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# SACRIFICE

IN

# RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

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*Essays in Honour of*  
VEN. PROF. J. OMOSADE AWOLALU

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© Department of Religious Studies

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreward	vii
List of Contributors	ix
<b>A. GENERAL PERSPECTIVE</b>	
1. Is Sacrifice Still Relevant in a Modern and Scientific Oriented Society? - <i>Prof. M. Y. Nabofa</i>	1
2. My Sacrifice, O God, is a Broken Spirit (Psalm 52:19) - <i>Rev. Prof Emeritus John S. Pobee</i>	9
3. Reappraising the Role of Women in Sacrifice in African Religions - <i>Oyeronke Olademo</i>	15
4. Scapegoatism: An Examination of the Concept of Removal of Communal Sin in Biblical and Yoruba Contexts - <i>The Most Revd Dr. G. L. Lasebikan</i>	25
5. Sacrifice in Religious Traditions and its Contemporary Significance - <i>Ayegbo, Matthew Babatope</i>	35
6. Islam, Eid Al-Adha and the Changing Meaning of Sacrifice - <i>Yusuf, M. G.</i>	47
<b>B. CHURCH HISTORY, CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY, CLASSICS AND PHILOSOPHY</b>	
7. Sacrifice and Human Prerogative in Ancient Greek Religion - <i>Folake Onayemi</i>	57
8. Christian Theology of Sacrifice in the African Context with Reference to the Yoruba Practice - <i>Rev. Dr. E. Ola. Adeogun</i>	65
9. Martyrdom as Sacrifice in the History of the Church: Then and Now - <i>Julius Adekoya and Deji Ayegboyin</i>	91
10. Sacrifice in Religious Traditions: The Roman Catholic Church Perspectives - <i>Rev. Sr. Dr. Adenike Regina Oke and Clement Chukwuma Chenimuya</i>	101
11. Property and Human Sacrifice: A Philosophical Analysis of Abraham's Attempted Sacrifice of Isaac and Jephthah's Sacrifice of His Daughter - <i>Bumiegha S. Aveke</i>	111
12. A Philosophical Analysis of Sacrifice as a Means to an End in Contemporary Nigerian Christianity and Yoruba Traditional Religion - <i>Gbadamosi Oluwatoyin Adebola</i>	119


<b>C. ETHICS AND SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION</b>	
13. <i>Religious Superstition and Human Sacrifice in the Context of Poverty and Power</i> - <i>Adejuyigbe Caroline Opeyemi</i>	133
14. Ethics of Self- Sacrifice as an Antidote to Political Corruption in the Contemporary Nigeria - <i>Oke Olusegun Peter</i>	141
15. The Socio-Ethical Evaluation of Sacrifice among the Yoruba People - <i>Adesanwo, Emmanuel Remi</i>	157
16. Voluntary or Subtle Compulsion? An Ethical Context of Giving as Sacrifice in Contemporary Christianity - <i>Olumuyiwa Olusesan Familusi Ph.D</i>	173
 <b>D. BIBLICAL STUDIES</b>	
17. The Johannine Concept of Jesus as the Lamb of God in John 1:29, 36 and the Sacrificial Use of Lamb in Yoruba Religio-Cultural Comparative Context - <i>Olubayo. O. Obijole Ph.D.</i>	189
18. The Acceptable Sacrifice with its Leadership Charisma of Divine Presence in Ancient Israel and the Cherubim and Seraphim Unification Church of Nigeria (C&SUCN), Ile-Ife - <i>Abiola Ayodeji Olaniyi</i>	205
19. Re-Reading 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 as a Model of Christian Sacrifice - <i>Abraham O. Adebo, PhD, Ngozi E. Adimora, &amp; Damilola J. Ajiboye</i>	217
20. An Interpretation of Christ as the Sacrifice in Hebrews 9:26 and its Relevance to a Holistic Relationship with God in Nigeria - <i>Honore Sewakpo, PhD</i>	233
21. Sacrificial Atonement in the Old Testament and its Implications for Sustainability of Relationships in Africa - <i>Kareem, Kayode Peter</i>	247
22. Does God Approve Human Sacrifice in Judges 11:31-40? - <i>Jonathan Ola. Ojo, PhD</i>	265
23. Exploring the Ethics of Sacrifices in the Old Testament and its Implication for Nigerian Christians - <i>Sangotunde, Sunday Oluyinka</i>	281
24. Sacrifices Inherent in Role Combinations of Homemaking and Political Leadership in the Nigerian Context: Deborah as a Case Study - <i>Egbeyale, Florence Abimbola</i>	291

<b>E. AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION</b>	
25. The Continuity of the Phenomenon of Sacrifice Among The Yoruba of Nigeria - <i>E. O. Babalola</i>	305
26. The Understanding and Practice of Sacrifice Among the Ganda (Uganda) - <i>Edison Muhindo Kalengyo</i>	315
27. <i>A Kii F'omọ Orẹ B'orẹ</i> : A Classcode and Control in the Concept of <i>Ẹbọ</i> (Sacrifice) in Contemporary Nigeria. - <i>Oláléyẹ Samuel Káyòdé, PhD</i>	353
28. Blood Sacrifice in Yoruba Religion: Its Traditional Necessity and Ethical Challenges in Modern Times - <i>Akinola Segun Gabriel</i>	369
29. Sacrifices: Imperatives of Quality Worship of <i>Esu</i> – (the Evil Deity) in Yoruba Indigenous Religion - <i>Ojetayo Gabriel Kehinde, Ph.D.</i>	383
30. The Concept of Sacrifice in <i>Ifa</i> Religious Tradition in South Western Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects - <i>Oluwawunsi, O. Adekola and Justine Titus Midala</i>	395
31. Sacrifice in <i>Ifa</i> Religious Tradition: Implications for the Physical Environment - <i>Oluwawunsi, O. Adekola and Adejumo, A. Samson</i>	417

## CHAPTER 12

### A Philosophical Analysis of Sacrifice as a Means to an End in Contemporary Nigerian Christianity and Yoruba Traditional Religion

Gbadamosi Oluwatoyin Adebola



#### Abstract

*History reveals to us the significant position occupied by sacrifice in most world religions. Today, in spite of the enormous pressure of Western civilization or what we call modernity, people still offer sacrifices in different religions. Sacrifice in the context of this paper involves a cost, depriving oneself of what is valuable and sometimes precious. There are several factors necessitating the offering of sacrifice, one of which is sacrifice serving as a “means” to an “end.” What is this “means” and what is this “end?” Why do people offer sacrifices? Is it because of the love for the deity or is their sacrifice premised on their own needs? What is the actual goal of a sacrifice? What is the real reason why people give sacrificially? Is a sacrifice attached to a need or what the one offering the sacrifice stands to benefit? This paper attempts to answer these vital questions attached to sacrifice in the contexts of Christianity and Yoruba Traditional Religion. It is a philosophical analysis of a fundamental purpose of sacrifice- a “means” to an “end” in the two selected religions. The paper adopts E. B. Taylor’s theory which sees Sacrifice as a means of “bribing” the gods or of paying homage to them. The methods of data collection includes consultation of relevant books and journals on the subject of discussion.*

**Key words:** Logic, Sacrifice, Means and End, Christianity and Yoruba Traditional Religion

## Introduction

Sacrifice occupies a significant position in most world religions. In fact, history reveals to us that offering of sacrifice is a vital act in religions. Nonetheless, sacrifice does not occupy a vacuum; it plays central roles in religious circles. This paper discusses the role of sacrifice in religion, focusing on African Traditional Religion and Christianity within the contemporary Yoruba society. What is the motive for offering sacrifice? Is it as a result of love for the deity? Or it is due to a particular need or desire on which the sacrifice is premised? This paper addresses these questions while employing the theory of E. B. Taylor who opines that sacrifice is a means of bribing the gods *in the same way as men pay homage to their overlords*.<sup>1</sup> In order to achieve this, the general meaning of sacrifice is discussed, while focusing on the meaning of sacrifice within the contexts of this paper with a view to defining “means” and “end”. The concepts of sacrifice are also discussed in both Christianity and African Traditional Religion in order to present background information on how sacrifice has featured in these religions. The Logic of the offering of sacrifice which supports the theoretical framework of E. B. Taylor is engaged to conclude the discourse that sacrifice is a “means” to an “end.”

## What is Sacrifice?

Attempting a definition of sacrifice is a complex task because, as important as the concept is in diverse religions, it is understood differently. In fact, there is no singular acceptable definition of sacrifice. According to Meszaros and Zachuber, sacrifice is riotously polyvalent: the more scholars discuss it, the more mercurial it seems to get. There is no universally functional definition of sacrifice. It is an inherently polyvalent concept with many senses.<sup>2</sup> For example, the word “sacrifice” is found within popular discourses, academic writings, theological ideologies and religious texts. The Latin word *sacrificum*, is derived from *sacer* which means “holy” and *facere* meaning “to make.” This is the etymological basis for the English word “sacrifice.” This root implies that sacrifice is a process of sanctification, a means by which to consecrate something.<sup>3</sup> In addition to this etymological definition of sacrifice, the Sanskrit word for Vedic Sacrifice is *Yajina*, which is derived from *yaj* meaning “to offer” and in the same vein; the German *opfer* (sacrifice offering) is most likely derived from the Latin *offere* which means “to offer” or “to present.”<sup>4</sup> What then is sacrifice? There is a problem in giving a general definition of sacrifice from a religious perspective. Can we then come up with an eternal, universally valid definition of sacrifice, one that is unequivocally applicable to all instances of sacrifices across religions either through Anthropological research or Philosophical speculation? Are these sacrifices just particular exemplifications of a

<sup>1</sup> E. Taylor, 1958. *Religion in Primitive Culture*. New York: Harper, 461.

<sup>2</sup> J. Meszaros & J. Zachuber Eds., 2013. *Sacrifice and Modern Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 133.

<sup>3</sup> J. Carter, Ed., 2003. *Understanding Religious Sacrifice: A Reader*, London: Continuum, 2.

<sup>4</sup> J. Carter, Ed., 2003. *Understanding Religious Sacrifice: A Reader*, London: Continuum., 2.

general, anthropological idea of sacrifice? Does the term sacrifice have exactly the same meaning, or is the term used analogically?<sup>5</sup> Daly's analysis of the concept of sacrifice is a good attempt to answer the questions raised above. He listed various meanings of sacrifice and what it can mean within different contexts:

1. Secular Meaning: Giving up something in order to get something else that is thought to be more valuable.
2. General Religious Meaning: Offering of something valuable to God.
3. Sacrifice in the Hebrew Scriptures: Sacrifice of Cain and Abel, of Noah after the flood and other different examples in the Old Testament, showing that from the outset, it is clear that God alone decides what an acceptable sacrifice is. Sacrifice is also associated with atonement and communion with God.
4. General Christian Meaning: Offering of something valuable to God, such as the dedication of one's life to priestly service or to a religious life.<sup>6</sup>

It is then obvious that an element that adds to the lack of clarity on sacrifice is the fundamental ambiguity of the conception. Nonetheless, the popular use of the word "sacrifice" revolves around the notion of renouncement or specifically "giving up" of something valuable. The emphasis here is on deprivation because it involves something precious, beneficial, advantageous, costly or worth keeping. This popular conception of sacrifice denotes a level of unpleasantness; people give up something they value for more pressing ideals which they consider "higher, whether it be health, prestige, or some other enhanced quality of relationships between the parties involved."<sup>7</sup> On a similar note, Awolalu opines that sacrifice in a general sense, means forgoing for a particular cause, that which is precious; denying oneself certain benefits and advantages for a particular purpose. What is "sacrificed," whether material or non-material, is often costly. Sacrifice, therefore, involves a cost and this general idea of sacrifice is an extension of the core meaning or what Awolalu calls the metaphorical use of sacrifice. In this metaphorical sense, sacrifice may be defined as the "giving up" of a thing for the sake of another that is higher or more urgent or for a particular cause.<sup>8</sup> There is an important dictum in the conception of Awolalu on the meaning of sacrifice; "whatever the purpose may be, it is obvious that something is renounced in order that a certain end may be achieved."<sup>9</sup> We may substitute the concept of renunciation for other synonyms such as "giving-up," "offering," "submission," and "presenting." All these terms suggest that something is laid down. This "offering," or whatever term is applied, is not done aimlessly, it is done in

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<sup>5</sup> A. Houtman, M. Poorthuis, J. Schwartz and J. Turner Eds., 2014. *The Actuality of Sacrifice: Past and Present*. Netherlands: Koinklijke Brill, 232.

<sup>6</sup> R. Daly, 2009. *Sacrifice Unveiled: The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice*. London: T & T Clarke International, 1-3.

<sup>7</sup> J. Carter, Ed., 2003. *Understanding Religious Sacrifice: A Reader*. London: Continuum, 3.

<sup>8</sup> J. Awolalu, 1979. *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*. Essex: Longman Group Limited, 134-135.

<sup>9</sup> J. Awolalu, 1979. *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*. Essex: Longman Group Limited, 135.

order for a certain end to be achieved. A sacrifice is offered with a certain “end” in view, the logic in the offering of sacrifice is that it is offered for the purpose of an “end.” This end varies ultimately and may be partly responsible for the fundamental ambiguity of the term sacrifice. For the purpose of this paper, it is imperative to have a restricted scope to reduce the abstruseness of the concept sacrifice. Therefore, Christianity and African Traditional Religion within the Yoruba contemporary society constitute the focus of this discourse.

### **The Concept of Sacrifice in Christianity**

The history of Christianity is not complete without an account of the different ways in which sacrifice has featured in the religion. In fact, Christianity as a religion is premised on the sacrifice of Christ. Ekstrand provides a worthy foundation for the history of sacrifice in Christianity. He believes that God instituted a “sacrifice” for sin when Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God provided garments of skin for them to wear which is a blood sacrifice. This blood sacrifice predates the sacrificial system instituted under Mosaic Law and the main idea behind a blood sacrifice was that of substitution. The sacrificial blood was shed on behalf of the guilty.<sup>10</sup> Sacrifice features several times in the Old Testament and the following cases are a few of the different people that offered sacrifices on different occasions:

Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:4); Noah (Genesis 8:20; Abraham always officiates as his own priest (Genesis 12:7; 13:4; 13:18); in Genesis 22, Abraham attempts to offer Isaac as a burnt offering, which was a test of his devotion to God; Job (Job 1:5); Isaac (Genesis 26:25); Jacob, who also offered other sacrifices (Genesis 28:18; 31:54; 33:20; 35; 46:1) and Israel in Egypt. Sacrifice was a familiar practice for the Israelites while they were in Egypt (Exodus 13:15; Exodus 3:18; 5:3; 7:16).<sup>11</sup>

By the time Jesus died in the early first Century of the Common Era, sacrifice was already a fixed part of the politico-religious environment. As a ritual practice in the Graeco-Roman world, sacrifice was also an integral part of Judaism. Jesus of Nazareth was killed as a common criminal, but those who reflected on his death were able to valorize it with sacrificial symbolism (Romans 12:5; I Cor. 10:17; 2:12,13,20). Christians also began to see themselves as “living” sacrifices.<sup>12</sup> According to McDowell, sacrifice is an important part of Christian faith. She proceeds to give an outline of seven important Bible verses about sacrifice which is a clear expression of the Christian idea of sacrifice:

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<sup>10</sup> D. Ekstrand, 2008. *Christianity: The Pursuit of Divine Truth*. Longwood: Xulon Press, 120.

<sup>11</sup> Sacrifice in the Old Testament retrieved 27<sup>th</sup> August, 2015 from <http://www.biblestudytools.com/encyclopedias/isbe/sacrifice-in-the-old-testament-1.html>

<sup>12</sup> G. Heyman, 2007. *The Power of Sacrifice: Roman and Christian Discourses in Conflict*. Washington D.C: CUA Press, 95-96.

**Sacrifice does not replace obedience** - *“But Samuel replied: ‘Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams’ (1 Samuel 15:22).*

**Sacrifice costs something**- *“But the king replied to Araunah, ‘No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing’ (2 Samuel 24:24).*

**Sacrifice can be a broken heart**- *“My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise” (Psalm 51:17).*

**Sacrifice is an everyday occurrence**- *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship” (Romans 12:1).*

**Sacrifice comes through thanksgiving**- *“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name” (Hebrews 13:15).*

**Sacrifice is pleasing to God**- *“And do not forget to do “good” and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Hebrews 13:16).*

**Sacrifice ultimately was paid through Jesus Christ**- *“God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith” (Romans 3:25).<sup>13</sup>*

Although Christ has paid the ultimate price for sacrifice on the cross of Calvary, Christians are still enjoined to offer sacrifices in different ways in the contemporary Nigerian society. It is worthy of note at this juncture that sacrifice today in several cases are often associated with material things, especially with the wave of prosperity teachings which in itself is not problematic but becomes a problem when applied wrongly. However, this does not mean or imply that sacrifice is made only when a person gives a precious material thing, be it a car, a house, huge amount of money or any other material thing that is of value. Sacrifice also includes non-material things and the ultimate is the dedication of a person’s life to God. Sacrifice may be understood as a means to an end for it is believed that what a person offers will pave the way for him/her and lead to the desired end. Sacrifice, in this context, is not bad but becomes bad when people go about it in an unethical way, when people want the result by all means. Today, there are many Christian clerics who teach the importance of sacrifice and emphasize on the roles of

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<sup>13</sup> C. McDowell, Bible Verses about Sacrifice. Retrieved 27th August, 2015 from <http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/7-important-bible-verses-about-sacrifice/>

sacrifice, often using the testimonies of their lives and those of others, how their sacrifice served as an effective means to breakthrough and changed their lives.

Pastor (Mrs.) Funke Felix-Adejumo puts this succinctly when she says, “When you want a particular breakthrough, you create an altar.”<sup>14</sup> The altar here ultimately connotes sacrifice and this does not involve the blood of bulls or any animal. The obvious understanding here is that a person has to sacrifice or lay something down in order to achieve the desired “end” which is breakthrough. Bishop Adedokun corroborates this belief and he provides a clearer explanation on the meaning of sacrifice. According to him (paraphrasing), “No altar will burn without a sacrifice on it, let there be sacrifice on your altar, a sweet smelling one, the one that is able to reverse curses, the type Noah sacrificed. There are opportunities presented before you all the time to put something on your altar.”<sup>15</sup> If this sacrifice does not involve the blood of animals, what then is meant by sacrifice on the altar? Regardless of what the object of sacrifice is, which may involve some level of indistinctness, one thing is clear, sacrifice is usually offered with a clear purpose in mind, which may be simply expressed as “an end” and the sacrifice is “a means” to “this end.” According to Bishop Oyedepo, sacrifice is like God saying to Abraham, “Bring me your son, your only son Isaac whom you love, and sacrifice him to me.” Every such sacrifice is God’s covenant device for your supernatural lifting.<sup>16</sup> He says further that “whatever you let go for the kingdom’s sake, Jesus said, it is an investment, it will surely come back to you in multiplied forms” (Matt. 19:29; Mk. 10:29-30; Lk. 18:29-30). When God makes a kingdom demand on you, it is so He can add colour to your destiny. It is His secret way of promoting you.”<sup>17</sup> This means, when God makes a sacrificial demand on a person, there is a purpose on God’s mind for that particular individual. On a similar note, Pastor E. A. Adeboye opines that those who refuse to give sacrificially to the Lord deny themselves the divine blessings that flow from the God of rapid results.<sup>18</sup> This interpretation of sacrifice should not be misunderstood, and sacrifice should not be seen only as a tool for multiplication, Bishop Oyedepo believes that many people have the teachings, but they do not have the results. Why? The foundation is not in place. Many are operating the principles, but lack the foundation. So the principles appear untrue; their foundation is faulty. Consecration is the first step into kingdom “colours.” God will give a person’s life colour when it is consecrated to him and, when a person’s heart is tuned to God, his/her sacrifices become acceptable (Ps. 51:16-19).<sup>19</sup>

The issue of people giving sacrificially has been applied in different contexts within the Nigerian contemporary Christian circle, placing undue emphasis in some

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<sup>14</sup> Pastor (Mrs.) Funke Felix-Adejumo while preaching at Jogor Centre, Ibadan on 1st February, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> T. Adedokun, 2009. *Overcoming Powers of Wickedness*. Ibadan: Victory publishing House, 32.

<sup>16</sup> D. Oyedepo, 1997, *Understanding Financial Prosperity*. Lagos: Dominion Publishing House, 201-203.

<sup>17</sup> D. Oyedepo, 1997, *Understanding Financial Prosperity*. Lagos: Dominion Publishing House, 201-203.

<sup>18</sup> E. Adeboye, 2013. *The Secrets of Increase*. 2nd Imp. Lagos: CRM Bookshop, 88.

<sup>19</sup> D. Oyedepo, 1997, *Understanding Financial Prosperity*. Lagos: Dominion Publishing House, 41,55,70.

quarters on the reward or benefits attached to the sacrifice, which is in multiple folds, often using the story of Isaac who got a hundred-fold return (Gen. 26:12). This multiple return often motivates people to go to any length to sacrifice and in some cases, ungodly means such as stealing or embezzlement are involved.

What then is the real motive for sacrifice today in the contemporary Nigerian Christian circles? Why do people give sacrificially? Is it because of the love towards God or is it because of the *returns* on the sacrifice offered? If there are no rewards, such as breakthroughs, blessings or increase, would people still give sacrificially? E. B. Taylor says sacrifice serves as a means of 'bribing' the gods or paying homage to them in the same way as men pay homage to their overlords.<sup>20</sup> A vital question arises from this position of Taylor's; Can God be 'bribed'? No serious Christian will give an affirmative answer. Unfortunately, today, we see expressions of this, when people's sacrifices are purely premised on specific needs without a genuine love for God. There is a subtle line between genuine love for God and human's selfish need. On the other hand, the purpose of sacrifice in African Traditional Religion is not so subtle, it is quite simple and straightforward, which is a departure from the Christian motive for sacrifice.

### **The Concept of Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion**

The practice of making sacrifices is found all over Africa. By this practice, material or physical things are given to God and other spiritual beings. This act marks the point where the visible and the invisible worlds meet.<sup>21</sup> Sacrifices aim at restoring communal balance and remain an important feature of African Religion and it is one of the most serious religious actions. The mechanism of sacrifice is explained by the possibility of liberating, transmitting and directing the 'vital dynamism' which would be particularly concentrated in the blood of animals and of man. Sacrifices are the primary means by which traditional Africans maintain and restore relations with the deity, ancestors and the community.<sup>22</sup> According to Mbiti, sacrifice or offerings constitute one of the commonest acts of worship among African people. Mbiti makes a distinction between sacrifice and offering; 'sacrifice' refers to cases where animal life is destroyed in order to present the animal, in part or in whole to God, supernatural beings, spirits or the living-dead. 'Offering' refers to the remaining cases which do not involve the killing of an animal, being chiefly, the presentation of foodstuff and other items.<sup>23</sup> In African societies, life is closely associated with blood and when blood is shed in making a sacrifice, it means the purpose of such a sacrifice must be a mysterious one. The kind of situation that calls for sacrifice may include drought, epidemics, war, raids, calamity, insect pests and destructive floods. These kinds of situation involve the community and it

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<sup>20</sup> E. Taylor, 1958. *Religion in Primitive Culture*. New York: Harper, 461.

<sup>21</sup> J. Mbiti, 1991. *Introduction to African Religion*; 2nd Ed. Long Grove: Waveland Press, 63.

<sup>22</sup> D. Thomas. 2015. *African Traditional Religion in the Modern world*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Jefferson: Mcfarland & Company, 18.

<sup>23</sup> J. Mbiti, 1990, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 2nd Ed. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 58.

is the community that sacrifices an animal or, in the past years, a human being.<sup>24</sup> Sacrifice can also be described as a form of petition to higher forces. The relationship with the divinities is based on a promise made between two parties: human and the divine. The devotee must *feed* the spirit and, in return, the divine must provide the devotee with good fortune. Sacrifices are premised upon the contract between the human being and the spirit world.<sup>25</sup> If sacrifice is premised on a contract, it is obvious that once a party fulfills his/her own term of the contract, the other party is then bound to fulfill the obligations of the contract.

Since the focal point of this paper is Yoruba Traditional Religion, it is imperative at this juncture to make a departure from the general African concept of sacrifice and focus on sacrifice in Yoruba Traditional Religion. According to Idowu, sacrifice is of the essence of the religion of the Yoruba as it is of every religion the world has ever known. It is primarily man's best way of maintaining an established relationship between himself and his object of worship. What is offered and how it is offered depend upon the nature of the particular cult as well as the occasion of the sacrifice.<sup>26</sup> Awolalu shares this view by saying that behind the offering of any sacrifice, there is usually a definite purpose. There is no aimlessness in making an offering; no one ever makes a sacrifice without having a goal in mind.<sup>27</sup> The general name for sacrifice among the Yoruba is *Ebo*. There are different types of sacrifices among the Yoruba, which Awolalu has divided into two broad classes. The first class consists of feasts, partaken of first by the supernatural beings and then by the community of worshippers amidst joy and jubilation. The second class is intended to avert calamity and atone for the offences which provoke such sacrifices, which is done in a joyless and fearful atmosphere.<sup>28</sup> Awolalu further classes sacrifices among the Yoruba into the following categories, basically determined by the purpose of such sacrifices:

1. *Ebo ope ati idapo* (thanksgiving and communion sacrifice) - used to express thanks to, and of holding communion with the supernatural being or the divinities.
2. *Ebo eje* (votive sacrifice) - used to fulfill vows.
3. *Ebo etutu* (propitiatory sacrifice) - used to propitiate the anger of the gods and the spirits and of purifying individuals and the community.
4. *Ebo oju koribi* (preventive sacrifice) - used to keep off evil or misfortune.
5. *Ebo ayepinun* (substitutionary sacrifice) or *Ebo irapada* (redemptive sacrifice) - used to alter an agreement; it has elements of propitiation, prevention and substitution.

<sup>24</sup> J. Mbiti, 1991. *Introduction to African Religion*; 2nd Ed. Long Grove: Waveland Press, 63.

<sup>25</sup> D. Thomas, Nd. *African Traditional Religion in the Modern world*, 2nd Ed, 18.

<sup>26</sup> B. Idowu, 1996. *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, Rev. Ed. Ikeja: Longman, 119.

<sup>27</sup> J. Awolalu 1979. *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*. Essex: Longman Group, 138.

<sup>28</sup> J. Awolalu, 1979. *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*. Essex: Longman Group, 141.

6. *Ebo ipile* (foundation sacrifice) – used for every new enterprise, such as journey, marriage, new career or any form of enterprise, to ensure success.<sup>29</sup>

On what constitutes materials of sacrifice, Idowu makes an adequate elucidation on the materials used for sacrifice among the Yoruba. According to him, the Yoruba offer almost all kinds of foods and drinks and all kinds of living things. Two things are, however, taken into consideration: Firstly, each divinity has his “taste” by tradition, which must be respected and such items are customarily offered to them. For example, *Orisa nla* delights in snails cooked in shea butter, *Orunmila* normally prefers rat and fish, Sango likes ram, *Ogun* relishes dogs, roasted yams and snails while *Esu* likes cock. Secondly, there are certain foods and drinks which are taboo to each divinity. For example, *Orisa nla* does not drink palm wine and it should not be taken near its shrine, while *Esu* does not like palm-kernel oil, anyone who brings it near him is therefore asking for trouble upon himself or upon someone else.<sup>30</sup> Olaleye makes a significant notion on the nature of sacrifice among the Yoruba, which connotes a level of flexibility. He says that no matter how poor a person may be, there is always a way for him/her to offer the sacrifice that emerged from divination. If a person is so poor that he/she cannot afford the items prescribed for sacrifice, he/she would be told to bring parts of the items prescribed. For example, a snail shell may be substituted for a live snail, a feather could replace a fowl, the bones or hair of a goat or pig could replace the animals, while pieces of cloth could represent new cloth.<sup>31</sup> The purpose of sacrifice as discussed among the Yoruba is quite obvious; the person offering the sacrifice is offering it for a particular purpose, for his/her need or to influence the deity to act in a particular way. What then is the logic of Sacrifice as a means to an end?

### **The Logic of Sacrifice as a Means to an End and the Theoretical Framework**

The analyses of the concept of sacrifice in both Christianity within the contemporary Nigerian society and African Traditional Religion reveal that in most cases, if not all, a sacrifice usually serves a particular purpose. This purpose is often attached to the need of people, which may be described as what is used to curry favour from the deity(ies). This notion is premised on the theory of E. B. Taylor that sacrifice serves as a means of ‘bribing’ the gods or paying homage to them in the same way as men pay homage to their overlords.<sup>32</sup> It is pertinent to note that the vital question that arises from this position of Taylor’s forms the basis for this work; Can God be ‘bribed’? A hasty response from most Christians will not be in the affirmative. Nonetheless, what then is the logic of sacrifice as far as contemporary Nigerian Christians are concerned? The analysis of “sacrifice” within the contemporary Nigerian Christianity in this paper

<sup>29</sup>Awolalu, 1979. *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*. Essex: Longman Group, 143-160.

<sup>30</sup>B. Idowu. 1996. *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, Rev. Ed. Ikeja, 119.

<sup>31</sup>S. Olaleye. 2013. *Ebo as a Healing Technique in Ifa Divination System*. Saarbrücken: Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 115-116.

<sup>32</sup>E. Taylor, 1958. *Religion in Primitive Culture*. New York: Harper, 461.

reveals its usage within the context of giving in most cases. Why do people give “sacrificially”? What is the premise of the call for sacrifice from clerics? All these questions, many times, revolve around human needs- breakthroughs, healing, fruits of the womb, financial prosperity, promotions, marital partner, employment, travelling abroad, success in elections and various other requests within religious circles. Since this is a philosophical analysis of the subjects of study, it is imperative at this point to use philosophical tools. Logic will feature aptly here because the rules of logic are needed in providing a rational basis for this assertion.

Logic is seen in some ways as the most fundamental area of philosophy, since philosophy is a rational inquiry and logic systematically sets forth the law of argumentation.<sup>33</sup> Oladipo says that the primary goal of inculcating logical reasoning as a philosophical skill is to promote the habit of “straight thinking,” the defining elements of which include, among others: avoiding errors in reasoning and promoting effective (that is clear and exact) communication.<sup>34</sup> The laws of logic are necessary in order to elucidate on the real basis for sacrifice. The logic that will be applied here is Modal logic which deals with three principal philosophical modalities: impossibility, contingency and necessity. “Impossibility means that a statement is false in every possible world. “Necessity” means that a statement is true in every possible world; “Contingency” means that a proposition is true in at least one possible world.<sup>35</sup> In order not to commit a fallacy (error in reasoning), the modal logic that will be employed here is contingency. This means that sacrifice suffices as a means to an end contingently. In other words, the assertion that sacrifice is a means to an end, if applying the philosophical modality of Impossibility is obviously not correct. This is because there are cases in which sacrifices are premised on human needs and such sacrifices are means to an end. In the same vein, it would also be wrong to apply the philosophical modality of Necessity. This is because there are some cases of exceptions, where the sacrifices are not based on any need but as a result of genuine love for God. Nonetheless, the most appropriate philosophical modality here is contingency, the assertion is true in at least one possible case. In reality, however, there are several expressions of sacrifice serving as a means to an end in the Nigerian contemporary religious contexts. In modal logic, using the philosophical modality of contingency, it is in order therefore to assert that the logic in sacrifice is that it is a means to an end.

For the sake of emphasis, the questions may be repeated; what is the real motive for a sacrifice? Is it used as a means of “bribing” God or gods as Taylor believes? Christians may give a hasty “no” meaning that God cannot be bribed. Nonetheless what do people do when they “sacrifice,” when it is not for the real love for God but what they

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<sup>33</sup>L. Geisler & P. Feinberg, 1980. *Introduction to Philosophy of Religion: A Christian Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 27.

<sup>34</sup>O. Oladipo, 2008. *Thinking about Philosophy: A General Guide*. Ibadan: Hope Publications, 42.

<sup>35</sup>L. Geisler & P. Feinberg, 1980. *Introduction to Philosophy of Religion: A Christian Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 29.

stand to get, the *returns* on their sacrifice? If it is argued that this does not occur in every case, nevertheless it will suffice to say that sacrifice contingently, serves as a means to an end.

On the other hand, the role or motive of sacrifice in Yoruba Traditional Religion is quite clear and straight forward. Awolalu narrates clearly the basis of sacrifice among the Yoruba. He says, "when we examine sacrificial practices among the Yoruba, we discover that we cannot speak of one purpose- the purposes are multiple."<sup>36</sup> There is a pungent point that can be inferred from this belief; the purposes of sacrifices are multiple, which is premised on various different needs. One thing is obviously very clear; sacrifice among the Yoruba is a means to an end. This "end" is, however, multiple and is premised on the various human needs. To the questions derived from E. B. Taylor's theory, that sacrifice serves as a means of 'bribing' the gods or paying homage to them in the same way as men pay homage to their overlords,<sup>37</sup> the Yoruba traditional worshippers would not be reluctant that sacrifice serves as a means of "bribing" the gods. Since it is very apparent from the type of sacrifice and the need that dictates the specific sacrifice that it is attached to a particular need, sacrifice is simply a means to an end. In addition to these religious concepts of sacrifice, theories of sacrifice are also built on other theories which support an economic exchange and the notion that "sacrifice is a means to an end." According to Keenan, most theories of sacrifice are predicated on an economy of debts and credits on which one gets a return on one's sacrificial investment.<sup>38</sup> This economic understanding shows that the "returns" on a person's sacrifice is the "end" and sacrifice is the "means" to this "end." It is interesting to note also that money itself has a sacrificial origin. According to Gerardus Van der Leeuw as quoted by Keenan, "the oldest Greek measure of value was the sacrificial ox, the tribute that was to be paid to the deity. The Greek word drachma (the name of a common coin) was once used to designate a handful of sacrificial meat (*oblos*). The Latin word *pecunia*, which is the root of the English word pecuniary, derives from cattle. The English word money is derived from Juno Moneta, the sister and wife of the Roman god Jupiter and Roman coins were first minted in the temple of Juno Moneta. The association of money with sacrifice is also extended to the Wall Street, where the bull is a familiar symbol of rising stock prices."<sup>39</sup> With this economic understanding of sacrifice, it is clear that sacrifice is subtly and also not so subtly influenced by the economy of gain and reward, and a sacrifice is usually paid-sacrifice, for this gain. On this note, it can be concluded that sacrifice is a "means" to an "end".

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<sup>36</sup>J. Awolalu, 1979. *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*. Essex: Longman Group, 138.

<sup>37</sup>E. Taylor, 1958. *Religion in Primitive Culture*. New York: Harper, 461.

<sup>38</sup>D. Keenan, 2005. *The Question of Sacrifice*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 10.

<sup>39</sup>D. Keenan, 2005. *The Question of Sacrifice*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 11.

## Conclusion

This paper has discussed the role of sacrifice in religion, in which sacrifice is a “means” to an “end,” focusing on African Traditional Religion and Christianity within the contemporary Yoruba society. The paper examines some crucial questions associated with sacrifice: What is the motive for offering of sacrifice? Is it as a result of love for the deity? Or it is due to a particular need or desire on which the sacrifice is premised? These questions have been engaged using the of E. B. Taylor’s theory which states that sacrifice is a means of bribing the gods. With this goal in view, the general meaning of sacrifice was discussed, while focusing on the meaning of sacrifice within the contexts of this paper in order to define “means” and “end.” The concepts of sacrifice in both Christianity and African Traditional Religion were also discussed while focusing on the roles of sacrifice in these religions. In conclusion, the logic of the offering of sacrifice supports the theoretical framework, although it is worthy of note that Christians generally may be reluctant to agree with E.B. Taylor on the role of sacrifice because of the general negative idea associated with a “bribe.” Nonetheless, in order to avoid a rational *impasse*, one thing is very clear and this is the “end” which varies as the faces of man differ- healing, breakthrough, a child, provision and several others, is a good venture. This is positive and it shows that sacrifice as a “means” to an “end” is noble and ought to be viewed from an optimistic perspective.

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