



## Research article

ISSN 2582-0214

**JESUS' SACRIFICE (HEBREWS 9:15-28) AND THE HUMAN SACRIFICE IN YORUBA TRADITIONAL RELIGION**Job Oluremi Okunoye<sup>1\*</sup>, Michael Olusegun Abodunrin<sup>2</sup><sup>1\*</sup>Associate Professor, *Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Oyo State, Nigeria.*<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, *United Missionary Church of Africa Theological College (UMCATC), Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria.*Email: [jo.okunoye@acu.edu.ng](mailto:jo.okunoye@acu.edu.ng), [oluremiokunoye@gmail.com](mailto:oluremiokunoye@gmail.com), [mikebodunrin@gmail.com](mailto:mikebodunrin@gmail.com)<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2458-6531>Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54513/BSJ.2024.6308>

## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

**Article history:**

Received: 28-7-2024

Accepted: 29-8-2024

Available online 30-9-2024

**Keywords:***Human sacrifice, Yoruba Traditional Religion, Sacrifice of Jesus, Hebrews 9: 15-28*

The sacrifice of Jesus as exemplified in the epistle to Hebrews 9:15-28 is studied in this paper in the context of human sacrifice in Yoruba Traditional Religion (YTR). The paper argues that sacrifice is at the centre in relation to salvation of mankind in both Hebrews and Yoruba traditions, though there is a great variety in the ways in which a sacrifice can be offered, as well as in the functions that it is expected to perform. Contextualizing the text under study enhances clarity in the understanding of the significance of the sacrifice of Jesus. Using historical-critical method and qualitative approach, the paper examines the sacrifice of Jesus as presented in Hebrews 9:15-28. Finding reveals that understanding the human sacrifice in YTR enhances contextualizing the sacrifice of Jesus among the Yoruba Christians. In conclusion, the sacrifice of Jesus as exemplified in Hebrews 9:15-28 is superior to the human sacrifice in Yoruba Traditional Religion.



## Introduction

At the early period of the Christian Church, the major problem centered on the doctrine, or faith of the Church. The emphasis or question which was paramount to every doctrine is whether it is true or not. But in the modern world, it has been shifted to how relevant is the doctrine to the present generation? This is true of the doctrine of the atonement, particularly the atonement of Jesus. If Jesus died as a sacrifice, does that sacrifice still have effect on man in this present age?

Considering the concept of atonement generally, both the biblical concept and others, it is a means of reconciliation between man and the supernatural being or Being. On a general note, however, it is not the supernatural being that offers the sacrifice of reconciliation; he only prescribes the kind of sacrifice to be offered for appeasement. This is because he is superior and cannot err. In the Old Testament (OT), the nature of sacrifice is as discussed above, but in the New Testament (NT), it differs. In the NT, God is involved in the work of the atonement fully so much so that man does not need to worry himself any longer on which type of sacrifice to make for appeasement. It has almost become a mystery to man. Then the question arises: is there any difference between the atonement in O.T. and N.T.? The analysis of the difference will help the interpretation of the concept of atonement in both testaments and draw out the relationship of both — and point out if there is any agreement between them?

Although the term, atonement has etymological problem — in O.T. כִּפָּר (kaphar) and N.T. *hilasmos* which implies a means of reconciliation — it is directed to the object of sacrifice, for example in the O.T., annual sacrifice was prescribed and the material for sacrifice has no human feeling, it was ignorant of the purpose for which it was sacrificed, it was just a mere animal. But in the N.T., the material of sacrifice is not an animal; it was Jesus Christ himself who came to replace the animal sacrifice which was imperfect. By his incarnation, this was made evident that animal sacrifice cannot save, not as effective as to wipe away the sin of man totally. Jesus Christ therefore laid down his life for the ransom of many voluntarily, unlike the animal sacrifice that lacks voluntarily offer, not original. And that is why Jesus is referred to as the high priest in Hebrews because he had done the sacrifice



once and for all, there is no need of having a high priest. He has offered a perfect sacrifice for perfect reconciliation and that is the basis of the Christian faith.<sup>1</sup>

### **Perspectives on the Atonement of Jesus**

There are different theories regarding the atonement of Jesus. Some of these historically dominant theories include the Scapegoat Theory, the Governmental Theory, the Penal Substitutionary Theory, the Satisfaction Theory (Anselm), *Christus Victor*, the Ransom Theory and the Moral Influence Theory.<sup>2</sup> It is discovered in the ancient belief that in human relations, blood had a mysterious and almost sacred aura. A contract made by blood is nearly inviolable. In fact, the intrinsic mystery of blood is seen among the moderns and despite the fact that certain beliefs about blood have been demythologized in our laboratories, blood still retains its mystic power.<sup>3</sup> From time immemorial, religions in history honoured blood as a “sacred substance”. Christianity also as other religions is blood based. For example, the OT writers extensively described and discussed the significance of blood sacrifices in the worship life of the ancient Israelite society.<sup>4</sup> While the NT writers with theological interpretation overlay the symbolic rituals in OT so much that on daily, weekly, and monthly bases, ‘Christians are called upon to commemorate Christ's death with the ceremony centred in his blood.’<sup>5</sup> Blood’s quality of cleansing is seen throughout the Bible. In Leviticus, the blood cleanses a person with an infectious skin disease and in some other O.T. passages as cleansing from sin- Atonement. In the N.T., Jesus blood cleanses from sin so that it is said in Rev. 7:14 that many have washed their robes and have been made white in the blood of the Lamb. Brand and Yancey,<sup>6</sup> a surgeon tries to confirm the Biblical function of blood as a cleansing agent in a scientific way by suggesting an experiment. He did this to correct the notion that reference to blood only indicates primitive Christianity remoteness and that, it is

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<sup>1</sup> Honor Sewakpo, “An Interpretation of Christ as the Sacrifice in Hebrews 9:26 to a Holistic Relationship with God,” *International Journal of Social Science Studies*, 4 no. 7 (2016). DOI:10.11114/ijsss.v4i7.1613. Accessed 17<sup>th</sup> May, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1993), 105-177. See also, Anselm, *Monologion and Proslogion*, Trans. Thomas Williams, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 67. Also, see Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo: Why God Became Man*, Trans. Sidney Norton Deane (New York: Beloved Publishing, 2004), 1,11.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *In His Image*, (Grand Rapids: Judith Markham Books, 1984), 71.

<sup>4</sup> W. Dryness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1979), 34. See also, G. O. Abe, *History and Theology of Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, (Benin City: Seevon Prints, 2004), 24.

<sup>5</sup> John R. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, 111: Intervarsity Press, 2012), 220.

<sup>6</sup> P. Brand & P. Yancey, *In His Image*, (Grand Rapids: Judith Markham Books, 1984), 74.



not true of the modern medical science. His simple experiment of blood as cleansing agent proves the fact that blood gives life and that it has the actual substance which does the cleansing. Hence, as the blood cleanses the body of harmful metabolites so does the blood of Jesus cleanse away the waste products, sins that impede the health.<sup>7</sup>

The Old Testament according to Brand. shows that sin by its nature is a blockage “a Paralyzing toxin” which restricts man’s realization of his full humanity. In other Words, sin interferes with man's relationship to God and even other people. In order to help man, God introduced an elaborate ritual with which man could purify himself but Jesus Christ made this ritual obsolete through a historical “once for all sacrifice”. This blood according to him does not only cleanse but has overcome. By Brand's understanding of blood transfusion, he sees communion, particularly, taking or drinking the blood of Jesus as becoming his own part.<sup>8</sup>

Considering Brand's proof of the function of the blood of Jesus, it lacks theological touches, he only discusses or relates the blood of Jesus on the sinners on the peripheral. If the blood of Jesus cleanses, how does it and of what value is the blood of Jesus compared with the different sins of man? More of serious and theological questions which are not new are raised by Baillie on the purpose of Jesus’ first advent, that is, the redemption of the fallen man.<sup>9</sup> The questions include the following: Was the incarnation part of God's original and eternal plan for mankind as the true end and crown of creation? Was it made necessary by the fall of man and consequent need of redemption? Would Christ have come if Adam had not sinned? And could God not have saved man in some other way?<sup>10</sup> To answer these questions, Baillie traces the concept of atonement from OT down to the NT. According to him, the OT concept has received a radically new interpretation because it is applied figuratively to the Christ’s sacrifice and it is even ultimately God himself that is regarded as bearing the brunt and paying the price. “It is all of God” who provides the means of reconciliation himself. Here, the victim and the priest are one, which is Jesus the Son of God.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Brand & Yancey, *In His Image*, 75.

<sup>8</sup> Brand & Yancey, *In His Image*, 77.

<sup>9</sup> D. M. Baillie, *God was in Christ*, (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1965), 157.

<sup>10</sup> Baillie, *God was in Christ*, 158.

<sup>11</sup> Baillie, *God was in Christ*, 160.



The idea of the atonement as “It is all of God” as suggested by Baillie is also related to Aulen's opinion who insists that the Manhood of our Lord Jesus has no real part to play in the work of atonement.<sup>12</sup> However, for Morris, both Godhead and the Manhood of Jesus are involved in the process. He stresses that unless Jesus was fully God, our salvation did not originate from God. To balance his theology, considering the books of the N.T., the death of Jesus implies and is strongly on the Manhood of Jesus for God does not die.<sup>13</sup>

Taylor,<sup>14</sup> conceptualizes atonement as the reconciliation of man and of the world to God. By analysing N.T. scope of teaching, he stresses that it relates to the needs of man both positive and negative. In appreciating the relationship of God to the atonement, he points out that the testimony of the N.T. to the belief that the atonement is the realization of the purpose of God is as full as is conclusive, that God wills the reconciliation of men to himself.<sup>15</sup> Taylor opines that the atonement is mainly the purpose of God and a proof of his great love emphasizing that there can be no inferences which could be more certain than this. In his study of the history of the doctrine of atonement, he raises a problem, which he perceives as common to the theories- unsatisfactory and unethical theories - apart from those immanent.<sup>16</sup> He asks the question “how can it be said that Christ, the merciful son, was punished by the father and that he died as Man's substitute or offered compensation to God for sin, if in all that he does for man, God is the moving factor or cause of redemption and in it gives free course to his love? Taylor claims that these theories are opposed to the unity of the Godhead, and since God is immanent in his universe and in man. Thus, believes that the relationship of the doctrine of the atonement becomes mainly man-ward and not God-ward. Man only responds to the fulfillment of the divine purpose of which is intended to evoke.<sup>17</sup>

In line with Taylor's submission that the doctrine of atonement is mainly Man-ward and not God-ward, it is supported by Murray who also stresses that the cross of Christ is the supreme demonstration of love of God, hence, the nature of the demonstration as it were

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<sup>12</sup> Gustav Aulen, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, Trans. A.G. Herbert, (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 131-132. Also, see L. L. Morris, “Atonement”, in *New dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson (Illinois: IVP, 2003), 55-56.

<sup>13</sup> L. Morris, *The Cross in the N.T.* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Company, 1999), 373.

<sup>14</sup> V. Taylor, *The Atonement in the N.T. Teaching*, (London, The Epworth Press, 1940), 245.

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, *The Atonement in the N.T. Teaching*, 246.

<sup>16</sup> Taylor, *The Atonement in the N.T. Teaching*, 248.

<sup>17</sup> Taylor, *The Atonement in the N.T. Teaching*, 253.



resides in the extreme costliness of the sacrifice rendered.<sup>18</sup> In fact, there is no meaning to incarnation without atonement. The purpose of the incarnation was that Christ should atone for the sins of man, and it is only him that is in order to save man. According to Letham, no incarnation without atonement and no atonement without incarnation. Jesus is seen to have taken the nature and name of Adam so that in Adam's place he might offer our flesh to God in order to satisfy his judgement.<sup>19</sup> But as regards Letham's assertion, Berkouwer,<sup>20</sup> is of the opinion that the connection between the incarnation and the need for deliverance through atonement which is sometimes called hamtiocentric conceptions be vigorously objected and that incarnation as a subject should be separated from atonement since Christ's coming to the world is not determined by sin only. He opines that the incarnation as such has its own motive of redemption and restoration.<sup>21</sup> On the contrary, Baillie asserts that any knowledge of Christ which cannot show how it makes the 'vital difference and brings forth 'saving benefits' to our human situation must be more than suspect. To him, if the central tradition of Christian theology through centuries has ever been right, then the full answer is not given until the whole problem of sin and atonement, forgiveness and reconciliation are considered. And this is true of Christian witness from the beginning, for instance 'faithful' is the saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' which implies that the doctrines of incarnation and atonement go *paripasu*.<sup>22</sup>

As regards the question, whether God would have become man if there had been no fall at all, Baillie opines that such question could be professed as a *docta ignorantia*, that is, a question that one cannot answer but speculate on. But it is different when we come to the question as to how the incarnation and the belief in it affect the human salvation.<sup>23</sup>

Wright,<sup>24</sup> while expatiating on the suffering and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ states that the suffering of Christ is of two dimensions, namely God's action and Man's action. These two must be considered in order to have a better understanding of his suffering. It must be

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<sup>18</sup> J. Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 13.

<sup>19</sup> R. Letham, *The Work of Christ*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 125.

<sup>20</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Company, 1965), 23.

<sup>21</sup> Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*, 23.

<sup>22</sup> D. M. Baillie, *God was in Christ*, (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1956), 76.

<sup>23</sup> Baillie, *God was in Christ*, 76.

<sup>24</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, (London: SPCK, 1992), 274-280.



noted that throughout Jesus' ministry, he was fully active and conscious in his suffering. For instance, Pilate was involved in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ in the sense that he declared Jesus' execution. Jesus acknowledges the authority of Pilate on whom he is now dependent. But it must be stressed that though Pilate decided to crucify Jesus but by God's permission. In other words, God's action manifested itself in and through Pilate, even after he had declared Jesus innocent and before the final verdict. Hence, one could see Man and God contributing to the death of Jesus.<sup>25</sup>

The above point is better explained in the nature of the suffering of Christ as a necessity. The scripture expresses that Christ must suffer (Lk. 9:22; 47.25; 247). And in the whole show, one discovers that through the mesh of human arbitrariness runs the thread of God's plan and action. That which is arbitrariness on the part of men such as Pilate and Herod is subjected to a divine must and this is because all the things which were written in the Law of Moses, in the prophets and in the Psalms concerning Christ must be fulfilled (Lk 24:44).

Tillich's Christology particularly relating to the question of what made Jesus the Christ has a kind of agnostic tendencies. For example, he said that Jesus proved and confirmed his character as the Christ<sup>26</sup> Here, dualistic Christology is implied that separates Jesus and Christ from one another. Although Tillich was trying to develop contemporary Christology which would preserve both the 'Christ character' and 'Jesus character' but seems to drive a wedge between them. But the major emphasis is that the suffering of Christ as sacrifice brought about the idea of a new being or creature because his sacrifice accomplished in reality what the old sacrifices were meant for but could not do.

Morris who appreciates the work of the author of Hebrews says that the author was conscious of certain things. First, that when men are thinking of the reality of heaven, it is necessary to be purified with better sacrifice (Heb. 9:23). Second, that Christ offered himself "once and for all", hence, "the utter finality of Christ sacrifice is an important truth."<sup>27</sup> Christ by offering his life according to Murray perfectly met both the penal and the prescriptive requirements of God's law expressing his vicarious obedience -active and passive obedience.

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<sup>25</sup> Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*, 137.

<sup>26</sup> S. J. Grevz & R. E. Olson, *20<sup>th</sup> Century Theology*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 116.

<sup>27</sup> Morris, *The Cross in the N.T.*, 270.



“it was through this course of obedience and of learning obedience that he was made perfect as Saviour.”<sup>28</sup>

### Human Sacrifice in Yoruba Traditional Setting

The Yoruba term for sacrifice, according to Awolalu is *ebo*, and both this word and the phrase "offer sacrifice," "*ru ebo*," are always employed in a religious context.<sup>29</sup> Among the Yorubas, sacrifice has both advantages and disadvantages. Positively, it is thought that life should be protected and that its survival depends on the goodwill of those entities that have the ability to either continue or end existence.<sup>30</sup> Thus, while keeping in communication with these spirits, the Yorubas, like other peoples, attempt to appease them. They are aware that their family, their harvests, their animals, and their material wealth all depend on these spiritual forces. As a result, they believe it is appropriate to express their thanks for all of their blessings.<sup>31</sup> As a result, gifts of gratitude are given, particularly on yearly festival celebrations. *Ebo riru* (offering of sacrifice) is so significant because it is a means of appeasing the supernal to invoke fortune. Hence the saying in Yoruba: *Riru ebo lo ngbe ni, Airu ki igb' enia* (Offering sacrifice helps a man, Refusal to do so is detrimental).<sup>32</sup> Mepaiyeda while corroborating Awolalu gives a vivid description of the purpose of *ebo*, the materials of *ebo* and the prescriptions by the oracle for different purposes. He also examines some sacrificial rites in Yoruba Religion.<sup>33</sup> Sacrifice and offering have a single expression in Yoruba – *ebo*, but Mbiti clearly states that there is distinction between sacrifice and offering from the ancient Hebrew's perspective.<sup>34</sup>

Human sacrifice in Yoruba traditional religion was typically used to appease certain deities and cleanse the society at the times of national crisis and calamity. It is actually believed to be the highest form of sacrifice. This is what Lasebikan refers to as

<sup>28</sup> J. Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 22-23.

<sup>29</sup> J. O. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1979), 34.

<sup>30</sup> Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, 36.

<sup>31</sup> S, M, Mepaiyeda, "The Interface between Sacrificial Rites in Yoruba Religion and African Indigenous Churches," *Biblical Studies Journal* 1 no.2 (2019):17-25.

<sup>32</sup> A. O. Dada, "Ritual, Symbolism in Yoruba Traditional Religious Thought," *Asian Journal of Theology*, 4 no. 1 (1990): 456-471.

<sup>33</sup> Mepaiyeda, 17.

<sup>34</sup> J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (London: Heinman, 1969), 58.





scapegoatism.<sup>35</sup> It was believed that in order to appease a deity who shielded an entire town or to appease someone who had brought misfortune upon the community as a whole, the greatest and best had to be presented. Human sacrifices are offered for different purposes; for example, the *abobaku* (someone designated to die with the king) is offered as sacrifice at the demise of the king. The ifa oracle also prescribes human sacrifice by choosing a person as the material for sacrifice. This is not voluntary. Normally, human sacrifice victims received a healthy diet before being killed. With the exception of their freedom and life, they received everything excellent they had requested. In cases when the sacrifice was intended to be propitiatory or substitutionary, the victims served as scapegoats, bearing the crimes and guilt of the offerer. As people prayed and begged the gods for blessings and forgiveness of their sins, these victims were paraded through the cities and villages.<sup>36</sup>

Awolalu cited the tradition on voluntary human sacrifice of *Eleguru* in Ijebu-Ode. It is presented that in the past years, Osa (lagoon) was threatening Ijebu-Ode and the people in their anxiety consulted the oracle to ascertain what could be done to control the threat. The *babalawo* (diviner-priest) on that memorable occasion was *Eleguru* (alias ‘*Eni see mo*). The oracle revealed that a human victim was required as sacrifice. And who was to be the victim? Surprisingly enough, *Eleguru* said that he was to be both the priest to offer the sacrifice as well as the victim. In this case, *Eleguru* played the role of a priest and a sacrificial victim in order to save his people from the menace of the lagoon.<sup>37</sup> There had been contention on the one whom sacrifice is offered. Some scholars opine that the supreme being is the ultimate, but that *Esu* shares in it as an intermediary and so that he would not cause confusion.<sup>38</sup>

The concept of human sacrifice in Yoruba Traditional Religion could be summarized thus: The *ebo* is not offered to God directly but through the lesser deities; Sacrifices are offered as prescribed by *ifa* (oracle) through a human priest (*babalawo*) when consulted over a matter;

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<sup>35</sup> G. L. Lasebikan, “Scapegoatism: An Examination of the Concept of Removal of Communal Sin in Biblical and Yoruba Contexts,” in *Sacrifice in Religious Traditions: Essays in Honour of J. Omosade Awolalu*, ed. Deji Ayegboyan and Adekunle Dada (Ibadan: Samprints and Graphics, 2018), 56.

<sup>36</sup> E.O. Bablola, “The Continuity of the Phenomenon of Sacrifice in Yoruba Society in Nigeria,” *African Theological Journal*, 21 no. 3(1992): 78–91.

<sup>37</sup> Awolalu, 42.

<sup>38</sup> A. Olowola, “Sacrifice in African Tradition and Biblical Perspective,” *African Journal of Evangelical Theology*, 10 no. 1 (1991): 3–9



The offering of *ebo* is as many times the need arises; in essence one sacrifice does not take care of all life challenges; The materials of sacrifice are perpetually earthly.

### **Exegetical Analysis of Hebrews 9:15-28**

From the previous chapters and verses of chapter 9 of this epistle prior to verse 15, the author emphasized the sacrificial blood of Christ as one that had its result in an eternal redemption through which the consciousness of sin is cleansed in man. He emphasized more on Christ's mediatorship in relation to a better covenant established. But in this passage, we see the author presenting the original inheritance promised to Abraham and his seed and this seed is, to Paul, Christ.

Verse 15 cannot be treated in isolation because of the clause *και δια τουτο (kai dia touto)*, "And on this account" meaning that because, as stated in verse 14 Christ's blood cleanse the conscience from dead works and thus fits men to draw near to God. "He is the mediator of (the) a new covenant' *διαθηκης καινης μεσιτης εστιν (diatheke kaines mesites estin)*. Even though the inheritance of the eternity was promised under the old covenant, people could not receive it 'until their sins were atoned for.'<sup>39</sup> The word for 'new' in Greek version is not *νεος* which means new in point of time. It is *καινος* which means new is quality of character. This *καινος (kainos)* implies the effectiveness of and freshness given to the covenant by Christ. What is referred to in this verse as 'first covenant' *τη πρωτη διαθηκη (te prote diatheke)* is a reference to the mosaic covenant given after about four hundred and thirty years after the time of Abraham. The new covenant was given through "a death having taken place" *οπως θαινατον γενομενον (opos thainaton genomenon)*. This death was at once vicarious and substitutionary which put the new testament in force being a perfect ransom. The author centered the 'ransoming' on the sins of the past (first testament) as can be seen in the expression- *εις απο λυτρωσιν (eis apo lutrosin)* that is, for the ransoming. Hence the whole of the past, present and future rest on the redemptive work of Christ. This makes his (Christ's) mediatorship relevant and accessible to every race and everyone that receives him.

In verses 16 & 17, is a question on why was the mediator's death necessary for the ratification of the covenant? It is affirmed that the testator must die where a testament is, otherwise it is of no value. The covenant requires that a death must take place. The author

<sup>39</sup> H. Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, (London: Adam and Clarks, 1964), 1.



uses the word *θερσαι* (*tharasai*), which is a legal and technical term. It implies an announcement or proof of the death of the testator before his will can become effective contextually.<sup>40</sup> To answer the question as to whether the covenant is valid even as the testator is alive, the author's answer is absolutely negative as seen in his use of the word *μη ποτε* (*me pote*) meaning, never! The term *διαθηκη* (*diatheke*)- covenant or testament as used by the author of the epistle to Hebrews is difficult to unravel. When it is interpreted as testament, the meaning in classical Greek is implied and never in O.T. nor in NT, except for probably here, but the word implies a death in a different manner.<sup>41</sup>

As to the problem surrounding the interpretation of the terminology *διαθηκη* (*diatheke*); it has been explained and interpreted in two major ways. The first explanation is, maintaining that the Hebrew idea means covenant throughout and the sacrifice that accompanied it is just a representative of the contracting parties. The second explains it as having the idea of bequest or will according to Bishop Lightfoot as quoted by Wiley. This idea remains like that through the epistle. Moffat opines that the writer uses the term to imply the two meanings: "Using it in both Greek and Hebrew meaning — and this is the same way Paul does in Gal. 3: 15ff. He explains further by considering the authors legal use of *βαβαια* (*babaia*) meaning "affirmed" and *ισχυει* (*ischuei*) meaning "of force". These terms are applicable to wills and laws. The writer also uses the words *ο διαθενος* (*ho diathenos*) a technical word for the testator. On the whole, considering Christ's acceptance as the Messiah among the Hebrews, the author of the epistle found it very difficult to express his intention, therefore he used the term *διαθηκη* (*diatheke*) under both aspects- covenants and testament.<sup>42</sup>

Verse 18 cannot be interpreted or explained in isolation to verse 17 as the author uses the word *οθεν ουδε* (*othen oude*) meaning "this is why or wherefore." The writer, here called the attention, to the importance and effectiveness of the blood of Jesus which is even better than the previous sacrifices. The reference to Moses in Verse 19 with the immediate preceding verse is meant to refer to the dedication of the Mosaic covenant in Ex. 24:1-8 which took place before the construction of the Tabernacle. The mentioning of water, scarlet wool, and

<sup>40</sup> P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Grand Rapids, Wm.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1977), 19.

<sup>41</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1990), 15.

<sup>42</sup> H. W. House, *Chronological and Background Charts of the N.T.*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Pub. House, 1987), 140-144.



the hyssop in this verse is symbolic as used by the author. As for *τη πρωτη διαθηκη (te prote diatheke)*, it was not only inaugurated with blood but its services were based on blood sacrifice for the blood is so significant for it was through the shedding of it that there can be access to God. Verses 23 and 24 discuss the necessity of the cleansing of the heavenly and earthly things. Christ's offering was once for all as in verse 25 as the author contrasts the offerings of the Levitical high priest and Christ.<sup>43</sup>

The Levitical priest entered with the blood of others and the sacrifice and repeated every year but Christ entered by his own blood once which implies full obedience to the will of God which makes other things unnecessary as it also implied in verse 26. Verse 27 mentions Death and Judgment, that it has been appointed *αποκειται (apokeitai)* which also means to lay off -to die once and after that judgment. To be in line with 'the author's intention, the judgment follows immediately after death. The Death as referred to in this passage closes the history of life in this world, hence whatever is not done before death must be left undone. Thus, verse 28 now talks about the appearance of Christ the second time. "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." Here the author draws his parallel to a close in which he describes the first advent of Christ as coming to sacrifice his life for the remission of man's sin. He came to bear our curse and suffer on our behalf, but at his second advent he will put on his garment of glory and beauty and appear as lightning comes out by the east to welcome the blessed of his father whom he had redeemed by his blood.<sup>44</sup>

### **Comparative Analysis of the Sacrifice of Jesus and Human Sacrifice in Yoruba**

#### **Traditional Religion**

The nature of Jesus' atonement is well described in the Epistle to Hebrews. The author of the epistle did a thorough comparison of Levitical type of tabernacle, priest and objects with Jesus in order to present the superiority of the sacrifice of Jesus to the Levitical sacrifice. Also, to educate in a better way the Jewish Christians (the original recipients of the epistle) who misrepresented or were probably' ignorant of the nature of the atonement of Jesus which has brought: free salvation by grace and not by law - the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant. The sacrifice of Jesus, which instituted the new covenant, is a perfect

<sup>43</sup> O. B. Grene, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, (Greenville: Gospel Hour Inc., 1965), 9-10.

<sup>44</sup> Grene, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, 10.



sacrifice different from one, which would have to be repeated each year. This new covenant is the will, which Christ made for his heirs, which could not become effective until he had atoned for their sins by his death as in Heb. 9:15-28.

As presented in Hebrews 9:15-28, Jesus offered himself once for all and he entered the holy place once for all, he once for all put away sin both at the immediate and the end of the ages, hence, Christians are sanctified once for all by this offering and Christ shall come the second time for the waiting sanctified. This makes a difference comparing the human sacrifice in Yoruba Traditional Religion to the sacrifice of Jesus. While the sacrifice is not offered to God directly but through the lesser deities in YTR, the sacrifice of Jesus was direct and was never routed through any deity. While sacrifice is offered as prescribed by *ifa* (oracle) in YTR, the sacrifice of Jesus addresses all issues of life. The offering of *ebo* (sacrifice) is as many times the need arises in YTR. In essence one sacrifice does not take care of all life challenges, but the sacrifice of Jesus is once and for all. The materials of sacrifice are perpetually earthly in YTR, but there is a difference in the case of Jesus sacrifice in the sense that his sacrifice purified the heavenly things which were necessary to be purified at his real appearance before God. The purification of the copies of the things in heavens *καθαριζεσθαι τοις ουρανοις* (*katharizethai tois ouranois*) should be understood in line with the author's argument from the beginning of the chapter where the author compares the earthly Tabernacle and the sacrificial rites performed in it (old covenant) with the sacrifice of Jesus which is superior (new covenant). Hence, what was pre-figured in the earthly Tabernacle and the rites performed by the priests in the heavenly Sanctuary through the work of Christ on the cross for us. This is true as even presented by the Philips version of the Bible — “It was necessary for the earthly reproductions of heavenly realities to be purified by such methods, but the actual heavenly things could only be made pure in God’s sight by higher sacrifices than these.”

### **Conclusion**

The idea of human sacrifice in Yoruba Traditional Religion as discussed in this paper has enhanced proper understanding of how the sacrifice of Jesus Christ has secured victory over both physical death and eternal death. An attempt has been made to provide an overview of the idea of the atonement of Jesus in Hebrews 9:15-28 and human sacrifice in YTR in the course of this paper. Additionally, an effort has been made to distinguish between the



sacrifice of Jesus and human sacrifice in YTR. While it has been suggested that some aspects of the YTR such as the essence of the sacrifice, objects and articles of sacrifice might not be suitable for contextual theology in relation to the sacrifice of Jesus, other aspects related to deliverance may be suitable for such theology within the framework of Yoruba Religion. Consequently, it has been recommended that the biblical truth should be properly contextualized in the language and culture of the Yoruba for proper understanding to avoid imposition and misrepresentation of the gospel. This should be carefully done to avoid syncretism.

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