical and humanitarian dimensions of sacrifice in modern contexts. Sacrifice should inspire compassion, justice, and ecological responsibility rather than literal or harmful ritual practices (Deopa and Rinaldo, 2023).

5. Further Research: Future studies should explore the intersections between sacrifice, ecology, and sustainability within both Christian and African frameworks. Such research would illuminate how sacrificial thought can contribute to global discussions on environmental ethics and communal well-being.

Through these recommendations, the study hopes to encourage greater respect for religious diversity and highlight the continuing relevance of sacrifice as a universal language of devotion, morality and transformation.

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