

## **SACRIFICE IN AFRICAN ONTOLOGY AND THE ISSUE OF GLOBALIZATION**

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### **Abstract**

*A cursory glance at the developments of studies in the area of globalization, especially in relation to Africa and the rest of the Third World, reveal a couple of changes taking place in virtually every dimension of life. Gradually reality is moving towards unification as barriers are broken down- making the world a global village on a global cosmopolitan conference table. In the midst of these changes driven by globalization, the substances of some realities have remained unchanged. This paper has studied the issue of sacrifice in African ontology to see how much of this religio-cultural phenomenon has been altered by the wave of globalization. In this study, the phenomenological method of research was adopted for the collection and analysis of data. It finally submits that, owing to the fundamental place that sacrifice occupies in the African world, many Africans once in a while, when the storm of life hits, find their way to traditional priests for the offering of traditional sacrifices of kola nut, fowl, goat, etc., in search of solutions to their problems. This practice has not been undermined by the expansion of Christianity in Africa.*

**Keywords:** Globalization, Africa, Ontology, Change, Permanence, Sacrifice, Line

### **Introduction**

The problem of change and permanence featured prominently at the start of the history of Western philosophy. As the Ionian philosophers observed that there were changes from one form to another in the constitution of reality and also continuity in the midst of change, they became concerned with that which remained unchanged in the midst of change. For Thales, that element was water, for Anaximander, it was a neutral, eternal, infinite and indeterminate element, different from all the elements that we know, for Anaximenes, it was air. These remained permanent and persisted through the changes in the universe. Through these elements, they responded to the problem of change and permanence in the universe (Kanu 2014). In relation to the questions of the dynamism of the change and permanence of the African culture, what eventually persists through generations is that which is held so highly by the people, though sometimes

adapted to new and emergent circumstances. This points to the pragmatic nature of the African person, who does not maintain continuity just for the sake of it. This is clearer when related to the African experience of the globalization of Christianity.

The conversion of Emperor Constantine I of Rome in 313, marked a new age in the process of the globalization of Christianity, making Christianity the major religion not only of Europe but also of many societies thousands of miles from Rome (Mbila 2003). In Africa, the spread of Christianity registered great successes. Many Christian Churches have come into Africa taking the place of traditional shrines and the gods. The vocation to priestly and religious life are abundant. The number of pastors, evangelists, prophets, etc., can hardly be quantified. About ninety nine percent of the clergy men and women now in Africa are Africans (Kanu 2012). In the midst of all these changes, one of the questions that has constituted an area of concern for African theologians is 'How much has really changed with the advent of Christianity?' In the midst of the changes in African Traditional Religious cultural values effected by the globalization of Christianity are there elements of African Traditional Religious values that has persisted through the change. This paper focuses particularly on the phenomenon of sacrifice in African traditional thought to see how much has changed given the developments in post-missionary African society. This notwithstanding, what is sacrifice in African traditional thought?

### **Sacrifice in African Ontology**

Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion has been understood variously, however, in all its nuances, it speaks of the relationship between human persons and spiritual forces that inhabit the universe. Mbiti (1969) defines sacrifice "as a means of restoring ontological balance between man and deity" (p. 7). Through sacrifice, the African influences spiritual forces that are unknown; it is a means of contact with the determiners of human destiny that they may be interested in human affairs. Okpalike (2008) sees sacrifice as any ritual action in religion that is capable of opening up the spiritual terrain for the human performer of such an action. In a way that is more detailed than Mbiti, Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) define sacrifice as, "The act of offering an animal or person, or some object, to the divine power or powers" (p. 132). During sacrifice in African Traditional Religion, the following could be offered: kolanut, yam, cocoyam, fruits, tender palm leaves, *ogilishi* leaves, oil, cassava, pigeon, cock, dog, goat, lizard, sheep, cow, banana, candle, cloth, nzu, eagle, feather, etc. Very significant in this list is kola nut, which stands for friendship

and communion. These are not offered directly by the person or persons who bring the sacrifice. They are offered through a sacred specialist called the Priest. He stands between the people and the divine, taking the cries and thanksgivings of the people to the divine and bringing the response of the divine to the people in a language that they can understand.

### **The Ontological Foundation of Sacrifice**

The African recognizes that human beings are not alone in the universe, and above all, that he or she is not the master of the universe. Apart from the consciousness of the being of animate and inanimate realities, there is also the recognition of the active presence of superior powers, that is, spirits in the ontological hierarchy. While some are good, some are evil. To maintain a cosmic equilibrium, he often relates with them, and according to Arinze (1970), he treats them with friendship and respect. It is, therefore, not surprising that, from time to time, he appeases them through the offering of gifts to them, which also acknowledges his dependence on these spiritual forces. Through sacrifice, Taylor (1871) thinks that their favour is secured and their hostility minimized. At this point, it might serve well to distinguish two kinds of sacrifice. Madu (2004) argues that there are two senses in which sacrifices are offered: the popular/personal sense and the ritual sense. In the first sense, sacrifice means renunciation, such as, when I give up my breakfast to save a man dying of hunger. In this case I have made a sacrifice; however, in the ritual sense, it applies only to public religious worship. The meaning of sacrifice that is employed in this paper is strictly the second sense, the ritual sense.

### **Types of Sacrifice**

There are different kinds of sacrifice in African Traditional Religion, however, it can be extended to about seven types which might still not adequately cover the different types of sacrifice in African traditional society. This is because the African offers sacrifices virtually in all kinds of circumstances in life.

#### **1. Petition Sacrifice**

Most of the prayers Africans offer are prayers of petition, asking something from God or the divinities or the ancestors. Morning prayers are usually prayers of petitions asking for success, life, good health, children etc. However, to strengthen these petition, the African sometimes offer a sacrifice. For instance, if the person wants to visit a wealthy relative to ask for something, he or she carries with him or her a keg of palm wine. In the same

way, when the African approaches God, he or she comes with gifts to be offered that the prayers made may be acceptable (Kanu 2015a).

## **2. Thanksgiving Sacrifice**

This is a sacrifice offered to express appreciation to supernatural beings for their protection and care. It is usually elaborate and offered in the company of many friends and well wishers (Kanu 2015a).

## **3. Votive Sacrifice**

These are sacrifices offered to the gods for the benefit received from them or in anticipation of future divine favours. They are usually kept on display in the divinity's sanctuary for some time before they are ritually discarded (Kanu 2015b).

## **4. Propitiatory or Expiatory Sacrifice**

This is a sacrifice offered in order to appease or pacify a particular divinity. This is usually done as prescribed by the oracle or divinity in question. It is offered during town calamities, illness, drought or famine, which are taken to be punishment from the gods for an offence committed. During this sacrifice, people, through the priest plead with the divinity to forgive (Kanu 2015a).

## **5. Substitutionary Sacrifice**

This sacrifice is offered in substitution for another person. For instance, if a deity asks for the life of a person as a sacrifice, as a substitution, the life of an animal could be offered; the life of another person could be offered to the deity as a substitution (Kanu 2015a).

## **6. Preventive Sacrifice**

This sacrifice is offered for preventive reasons or as a precautionary measure to ward off evil spirits and horrible realities. Through such sacrifices, it is believed that the attention of evil powers are diverted from the person who have offered the sacrifice. This sacrifice is offered out of fear of the unknown (Kanu 2015a).

## **7. Foundation Sacrifice**

This is offered when laying foundation for a new house. Since the earth in which we live has been used by many generations who have come and gone, it is necessary to offer this sacrifice to purify the land. It is offered just in case the previous occupants have desecrated the earth, to ask the gods to ensure that the new building stands (Kanu 2015a).

### **The Globalization of Christianity and Sacrifice**

A cursory glance at the contact between ATR and Christianity reveals that the globalization of Christianity has tremendously affected African Traditional Religious practices. The hospitable and receptive nature of African Traditional Religion opened the way for the initial contact and embrace of Christianity. However, in spite of the vaunted hospitality of African Traditional Religion to other religious ideas, it is obvious that the purpose of ATR's receptivity and hospitality to new religious ideas is to add to the old ones which constitute the crux of the traditional people's religious belief. Even after European missionaries have condemned African Traditional Religion as devilish, pagan, fetish, idolatry etc., the major religious practices of African Traditional Religion has endured. Rather than die of in the cosmological conflict between ATR and Christianity, ATR has emerged in new forms accommodated by Christianity.

Amidst the eroding wave of the globalization of Christianity in relation to ATR, religious practices like the offering of sacrifices has remained as a resilient religio-cultural tradition, and continues to retain its specificity in the globalizing world. This is simply because sacrifice is at the heart of African Traditional Religion. It is so central that virtually everything done in ATR revolves around sacrifices; to remove sacrifice from ATR would be like stripping it naked, that is, of all its attributes. African Traditional Religion is, therefore, a religion of sacrifice and sacrifices. This explains why the waves of Christianity and Islam, coupled with Western civilization have not been able to wipe out that commitment to sacrifice in the spiritual life of the African. It is, therefore, not surprising that many Africans are Christian converts, once in a while, when the storm of life hits, they find their way to traditional priests for the offering of sacrifices. Even many African indigenous churches now employ the offering of sacrifices as part of their worship, sacrifices like the slaughtering of goat or ram and sprinkling the blood on the person for whom it is offered. Indigenous churches like the *Aladura* in prescribing solutions to problems offer sacrifices at crossroads or some secluded places, and many times by the sea side. Although they are Christian churches, they still maintain the offering of sacrifices as part of their way of worship.

### **Conclusion**

The foregoing has studied the issue of globalization and the persistence of sacrifice in African ontology. It has discovered that no matter the wave of globalization in Africa, no matter the African's level of education, he/she still strongly believes that he/she is not alone in the universe, but amidst spiritual forces with whom

he/she must relate, positively or negatively. This spiritual experience is what consistently connects the African to the value of sacrifice. Rather than sacrifice to face out among Africans, new forms of sacrifices are rather emerging in the form of renunciation, as seen in many Christians who take rams, bulls, fowl, yam, etc., to the church as their sacrificial offering. This notwithstanding, many leaders of African Independent Churches still recommend the offering of sacrifices to their followers as part of worship. With these developments, one can conclude that sacrifice in African ontology will hardly die.

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