



**Dissertation**

**By**

**ADELAKUN, Adewale  
Joshua**

**DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
OBAFEMI A WOLOWO UNIVERSITY, ILE-IFE**

**A Hermeneutical and Theological Study of John 1:29 in  
the context of Yoruba Understanding of Sacrifice**

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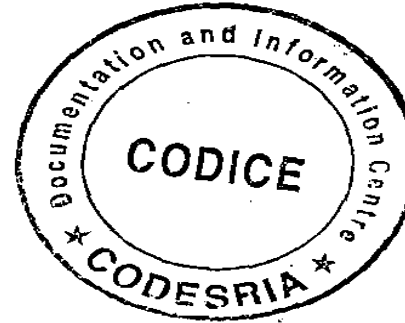
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**A HERMENEUTICAL AND THEOLOGICAL STUDY OF JOHN 1:29 IN  
THE CONTEXT OF YORUBA UNDERSTANDING OF SACRIFICE**

**BY**

**ADELAKUN ADEWALE JOSHUA  
B.A. (RELIGIOUS STUDIES)**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF ARTS  
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY, ILE-IFE**



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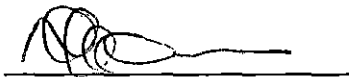
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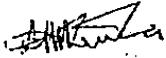
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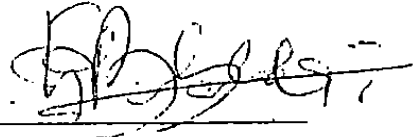
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## CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

This is to certify that this research was carried out by Mr. ADELAKUN Adewale Joshua (Registration Number ARP05/06/R/0757) in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts (M.A) in Religious Studies under my supervision.



\_\_\_\_\_  
Profesor A.O. Nkwoka  
Supervisor



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Dr. E.O. Babalola  
Acting Head of Department

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## DEDICATION

This research work is dedicated to Council for Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) which awarded me grants which expedited the completion of this research work.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| AJBS     | - African Journal for Biblical Studies                                  |
| ATR      | - African Traditional Religion  |
| CCC      | - Celestial Church of Christ  |
| Col.     | - Collosians  |
| Cor      | - Epistle to the Corinthians  |
| Exo      | - Exodus  |
| Gal      | - Epistles to the Galatians   |
| HIV/AIDS | - Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired<br>Immunodeficiency<br>Syndrome |
| Jn       | - Gospel according to Saint John  |
| Lk       | - Gospel according to Saint Luke  |
| LXX      | - Septuagint  |
| Mk       | - Gospel according to Saint Mark  |
| Mt       | - Gospel according to Saint Matthew                                     |
| NABIS    | - National Association for Biblical Studies                             |
| N.B.C.   | - Nigerian Baptist Convention   |
| NT       | - New Testament   |
| OT       | - Old Testament   |
| Rev      | - Revelation  |
| Rom      | - Epistle to the Roman  |
| RSV      | - Revised Standard Version  |
| vs       | - verse   |



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## Abstract

This study carried out a hermeneutical and theological appraisal of John 1:29 within the context of Yoruba cultural understanding of sacrifice. It also examined an interpretation of Jesus as the 'Lamb of God' within the New Testament meaning of Jesus' sacrificial and vicarious death as implied in the passage. This was with a view to contextualizing the interpretation of the passage in the Yoruba cultural understanding of sacrifice.

Exegetical and intercultural hermeneutical approaches were adopted to explore the meaning of John 1:29. The exegesis involved obtaining the Greek text of the passage, breaking it into discernible phrases and key words. It also involved undertaking a grammatical and structural analysis of these phrases and key words and relating them to appropriate passages in other parts of the New Testament. Finally, deductions were made based on contextual, historical, literary and intercultural considerations. Moreover, interviews were conducted with ten purposively selected diviners and ten purposively selected traditional healers from Ogbomoso and Ile-Ife. Ten purposively selected people who were custodians of Yoruba cultural heritage from both towns were also interviewed. The people interviewed were selected based on their accurate knowledge and experience about sacrifice. Moreover, twenty-four purposively selected church leaders of the Orthodox Churches, Pentecostal Churches and African Initiated Churches in Ogbomoso and Ile-Ife were interviewed in order to obtain their understanding of John 1:29 in connection with the notion of sacrifice. Lastly, articles in learned

journals, books and the internet sources relevant to the subject matter were consulted. The data collected were analysed using intercultural hermeneutical principles.

The results showed that John 1:29 was interpreted by the first century Christians within the context of the Jewish Passover Lamb; hence, Jesus through his vicarious and sacrificial death was considered 'the Lamb' that was slain for the sins of the world. Therefore, sacrifice in the New Testament was more of spiritual than physical exercise as Jesus was believed to have made the final sacrifice with his death on the cross. The results also showed that human sacrifice, which was practised among Yoruba people in primordial times, was regarded as the greatest sacrifice that could be offered to the divinity just as the death of Jesus was regarded as the ultimate sacrifice among Christians. In addition, the results also found out that the deaths of individuals that died as scapegoats in the primordial times in Yorubaland served the purpose of propitiation for their communities. Indeed, the traditional Yoruba notion of sacrifice as propitiation is related to the biblical notion. Consequently, Jesus as the sacrificial 'lamb of God' has been contextualised by Yoruba Christians as the ultimate sacrifice in Christianity, because most of them came from cultural and religious contexts where traditional sacrificial rites still persist despite the overwhelming presence of Christianity.

The study concluded that Yoruba cultural understanding of sacrifice could shed light on the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God in other African cultural contexts.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0. Introduction

Man always faces challenges and as a result, he looks for a way out of the challenges or a means of coping with them. Sometimes, some situations are inexplicable, yet he wants explanation on whatever happens to him. He is not happy whenever he does not understand a situation. In such a time like this, religion appeals to him and he takes solace in it. Religion, which is a universal phenomenon, plays a vital role in the lives of its adherents. Religion offers help when man is helpless and gives hope in hopeless situation.<sup>1</sup> It also gives meaning to life.<sup>2</sup> Religion performs its function through different ways. Anybody with a problem may be called upon to offer “something” to appeal to the power that controls the universe. If the problem is solved, the person is also called upon to offer “gifts” to express his gratitude to the powers that helped him. Those gifts offered as expression of gratitude or as expiation are called sacrifices.

Sacrifice has been defined as a gift offered by an inferior to the superior.<sup>3</sup> The New Encyclopaedia Britannica defines it as “the act of offering objects to a god (or other supernatural being), thereby making them the property of the

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Carlton, *Pattern of Belief 2: Religions in Society*, (London: George Allen & Unwin), 1973, p.83.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Schmidt, *Exploring Religion*, (Belmont: Wadsworth, Inc., 1980), p.5.

<sup>3</sup> G.O. Abe, *History and Theology of Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, (Benin: Seevon Prints, 2004), p.1



god and thus holy.”<sup>4</sup> Awolalu defines it as an “act of making an offering of animal or vegetable life, of food, drink or of any other to a deity or spiritual being.”<sup>5</sup> The three definitions imply that three things are involved in sacrifice namely: the worshipper, the supernatural and the victim or the object of sacrifice. The worshipper is inferior to the recipient who has power at his disposal to forgive, bless or prosper the worshipper.

From the Judeo-Christian tradition, sacrifice is regarded as “an act of external worship in which God is honoured as the Principle and End of man and all things, by the oblation of a visible creature by submitting it to an appropriate transformation by a duly qualified minister.”<sup>6</sup> This suggests that sacrifice is a vital part of Judaism and Christianity. The essence of this is that sacrifice is a universal phenomenon. It is present in one form or the other in almost all world religions.

One of the major reasons why people offer sacrifices is to atone for their sins. In Yoruba traditional religion, this is known as *Ebo Etutu* (Propitiatory Sacrifice).<sup>7</sup> Atonement is a very prominent theme in Christianity. Man is believed to be sinful by nature and thus cannot save himself. His sins have separated him from his Creator. Nothing he does can make a full atonement.

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<sup>4</sup> *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol.X, Micropedia, (Chicago: Encyclopaedic Britannica Inc., 1997), p.289

<sup>5</sup> J.O. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, Brooklyn, (New York.: Athelia Henrietta Press, 1996), p.136.

<sup>6</sup> “Sacrifice” in *A Catholic Dictionary*, (eds). William E. Addis and Thomas Arnold, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), p.720.

<sup>7</sup> Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, p.152.

God, as a loving Father, therefore, sent his only Son to die for the sins of the world. This is the message of the Gospel writers and all the New Testament (NT) writers.

John 1:29 which is the focus of this thesis, portrays Jesus Christ as the sacrificial lamb to “take away the sin of the world.” The verse evokes the thought of the Paschal lamb or the Passover Lamb of the Old Testament (OT). It also depicts the idea of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. To be precise, the verse implies that Jesus Christ is a sacrifice offered to take away the sin of the world and thus pointing out that sacrifice is very essential in Christianity. Hence, the study seeks to explore the verse and other related passages in the Bible and also examine the Yoruba understanding of sacrifice. This will result in the contextualisation of the verse. It will also bring out the implications of the verse for the Yoruba religion as well as Yoruba Christians.

### **1.1 Statement of Research Problem**

Interpreting Jn 1:29, many Western scholars, using Western hermeneutical tools within the Western religio-philosophical context, have given the passage different meanings which sometimes disrobe the text of its beauty. The subject matter of the verse which is sacrificial death of Christ is often absent from such interpretations. Sometimes, when it is presented, it is done in such a way that is devoid of its meaning. Sacrifice seems to have no meaning to such scholars. This is not peculiar to this verse alone. There are many verses treated like that by Western scholars. Because of their attitude to the Bible, many scholars have

treated some passages with biased and preconceived notion. However, the case is different in Africa where many scholars have seen the deficiency of Western theology. The Bible means a lot to Africans who always read and study it as the “word of God”. Hence, many African scholars propose that scholars should look for a way of interpreting the Bible so that it will speak to the situation of the continent. To do this, African theology must be decolonised and the Bible contextualised.

This study is an attempt to fill the lacuna created by the interpretation of the text by Western scholars. The problem is that of methodology and contextualisation. Hence, the study seeks to explore the biblical text in a new context: that of the Yoruba belief and practices, in order to elicit its implications for the understanding of sacrifice among the Yoruba.

## **1.2. Objectives**

The specific objectives of the research are to

- (a) carry out a hermeneutical and exegetical appraisal of John 1: 29;
- (b) explore Yoruba cultural understanding of sacrifice;
- (c) provide an interpretation of the meanings of Jesus as the Lamb of God and sacrifice in Johannine understanding; and
- (d) contextualize the interpretation of the passage in the Yoruba understanding of sacrifice.

### **1.3. Significance of the Study**

John 1:29 is a very popular verse in the Bible. It has been interpreted by many scholars from Western perspective using Western hermeneutical tools. Consequently there has been no contextualization of the passage and its implication for the understanding of sacrifice among the Yoruba. Hence, the study hopes to deepen knowledge about sacrifices in the Bible and the Yoruba culture. It will also help to explain elements of sacrifice and their significance in Jewish, Christian and Yoruba Religions. The relationship, similarities and differences between Judeo-Christian and Yoruba cultures will be identified.

### **1.4. Limitation of the Study**

This study does not encompass every aspect of sacrifice as portrayed in both OT and NT. It focuses on John 1:29 with reference to other related verses in the Old and New Testaments. Furthermore, the Yoruba traditional religion will be examined from the perspectives of the Yoruba people of south western Nigeria for the understanding of the relevance and importance of sacrifice in Yoruba religion. Therefore, useful information will be gathered from the Yoruba people of south western Nigeria.

### **1.5. Research Methodology**

As a study in the New Testament (NT), the exegetical and intercultural hermeneutics will be adopted to explore and interpret the text. The exegesis will involve obtaining the Greek text of the passage, breaking it into discernible phrases and key words, undertaking a grammatical and structural analysis of these phrases and

key words and relating them to appropriate passages in other parts of the New Testament, and finally making deductions based on contextual, historical, literary and intercultural considerations. Intercultural hermeneutics is adopted because the study involves two cultures – biblical culture and Yoruba culture. Moreover, the study is an attempt to decolonise biblical studies in Africa. Thus the methodologies must be African.

“Hermeneutics” is ultimately derived from Hermes the Greek god who brought the messages of the gods to the mortals and was the god of science, invention, eloquence, speech, writing and art.<sup>8</sup> In theology, hermeneutics is regarded as the science of the correct interpretation of the Bible. It is a special application of the general science of linguistics and meaning. It is also an art in the sense that principles or rules can never be applied mechanically but involves the skill of the interpreter. Intercultural hermeneutics is a methodology in biblical studies. It is applicable to biblical texts so as to facilitate interpretation and the appropriation of the meaning of God’s self disclosure in creation into another culture.<sup>9</sup>

Manus enumerates ten steps which anyone who is using the methodology must follow. Step One is choosing a passage from the Bible either from the OT or from the NT. Step Two is stating clearly the research problem. This is followed by Step Three which is the introduction of the methodology of intercultural hermeneutics. Step Four which is the context of interpretation is a brief analysis of the African context against

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<sup>8</sup> B. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), p.11.

<sup>9</sup> Ukachuckwu Chris Manus, *Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa: Methods and Approaches*, (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2003), p. 34.

which the story is to be interpreted. The next step deals with the socio-historical context of the biblical story. It delves into the social setting of the passage or the text. It also involves consulting the previous scholarship in order to know what other scholars have written about the life-context of the passage. Step Six is where the exegetical/textual analysis of the text is done. It is the real kernel to crack. It involves discussing where the story is framed or structured in the Bible, delimiting its scope, sketching its context and describing what Jesus or whosoever is the major character in the passage is doing. Step Seven is the interpretation of the passage. At this stage the researcher harnessed together his/her findings from previous discussion in order to produce the meaning of the pericopes that can be correlated with contemporary African contexts. The interpretation is followed by contextualisation which is the eighth step. This is where the results of the interpretative analysis must be attuned to the African context in order to address real social issues besetting modern Africa. After this has been done, the next step is the conclusion on the approach which has to be formulated in such a way that it can show the implications on contemporary political, economic, social, feminist and other ideological contexts. The last step, the tenth step, is where the author provides notes and references used in the study. The reference must include year of publication and page or pages. The bibliography or "Works Consulted" must be arranged alphabetically and be put at the end of the paper.<sup>10</sup> This study will adopt this methodology to gather and analyse data.

In addition, structured interviews will be conducted with purposively selected ten diviners (*babalawo*, five from Ogbomoso and five from Ile-Ife) and ten traditional

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42-47.

healers (*onisegun*) in Ogbomosò and Ile-Ife (five from each town). They will be interviewed in order to get information on sacrifice in Yorubaland. Furthermore, ten custodians of Yoruba cultural heritage purposively selected from Ogbomoso and Ile-Ife will also be interviewed. In addition, three pastors/church leaders purposively selected from each of Mainline Churches, Pentecostal Churches and African Initiated Churches will be interviewed in order to find out the Christian perspectives of sacrifice. These pastors/church leaders will be selected from churches in Ogbomoso and Ile-Ife. Secondary sources such as books, Bible commentaries, journal articles and internet resources will be consulted. The data collected will be analysed using intercultural hermeneutical principles.

#### **1.6. Conclusion**

It is noteworthy to point out that offering sacrifices is still rampant in Africa in spite of civilisation and the debilitating effect of Christianity and Islam on African Traditional Religion. This shows that sacrifice plays a significant role in the religious life of the people. Jn 1:29 is also an important text in the Bible because of its sacrificial undertone. It is a prophetic declaration on the sacrificial death of Jesus as the Lamb of God. With the methodology adopted in this study and the available books reviewed, it is hoped that the relevance of Jesus as Paschal Lamb will be revealed.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0. Introduction

There is no doubt that many scholars have written on John 1:29 and sacrifice. Hence, there is a need to review the available ones to enrich the study with the information garnered from them. This chapter will provide the review of some articles in learned journals, commentaries and books that are relevant to the study. This will be done under two sub-headings namely Relevant Literature on Sacrifice and Relevant Literature on African Theology and Approaches

#### 2.1. Relevant Literature on Sacrifice

Starting from the etymology of the word 'sacrifice' which is derived from Latin '*sacrificium*', the word, according to Henninger, carries the connotation of the religious act in its fullest sense.<sup>1</sup> He enumerates four intentions of sacrifices as follows: praise, thanksgiving, supplication, and expiation. He further highlighted the various theories of the origin of sacrifice. The first theory was the one propounded by E.B. Tylor in which sacrifice is said to originate as an attempt to bribe the gods with gift. The second is that of W.R. Smith who believed that sacrifice started as a (totemic) communal meal. Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, rejecting Tylor's theory, proposed a theory of the link between the profane and sacral worlds. Other theories include theories of sacrifice as magic, sacrifice as re-enactment of primordial events;

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Henninger, "Sacrifice" in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Vol.xii, (ed.) Lindsay Jones, (Detroit, N.Y: Thomson Gale, 2005),



sacrifice as anxiety reaction and lastly, sacrifice as a mechanism for diverting violence. It is pertinent to note that the origin of sacrifice cannot be easily determined but the essential basis remains that sacrifice was and is natural to man.<sup>2</sup>

C.R. North<sup>3</sup> in his article on sacrifice in Old Testament (OT) gives a comprehensive note on the motives underlying sacrifice in the OT. In the OT sacrifice was a gift to God, a means of entering into communion with God, and a means of releasing life, whether for the benefit of God himself or of the worshipper. There are different classes of sacrifice in the OT period. They are gift-offering, atonement-expiation, burnt-offering, peace-offering, sin-offering, guilt-offering, meal-offering, and heave-offering or wave-offering. Each of these classes represents a period of time in the history of sacrifice in the OT.

In Donald Guthrie's view, sacrifice in the OT was a means by which man was enabled to approach God. The Levitical priestly system, according to him, contained five different kinds of offerings: the burnt offering, cereal offering, guilt offering, sin offering and peace offering. Each has its particular purpose and was intended to facilitate man in his relationship with God. Sacrifice was essentially viewed as a condition of the covenant. He believes that it was instituted by God. It was a provision of mercy intended to enable man to draw near to God, not to keep him away.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> G.O. Abe, *History and Theology of Sacrifice in the Old Testament* (Benin: Seevon Prints, 2004), p.4.

<sup>3</sup> C.R. North, "Sacrifice" in *A Theological World Book of the Bible*, ed. Alan Richardson, (London: SCM Press, 1950), pp.206-214.

<sup>4</sup> D Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), p.432.

His comments on Jn 1:29 are noteworthy. He notes that John the Baptist twice declared Jesus as the Lamb of God even before he (Jesus) started his ministry. The Lamb taking away sin is reminiscent of OT ceremonial sacrifices. He refutes the claim of scholars like C.H. Dodd that the term "Lamb of God" is a messianic title and not a reference to the sacrificial death of Christ. The term is an echo from Isaiah 53:7, which says of the servant that he did not open his mouth, 'like a lamb that is led to the slaughter'. He sees the possibility of linking Isaiah 53:12 (he bore the sins of many) with Isaiah 53:7 in a composite idea of the Suffering Servant. He is of the opinion that it is possible that John the Baptist may have had some flash of insight into this identification in his announcement of Jesus. A difficulty is raised because the verb used in Isaiah 53:12 (*pherein*) is different from that used by John (*airon*). He resolves this by saying that since John the Baptist's statement requires the idea of 'bearing away' rather than simply 'bearing' it has closer links with the scapegoat ceremonial of the Day of Atonement. Apart from this, the lamb may point to the paschal lamb, although this is sometimes erroneously objected to on the grounds that in Judaism the paschal lamb was not sacrificed as a sin-atonement. This declaration of John the Baptist at the commencement of Jesus' ministry is significant because it marks the goal of that ministry: a sacrifice related to sins. In all probability it should be regarded as an amalgam of various OT ideas.

Abe<sup>5</sup> gives the definition of sacrifice as a gift given or offered by an inferior to a superior. It is a tribute paid by the dependant to his lord, an offering with or without blood. He gives an etymology of the word as being formed from the Latin *sacer* –

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<sup>5</sup> Abe, *History and Theology of Sacrifice in the Old Testament*

holy, and *facere* to make. The two words form *sacrificium* to mean "sacrifice". To him, sacrifice involves the destruction of a victim for the purpose of maintaining or restoring a right relationship of man to the sacred order. The offering of sacrifice is also the destruction or surrender of a valuable or desirable thing for the sake of something regarded as having a higher or a more pressing claim. Though the origin of sacrifice could not be easily determined it could be connected with ancestral worship during which some foods and drinks were left at the graves for the refreshment of the spirits of the dead which had been raised to the rank of divine. Hence, sacrifice is regarded as a gift to the deity. It was not imposed on man. It was rather natural to him. Man by his experience determined the time, place, the reason and the recipient of the sacrifice. It is not only the worshipper that benefited from sacrifices the deity also needed them for sustenance in order to be effective. He may not eat the raw materials but he is pleased with the smell of the essence of the victim and be satisfied. Writing on sacrifice in Israel, Abe mentions two kinds of sacrifice in the Hebrew religion as Gift Sacrifice and Communion or Meal Sacrifice. The Israelites offered gift-offerings basically as their appreciation of their successful entry into Canaan. In the case of communion or meal offerings the bond of union between God and the worshippers was renewed or strengthened. The two parties always partook in the consumption of the meal. The worshippers consumed their own portions while the deity's portion was burnt on the altar. The priest was given a portion as the human proxy of the deity. This implies that there are three parties in sacrifice. They are the worshippers, the deity ably represented by the priests and the victim. He notes further that in Israel sacrifices

were necessary on many occasions such as the dedication or consecration of individuals or the community, or when new events were to be undertaken by such persons. On the origin of sacrifice in Israel, Abe mentions the opinion of some scholars that it was ordained and suggested by God himself. It was a revelation from God. He is of the opinion that the story of Cain and Abel implies that it was not God who originated but they offered their sacrifices as an expression of their feeling of dependence on God and thankfulness to him. He, nevertheless, traces the origin of sacrifice in Israel to the universal prevalence of sacrifice among the early ancient nations, specially the Semites with whom the patriarchs sojourned. The prominent sacrificial items in Israel were oxen, sheep, goats and birds like pigeon and turtledoves. Other materials include the first-fruits, the produce of the soil, first-born of both animals and human beings.

The altar was the place where sacrificial victims were slaughtered. Sacrificial victims were burnt on it. In the early history of the Patriarchal worship, the altar symbolized the centre of Israel's worship. The earliest altars in Israel were the ones built whenever Yahweh appeared to patriarchs. Abe also notes that it is most probable that the altar was a structure in all cases. This can be seen in cases where rock surfaces were used as altar which could be referred to as altars were not consecrated. Later the Israelites were commanded to make an altar of earth upon which sacrifice of burnt-offerings and peace-offerings should be made unto Yahweh (Exodus 20:24-26). They could build altar of stones which should not be hewn to avoid pollution. It should not have steps in order to avoid the exposition of their nakedness while ascending and

descending on it. Another form of altar was the Table of Showbread otherwise known as the Holy Table. While the Holy Table was conspicuously placed at the holy place for the purpose of worship, the altar of holocausts was in the temple hall or court for the purpose of receiving sacrifices. The religious significance of the altar was that it served as the table of the deity and the hearth of the house of the deity. It also represented the presence of Yahweh in the same way the Ark of Covenant represented his presence. Abe further cites the example of the altar Jacob built and called *El-Elohe*, i.e. "The mighty God, the God of Israel" (Gen 33:18-20). He gives a comprehensive list of the forms of sacrifice in Israel as Gift-offerings, Fruits and First-born offerings, First-born and their sanctification, Sin, Trespass and Guilt offerings as well as the Expiatory sacrifice and sacrifice of reparation. His conclusion is that Jesus Christ has put an end to all forms of the OT sacrifice, which were imperfectly observed including the great Day of Atonement. The Church of Christ is believed to have accepted in an act of faith the unique offering which Jesus made on her behalf. The Church takes the sacrifice as final and lives the life of the sacrifices, the sacrificial lamb and the propitiation for the sins of mankind.

Abe's work is commendable in that it is comprehensive enough and states clearly what sacrifice entails. The scope of the study which is OT is treated extensively without mincing words. However, his view that the show table of the OT could also represent the presence of YAHWEH is questionable in the sense that the OT does not expressly state so. The table never served the same purpose as the Ark of the Covenant. Furthermore, his assertion that the origin of sacrifice in Israel could be

traced to the religious influence of the neighbouring nation is probably based on erroneous inference. As rightly pointed out by Guthrie, it was God who instituted sacrifice in Israel (cf. Lev 17:11).<sup>6</sup> Sacrifices in pagan notions had no spiritual content which was part of the major components of sacrifices in Israel religion. However, his conclusion that Jesus Christ has fulfilled all the sacrificial requirements of the OT expresses clearly the view of the Church and majority of NT scholars.

Awolalu's study of Yoruba beliefs and sacrificial rites is a classic work on sacrifice among the Yoruba.<sup>7</sup> He defines sacrifice as having both religious and secular meanings. The secular meaning of it is forgoing for a particular cause that which is precious; denying oneself certain benefits and advantages for a particular purpose. For a religious definition, sacrifice can be defined as "an act of making an offering (of animal or vegetable life, of food, drink or of any objects) to a deity or spiritual being". It could also be seen as something consecrated and offered to God or divinity. Universally, people offer sacrifice to the beings that are higher than they. They do this in order to appeal to the deities, the evil powers and spirits, or to appease them wherever they were angry. Moreover, sacrifices are offered so that the offerers will increase on wealth, good health and be protected. Sometimes, people offer sacrifices to show their appreciation to their benefactors. This is known as thanksgiving sacrifice and is offered on annual festival occasions. On the negative side, sacrifice is offered to counteract the powers of destruction such as witches and sorcerers who are wantonly wicked and who dislike the progress of people. Sacrifice can serve as a means of

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<sup>6</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, p.435

<sup>7</sup> J.O. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, Brooklyn, (New York.: Athelia Henrietta Press, 1996).

- a. expressing gratitude to the spiritual beings;
- b. fulfilling a vow;
- c. establishing a communion between man and the spiritual beings;
- d. averting the anger of the divinities and spirits;
- e. warding off the attack and evil machinations of enemies;
- f. as a means of purifying a person or a community when a taboo has been broken or sin committed;
- g. preventing or expelling epidemics; and
- h. strengthening the worshippers against malign influences.

According to him, there are different kinds of sacrifice among the Yoruba. They include *Ẹbọ Ope ati Idapò* (thanksgiving and communion sacrifice), *Ẹbọ Ejé* (votive sacrifice), *Ẹbọ Ètútù* (propitiatory sacrifice), *Ẹbọ Ojúkòribi* (preventive sacrifice), *Ẹbọ Ayèpinun* (substitutionary sacrifice), *Ẹbọ Ìpìlẹ̀* (foundation sacrifice). Victims and materials of sacrifice one has to procure depend on the kind of sacrifice one wants to offer and the reason for offering it. They range from the smallest living and non-living things to a big domestic animal like a cow. The Yoruba do not have different names for the sacrifice of animals and the sacrifice of plant or other things. All sacrifices are known as *Ẹbọ*. Awolalu classified the materials thus: Food-crops, kola-nut, bitter kòla, yams, plantains, corn-meal, maize, coconuts, sugar-cane; Birds: hens, chickens, cocks, ducks; Animals: she-goats, he-goats, sheep, rams, pigs, cows; Liquid: cold water, palm wine, gin, and palm-oil. Others include articles of garments or pieces

of cloth, money, and fish. All these items have to be presented by priests/offerers who have prepared by observing certain taboos and codes of conduct if the sacrifice is to achieve the desired purpose. The presentation of the sacrifice has some procedure to be followed. The first one is invocation, followed by presentation where by the person who comes to make the offering is asked to stand before the shrine and to state his purpose of bringing the offerings. This is followed by immolation – the climax of the whole rite of sacrifice. This is normally done by the presiding priest or his representative. His conclusion is that the sacrifice offered could be shared or no sharing depending on the nature of the sacrifice. If it is a thanksgiving offering there would be dancing and singing but if it is done because of an unpleasant thing there would not be any sharing. The sacrifice offered to the divinity or spirit is total- there is no sharing. Awolalu's work, as classical as it is, however, says nothing about the use and the role of altar in sacrifice among the Yoruba. Does it mean that altars are not needed in Yoruba sacrifices?

Similar to Awolalu's work is the article of Babalola<sup>8</sup> titled The Continuity of the Phenomenon of Sacrifice in the Yoruba Society of Nigeria. In the article, sacrifice is defined as "a rite in the course of which something is forfeited or destroyed, its object being to establish relations between a source of spiritual strength and one in need of such strength for the benefit of the latter." He emphasizes the presence of the phenomenon of sacrifice in Yorubaland. He links its continuity with the functions it performs. It meets certain basic needs and aspirations of men. It is utilized to express

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<sup>8</sup> E.O. Babalola, "The Continuity of the Phenomenon of Sacrifice in the Yoruba Society of Nigeria" in *African Theological Journal*, vol.21, NO. 1, 1992, pp. 78-91.



gratitude to the spiritual beings, fulfil a vow, establishing a communion between man and spiritual beings, just to mention a few. Another factor that is responsible for the continuity of sacrifice is its direct connection with divination. He notes that divination endures despite the incursion of modernity and plurality. He also points out that sacrifice is present in the major religions of Yorubaland, in the practice of some Muslims and in the Aladura movement of Christianity. On the survival of sacrifice in the face of urbanisation, education and modernisation, he explains that

its occurrence may possibly have been reduced but the fact is that even modern and westernised elites are still involved in sacrifice in order to avert one problem or another. Politicians, students, judges, civil servants and businessmen flock daily the homes of diviners who prescribe one thing or another for them.

This assures that the waves of urbanisation, education and modernisation cannot erode sacrifice from the Yoruba society. However, he observes that the presence of Islam in Yorubaland could not put an end to the phenomenon. Rather, it actually strengthened its continuity. Even in spite of the teaching of Christianity against sacrifice, the traditional people that were converted to orthodox Christianity still visit the diviners in time of danger and crisis. Another important issue raised in the paper is that of syncretism, that is, the marriage of convenience between the traditional religious practices and African Independent Churches, otherwise known as Aladura Churches. These churches emphasize the use of African traditional practices in form of a special offering known as *itore áánú*. Babalola regards this as “a form of sacrifice”. Another common practice which is regarded as sacrifice is *yíyẹ̀ ìpinnu àwọn eḷegbẹ̀*. This is

similar to the substitutionary sacrifice of the Yoruba traditional society. He also mentions the use of traditional system of healing in the Cherubim and Seraphim Church. In addition, he points out that due to urbanisation and modernisation, sacrifice has taken a new form. It is now called *sàràà*, a word which is common among Muslims and Christians. He notes that "people find it more convenient to accept a *sàràà* invitation for feasting than an *èbò* ritual. He concludes by reiterating the fact that as the problems that people are facing increase they will be resorting to sacrifice and thus sacrifice will continue. The paper is a good contribution to the knowledge about sacrifice. Its conclusion on the future of sacrifice is also promising.

Writing on the typology and meanings of sacrifice among the Igbo, Ikenga-Metuh<sup>9</sup> noticed that the Igbo rarely defined sacrifice but have some terms which throw some light on how they understand sacrifice. The generic term for sacrifice in Igbo is 'aja' which seems to refer to the consecrated offerings to the spirits. If *aja* is used with the verb "Ichi"(drive away) it refers to the exorcist sacrifice to drive away evil spirits. He also brought to notice the fact that verb always determines the type of sacrifice in Igbo religion. The following are the types of sacrifice as given by Metuh:

- a. *Igo Mmúo* – it is the consecratory sacrifice. This could be offered to the Supreme Being, "Chukwu" to the deities 'Mmuo', or to any of the many spirits. It is always a joyful sacrifice. Under this are direct sacrifices to the Supreme Being, sacrifice of consecration at Yam Harvest and

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<sup>9</sup> E. Ikenga-Metuh, *African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes: The Problem of Interpretation* (Ibadan: Pastoral Institutes, 1985).

Consecration of Living Offerings as sacrifices. *Igo Mmuo* is effected the moment the victim is consecrated to the deity, with or without the killing of the victim. The sacrifice may not include shedding of blood because the victim can just be consecrated to live around the shrine.

- b. *Ilo Mmo* or *Imeria Mmuo*: it is the propitiatory sacrifice which is undertaken to please a god or spirit. Sacrifices of petition, oath sacrifices, as well as some sacrifices made in times of sickness or misfortune come under this category.
- c. *Ikpu Alu* (purificatory sacrifices): they are offered to cleanse the pollution (*alu*) arising from a breach of '*Nso ala*' (sacred prohibitions of the Earth-mother). The pollutions could be major or minor. The major pollutions are regarded as abominations because they threaten the community as a whole, e.g. pollutions arising from murder, incest, birth of twins, and bestiality. The minor pollutions are the ones in which only the offender and his immediate kindred are affected.
- d. *Ichu Aja* (Exorcist sacrifices): these are done to drive away (*ichu*) evil spirits. The Igbo people resort to this kind of sacrifice whenever there are series of misfortunes which are inexplicable. They first consult a diviner who would in most cases recommend *ichu aja* to drive away evil spirits of the dead. The characteristic feature of this sacrifice is that it is altogether without joy. The offerings are grudgingly given, and

consist of worthless things like rotten eggs, sick chickens, lizards, rags and so forth.

The essence of sacrifice, according to Metuh, is not in the slaughtering of the animal/victim as asserted by Van Baal. It is not compulsory that sacrifice should involve shedding of blood. He noticed that most of the sacrifices in Igboland do not involve shedding of blood. He explains thus

For example, in the sacrifices of purification, the victims are thrown away. They are neither slaughtered nor consumed. They are bearers of sins or abominations, and as such, are neither acceptable to God nor to man. Their purpose, in this type of sacrifice is to serve as substitutes for sinful man....

He opines that the meaning of sacrifice becomes more comprehensible if it is seen in the broader perspective of a form of prayer communication with God. Sacrifice could be classed, he suggested, as a material/corporal prayer. Offering in this context would be no more than part of the complex which makes up the ritual prayer. The gift thus becomes a means of expressing the intensity of one's desire to communicate with God. The essence of this is that sacrifice will be seen in the totality of the sacrificial act, and not just in the significance of the gift. His conclusion is that "sacrifice is primarily a ritual prayer. It allows man to achieve communion with God through the mediation of the offering."

Ikenga-Metuh's work shed light on the meaning of sacrifice among the Igbo who do not bother to define it. It really increases our knowledge of the various types of sacrifice among the Igbo which are very similar to the ones found among the Yoruba as pointed out by Awolalu.

Another prominent work on sacrifice among Africans is that of J.S. Mbiti<sup>10</sup> in which he defines sacrifice as destruction of animal life in order to present the animal, in part or in whole to God, supernatural beings, spirits or the living dead. This definition is based on the meaning of sacrifice in Africa. In his attempt to separate offering from sacrifice, he defines offering as the remaining cases (that are not part of sacrifice) which do not involve the killing of an animal, being chiefly the presentation of foodstuffs and other items. Sacrifices and offerings could be directed to God, spirits and living dead. He also emphasizes the role of prayer in sacrifice. Prayer is inevitable in sacrifices – sacrifices and offerings are the silent responses while prayers are the verbal responses. Mbiti rightly notes that sacrifices constitute one of the commonest acts of worship among African peoples. However, his opinion that offering is different from sacrifice because the latter involves the killing of an animal while the former involves no killing of an animal may not be correct if one considers that the essence of sacrifice is not the killing or the death of the victim but the reason for offering sacrifice and the motive of the worshippers. Separating the two may lead to excluding many important things from sacrifice.

## **2.2. Relevant Literature on African Theology and Approaches**

Folarin defines theology as the teaching about God and His relation to the world from creation to consummation particularly as it is set forth in an ordered,

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<sup>10</sup> J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1980 Edition).

coherent manner.<sup>11</sup> Another definition is that theology is the statement of the truth of Christian message and interpretation of this truth for every generation.<sup>12</sup> The definition underscores the eternal truth (i.e. Christian message) and the subjective context of the recipients of the revelation. Many African scholars find solace in this definition because it allows them to take seriously the Christian message, and the experience of Africans. Christology can be categorized into two: the Ontological Christology and Functional theology. The former deals with the Person (nature and will) of Christ while the latter deals with the activities of Christ.<sup>13</sup> It emphasizes the role of Jesus the Christ as “the true mediator between God and man, the true liberator from all forms of human and demonic oppressions, and the true healer from all forms of sicknesses” Folarin, however, notes that the Ontological Christology has a widespread support among the Western scholars while Functional Christology and African theology are in apposition. Africans are believed to be existentialists thus the theological model that would appeal to them must be functional. C.U. Manus<sup>14</sup> has also proposed Reconstruction Christology which would allow African theologians to present Jesus as the “reconstructor” of the African society which has been bedevilled by corruption, poverty, HIV/AIDS and other misdemeanours. In essence, African scholars believe that theology should not be abstract and theoretical the way it is in the Western world.

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<sup>11</sup> G.O. Folarin, “Functional Christology in the Fourth Gospel: Implications for African Christianity” in *African Journal of Biblical Studies (AJBS)*, vol. xviii, number 2, October 2002, p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systemic Theology*, (Maryknoll: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> G.O. Folarin, *Functional Christology*, p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> Ukachukwu C. Manus, *Reconstruction Christology for Africa of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: (A Re-reading of Mark 11:15-19 and Parrallels)* in *AJBS*, vol. xviii, number 2, October 2002.

It should be practicable. It should be used to bring God to the situation of Africans and vice versa.

Adamo<sup>15</sup> in his Inaugural Lecture delivered at Delta State University, Abraka, defined African Biblical Studies as the biblical interpretation that makes African social cultural context a subject of interpretation. It is doing the analysis of the text from the perspective of African world-view and culture the purpose of which is not only to understand the Bible and God in African experience and culture, but also to break the hermeneutical hegemony and ideological stranglehold that Eurocentric biblical scholars have long enjoyed. African biblical studies is a methodology that reappraises ancient biblical tradition and African worldview, culture, and life experience with the purpose of correcting the effect of the cultural ideological conditioning to which Africa and Africans have been subjected. African biblical studies have two main characteristics - it is liberational and culturally sensitive. There are also methodological characteristics such as narration, orality, theopoetic and imagination. African scholars have been employing various methods to achieve decolonisation. The methods are comparative studies, Evaluative studies, African presence in the Bible, Inculturation, Liberation, Black theology and Feminist Hermeneutics.

Adamo suggests five main conditions an African biblical scholar must fulfil.

They are:

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<sup>15</sup> D.T. Adamo, *Decolonizing African Biblical Studies*, (Abraka: Delta State University, 2004).

1. the interpreter must be an insider. He/she must be an African or must have lived and experienced all aspects of African life in Africa;
2. he/she must be immersed in the content of the Bible. He/she must also believe the stories and the event of the Bible as a life of faith;
3. the person must understand indigenous culture;
4. the interpreter must have faith in God; and
5. the person should be literate. He/she must be able to read.

Adamo's suggested qualifications for those who would like to be involved in African biblical study leaves out non believers and foreigners. Moreover, the conditions will be good for those who want to carry out an uncritical biblical analysis. One expects that the first criterion should be that the interpreter should possess a working knowledge of the biblical languages. In addition, the conditions suggested portray African biblical studies as of the first order which is elementary and unscientific.

In an attempt to decolonise theology and biblical studies in Africa, Ukpong<sup>16</sup> has decried using Western methodologies to carry out interpretation of the Bible in Africa. As a way of decolonizing the biblical studies in Africa, he proposes inculturation as the most fundamental process of decolonization. According to him, biblical inculturation is a dynamic on-going process by which people consciously and

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<sup>16</sup> J.S. Ukpong, "Inculturation as Decolonization of Biblical Studies in African" in S.O. Abogunrin (ed.) *Decolonization of Biblical Interpretation in Africa*, (Ibadan: NABIS, 2005), p.33.



critically appropriate the Bible and its message from within the perspectives and with the resources of their cultures. It is a methodology that focuses on Africa's anthropological empowerment and cultural identity. The idea of inculturation is not informed by the classist but by the empiricist understanding of culture. No human group is without a culture and no culture is inferior. However, the expectations of the colonialists and missionaries were to erode African indigenous cultures with their own. Though they were successful in most cases they have not been able to put African cultures to death. Ukpong also pointed out how Africans were not allowed to worship in their own way, but later blended their culture with Christianity. However, the Africans were able to use biblical texts to create music with African rhythm which reflected the sort of music they were comfortable with. This, he asserted, is what African theologians know as Africa's oral theology of inculturation, i.e. a creative appropriation of the Bible. This kind of theology is found in songs, dances, paintings and carvings and in the use of various symbols. Ukpong regards this as grass-root inculturation which is common among ordinary people. The academic inculturation in reading of the Bible consists of various models among which are Comparative Reading, Africa-in-the-Bible Reading, Evaluative Reading and Inculturation Hermeneutics Reading. These are the most common methods adopted by African theologians to read the Bible. The Inculturation Hermeneutics Reading is the most recent and integrates social issues such as poverty, political oppression, e.t.c.

Manus has also enumerated some similar methodological approaches which will be useful in carrying out African biblical scholarship. They are: the

Comparativists' Approach, the Thematic Approach, the Contextualists' Approach, the Inculturationists' approach and the Culturalists' Method. The approaches Manus adopts and uses most are the Inculturationists and Culturalist Methods.<sup>17</sup> All the approaches mentioned are useful in making the message of the Bible relevant to Africans. Some of the approaches will be adopted and used to explore the meaning of Jn 1:29 and to relate it to the African context.

### 2.3. Conclusion

From the literature reviewed it is clear that sacrifice has been with man since the inception of the world. It is natural for man to look for a way of appeasing the powers - that - be in his society in order to win their favour. It is in the light of this that the subsequent chapters will seek to examine sacrifice in Yoruba culture and the biblical culture.

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<sup>17</sup> C.U. Manus, "Methodological Approaches in Contemporary African Biblical Scholarship: The Case of West Africa," in Emmanuel Katongole (ed.) *African Theology Today*, (Scranton: The University of Scranton Press), 2002, pp.1-21.

## CHAPTER THREE

### EXEGESIS AND INTERPRETATION OF JOHN 1:29

#### 3.0. Introduction

The Gospel According to St. John is one of the most widely read and frequently quoted books of the Bible in Christendom.<sup>1</sup> It has been adjudged to be the simplest and at the same time the most profound book in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> It is profound in the sense that, in the book, history and interpretation, biography and theology are all blended in such a way that the reader, sees the Jesus of history, and “yet sees him in the light of Christian experience”. Due to the nature of the book, Clement of Alexandria referred to it as a spiritual Gospel which makes it different from other three gospels<sup>3</sup> while W.F. Howard calls it the “crown of the Scriptures in many ways”.<sup>4</sup>

Some distinctive peculiarities are clearly evident from the Gospel. Such peculiarities include a different account of the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, a different account of the scene of Jesus’ ministry and a different account of the duration of Jesus’ ministry.<sup>5</sup> These peculiarities consist of pericopes which are not found in the other three Gospels – Matthew (Mt), Mark (Mk) and Luke (Lk). On the other hand, the Gospel omits so many things that the trio of Mt, Mk and Lk have. For example, there is no account of the Birth of Jesus, his baptism,

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<sup>1</sup> D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 3

<sup>2</sup> Wilbert F. Howard, “The Gospel According to St. John” in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), p. 436

<sup>3</sup> Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, p.4.

<sup>4</sup> Howard, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 436

<sup>5</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 1, (Philadelphia: the Westminster Press, 1975), pp. 2-4.

temptation, the Last Supper, Gethsemane, and the Ascension as well as many miracle stories and parables.

The content of the Gospel is a narrative of the life of Jesus from his baptism to his resurrection and his manifestation of himself in the midst of his disciples. This can be divided into four sections:

1. the Prologue (1:1-18, this is a brief epitome of the whole Gospel in the doctrine of the incarnation of the Eternal Word);
2. the First Part (1:19-12:50, it is a recount of the public life of Jesus from His baptism to the eve of His passion);
3. the Second Part (13:1-20:31) relates the history of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus.
4. a Short Epilogue (20:31-21:25) which refers to the great mass of Jesus' words and works which are recorded in the Gospel.<sup>6</sup>

### **3.1. Background to the Gospel of St. John**

The Gospel was written in Ephesus about the year A.D. 100. By that time Christianity had gone beyond Jerusalem and spread to the Gentile world. The church was overwhelmingly gentile. The vast majority of its members had Hellenistic background. Hence, Christianity had to be restated. The terms and the categories in which it found expression had to be changed. While in Ephesus the evangelist must have faced the problem of how to explain Christianity to the Gentiles who could not understand from the Jewish perspective. He therefore

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<sup>6</sup> Leopold Fonck, "The Gospel of John" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol.VIII, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), n.p.

seized on the Greek's understanding of Logos as the mind of God to inform them that Jesus was the Logos.<sup>7</sup>

The evangelist stated his purpose of writing the gospel in John 20:31 "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name". Wilbert F. Howard<sup>8</sup> describes this as "theological rather than biographical but the theological message is grounded in a historical revelation."<sup>9</sup> It is clear from this text that the writer's primary aim was to encourage faith and to serve as an evangelistic instrument. Apart from the theological purpose, a closer look into the Gospel indicates that there are some subordinate aims embedded in its message. John probably wrote to reveal the extent and gravity of opposition against the church. This is clearly seen in his expression of the hostility of the synagogue which can be inferred from his frequent references to "the Jews" in the account of Jesus' stay in Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> Besides, there was probably a sect which tended to exalt John the Baptist above Christ. Hence, the evangelist had to write to inform them that John the Baptist was not superior to Jesus. This is also evident from the writer's emphasis on the subordination of John to Jesus.<sup>11</sup> Thirdly, the Gospel might have come into existence in order to kick against heresy. Scholars have suggested Gnosticism in form of Docetism as the heretical teachings that John intended to counter.<sup>12</sup> It is

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<sup>7</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 1, (Philadelphia: the Westminster Press, 1975), pp.6-9.

<sup>8</sup> F. Howard, "The Gospel According to St. John", p.437

<sup>9</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p.271

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.273

<sup>11</sup> Howard, "The Gospel According to St. John", p. 439

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 439; See also William Barclay, p. 11.

also believed that the evangelist was consciously opposing in his Gospel the teaching of Cerinthus whose message flourished in Asia near the end of the first century. He taught that the Son of God had no existence prior to His birth from Mary.<sup>13</sup> The verity of this assertion cannot be proved but Tasker regarded it as “an early and persistent tradition.”<sup>14</sup>

### 3.1.1 The Prologue Jn 1, 1-18

In the opening verses of each of the four Gospels, the evangelists provide some insights into the interest that will govern their respective accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry. Mark’s opening is the most concise, recounting Jesus’ baptism in order to establish his identity as Son of God. Matthew, in his opening genealogy identifies Jesus as a descendant of both Abraham and David as well as supplying his credentials as Messianic king while Luke’s introduction gives a detailed account of the announcements and births of both John the Baptist and Jesus. However, John makes the most dramatic use of the prologue form in shaping the contours of a particular Christological emphasis.<sup>15</sup>

Jn 1, 29 cannot be fully understood without considering its relation with the Prologue. Some NT scholars believe that the Prologue was an early Christian hymn, which probably stemmed from Johannine circles. It was adapted to serve as

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<sup>13</sup> R.V.G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1960), pp.34-35.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>15</sup> Richard van Egmond, “An Exegetical Study of the Prologue of John (John 1:1-18)” <http://www.mcmaster.ca/mjtm/4-7.htm>

an overture to the Gospel narrative of the career of the incarnate word.<sup>16</sup> In Bultmann's view, the Prologue is placed at the beginning of the Gospel as a kind of introduction as well as an overture.<sup>17</sup>

Opinions of scholars vary on the original source of the Prologue. Some trace it to the hymnic traditions of the early church. Bultmann is of the opinion that it originated from the Gnostic faith due to its lyric form. He seeks to trace the hymn's origin to Gnostic circles, via a sect of John the Baptist's adherents. He argues that the hymn was originally directed to John, and only later adapted to Christian usage, when the final editor of the Gospel set it here to introduce the work as a whole.<sup>18</sup> Ridderbos rejects this assertion based on the fact that the Gnostic texts Bultmann works from post-dated the Gospel by several centuries. He also opines that there is a "lack of evidence suggesting that such Gnostic movements were even current at the time of the fourth Gospel's composition." Moreover, the contexts of redemption described in Gnosticism and the Prologue are mutually exclusive and too incompatible to allow for such adaptation from one to the other."<sup>19</sup> Brown proposes that the hymn-like sections (Prologue) were written independently of the Gospel itself. He however, asserts that it originated from within the same Christian circles as that of the Evangelists.

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<sup>16</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John (I-XII)*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1966), p.1.

<sup>17</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. by G.R. Beasley-Murray, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), p.13.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 18, 28.

<sup>19</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp.30-31.

The relation of the Prologue to Gnosticism cannot be simply ignored because it is evidently clear from verse 14 that the evangelist's intention was to reject Gnostics' claim of disparity between the spirit and the flesh. The origin could be traced to Gnosticism if there are evidences to prove that the 7<sup>th</sup> Ode of Solomon taken as the source by Bultmann predated the Gospel, but if it post-dated it as ascertained by Ridderbos, the Prologue probably emanated from the Christian circles.

### 3.1.2 Structure of the Prologue

Bultmann has rightly pointed out that the structure of the Prologue is not loose or haphazard but rigid and "even minor details are governed by strict rules."<sup>20</sup> In comparison, the construction is similar to that of the Odes of Solomon. Each couplet is made of two short sentences – a common feature in Semitic poetry. The hymn can be divided into four strophes.

The First Strophe, vss 1-2, is about the Pre-temporal Existence of the *Logos* and his relation to God.

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος,  
καὶ ὁ Λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν,  
καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ Λόγος.  
ὁ ὅτις ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν Θεόν.

The verses reveal the relation of the Word to God. The evangelist does not explain the existence of *Λόγος*. He assumes that the readers are aware of it or as pointed out by Bultmann, it is self-explanatory within the bounds of community from which the hymn originates. *ὁ Λόγος* is a divine figure at once Creator and

<sup>20</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, p.15.



Revealer.<sup>21</sup> “In the beginning” recalls the opening words of Genesis and suggests an equation between the *Logos* and God.

The Second Strophe which contains vss 3-5 is about the relation of the *Logos* to the World.

παντα δι' αυτου εγενετο,  
και χωρις αυτου εγενετο ουδε εν γεγονεν.  
εν αυτω ζωη εν,  
και η ζωη εν το φως των ανθρωπων.  
και το φως εν τη σκοτια φαινει,  
και η σκοτια αυτου ου

He created everything in the world. Bultmann notes that the concept of *κοσμος* which later appears in vs. 10 is here represented by *παντα* rather than *ο κοσμος* is a matter of liturgical style, which likes using parts of the word *παν*, to arouse a feeling for the fullness of that which has its origin in God.<sup>22</sup>

This strophe is followed by an interjection (vss. 6-9). This is considered by Bultmann as prose narrative with a clear polemical purpose.<sup>23</sup> The evangelist carefully indicates the inferiority of the Baptist to Jesus. The name John, as noted by W.F. Howard<sup>24</sup>, is never in this Gospel, as often in the Synoptic Gospels, distinguished by the title “the Baptist”. He is presented as a witness to the light and not the light.

The Third Strophe is vss.10-12.

εν τω κοσμο εν,  
και ο κοσμος δι' αυτου εγενετο,  
και ο κοσμος αυτον ουκ ηγνω.

<sup>21</sup> R.E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>22</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, p. 37.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>24</sup> W.F. Howard, “The Gospel According to St. John” in *The Interpreter's Bible*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), p.467.

εις τα δια λθε,  
 και οι ιδιοι αυτον ου παρελαβον.  
 σοι δε λαβον αυτον,  
 δωκεν αυτοις εξουσιαν τεκνα Θεου γενεσθαι,  
 τοις πιστευουσιν εις το νομα αυτου,

This follows the parenthetic comment about John. The *Logos* is presented as light, that is, as revealer of God. The strophe reiterates what is in vs. 3 about the creation of the world. The *Logos* came to his people who did not accept him. *οι ιδιοι αυτον* may mean those who belong to him as their creator, or the Jews, or his neighbours and kinsfolk.<sup>25</sup>

The Fourth Strophe (14-18) crowns the *Logos* doctrine of the prologue and contains the essential message of the entire Gospel.<sup>26</sup>

Και ο Λογος σαρξ εγενετο  
 και εσκηνωσεν εν ημιν,  
 και εθεασαμεθα την δοξαν αυτου,  
 δοξαν ως μονογενους παρα πατρος,  
 πληρης χαριτος και αληθειας.  
 Ιωαννης μαρτυρει περι αυτου  
 και κεκραγε λεγων· οτος εν επον,  
 οπισω μου ερχομενος μπροσθεν μου γεγονεν,  
 τι πρωτος μου εν.  
 Και εκ του πληρωματος αυτου ημεις παντες ελαβομεν,  
 και χαριν αντι χαριτος·  
 τι ο νομος δια Μωσεως εδοθη,  
 η χαρις και η αληθεια δια Ιησου Χριστου εγενετο.  
 Θεον ουδεις ωρακε ποποτε·  
 μονογενης υιος ο εν εις τον κολπον του πατρος,  
 εκεινος εξηγησατο.

With *ο Λογος σαρξ εγενετο* (the Word became flesh) the evangelist repudiates all Gnostic disparagement of man's physical nature. The statement is an assertion of

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.471.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.472

the real humanity of Jesus Christ. Verses 15, 17 and 18 contain the parenthetical comment of the writer on the difference between John and Jesus as well as Moses and Jesus who reveals God.

### 3.1.3. The Polemics Contained in the Prologue

It has been suggested that one of the purposes of the fourth Gospel is its polemical interests.<sup>27</sup> Barclay presents the polemic thus:

Somewhere in the church there was a group of men who wished to give John the Baptist too high a place. John the Baptist himself gave no encouragement to that but rather did everything to discourage it. But the fourth Gospel knew that that tendency was there and took steps to guard against it... Over and over again the Fourth Gospel quietly, but definitely, relegates John to his proper place.<sup>28</sup>

As noted by Barclay, the evangelist seeks to correct this understanding by giving John his right place to Jesus. Polemical elements can be found in 1: 6-8, 15, 19-34; 3:22-36; 5:33-36 and 10:41. 1: 6-8 and 15 belong to the Prologue. In vss 6-8 the evangelist brings in John without any introduction as can be found in the Synoptic Gospels, but as a man sent from God. The word "sent" carries the sense of official authority, recalling the OT prophets, though the word is frequently used in this Gospel to refer to Jesus. He assumes that his readers will know him. He also omits the content of his preaching. He is not the "forerunner" but merely a witness; even his ministry of baptism, which is not so much mentioned here,

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<sup>27</sup> W.E. Hull, "John" in *the Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, (ed.) Clifton J. Allen, (Nashville: Broadman, 1970), p.203.

<sup>28</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 1, p.11.

serves only his calling as a witness (1:19ff.; 3:22ff). Bultmann's comment goes thus

The Evangelist leaves the discussion of the content of the *μαρτυρία* till later; here he simply stresses its purpose: *ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσι δι' αὐτοῦ*...The fact that all men are to be brought to faith by the Baptist, shows that the Evangelist was not thinking of the historical situation of the Baptist's preaching, but that he was referring to his witness as it was constantly represented through the tradition and which in this way retains its actuality.<sup>29</sup>

It is clear from the quotation above that the evangelist does not assign any other task to John but maintains the fact that he is only a witness to the light. The positive comment of vs. 7 leads to the repudiation of the fact that John was the light. This verse suggests that some people were taking John to be the light. Thus, the evangelist quickly corrects the notion by saying that "He was not the light".

Another polemical tendency is found in vs. 15 which contains another witness of John about Jesus – "He who comes after me ranks before me". The evangelist, once again, relegates John to be inferior to Jesus. In the verse, John also bears witness to the pre-existence of Jesus (*ο σπισω μου*).

It is not unnecessary to note that most of the passages on the Baptist do not fit well into their present contexts. This gives the impression that they were probably taken from an independent source written to meet this special problem. It is to be noted that although this polemic had the negative purpose of restricting inflated claims made for John, it was equally concerned with the positive task of giving John his rightful place in Christian theology. He is never treated as Jesus'

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<sup>29</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, p.50.

opponent like “the Jews”. His followers do not come under attack, as for example, the Pharisees do. Rather, John is portrayed as the ideal witness (1:7) and friend (3:29) of Jesus who, in utter self-denial, fulfilled the greatest task of all, that of proclaiming Christ to the world. Other verses after the Prologue contain the witness of the Baptist about Jesus. Also important is the Gnostics who were attacked by the evangelist. Vs. 14 is a direct attack on the dualism of the Gnostics who distinguished the spirit from the body.

### 3.2. Exegesis of Jn 1:29

The term “exegesis” which comes from a Greek word *exegeomai* basically means “to lead out of”. When applied to a text, it implies reading out of the meaning. As a noun it could mean interpretation or explanation. The task of this section will therefore be to seek to understand and interpret the biblical passage in question (Jn 1:29).

#### The text in Greek

Τη□□ ε□παυριον βλεπει ο□ □Ιωαννης τον □Ιησου□ν ε□ρχομενον προς  
αυ□τον και λεγει· □δε ο□ α□μνος του□ Θεου□ ο□ α□ρων την  
α□μαρτιαν του□ κοσμου.

#### English Translation

On the next day (on the morrow) John saw (sees) Jesus coming towards him and said (says) “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away (removes) the sin of the world.

## Word by Word Exegesis

*Τῇ ἑπομένῳ* - this is the second day of the event of Jn 1:19 and may probably refer to the day following Jesus' baptism (cf. 32). John made three declarations about Jesus that day namely that: (a). He is the sin-bearing Lamb of God (v. 29); (b). He is the one who was to be baptized with the Spirit (v. 33); and (c). He is the Son of God (v. 34).<sup>30</sup> The evangelist seems to imply that John had not known or met Jesus before though Matthew and Luke think otherwise. This seems to be contradictory but could be resolved thus: John the Baptist knew who Jesus was but did not know what he was until he saw the Holy Spirit descending upon him. He knew Jesus as his cousin but not as the Messiah. Since the personality and mission of Jesus had been revealed to him, the onus fell on him that day to make him (Jesus) known to the public.

*βλεπει ο' Ιωαννης τον Ιησουν ερχομενον προς αυτον* (John saw (sees) Jesus coming towards him). The evangelist used a dramatic historical present indicative (*βλέπει*) with vivid present middle participle (*ερχομενον*) to give a graphic picture of the scene. This was the second time the name "Jesus" would be mentioned; the first time is when it was mentioned *en passé* with Moses (1:17). It was also the first appearance of Jesus in the Gospel. The evangelist did not mention where Jesus was coming from. What follows is the first declaration about his personality and mission.

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<sup>30</sup> Howard, "The Gospel According to John", p. 483

Και λεγει· ἴδε ο' ἀμνος του Θεου (and said (says), "Behold, the Lamb of God),- the exclamation ἴδε like ἴδου is not a verb and so nominative ἀμνος. This is a common idiom in John (Jn 1:36; 3:26, etc.). The phrase introduces to us a formula of revelation that John uses on several occasions. M. de Goedt has analyzed the formula thus: a messenger of God sees a person and says, "Look!" This is followed by a description wherein the seer reveals the mystery of the person's mission.<sup>31</sup> Such instances are found in 1:35-37, 47-51; 19:24-27. The root of the formula can be traced to the OT, for instance in I Samuel 9:17: When Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said to him, "Look! Here is the man... who shall rule over my people." However, it is John the evangelist that is fond of using it in the NT. What did John the Baptist have in mind when he called Jesus the Lamb of God? Barclay suggested four plausible answers to this question. Firstly, it may have been that John was thinking of the Passover Lamb. The Passover was not very far away (Jn 2:13). Sacrificing a lamb during the Passover was initiated during the time when the angel of death slew the entire first born of Egypt. The Israelites were told to smear their doorposts with the blood of the slain lamb and the Angel would pass over any house that had the blood. John might be saying "There is the one true sacrifice who can deliver you from death," just like the blood of the lamb delivered Israel from destruction in Egypt.<sup>32</sup>

Secondly, John as the son of a priest must have known all the ritual of the temple and its sacrifices. He had seen how lambs were sacrificed in the morning

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<sup>31</sup> Cited in Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 58.

<sup>32</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, pp. 80-81.

and evening for the sins of the people. On the eve of the Passover, priests had to pass through the flock of lambs brought to the temple for sacrifice in order to choose the unblemished one. Sighting one, the priest would point at it and say, "Behold the lamb!" John must have seen this several times. Thus he was saying Jesus was the Lamb to be sacrificed for the sin of the world.<sup>33</sup>

Thirdly, he may probably be referring to the two great pictures of the lamb in the prophets; for both Jeremiah and Isaiah had the vision of one whom by his sufferings and his sacrifices, meekly and lovingly borne, would redeem his people.

The fourth reason is that the lamb has a symbolic meaning among the Jews. The horned lamb symbolized the conquering champion of God. Jesus was the champion of God who fought with sin and mastered it in single contest.<sup>34</sup> The four answers summarize the opinion of scholars on the interpretation of the phrase "the Lamb of God".

There are scholars who deny that John the Evangelist was referring to Jesus as the sacrificial lamb; the opinion which is the traditional belief of the Church. Herman Ridderbos gives a summary of the arguments raised against this opinion.<sup>35</sup> According to him, there are scholars who suggest that the Aramaic word for lamb *talya* can also mean "servant" or "boy" (*pais*). Their assumption then is that in the Greek tradition a shift took place from the originally intended "servant of God" to "Lamb of God". This change in the Greek is supposed to have

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82

<sup>35</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, pp. 69-75.



arisen in connection with the concept which later emerged in the church – of the Messiah as the sacrificial lamb. Ridderbos refutes this argument by saying that Aramaic *`abda* would have been a better word if the writer meant “servant” since *talya* usually means “boy” and not “servant”.<sup>36</sup> Dodd’s argument is that in the Old Testament the Lamb is “not the characteristic sin-offering” and that the widely favoured opinion that the reference here is to Christ as the true paschal lamb is highly improbable because that symbolism is nowhere mentioned in the story of Jesus’ suffering and death and because the indirect evidences cited for it are weak. To him, in the expression “Lamb of God” we are dealing with an original messianic title of power, as it is in Revelation, where the lamb shares in the omnipotence of God (Rev. 22: 1,3) and battles against God’s enemies (14: 1-5; 17:14; cf. 5:6). This image is said to occur elsewhere in apocalyptic literature where the people of God is pictured as a flock and its leaders as horned sheep or rams, as in Revelation, which mentions a many-horned lamb. Other scholars such as Barrett and Brown agree partly with Dodd by attributing this supposed apocalyptic understanding of the “Lamb of God” to John the Baptist. The church, according to them, later associated John’s pronouncement with the expiatory function of the Lamb.<sup>37</sup> In objection to this, Ridderbos is of the opinion that the basis for the apocalyptic significance of the lamb as an image of power and of the people of God is weak. The horned lamb in the Revelation does serve as a representation of Christ’s position of power, but it does so as the image of the

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.71.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

crucified one, now exalted, whose violent death is determinative for our understanding of the figure (“a lamb standing as though it had been slain,” Rev. 5:6, etc). Ridderbos concludes thus:

In the light of the total picture, the pronouncement in vs. 29 can hardly be understood other than as John’s pointing to Jesus as the Lamb of God because it is Jesus who will effect the reconciliation of the world to God. On closer scrutiny, the thesis that such a description of Jesus in the language of Israel’s sacrificial cult would not fit in the context of John’s preaching is hard to maintain, at least as long as one guards against overinterpretation, that is, against any interpretation not based on the context here but on any of a variety of specific expiatory motifs derived from elsewhere, such as Isaiah 53, Christ as the true paschal lamb, or the institution of the Lord’s Supper.<sup>38</sup>

It is important to maintain at this juncture that John was pointing to Jesus as the paschal and sacrificial Lamb of God. The ideas of paschal lamb and sacrificial lamb are present in John the Baptist’s designation of Jesus as *ο' άμνος του Θεου*.<sup>39</sup> The NT’s usage of *άμνος* provides a clear picture of Christ as the “lamb of God. As the sacrificial lamb was to be without blemish, so Christ was without blemish (that is, sinless, I Peter 1:19). He patiently endured his vicarious suffering (Acts 8:32, cf. Isaiah 53) so that he might take away the sins of the world.<sup>40</sup> A pertinent question that may arise from this interpretation is whether a lamb was ever used as the sin offering in the OT period. In the OT “lamb” could mean a young of the sheep and also the kid of the goat (Exo.12:5). A lamb was used for the burnt offering (Lev.9:3; Numbers 7:15ff; Ezekiel 46:4ff), the guilt

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>39</sup> Thoralf Gilbrant (ed.), *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary* (Springfield: The Complete Biblical Library, 1990), p.197.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

offering (Lev.14:12; Numbers 6:12), and the peace offering (Lev. 23:19). Apart from these, it was also used for the sin offering (2 Chronicles 29:21).

One should not ignore the connection between “the lamb” and “sin” in this verse and interpret “the Lamb of God” as a whole. John, being a son of the priest, was no doubt, familiar with the use of lamb in the temple. He must have seen how worshippers, bringing lambs to the temple and the priest looking for the unblemished one among them, declares “Behold the lamb that will be used.” Thus, when he saw Jesus, being revealed to him by “he who sent me” (1:33), declared him to be the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world.

*ὁ ἀφῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου* (who takes away the sin of the world) the future work of the Lamb of God is described here in present tense as in I Jn 1:7. There is connection between the “Lamb” and the “sin” of the world as noted above. Note singular *ἁμαρτίαν* not plural *ἁμαρτιαν* just as in I Jn 3:5 where the same verb *ἀφῶ*, to bear away, is used. The present here (*ἀφῶν*) may have future force meaning “will take away”. “*ἀφῆν*” occurs in LXX of I Samuel 15:25; 25:28, in the sense of pardoning sin or removing guilt. I Jn 3:5 has “take away sins (plural). R.E. Brown differentiates between the meanings of the singular (sin) and the plural (sins). The latter refers to a sinful condition while the former refers to sinful acts.<sup>41</sup> The phrase could also be translated as “who is taking away the sin of the world”, which denotes it a continued act.

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<sup>41</sup> Brown, *The Anchor Bible*, pp.55-56.

All the NT words for “sin” occur in classical Greek but many of them were given new associations already in the LXX. They may be grouped as formal terms, terms with theological orientation, terms indicating spiritual badness and ethical and juridical terms. Among the formal terms is *ἀμαρτία* which is the most prominent NT word for “sin”. It is the equivalent of *ajx* in the OT. It means deviation from the good.<sup>42</sup> As a religious term *ἀμαρτία* originated in the LXX.<sup>43</sup> In the classical usage this term indicated the missing of a target or road, hence also intellectual error and moral fault. In the NT it occasionally refers to wrong done to a fellow man, but generally it is used to express sin against God. Paul prefers to use *ἀμαρτία* to indicate the quality of life and the state of alienation from God. Other NT words for sin includes *anomia* which is a term with theological orientation and means lawlessness. *kakia* also *kakov* which means bad is one of the terms used for spiritual badness. *adikia* which means “injustice or unrighteousness” is an ethical and juridical term.<sup>44</sup> In Johannine writings, sin is often spoken of in the singular than in the Synoptic Gospels which generally speak of it in the plural. John uses the singular thirteen times while the plural is used three times.<sup>45</sup>

John the Baptist, in the Synoptic Gospels, had been preaching to people to repent from their sins. Now, sighting Jesus, he showed them how and by whom

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<sup>42</sup> S.J. De Vries, “Sin” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), pp.271.

<sup>43</sup> T. Gilbrant (ed.) *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary* (Springfield: The Complete Biblical Library, 1990), p.183.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

<sup>45</sup> J. Lachowski, “Sin in the Bible” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book, 1967), p. 239.

the remission of their sins was to be expected. By taking away sin, Jesus came to take away the guilt of sin by the merit of his death. He purchases pardon for all of what country, nation, or language, whosoever they be.<sup>46</sup> Jesus is the Lamb of God and his function is to take away the sin of the world. The idea of taking away the sin of the world is not uncommon with Johannine corpus. This is the reason why “who takes away the sin of the world” must probably be interpreted in the light of several references in I Jn, where it is written that Jesus “appeared to take away sins” (3:5); that he “will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1:9); “that he is the expiation for our sins, and ...for the sins of the whole world” (2:2), that his blood cleanses us from all sin (1:7), and that he has freed us from our sins by his blood” (Rev. 1:6).<sup>47</sup> The doctrine of sin in the NT is dominated by the assurance that Christ has come to conquer it. Thus whatever is said to emphasize sin’s deadliness and seriousness serves to magnify the greatness of the salvation from sin which Christ has obtained.

### **3.2. Jn 1:29 in the Context of Johannine Theology and Christology**

John the Evangelist, as noted by D. Moody Smith, did not write a theological treatise, “but a Gospel which is a narrative of the ministry of Jesus Christ.”<sup>48</sup> Yet right from the days of the Church Fathers he was given the title of theologian. This title has seemed to be more apposite for John than any other Gospel writers because Jesus, the Son talks about his relationship with God the Father more than in any other books. Apart from this, John uses new titles for

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<sup>46</sup> Brown, *The Anchor Bible*, pp.55-56.

<sup>47</sup> Howard, *The Gospel According to St. John*, pp. 483-484.

<sup>48</sup> Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, p.1

Jesus which are not found in any other books. Thus both the Johannine theology and Christology are more superb and deeper in meaning than the ones found in other books of the NT.<sup>49</sup>

Considering Jn 1:29 in the context of Johannine theology and Christology, there is a need to briefly enumerate the contents of the two issues- theology and Christology. Christian theology begins with the fact of Jesus Christ. That fact became first the object of faith and then the object of thought. D.M. Smith puts it this way:

It was a complex fact: a man who is Son of God, dead yet living, weak yet Lord. It demanded that God be seen as Father of a Son, the two of them acting through a Holy Spirit who is at once immanent in the 'hearts' of the faithful and transcendent over them.<sup>50</sup>

John, more than any other writer, echoes this fact comprehensively that the reader has no choice than thinking about it. Ngewa enumerates the key theological ideas in the Gospel of John as follows:

- a. Jesus has been sent from above, is on a mission to earth, and will return to the Father. This is the central truth of the whole book.
- b. Jesus' mission involves sacrificial death. The description of him as the 'Lamb of God' (1:29, 36) and the motif of the 'lifting up' of the Son of Man (3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34), among other elements, make this clear.
- c. Humans fall into two categories on the basis of their response to Jesus. They are either children of God (1:12) or children of the devil (8:44).

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

Other descriptions of the two realms contrast light and darkness, and a life of faith with a life of unbelief.

- d. God works as a team to bring about human salvation. The Father sends the Son, the Son dies on the cross, and the Holy Spirit makes the work of Christ effective so that people are saved. The human contribution to salvation requires only cooperation: God has provided the means, God draws to salvation, Christ cleanses, but the individual must be willing. People can voluntarily choose to respond to God's provision.
- e. The end result of God's sending the Son's taking human flesh in order to live among us and die on the cross, and the Holy Spirit's convicting of sin and leading into all truth is that is that we may have eternal life.<sup>51</sup>

In 1:29 is a prophetic declaration of the kind of death Jesus would die in order to save human kind. The context of 1:29 is explicitly expressed in Johannine theology and Christology throughout Johannine corpus. Later in the book, the author presents Jesus in the picture of the Passover feast. Jesus is the Lamb provided by God whose function is to remove/take away the sin of the world. 19:14 says that he was condemned to death at noon on the day before Passover, which was the exact time that the priests began to slay the paschal lambs in the Temple. While on the cross, Jesus was offered a sponge full of wine raised up to him on hyssop (19:29); it was this same hyssop that was smeared with the blood of the paschal lamb to be applied to the doorposts of the Israelites (Exodus 12:22). So also in Ex.12:46 it is said that the bones of the paschal lamb must not be

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<sup>51</sup> Samuel M. Ngewa, *The Gospel of John*, (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 2003), p. 413.

broken; Jn 19:36 portrays Jesus as being the fulfilment of this Scripture for none of his bones was broken.<sup>52</sup>

Other Johannine work in which Jesus is described as the Paschal Lamb is the book of Revelation. The Lamb of Rev. 5:6 is a slain lamb. In Rev. 15:3 the Song of Moses is the song of the Lamb. In Rev. 7:17 and 22:1 the Lamb is seen as the source of living water (this may be another connection with Moses who brought forth water from the rock). Rev. 5: 9 mentions the ransoming blood of the Lamb, a reference particularly appropriate in the paschal motif where the mark of the lamb's blood spared the houses of the Israelites.<sup>53</sup>

### 3.3. The Vicarious Death of Jesus

Writing on the scriptural proof for the vicarious atonement of Christ, Berkhof affirms that the Bible teaches that the sufferings and death of Christ were vicarious and vicarious in the strict sense of the word. Jesus took the place of sinners, and that their guilt was imputed, and their punishment transferred, to him. According to him, "the sufferings of Christ were not just the sympathetic sufferings of a friend, but the substitutionary sufferings of the Lamb of God for the sin of the world".<sup>54</sup> Eunice Abogunrin explains the substitutionary nature of Jesus death thus

...man was liable to punishment from God. But the *Logos*, as the vicar of humankind, endured the punishment, which

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<sup>52</sup> Brown, *The Anchor Bible*, p. 62

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>54</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), p. 377.



we deserved. He did not deserve any punishment, but he was punished instead of or in place of us.<sup>55</sup>

There are two conflicting ideas about the theory of substitution. Some scholars are of the opinion that it must be understood in terms of the bearing of sin's penalty while others doubt whether substitution is necessarily involved in sin-bearing.<sup>56</sup> The former are of the opinion that the death of Christ was vicarious punishment while the latter believe that it was vicarious penitence. It is to be noted, however, that the two ideas are fulfilled by Jesus when he offered what man could not offer and bore what man could not bear. He offered a holy life untainted by sin and bore the injuries for the loveless.

In the OT, "to bear sin" means not only to sympathize with sinners, nor to identify with their pains, nor to express their penitence, but to specifically endure its penal consequences and also to undergo its penalty.<sup>57</sup> There are NT passages that point to the vicarious death of Christ. Jn 1:29 states that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is fulfilled through his vicarious death on the cross. Rom. 8:32 says that God gave Jesus his Son up "for us all". I. Cor. 15:3 states categorically that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures". Other passages that refer to Jesus' vicarious death include, among others, Gal. 1:4; 2:20, and Titus 2:14. This section is better concluded with Berkhof's words which go thus:

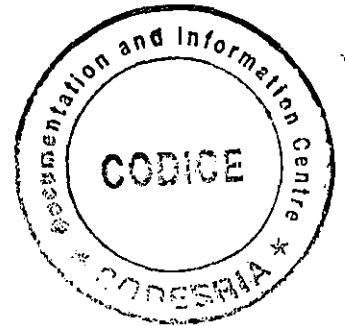
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<sup>55</sup> Eunice O. Abogunrin, "Analogous Study of the Atoning Death of Jesus Christ and Deaths of some African Heroes" in *Christology in African Context*, NABIS Biblical Studies Series, Number 2, p.97.

<sup>56</sup> M.O. Iyede, "The Death of Christ in the Light of Scapegoatism in the Old Testament" in *Christology in African Context*, NABIS Biblical Studies Series, Number 2, p.212.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.213.

When man fell away from God, he as such owed God reparation. But he could atone for his sin only by suffering eternally the penalty affixed to transgression. This is what God might have required, if He had not been actuated by love and compassion for the sinner. As a matter of fact, however, God appointed a vicar in Jesus Christ to take man's place, and this vicar atoned for sin and obtained an eternal redemption for man.<sup>58</sup>



### 3.4. Jesus as the Paschal Lamb in Christian Theology

The other non-Johannine books of the NT have some references to Jesus as the Paschal Lamb. These verses later influenced the Church's interpretation of Jn 1:29. William E. Hull is of the opinion that the Evangelist probably intended the paschal allusion to be central (cf. 19:36 and Ex. 12:46).<sup>59</sup> In R.L. Reymond's view, many times Christ's cross work is represented as work of sacrifice throughout the NT. I Cor.5:7, reads: "Our Passover Lamb (*το πασχα*) has been sacrificed – even Christ." Eph. 5:2 says Christ "gave himself up for us as... a sacrifice (*θυσιαν*) to God." The following verses from Hebrew refer to Christ both as the "high priest" after the order of Melchizedek who offered himself up to God and as the "Lamb of God" who was made a "sacrifice" and an "offering" to God. Heb. 9:23; 9:26; 10:12. The events on the cross are seen as Jesus being the paschal lamb who was sacrificed because of the sin of the world.

### 3.5. Conclusion

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<sup>58</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 377.

<sup>59</sup> William E. Hull, "John" in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, pp. 222-224.

The emphasis of this chapter is on the fact that Jesus is the Lamb of God who was sacrificed to take away the sin of the world. This message is contained in Jn 1:29 which is the text interpreted. Though some scholars have interpreted the text to exclude Jesus' sacrificial death, looking at it from its OT background, it is obviously clear that the verse is pointing to the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. By referring to Jesus as the Lamb of God, the evangelist attempts to settle the polemic that arose from the misunderstanding of the role of John. He portrays John as a witness pointing to Jesus as the solution to the problem of sin which he (John) was preaching against (as it is presented in the Synoptic Gospel) but could not solve.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE CONCEPT OF SACRIFICE IN YORUBA CULTURE

#### 4.0. Introduction

The Yoruba are a nationality of about forty million people the majority of whom live in the South Western part of Nigeria. They have a common language which is Yoruba, which belongs to the Kwa group of the Niger-Congo linguistic family. It has about twelve dialects such as Ìjèsa, Oyo, Èkiti, Ìjèbú, Òndó, Ègbá among others. Some Yoruba people can be found in Togo, Benin Republic and in other parts of the world, including Brazil, Cuba and Trinidad. The southern boundary of Yorubaland is the Bight of Benin and extends from the eastern limit of (former) French Dahomey on the west to the western border of the Kingdom of Benin on the east. To the east it is bounded by the territory of the same Kingdom, and by the Niger up to Etobe, at about 7.3°N.<sup>1</sup>

The Yoruba are very religious and were worshipping the Supreme Being even before the coming of the Islamic and Christian missionaries.<sup>2</sup> The only religion they practised before the advent of the foreign religions was Traditional Religion. The advent of Islam and Christianity brought about a lot of changes and the Traditional Religion lost most of its members to them. The aim of this chapter is to examine the religion of the Yoruba people, their understanding of sacrifice and its role and influence on their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> N.A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970), p.21.

<sup>2</sup> E.B. Idowu, *Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief* (Ikeja: Longman Nigeria, 1996 Edition), p. 5.

#### 4.1. Traditional Religion in Yorubaland

Idowu has rightly pointed out that

the religion of the Yoruba permeates their lives so much that it expresses itself in multifarious ways. It forms the themes of songs, makes topics for minstrelsy, finds vehicles in myths, folktales, proverbs and sayings, and is the basis of philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

Religion was taken as part and parcel of life among the traditional Yoruba. It served as a basis for the formation of social groups. Thus religion and the socio-economic and political structures were closely linked.<sup>4</sup> Though the advent of Islam and Christianity has affected the growth of the religion among the Yoruba, it has been noted that the religion is not dead but living. It has adherents in all and sundry and co-exists with Islam and Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

Yoruba Traditional Religion is characterised by various beliefs and practices. Beliefs are an important part of every religion. In them are the various ways people think about the universe and their attitude towards life itself.<sup>6</sup> In Yoruba religion, there is a strong belief in the existence of the Supreme Being who is known as *Olódùmarè*, *Olòrun* (the Lord whose abode is in the heaven above) or *Èlédàá'* (the Creator), *Alaayé* (the Living One), *Èlémì* (the owner of

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>4</sup> J.S. Eades, *The Yoruba Today* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980, online edition) downloaded at <http://lucy/ukc.ac.uk/YorubaT/yt6.html>

<sup>5</sup> Ade Dopamu, "Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity in Yorubaland: Patterns of Interaction" in *The Gods in Retreats: Continuity and Change in African Religion*, (ed.) E. Ikenga-Metuh (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1985), p.107

<sup>6</sup> J.S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1975), p.10

Life), *Olojo Òní* (the Owner or Controller of this day).<sup>7</sup> All these names imply that the Supreme Being is conceived as “the One who has everlasting majesty and superlative greatness, who has tabernacles in the heavens above and who determines man’s destiny.”<sup>8</sup> He is not a *Deus Absconditus* but a *Deus Revelatus*, God that is accessible to His people. The attributes of God include his uniqueness, immortality, omnipotence, omniscience and transcendence. He operates a theocratic kingdom in the world through the divinities that have no existence apart from Him and serve as intermediaries between God and man.<sup>9</sup>

Another characteristic of the Yoruba Traditional Religion is the belief in the divinities. The actual number of these divinities could not be easily determined but has been variously estimated to be two hundred, two hundred and one, four hundred, four hundred and one, four hundred and sixty, six hundred, six hundred and sixty, one thousand and seven hundred or even more.<sup>10</sup> The divinities could be grouped into three: the primordial divinities, the deified ancestors and personified natural forces and phenomena. The primordial divinities are the ones who are believed to have been with Olódùmarè long before the creation of the earth and human beings. A good example is *Obàtálá* who is the arch-divinity. The deified ones were once men and women who were good people while they were on earth. They were usually historical figures like kings, culture, heroes and heroines, war champions, and founders of cities who have been deified. The third

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<sup>7</sup> J.O. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (New York: Athelia Henrietta Press, 1996), pp. 11-12

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20

category represents personification of natural forces and phenomena - earth, wind, trees, river, lagoon, sea, rock, hills and mountains.<sup>11</sup> The worship of these divinities involves three types of ritual. Firstly, there are private individual rites, carried out in the house, usually very early in the morning. Secondly, there are the regular rituals at the *Òrìsà's* shrine. Their cycle is based on the four-day Yoruba week. The third type is annual festivals, much more elaborate affairs involving a large proportion of the population of the town as well as cult members from elsewhere.<sup>12</sup>

Belief in the ancestors is as important as other beliefs enumerated earlier. The Yoruba believe in the active existence of the deceased ancestors who are described as the living-dead by Mbiti.<sup>13</sup> This belief bespeaks the fact that the Yoruba have a notion of life after death. They know that death is not the end of human life; the earthly life is extended into the life beyond.<sup>14</sup> It is believed that the family is made up of both the living members and the ancestors. The ancestors serve as the closest link between the world of men and the spirit-world. Moreover, they are keenly interested in the affairs of their relations on earth. They also serve as guardians of family affairs, traditions, ethics and activities.<sup>15</sup>

Lastly, the religion is characterised by the belief in mysterious powers. Such powers include incantations, medicine, magic, witchcraft and sorcery. It should be noted that all those beliefs are connected with sacrifice in one way or

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-22

<sup>12</sup> Eades, *The Yoruba Today*

<sup>13</sup> Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, p.83.

<sup>14</sup> Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, p.53

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61

the other. Sacrifices are offered to both God and the divinities. Traditional medicine practitioners prescribe sacrifices as a cure or antidote to sickness. Sacrifices were offered to appease witches and sorcerers whenever it is discovered that they are connected with any mishap or misfortune in the society.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4.2.Sacrifice in Yoruba Religion

Sacrifice permeates all the religious sphere of the Yoruba. It is a means of contact or communion between man and the Deity. It is man's way of establishing and maintaining relationship with his object of worship.<sup>17</sup> Thus it is a daily activity in the religion. This underlines the importance of sacrifice in terms of its function in the Yoruba religion. Because of this, Yoruba offer almost all kinds of foods and drinks according to the taste of each divinity. They are always conscious of the foods that are taboo to each divinity. The worship of the divinities and the ancestors requires that sacrifices are offered to them daily, monthly or annually, depending on the reason for the sacrifice and the worship of the deity. The belief that the divinities, otherwise known as *Irúnmolè* or *Òrìsà*, play important role in the lives of their worshippers always prompts people to want to seek their favour or avoid their wrath by giving them their food which is sacrifice. For instance, *Obátálá* is known for giving children to barren women and for moulding the shape of the child in its mother's womb.<sup>18</sup> Hence, barren women and pregnant women would do everything to win his favour.

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<sup>16</sup> Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, pp.69-93

<sup>17</sup> Idowu, *Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief*, p. 119

<sup>18</sup> Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, p. 21.



Worth noting is the fact that each *òrìsà* has the kind of offerings the worshippers give them. “One man’s food is another man’s poison” is applicable to them. Idowu reiterates this by saying that the worshippers offer almost all kinds of foods and drinks according to the taste of each divinity.<sup>19</sup> One must always be conscious of the foods that are taboos to each divinity. It is also possible for one to offer foods that are odious to a deity on behalf of one’s enemy. The deity that is always interested in this is *Èsù*. One can instigate him to harm one’s enemy by offering *adin* (oil extracted from palm kernel) to him in the name of the person. *Èsù* will then deal ruthlessly with the person.<sup>20</sup> The essence of this is that worshippers must be careful about what they offer to the deities. *Ebo* is regarded as the most important part of worship. The adherents of Yoruba Traditional Religion regard it as their object of faith.<sup>21</sup> It may be simple or elaborate. It may be as simple as setting apart a stone in the corner of one’s house and pouring oil on it. It all depends on what *Ifá* prescribes for the worshipper through divination.

The role of divination in sacrifice among the Yoruba cannot be undermined. The Yoruba do practise divination a lot because of their belief that man needs to know what the future holds for him. They employ various systems of divination which includes casting of kola-nuts (*dida òbì*), the use of

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<sup>19</sup> Eades, *The Yoruba Today*

<sup>20</sup> Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* p. 30.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Pa Adeleke, *ifa* priest and traditional healer, aged 70 in Ogbomoso on 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2008.

*Erindinlógún* (the sixteen cowries used by diviners), *opèlẹ̀* and *Ifá*.<sup>22</sup> It is believed that *Orúnmilà* has knowledge of the future and can prescribe what can be done to prevent calamities and plead one's case before *Olódùmarè*. Man can only know the will of *Olódùmarè* through *Orúnmilà* and the only way to do this is through divination. The experts who do divination for people are known as *Babaláwo*. After consulting the oracle, the *babaláwo* will inform the inquirer what *Olódùmarè* wants the person to do and the kind of sacrifice he/she has to offer to prevent the misfortune or to be saved from the situation.<sup>23</sup> It is *Orúnmilà* through *Ifá* that tells one what to offer to the deities.

The divinity that is in charge of sacrifice is *Èsù* who has been wrongly perceived to be the Satan of the Bible and the *Quran*. Yoruba scholars have pointed out that *Èsù* is the public relations officer of *Olódùmarè*. He is the Inspector General who inspects and reports to *Olódùmarè* regularly on the sacrifices people offered to him.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, people constantly offers sacrifices to *Èsù* in order not to incur his wrath. A portion of all sacrifices goes to *Èsù* according to the contract with *Orúnmilà*. If a person refuses to do the will of *Olódùmarè* and the divinities, *Èsù* will make life unbearable for him or her.<sup>25</sup>

Another important determinant in offering sacrifice is *Orí*. It is one of the reasons why many people offer sacrifice to the divinities. *Orí*, the Yoruba word

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<sup>22</sup> Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, pp.122-123

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Mr. Deji Adekunle Obembe, ifa priest, teacher, aged 51 on 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2008 in Ile-Ife.

<sup>24</sup> Idowu, *Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief*, p. 39

<sup>25</sup> Obembe, Interview Respondent

for 'head' is regarded as the inner person. It is the personality-soul. The Yoruba believe that the physical *orí* is a symbol of *orí-inú* – the internal head. It is this *orí* that rules, controls and guides the 'life' and activities of the person.<sup>26</sup> A prosperous person is called *Olorí rere*, that is, one who possesses good *orí* while an unfortunate person is regarded as *Olorí burúkú*, - one who possesses a bad *orí*. It is also believed that *orí* is an object of worship because, firstly, it is the essence of personality and secondly, one's prosperity depends on it.<sup>27</sup> Thus one must always seek its favour. Hence, *orí* regularly receives sacrifices from the adherents of the Traditional Religion.

Sacrifice can be categorized into three namely:

- a. Consumable sacrifice: it is a kind of communion between the deity and the worshipper. A part of the food is given to the deity while the worshipper consumes the rest.
- b. Non-consumable sacrifice: this is offered to the deity alone. The worshipper and even the priest has no part in its consummation.
- c. Human sacrifice: this was common during the pre-colonial era in Yorubaland. It was regarded as the climax of sacrifice. Strangers and convicted criminals were usually used as victims.<sup>28</sup>

Under these categories we can deduce about seven different types which also depict the rationale behind each sacrifice offered by worshippers. The first kind is

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<sup>26</sup> Idowu, *Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief*, p. 180.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.181-184 . . .

<sup>28</sup> Deji Adekunle, *Oduism: The Transcendental Orthodox Religion of the Odua Race (Ile-Ife: Kunle Ade Investment, 2002)*, pp.21-22

known as *Ẹbo Opé* (thanksgiving and communion sacrifice). Worshippers offer this in order to express their gratitude to the Supreme Being or the divinities. This is expedient for worshippers who have requested something from *Olódùmarè* and have received the answer. Failure to do this is equivalent to robbery for the Yoruba believe that “*Eni ti a bá se lore tí kò dúpé dábi olosà kóni l'èrù ló*” meaning “one upon whom we bestow kindness but refuses to express gratitude is like armed robbers who carry away our belongings.”<sup>29</sup>

Another kind of sacrifice is *Ẹbo Ẹjé* (Votive sacrifice). This is also a sort of thanksgiving sacrifice in the sense that the worshipper offers it to fulfil a vow. What comes to mind on this is the story of Moremi who promised to offer her only son, *Olúorogbo*, to the river goddess, *Esinmirin*, if her requests were granted. She made this painful vow during the time the *Ugbo* people were ravaging the *Ifè* people. She volunteered to risk her life by being captured by the *Ugbo* in order to know their secret that made *Ifè* people to run away whenever the former raided the latter. The *Ugbo* captured her and was taken to *Olugbo* of *Ugbo* in whose palace she became the favourite wife. She learnt their secret and returned to *Ifè* safely. She instructed her people to prepare *ògùsò* (flaming brands) and burn the *Ugbo* invaders for their garments were made of grasses and twigs which could easily be set on fire. This was done and the *Ugbo* were routed in their next raid on *Ifè*. However, Moremi had to fulfil her vow reluctantly by offering *Olúorogbo* to

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<sup>29</sup> Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, p.144.

Èsìnmìrìn.<sup>30</sup> In this kind of sacrifice, one must offer whatever one has promised whether it is easy or difficult to get.

*Ebo Ètùtù* (propitiatory sacrifice) is as common as *Ebo Opé* and *Ebo Ejé*. Any misfortune, mishap, disasters, famine, outbreak of plague and disease, and other calamities are attributed to the anger of the gods. For example, motor accidents are seen as the manifestation of Ògun's anger. *Ebo etùtù* is always employed to propitiate the anger of the gods and spirits as well as to purify the community. Nowadays, *Ebo Ètùtù* is offered when somebody is bedevilled by a protracted sickness. Such a person will be taken to an *Ifá* priest for divination in order to ascertain the root of the sickness. In most cases, the witches are believed to be the causes of such sickness and the only way to propitiate them is to offer a sacrifice. They can be pacified by offering *àgùntàn* (sheep or lamb) which is regarded as *eran àgbà* (the elders' favourite animal) or *eran àwon iyá* (witches' favourite animal). This is offered to them when the sickness has reached its climax.<sup>31</sup> *Ebo Ètùtù* is not a kind that requires singing and dancing or eating and wining. There is no sharing with the deities being propitiated. It is quickly disposed of because it is a sacrifice of appeasement; a solemn sacrifice.<sup>32</sup>

In addition, there is also *Ebo Ojúkòríbi* (Preventive Sacrifice). Prevention, they say, is better than cure. This adage aptly illustrates Yoruba belief about

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 150-152

<sup>31</sup> Obembe, Interview Respondent

<sup>32</sup> Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, pp.152-156

taking precautionary measures to prevent imminent danger and disasters. It is a common practice among them to seek to know what is going to happen in the nearest future. Once a person consults the oracle and is revealed to him that a disaster is imminent, he/she must offer sacrifice as prescribed by the oracle. By doing this, it is believed that the imminent disaster or evil will be warded off from the person or a town or community that offers such a sacrifice. Failure to comply with the prescription of the oracle may lead to disaster and loss of lives.<sup>33</sup>

The next type of sacrifice, *Ebo Ayèpinun* (Substitutionary sacrifice), has an element of propitiation as well as of prevention and substitution in the sense that something (rather than the person who should have suffered deprivation, discomfort or even death) is offered to propitiate a thirsty divinity or spirit who plans evil against man.<sup>34</sup> As noted above, sheep or lamb which is noted for its meek nature is sometimes prescribed as a substitute sacrifice. It replaces the person who offers it and saves him/her from premature death. The sheep, if it is the one prescribed, is immolated in the place of man.<sup>35</sup>

Another kind of sacrifice, *Ebo Ìpìlẹ̀* (Foundation sacrifice) serves many purposes. It is preventive; it is propitiatory as well as thanksgiving. People offer it whenever they want to embark on new projects like building a house, starting a business, etc, so that what they want to embark on would be successful. It is also

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 156-160.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

repeated at the conclusion of the project and thus the sacrifice is also thanksgiving.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, *Ebòl̀p̀ès̀è* (food offering) is also common among the Yoruba. A small part of the food is given to the deity while the rest is shared among the worshippers to reinforce the communion between man and the supernatural.

A careful examination of the types of sacrifices mentioned above shows that each of them depicts the functions of sacrifices and the purposes for which worshippers offer them. It should be noted however that the elements used for sacrifice vary and depend on what the oracle prescribes. Most common element used by *babaláwo* is *èkọ* (pap). They use it whenever they want to use *oṣon Ifá* (divining tray) for divination.<sup>37</sup> Other common elements are native chalk, kola-nut, alligator pepper, palm-fronds, yam, fowl, and pigeon which is used on any occasion that offerings are made to *orí*. Included also are fish, sheep, cows and human being. Cows are now offered as a substitute for human sacrifice since the latter is forbidden. They are regarded as the highest domestic animal and are offered only when there is a great national disaster or when a community is badly oppressed.<sup>38</sup>

Offering sacrifices requires great preparation on the part of the officiating priests and the worshippers lest the offering is rejected. They have to prepare themselves in order to be worthy and acceptable before the divinities. There are

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160

<sup>37</sup> Obembe, Interview Respondent

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* See also Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, pp.162-170.

taboos and codes of conduct to observe. There are certain things and actions to abstain from. These and other things must be taken into consideration before sacrifices are offered.<sup>39</sup>

The normal procedure of the sacrificial rite starts with invocation which is called *ijíba* (that is, paying homage) after which the person who comes to make the offering is asked to stand before the shrine and to state his purpose of bringing the offerings. This is known as presentation by the worshipper. Presentation is followed by immolation which may take different forms among the Yoruba. In some cases, the sacrificial animal is killed by being held on the ground before the shrine while the throat is slashed with a knife. In some cases, the victim is slain outside the shrine, the earth is dug, and the blood is allowed to flow into it. Immolation is the climax of every sacrifice which involves taking the life of the victim.<sup>40</sup> The blood is not just to be wasted; it is poured on the altar of the deity or sprinkled on the ground or the environment to be cleansed or on the worshippers as the case may be.

#### **4.3. Human Sacrifice and Scapegoatism in Yoruba Traditional Religion**

Human sacrifice was not uncommon among the traditional Yoruba people. But with the advent of foreign religions and colonialism it could no longer be done openly. A human being was the highest and costliest victim of sacrifice at that time. According to Awolalu,

human beings were offered not because of a sadistic desire for wanton destruction of life or a lack of respect for human life,

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.170.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.174.



but mainly because the people's philosophy of life with regard to sacrifice held that it was better to sacrifice one life for the good of the community than for all to perish. Human being was seen as an ambassador: believed to be "going to represent the people before and carry their petitions to the higher power."<sup>41</sup>

The people believed that the life of a person could redeem the community and prevent it from misfortunes. Human sacrifice was not what a man could offer. It was a community affair. The community only resorted to it when there were crises and disaster which were beyond the control of the people. The community would consult the oracle and if the oracle demanded human sacrifice the community had to offer it.

The offering of Oluorogbo as a sacrifice by his mother, Moremi, was one of the numerous cases of human sacrifices in Yorubaland. The *Ogun ò já 'lú* shrine in Ogbomoso is also a reminiscence of how one of the kings in the town offered his son to prevent the Fulani warriors from entering it. During the Old Oyo Kingdom, many people were killed as part of burial rites for any *alááfin* that died.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the death of Eleguru among the Ijebu people is a remarkable example of human scapegoat. It was said that the people consulted the *Ifá* oracle to find out solution to the flood that almost swept the whole town. The *Ifá* priest that consulted the oracle was Eleguru. He told them that *Ifá* wanted human

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<sup>41</sup> J.O. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (New York: Athelia Henrietta Press, 1996), p

<sup>42</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (Lagos: CSS, 1921, 2001 edition), pp.56-57.

sacrifice and he was going to surrender his life for the lagoon. Thus he died for his people and the lagoon stopped troubling the people.<sup>43</sup>

There were cases of people serving as scapegoats for their community. The Yoruba believed that the human scapegoat could bear all the misfortunes of the community, hence the saying, *kó ikú ló, ko àrìn ló*, meaning bear our death and diseases. A good example of human scapegoat is that of *Teele* in Ile-Ife. Awolalu captures the celebration of *Edi* Festival during which *Teele* is presented thus:

The people shout at the top of their voices '*Ògúná yòyò*'! (hot firebrand) as they seize lighted torches and wave them over their heads begging that all their human miseries, diseases, sores and death be driven away, and also praying that they may live to celebrate the feast the following year. To crown the ritual cleansing, a human scapegoat (*Teele*) carries away the sins of the people.

In the modern days the human *Teele* would use an animal scapegoat as a substitute. From the foregoing it is clear that scapegoatism was not uncommon among the Yoruba as it was found among the Jews on the Day of Atonement.

#### **4.4. The Influence of Islam and Christianity on Yoruba Traditional Religion**

The most obvious trend in Yoruba religion, according to Eades, is the decline of the traditional cults in the face of Islam and Christianity.<sup>44</sup> In other words, the advent of Islam and Christianity put an indelible mark on the Traditional Religion

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<sup>43</sup> Eunice O. Abogunrin, , "Analogous Study of the Atoning Death of Jesus Christ and Deaths of some African Heroes" in *Christology in African Context*, NABIS Biblical Studies Series, Number 2, p. 97.

<sup>44</sup> Eades, *The Yoruba Today*.

among the Yoruba. However, though the two religions tried to eliminate the Traditional Religion, the religion is still vibrant with few adherents.

The actual date of the introduction of Islam into Yorubaland is unknown but it has been suggested that it probably reached the land in the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>45</sup> and by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Muslim converts were found in Yoruba towns like Old Oyo, Ikoyi, Ogbomosho, Iséyin, Igboho, Ijanna, Ketu and Lagos.<sup>46</sup> The rapid growth of the religion among the Yoruba could not be disassociated from its affinity with African culture. The Yoruba did not need to “forsake all” to embrace Islam as it was required in Christianity. Polygamists did not need to metamorphose to artificial monogamists before they could join the *Ummah* - a requirement which was necessary for one to become a full member of the Church.

Christian missionaries entered Yorubaland through Badagry in 1842.<sup>47</sup> Initially, when missionaries came in contact with African religion, they condemned some of its beliefs and practices. The Yoruba were told to “forsake all” and embrace the new religion with its new way of life. Some responded in affirmation while those who rejected sometimes did so in a disdainful way.<sup>48</sup> However, Christianity won many converts through the instrumentality of educational and health facilities as well as civilisation. Later, Africans began to find common grounds between their culture and the biblical culture. The

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<sup>45</sup> E.O. Babalola, *Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity: Patterns of Interaction* (Ile-Ife, n.p., 1992), p. 6

<sup>46</sup> Dopamu, *Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity in Yorubaland: Patterns of Interaction, in The Gods in Retreats*, (ed.) E. Ikenga-Metuh p.108

<sup>47</sup> E.A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (London: Longman, 1966), p.4

<sup>48</sup> Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, p.189.

emergence of the *Aladura* Churches also contributed to the mass conversion of the Yoruba to Christianity. Thus Islam and Christianity drew their converts from the Traditional Religion and thus vitiated it. For example, *Egúngún* and *Orò* cults which used to be awesome and dreadful before were turned to objects of ridicule and condemnation among Muslims and Christians. Those who continued with the Traditional Religion were regarded as *ajebo* (one who eats *ebo*) .

Ikenga-Metuh has rightly noted that Traditional Religions of Nigeria, like most African Religions, have an all inclusive attitude to other religions and beliefs, and tend to accommodate them comfortably. Because of this gullible nature of the religion, the foreign religions indelibly influenced it. The grip of the religion was so strong on the traditional religion that many things have to be changed so that more faithful adherents would not leave for other religions. Services were conducted on Saturday like Islam and Christianity. Today, most *Ifá* worship centres have organised choirs and do make use of modern musical instruments. They even have Schools. *Ọla* in Ejigbo Local Government, Osun State, for example, has a primary school named *Àború-Àboyè* Community Primary School, *Ọla*. The *Ifá* “Church” in *Ọla* is called *Ilé ỳjúbà* (a.k.a. *Àdìmúlà* Cathedral) where services are conducted just as it is done in Christian Church in an orderly manner.<sup>49</sup> Opeola rightly asserts that the *Ifá* temples in *Ọla*, Oyo, *Ilé-*

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<sup>49</sup> This is not peculiar to *Ọla* in Ejigbo Local Government, Osun State. *Masifa*, a town in the same Local Government, has an *Ifa* Cathedral and a community school. There is also an *Ifa* Temple in *Oke Itase, Ile-Ife*

Ifẹ and Masifa are more of Christianity than an indigenous and thus attesting to the fact that Christianity has influence on the traditional religion.<sup>50</sup>

Another impact of Christianity on the traditional religion can be seen in the attempts by adherents to have a Scripture like the Bible and the Quran.<sup>51</sup> Opeola notes that most elites who now take to the study of *Ifa* literary corpus consider it as a sacred scripture of an ancient religion. This has made some to equate the corpus to the Bible and *Quran*. This has also affected the worship of God among the adherents. One needs to note that for some Western scholars to have said that Africans could not conceive the idea of God, it must have been that they did not hear Africans calling or even mentioning God's name in their worship. The Yoruba, no doubt, believed and worshipped God whom they knew as *Olódùmarè* as noted earlier but not the same ways the modern day people do it. It is the submission of this study that Islam and Christianity greatly influenced not only the conception but also the worship of God among the Yoruba.

In the same vein, practices like human sacrifices, dawn to dawn curfew because of *Orò* or *Egúngún* cult, ill-treatment meted out to widows, the handicapped and albinos have been reduced drastically because the dominating foreign religions would not allow those things to continue.

Lastly, the influence of the foreign religions on the Yoruba traditional religion can be seen from political perspective. As noted by Atanda, Islam and Christianity had tremendous impact on the politics and social development of

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<sup>50</sup> S.M. Opeola, *Ifa is not a Religion and Babalawo is not a Priest* (Ile-Ife: Kabbalah Centre Publications, 2001), p.7.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

Yorubaland. He writes "Both the Muslims and the Christians got involved in power politics in Yorubaland and both did a lot to influence the course of events in this respect."<sup>52</sup> Later, most of the kings in Yorubaland became either Muslims or Christians who also participate in traditional rituals because they believe that they are the custodians of culture and fathers of all. In some rituals like burial of a king, Christian or Muslim priests participate in the ritual and not the adherents of the traditional religion as it used to be before the advent of Christianity and Islam.

#### 4.5. Conclusion

The chapter will not be complete without mentioning the interaction between the three religions. As noted by Dopamu, the religions co-exist with one another and interact and adherents live with one another as brothers and sisters. He writes further:

Cooperation takes place at different levels. The environmental demands in trade, association, education, government extended family situation bring together Traditionalists, Muslims and Christians at various levels...In the area of politics, Christians, Muslims and traditional rulers are seen together as brothers....Traditionalist, Muslims and Christians go to the same school from the colonial days...At the theological level the tendency to say that "others have none and we have all" is removed...<sup>53</sup>

Moreso, another way by which Yoruba beliefs and the foreign religions have interacted is through syncretism.<sup>54</sup> Many professed Muslims and Christians still participate in the traditional rituals and even consult *babaláwo* for divination.

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<sup>52</sup> J.A.. Atanda, *An Introduction to Yoruba History* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1980), p.40.

<sup>53</sup> Dopamu, "Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity in Yorubaland: Patterns of Interaction," pp. 123-125

<sup>54</sup> Eades, *The Yoruba Today*

Dopamu cited a case about two members of his church who paid him a visit and he offered them gin. The two old men used the gin to pray for him. In their prayer, they referred to Dopamu's father and ancestors. The prayer was ended in Jesus' name.<sup>55</sup> This is nothing but a clear instance of syncretism which is an evidence of the interaction among the three religions.

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<sup>55</sup> Dopamu, "Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity in Yorubaland: Patterns of Interaction," p. 122.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONTEXTUALIZATION OF JOHN 1:29

#### 5.0. Introduction

Contextualising a biblical passage makes the passage clearer to both the contextualist and his/her readers. It makes the message of the passage to be easily digested by the hearers because of the way it compares the biblical culture with the contemporary setting. Hence, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the meaning of sacrifice in Jn 1:29, and compare it with Yoruba understanding of sacrifice. The implications derived from the exercise will be useful for Yoruba Christian churches.

#### 5.1.1 Sacrifice in Biblical Culture (Jewish Religion)

Sacrifice is a common theme in the Hebrew Bible. It is known as *korban*, from the Hebrew root *karov*, meaning “to come close to God”<sup>1</sup> Sacrifice in the Old Testament (OT) was a means by which man was enabled to approach God. It forms the core of the OT levitical cultus. The levitical priestly system contained five different kinds of offerings: the burnt offering, cereal offering, guilt offering, sin offering and peace offering. Each had its particular purpose and was intended to facilitate man in his relationship with God.<sup>2</sup>

Sacrifices were either bloody (animals) or unbloody (grain and wine). Bloody sacrifices were divided into holocausts (burnt offerings, in which the

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<sup>1</sup> [www.jewfaq.org/qorbanot.htm](http://www.jewfaq.org/qorbanot.htm)

<sup>2</sup> D. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Leicester: Inter Varsity, 1981), p.432



whole animal was burnt), guilt offerings (in which part was burnt and part left for the priests) and peace offerings (in which similarly only part of the animal was burnt).<sup>3</sup>

Burnt offering is the best-known class of offerings. It was the oldest and commonest sacrifice and represented submission to God's will. The Hebrew word for burnt offering is *olah*. An *olah* is completely burnt on the outer altar; no part of it is eaten by anyone. It expresses a desire to commune with God, and expiates sins incidentally. An *olah* could be made from cattle, sheep, goats, or even birds, depending on the offerer's means.<sup>4</sup>

A peace offering is an offering expressing thanks or gratitude to God for his bounties and mercies. The Hebrew term for this type of offering is *zebach sh'lamim*, which is related to the word *shalom*, meaning "peace" or "whole". A representative portion of the offering is burnt on the altar, a portion is given to the priest, and the rest is eaten by the offerer and his family; thus every one gets a part of this offering. This category of offerings includes thanksgiving-offerings, free will-offerings and offerings made after fulfilment of a vow.<sup>5</sup>

A sin offering is an offering to atone for and purge a sin. It is an expression of sorrow for the error and a desire to be reconciled with God. The Hebrew term for this type of offering is *chatta't*, from the word *chayt*, meaning "missing the mark." A *chatat* could only be offered for unintentional sins

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<sup>3</sup> [www.jewfaq.org/qorbanot.htm](http://www.jewfaq.org/qorbanot.htm)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

committed through carelessness, not for intentional, malicious sins. It could also be individual or communal. A few special *chatatot* could not be eaten, but for the most part, for the average person's personal sin, the *chatat* was eaten by the priests.

A guilt offering is an offering to atone for sins of stealing things from the altar, or when one is not sure whether one has committed a sin or does not know the sin one has committed, or for a breach of trust. The Hebrew word for a guilt offering is *asham*. When there was doubt as to whether a person committed a sin, the person would make an *asham* rather than *chatat*.

A meal offering (*minchah*) represented the devotion of the fruits of man's work to God, because it was not a natural product, but something created through man's effort. A portion of it was burnt on the fire of the altar, while the rest was eaten by the priests. Mention must be made of *parah adumah* (the Red Heifer). The purpose of ritual of red heifer is part of one of the most mysterious rituals described in the Hebrew Bible. The purpose of this ritual is to purify people from the defilement caused by contact with the death. The ritual is discussed in Numbers 19.<sup>6</sup>

Sacrifice, in Jewish religion, was instituted by God (cf. Lev.17:11). It was a provision of mercy intended to enable man draw near to God, not to keep him away.<sup>7</sup> By the sixth century B.C sacrifices were primarily performed by priests in the temple. In the priestly tradition sacrifice was not understood as

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, p.432.

a means of appeasing divine wrath or of cajoling God to show favours. Rather, the sacrifices described in Lev. 1-7 are means of atonement, of healing the breach in the covenant relationship and reuniting the people in communion with God. Sacrifice was believed to be efficacious in restoring a broken relationship, not because blood had magical power in itself, but because God had provided the symbolic means by which guilt was pardoned.<sup>8</sup>

As pointed out earlier, the priests had their important roles to play in offering sacrifices to Yahweh. They were appointed primarily to administer sacrifice in the sanctuaries of God.<sup>9</sup> There was no official priesthood during the patriarchal era, despite the fact that sacrifice was the central act of their private and public worship. Rather it was the head of the family and community that performed the duties of priest. Priesthood was unlike prophethood in the sense that it was not a vocation but an office. Priests were never called but chosen by God. In Lev 21:6 and Exodus 28:36, the priests were made holy or sanctified to Yahweh for his service. They stood as intermediaries between Yahweh and the worshippers. They put on the sanctuary costume, the ephod (1Sam 21:9), in the exercise of their duties. It was also their duty to take charge of the ark, *Urim* and *Thummin*. They were to instruct the worshippers. Their function was more distinct in connection with the sanctuary worship especially the offering of sacrifices. A priest, in modern term, is a minister of the altar.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> [www2.kenyon.edu/Dept/Religion/projects/Reln91/Blood/sacrificemainpage.htm](http://www2.kenyon.edu/Dept/Religion/projects/Reln91/Blood/sacrificemainpage.htm)

<sup>9</sup> G.O.Abe, *History and Theology of Sacrifice in the Old Testament* (Benin City: Seevon Prints, 2004), p.38

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

Another aspect of the Jewish sacrifice was the altar. The earliest form of altar in Israel was soil or unworked stones. They were used to construct structure wherever Yahweh had manifested himself to the Patriarchs and offering was to be offered to him there.<sup>11</sup> Later, the LORD specified the altar to be used and gave instructions on how to build it (Exodus 20:24-26). The Israelites were commanded to make an altar of earth upon which sacrifice of burnt-offerings and peace-offerings should be made unto God. In the Tent or the Tabernacle, the altar of burnt-offering or holocausts stood immediately in front of the entrance. It was called "bronze altar". The Altar of Incense stood inside the Tent, in front of the veil separating the holy place from the holy of holies where the Ark of the Covenant was. There was also the altar of the tabernacle which was made of wood and plated over with brass. In fact, there were multiple altars in course of worship development in Israel. It is to be noticed that the altar of holocausts or burnt offerings and the altar of showbread were very prominent in the Temple worship in Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup> The former stood at the very centre of the courtyard while the latter was located on the right side of the Holy Place toward the north (Exodus 40:22). Two stacks of six flat cakes of freshly baked unleavened bread were placed on the table each Sabbath (Lev 24:5-8) and small golden bowls of fresh grape juice were

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47

<sup>12</sup> O.T. Okochi, "The Daily Sancturary Services and the Cross: Implications for Christians in Contemporary Nigeria" in *Christology in African Context*, (ed) S.O. Abogunrin, et.al, Biblical Studies Series, Number 2, (Ibadan: NABIS, 2003), p.129

placed nearby. It was kept ever before the LORD as a perpetual offering – an indication that it was part of the daily sacrifices.

### 5.1.2. Atonement

One of the reasons for sacrifice among the Israelites was to atone for their sin. Atonement is the making of reparation, the amendment for or expiation for any penalty as brought about by committing any great offence, trespass or sin.<sup>13</sup> It can also be viewed from the perspective of the state of, or act of bringing into concord, restoration of friendly or cordial relations and reconciliation.<sup>14</sup>

“Atonement” is from the word “*kippurim*” which means “expiation”, “the wiping away or to ransom”. The word is used in the OT over seventy times and it is used invariably with the idea of sacrifice.<sup>15</sup> Atonement was instituted by God for the guilty soul and not vice versa. It was made by God out of mercy in order to reconcile sinners to him.

The Day of Atonement is known as *Yom Kippur*. It was the most important day in the religious calendar of Israel. It fell on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Tishri (the Hebrew month corresponding to mid-September through mid-October). On that day the high priest entered the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle (or Temple) to atone for the sins of all Israel.<sup>16</sup> On that day, the high priest must

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<sup>13</sup> J.M. Campbell, *The Nature of Atonement* (London: James Clarke, 1959), p.1.

<sup>14</sup> R.S. Paul, *The Atonement and the Sacrament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961), p.18.

<sup>15</sup> Abe, *History and Theology of Sacrifice*, p.94.

<sup>16</sup> iLumina Gold published by the Tyndale House Publishers, 2007.

first offer sacrifice to atone for his own sin before he could make atonement for the nation. Lev 16:33 explains further,

He shall make atonement for the sanctuary,  
and he shall make atonement for the tent of  
meeting and the altar, and he shall make  
atonement for the priest and for all the people  
of the assembly.

The atonement for sin must be by substitution. The sinner must bring an offering which he has acquired at some cost as a substitute for his own life. The congregation was required to rest and do no work. It was a day of repentance. The people must afflict their souls (Lev 16:29). The high priest would enter the Most Holy Place and sprinkled the atoning blood upon the mercy seat. Two goats were presented before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle. Aaron or the High Priest was to cast lots on them. One would be slaughtered and the other would be the "scapegoat". The scapegoat is called *Azazel*. The blood of the slaughtered goat would be sprinkled upon the mercy seat and thus make atonement for the people. The priest would also lay his hand on the scapegoat and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel and all their transgressions and sins, and put them upon the head of the goat, and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who was in readiness.<sup>17</sup>

The motives for sacrificing appear to have varied with the different types of offerings that were made. However, a proper understanding of Hebrew sacrifice show that it was neither a *do ut des* contract with God, nor a magical

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<sup>17</sup> S.O. Ogunbode, "The Death of Christ in the Light of Scapegoatism in the Old Testament" in *Christology in African Context*, (ed) S.O. Abogunrin, pp. 108-109.

means of escaping guilt, nor yet a provision of food for a hungry deity. The acceptable motives for sacrifice, as stated by James King West, were, rather, a profound awareness of Yahweh's holiness and a compelling need to relate to it through traditional and established worship rites.<sup>18</sup> Through his offering the Israelite sought to acknowledge the ownership of God over all his life by giving back to Him a portion of his flocks and crops. He also sought to establish a communion with him, as well as repair the covenant relationship which had been broken by inadvertent transgressions.<sup>19</sup> The offering must not be an external act but a sincere act of worship. The external act at the altar was accompanied by prayers, confessions, and psalms expressive of the mood of worship.

### 5.1.3. The Passover

The Passover was another occasion that required sacrifice. The story behind it is recorded in Exodus narrative. It was precipitated by the tenth plague, the death of the Egyptian first-born, which was the climatic scourge which breaks the Pharaoh's stubborn will and gave the Hebrews their chance for freedom. The Hebrew word for "Passover" is *pesah*. The feast, in actual fact, antedated the Exodus, having originated as a pastoral celebration of the birth of new lambs at the first fall moon of spring.<sup>20</sup> When the tenth plague was about to happen, the Israelites were asked to slaughter a lamb each in the

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<sup>18</sup> J.K West, *Introduction to the Old Testament: "Hear O Israel"* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971), p:154.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>20</sup> West, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 131.

families and smear its blood on the doorpost. Any house with the blood would not be torched by the angel of the LORD. The lamb slaughtered must be roasted, and eaten with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. None of its bones must be broken. The writer of the Gospel according to John later regarded this as a prophetic action pointing to the death of Jesus (Jn 19:33-37).

From the foregoing, it is clear that all the animal sacrifices among the Israelites were piacular, that is, they were originally expiatory or atoning, though this feature was not equally prominent in all of them. It was prominent in the sin- and trespass-offerings, less prominent in the burnt-offering, and least in evidence in the peace-offerings. L. Berkhof has rightly stated that the presence of that element (piacular) in those sacrifices appears from

1. the clear statements in Lev. 1:4; 4:29, 31, 35; 5:10; 16:7; 17:11;
2. the laying on of hands which, in spite of Cave's assertion to the contrary, certainly served to symbolize the transfer of sin and guilt, Lev. 1:4; 16:21, 22;
3. the sprinkling of the blood on the altar and on the mercy-seat as a covering for sin, Lev.16:27; and



4. the repeatedly recorded effect of the sacrifices, namely the pardoning of the sins of the offerer, Lev. 4:26, 31, 35.<sup>21</sup>

However, the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. by the Roman army brought an end to the sacrificial rites in Israel. The practice was briefly resumed during the Jewish War of 132-135 AD, but was ended permanently after the war was lost. The Temple in Jerusalem was the only place where worshippers could make sacrifices. The destruction of the temple thus signified the end of sacrifice. Orthodox Jews still believe that when the Messiah comes, a place will be provided for sacrificial purposes. This can be seen in their daily prayer services where they pray for the restoration of the Temple and the resumption of its rituals, including the rituals of sacrifice.<sup>22</sup>

#### **5.1.4 A Comparison of Sacrifice in OT and African Traditional Religion (ATR)**

A careful study of sacrifice in ATR among the Yoruba and the biblical culture shows that there are symmetrical and asymmetrical features in their beliefs about sacrifice. Sacrifice is central in the two religions. It is regarded as a means through which man can approach the deity (deities). Therefore, it is offered on daily basis. In Judaism, a lamb is offered in the morning as well as in the evening. In the Traditional Religion, there are series of sacrifices adherents must offer to different deities. Similar to this is the fact that

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<sup>21</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), p. 364.

<sup>22</sup> [www.jewfaq.org](http://www.jewfaq.org)

sacrifices are directed to the deities in the two religions. Yahweh is the object of worship in Judaism while there is a pantheon of deities in the Traditional Religion.

The preventive or substitutionary sacrifice in the African religious belief is a type of the OT scapegoat. In OT, the goat (Azazel) is led out of the town into the bush. In African Traditional Religion, human victim, who served as the scapegoat was commonly led and paraded through the streets of the town for the well being of the king and of every family or individual in the community. It is believed that the scapegoat would carry off misfortune and death of everyone without exception.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, the symbolic meaning of the lamb in the two religions deserves comment. Lamb was an animal usually used for Passover and the temple sacrifice among the Jews. It could be the young of the sheep and also the kid of the goat (Exo. 12:5).<sup>24</sup> In the Yoruba belief it is used to appease the witches and sorcerers.<sup>25</sup> Writing on this, Awolalu notes that

This animal is noted for its meek nature; thus when the occasion arises that a substitute sacrifice is prescribed by the oracle, the usual victim is the sheep. It is immolated in the place of man.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> M.O. Iyede, "The Death of Christ in the Light of Scapegoat in the Old Testament" in *Christology in African Context*, NABIS 2003, p.210.

<sup>24</sup> [www.jewfaq.org](http://www.jewfaq.org)

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Chief O.O. Falua, *Ifa* priest and traditional healer, aged 80, in Ile-Ife on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2007.

<sup>26</sup> O. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (Essex: Longman Group, 1979), p.167.

It does not necessarily mean that the sheep must be a year old as in the biblical culture but it must be without blemish. Christians believe that Jesus is the Lamb of God - the accepted sacrifice for human sin. He is the Paschal Lamb who died not to appease God who is not seen as an angry God but to atone for the sin of the world.

However, a remarkable difference can be seen in the fact that in African Traditional Religion sacrifices are taken as the food of the gods. This is not so in the Jewish religion. Worshippers who offered sacrifices did not regard it as food for Yahweh even though the showbread was called God's Loaves".<sup>27</sup> Hence, it is stated in Psalm 50:12-13 that "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?"

Sacrifice in the OT and NT can also be compared. In OT man offered sacrifice in order to reconcile with God while in the NT Christ offered himself as sacrifice in order to save man. The animals in the OT were forced to die for people's sin but Christ willingly surrendered to die. Sacrifice was offered year after year in OT while in NT Christ offered himself once and for all. On the Day of Atonement two goats must be presented as sacrifice while in the NT Christ alone, who was sinless and perfect was offered. Lastly, the sacrifice of

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<sup>27</sup> Abe, *History and Theology of Sacrifice*, p. 108.

OT could only remove sin for a while but Christ's sacrifice completely removed sin and gave man eternal life.<sup>28</sup>

## 5.2. Sacrifice in Johannine Theology

Johannine theology can be deduced from the Gospel according to John as well as the first Epistle of John. Apart from embodying John's theology, they also exemplify his style, terminology and mode of conceiving Christian truths. Prominent in the theology in Johannine literature are the ideas of Godhead, human nature and destiny, eschatology (in Revelation) and the Church, ministry, and sacraments.<sup>29</sup> Jesus is portrayed as the One sent from above, who is on the cross. This explains the reason why he is described as the "Lamb of God" (Jn 1:29, 36) and the Son of Man to be lifted up (3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34).<sup>30</sup> The pericopes which imply the Passion of Jesus as sacrifice will be examined in order to know the role of sacrifice in Johannine theology. Starting with the declaration of John the Baptist in Jn 1:29, 35, it is crystal clear that the language is drawn from sacrificial imagery.<sup>31</sup> The Lamb taking away sin is reminiscent of OT ceremonial sacrifices. "Lamb of God" should not be taken to mean a messianic title.<sup>32</sup> There is no doubt that there is an echo here from

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<sup>28</sup> S.O. Ogunbode, "The Death of Christ in the Light of Scapegoatism in the Old Testament" in *Christology in African Context*, Biblical Studies Series, Number 2, NABIS 2003, p.108.

<sup>29</sup> C.C. Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), p.302.

<sup>30</sup> W.F. Howard, "The Gospel according to St. John" in *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952), pp. 442-445.

<sup>31</sup> S.M. Ngewa, *The Gospel of John* (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 2003), p.413.

<sup>32</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, p.451.

Isaiah 53:7, which says of the servant that he did not open his mouth, 'like a lamb that is led to the slaughter.'<sup>33</sup>

In addition, in Jn 6:51, Jesus himself claimed that the "bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" and "truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." As noted by Guthrie, the primary meaning of this saying should not be sacramental. It should be noted that wherever flesh and blood are separated, death is implied. The imagery is sacrificial in meaning. Jesus was referring to his sacrificial death in this passage and not primarily sacrament.<sup>34</sup>

Also in 12:24, Jesus says "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit." This is a clear reference to his sacrificial death. Jesus was referring to himself under the figure of seed. "He recognized the need for his own approaching death, but he also saw death as a means of multiplication. It introduces a paradox – that death produces life."<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, included in John's account of the cleansing of the temple is a statement of Jesus, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn 2:19). The Jews misunderstood this but the Evangelist interpreted it as referring to his body. This saying, no doubt, carries the implication of violent death (i.e. destroy this temple).

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<sup>33</sup> C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p.233.

<sup>34</sup> *New Testament Theology*, p.451.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.452.

In the Johannine epistles, there are two statements in 1Jn 2:1-2 which refer to Jesus Christ as the Righteous who is to be ἱλασμος (expiation) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” ἱλασμος is translated as ‘expiation’ and should more be understood in the sense of ‘propitiation’. So also in 1Jn 4:10 where it is said that “...he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins.”<sup>36</sup> Though neither of these passages is connected specifically with the death of Christ but 1Jn 1:7 says it is “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son that cleanses us from all sin”. Again the ‘blood’ must mean the “death” in common with other NT usage. ἰη of 1Jn 3:5 which finds a close parallel in 1 Peter 2:24 also has sacrificial and vicarious implications. 1Jn 3:16 says “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us.” This again suggests a sacrificial act.

In Revelation, the idea of sacrifice is strongly represented by the Lamb, a name for Jesus Christ which occurs twenty-nine times.<sup>37</sup> There is no doubt that the Lamb described in Revelation 5:6 is a sacrificial Lamb who is now triumphant. There is also a combination of sacrificial Lamb seen in Isaiah’s servant passage (Isaiah 53) and in John the Baptist’s announcement (Jn 1:29), and the symbolic leader lamb of the Jewish apocalypses. One passage which connects Christ’s work with man’s sins is Revelation 1:5, “to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.” The second verb (*λυω*) contains

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.453.

<sup>37</sup> B.F. Westcott, *The Epistles of John* (London: Macmillan, 1892), p.44.

the idea of deliverance, but the fact that loosing is directly linked with Christ's blood supports a sacrificial interpretation.

It is to be emphatically stated here that the Passion story in John's Gospel is presented in a way that indicates that the evangelist wishes his reader to see Jesus as the Paschal Lamb. This can be seen in the fact that John dates the crucifixion of Jesus on the day before the Passover<sup>38</sup> and when he was crucified the soldiers used a hyssop reed to put vinegar in his mouth. This is related to what happened in Exodus 12:22 where Israelites dipped hyssop in the blood of the Passover Lamb and touched the lintel and the two doorposts of their houses. The very mention of hyssop, as recorded by Barclay, would take the thoughts of any Jew back to the saving blood of the Passover Lamb and this was John's way of saying that Jesus was the great Passover Lamb of God whose death was to save the whole world from sin".<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Caiaphas is also referred to as the one who said that it was better for one to die for all. By saying this, he was referring to the sacrificial death of Jesus. Lastly, to be more specific on the fact that Jesus is the Paschal Lamb, John points out that they did not break Jesus' limb in order to fulfill the injunction in Exodus 12:46 that the bones of the Lamb must not be broken.

In summary, sacrifices, though not mentioned as a word in any Johannine literature is clearly and conspicuously evident throughout the corpus. The theology of John is based on the mission of Christ among men who are sinful

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<sup>38</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, p.475.

<sup>39</sup> W. Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, Volume 1, Revised Edition, (Edinburgh: the Saint Andrew Press, 1975), p.5.

and need Jesus the Word of God and who laid down His life for them because He loved them. John makes it as a mandate for him to proclaim to the world that Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb of God.

### **5.3. The Understanding of Jesus as a Sacrificial Lamb among Yoruba Christians**

Lamb or sheep is a very important sacrificial element among the Yoruba. According to Adeleke who was a Christian before he became a *babaláwo*, a lamb is *eran owo* or *eran awon agba* (a revered animal). It is used for sacrifices in any case that is beyond the control of ordinary human being.<sup>40</sup> In most cases, it is used to appease *awon iyá* (the mothers, that is, the witches) whenever they are angry with anybody who has offended them. Such a person may be trapped down with an incurable disease and after all diagnoses to no avail, *babaláwo* will be consulted to know what to do.<sup>41</sup> The essence of this is to point out the significance of sheep/lamb in Yoruba sacrificial rites.

Yoruba understanding of Jesus Christ as a sacrificial lamb is informed by the importance attached to sacrifice and the blood shed in the process. Human sacrifice was not uncommon before the advent of colonialism. It was the pinnacle of all sacrifices. Human sacrifice was usually a community duty. It is no longer practiced due to the influence of Islam and Christianity.

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Pa Adeleke, *Ifa* priest and traditional healer, aged 70 in Ogbomoso on 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Mr. Deji Adekunle Obembe, *Ifa* priest, teacher, aged 51 on 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2008 in Ile-Ife.



There are many mythical stories of individuals who were offered as sacrifices for their people. Popular among them are *Olúorogbo* who was offered as a sacrifice by his mother, *Eleguru* among the Ìjẹ̀bú-Òde people, and the death of *Tele*, the human scapegoat offered annually in Ilé-Ifè to cleanse the city of its sins and peril.<sup>42</sup> The deaths of these individuals have some similarities with the story of the death of Jesus Christ. First, the said heroes died on behalf of other people. *Eleguru* surrendered his life to prevent further destruction in his community. Secondly, the idea of propitiation can be found in the death of *Teele* and *Eleguru*. Each of them died to avert the anger of the offended divinities.<sup>43</sup> With this, it is clear that the importance of human sacrifice among the traditional Yoruba people is familiar to some Christians, especially, those who were converted from ATR. It is believed to be the greatest sacrifice one can offer to the divinity. Even some African Traditional Religion adherents still believe in its efficacy. They are of the opinion that all the catastrophes and calamities that are happening now are as a result of the refusal of the society to offer human beings especially criminals as sacrifices.<sup>44</sup> However, the fact that human sacrifice is efficacious does not mean that it should continue. Those who hold this opinion should take the dignity, sacredness and sanctity of life into consideration. This is the reason why

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<sup>42</sup> O. Awolalu, "Scape-Goatism in Yoruba Religion", in *Orita Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, volume 19, (1987), pp. 5-6

<sup>43</sup> Eunice O. Abogunrin, "An Analogous Study of the Atoning Death of Jesus Christ and Deaths of Some African Heroes" in S.O. Abogunrin (eds.), *Christology in African Context*, Biblical Studies Series, number 2, NABIS 2003, p.103.

<sup>44</sup> Interview respondent, D.A. Obembe.

Christians hold the belief that Christ died once and for all men. Thus, no human sacrifice is needed.

Moreover, the importance of blood in sacrifice in ATR among the Yoruba cannot be overlooked. It is regarded as the essence of any sacrifice offered to the divinities if it involves loss of life. It is used to purify or strengthen a supplicant. It is a common practice, for instance, to rub the forehead of a child who is ill with some of the blood of a fowl killed for that purpose. This implies that the child's life is built up by giving blood to the spirits that may have been tormenting the child and causing him to become emaciated.<sup>45</sup>

The blood of the sacrificial victims is regarded as the essence of any offerings made to witches. It is poured into a potsherd (*agbada*) together with palm-oil; the head of the animal, the lower limbs, the entrails and other prescribed materials of sacrifice may also go into the *agbada* but the blood is regarded as vital by the witches.

Blood is the most important element in sacrifice. It is poured on the symbols of the divinities, or collected in a potsherd and applied to the symbols; sometimes feathers of a sacrificial bird are mixed with the blood and applied to these symbols; at times, the blood is carried to chosen spot to feed the evil spirits. In some cases, however, the earth is dug and the blood is allowed to flow into it and then covered up. When the offering is made to an ancestral spirit, the blood is poured on the grave or before the shrine of the ancestor, and

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<sup>45</sup> O. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, p.177.

some quantity of blood is smeared on the supplicant's right big toe (if a paternal ancestor) and on the left toe (if a maternal ancestor). It is a general belief among the adherents of ATR among the Yoruba that the divinities and the spirits drink blood as their main share of the sacrificial victims. And when they take blood, they are believed to have taken the whole victim because when blood is drained from a living creature it dies.<sup>46</sup>

In the light of this, the blood of Jesus which was shed on the cross at Calvary is regarded as efficacious among Yoruba Christians. It is generally believed that the blood has power to cleanse believers from their sins (I Jn: 1:7; I Peter 1:18-19). It is the blood that redeemed them from sin and its consequences. Apart from this, Yoruba Christians believe that the blood can also protect them from evil, hence, the common saying "I am covered by the blood of Jesus". It is believed that one can avert evil by pleading *ẹjẹ Jésù* (blood of Jesus).<sup>47</sup>

Knowing the similarities between the death of some heroes and Jesus Christ, the death of Jesus is interpreted by Yoruba Christians to be the sacrificial Lamb that was offered to appease *Olódùmarè* for the forgiveness of their sins.<sup>48</sup> In the case of Tele, Awolalu clearly captures the belief of the Yoruba about the removal of their sins when he says, "in this act, the people believe that their sins and the attendant evils are transferred to and are

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.178.

<sup>47</sup> Segun Akande, "Power in the Blood" in *Church Training Programmes for Adult and Young Adults 2008*, (ed) Gbemileke Tanimola (Ibadan: Publications Division, NBC, 2007), pp. 18-29.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Rev. Father Louis Omojola, priest, aged 32, St. Peter & Paul Catholic Church, Lagere, Ile-Ife on 25/06/08.

ceremonially borne away by Tele into the grove”<sup>49</sup> This is related to the belief of Yoruba Christians about the death of Jesus Christ who died outside the camp like the OT *Azazel* (Hebrews 13:10-12). Sin is believed to be the root of all human problems and once it is dealt with, other problems will be solved easily.

In another dimension, in Yoruba culture, nobody dare offer any animal with blemish. In fact, if one wants *Èsù* to torment one’s enemy, all that is needed to be done is to offer animals with blemish on behalf of the person and wait for the response of *Èsù*. Jesus is believed to be the perfect sacrifice in the sense that he lived a sinless life and was without blemish. Jesus is believed to have lived a holy and perfect life by the time he died. He thus qualified to die for man’s atonement. If *Olúorogbo*’s death could serve the purpose for which he was sacrificed, Jesus’ death, no doubt, also served its purpose. *Olúorogbo* did not die out of his own volition but Jesus voluntarily gave himself up to be crucified for the salvation of human kind. He voluntarily died for the wicked ones – the sinners and not for the righteous.

Some Christians still appreciate the death of Christ for economic reason. At least, apart from the forgiveness of their sins, they do not need to spend money on buying animals as sacrificial items monthly or annually like their counterparts in other religions.<sup>50</sup> It is a general belief in Christianity that since Jesus died once and for all, nobody needs any sacrifice. The offerings in

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Matthew Ayodele, aged 45, Pastor, at Ile-Ife on 18/08/08..

<sup>50</sup> O. Awolalu, Sin and Its Removal in African Traditional Religion,” in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 44, (1976), p.285.

the church are not counted as sacrifice but as a token of their love for the blessings of God bestowed upon them.

Mainline and Pentecostal churches agree that Jesus' death covered all the aspects of human life. They regard sin as the root of all human problems. Some *Aladura* churches do not agree with the Mainline and Pentecostal Churches on what constitutes sacrifice. In other words, what the Mainline and Pentecostal Christians count as sacrifice in the Christian community are not taken so by some *Aladura* Christians. There are some rites, for example, in the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) prescribed for members who have problems. It may include slaughtering of an animal and cooking its meal for people to eat. An orthodox Christian will call this a sacrifice but to a CCC member it is *èètò* or *ìtọrẹ áánú* (a kind of ritual in the CCC).

However, there is no doubt about the sacrificial death of Christ. His death covers all the problems man can have - be it sickness, disappointment, failure, loss of life and properties, just to mention a few.

#### **5.4. The Implications of Jn 1:29 for Yoruba Christians**

The first implication of Jn 1:29 is about the sufficiency of Jesus' death for atonement. As a Christian who has put faith in Christ, there is no need for one to make sacrifice to other things. Sacrifices are offered daily among the adherents of the Traditional Religion to avoid the wrath of the gods. However, Jesus' sacrifice, being human sacrifice, supercedes all the sacrifices one can offer. Christians do not need to appease any gods or ancestors in order to find

their favour. The reason is that none of the gods is believed to have died for the sin of the world. There is no record of any Yoruba god who died to atone for the sins of his or her people. It is not uncommon among the Yoruba to see people who go to the grave yards of their parents or ancestors with wine or a goat in order to make sacrifice to appease them. Christians who involve in such a traditional practice would be considered as syncretists. Yoruba Christians need to know the efficacy and sufficiency of the death of Christ. The understanding of Jesus as the Lamb of God should help them to appreciate his sacrificial death. It is a general belief among Christians that by the price Christ paid he cannot be compared with other men who were before him or after him. Thus, his death is sufficient.<sup>51</sup>

There is a strong belief in the existence of witches and sorcerers among the Yoruba. This has created fears in the hearts of many people that they would not like to offend them. For this reason, they offer sacrifices to appease the witches and to atone for their sins if they think they have offended them. Sometimes, those who offend the witches or sorcerers are bedeviled by incurable diseases or ones that cannot be diagnosed by medical doctors. If such a person consults the *babaláwo*, he/she would be asked to offer sacrifices to the witches. However, the Christian understanding is that there is no sacrifice one can offer to atone for one's sin. The atonement for sin is the work of God and cannot be earned through human efforts alone but through faith in Jesus.

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with S. Ajayi, aged 40, Sunday School Teacher, Beulah Baptist Church, Ile-Ife on 22/06/08.

Another fact that Jn 1:29 implies for the Yoruba Christian Church is that of sin. John states that Jesus will “take away the sin of the world”. In other words, Jesus’ sacrificial death is all about dealing with the sin of the world. Sin has been the major problem of the world even right from its beginning. The idea of sin is found everywhere in the OT as well as the NT. In the Synoptic Gospels three terms are used to mean “sin”. The first is *amartia* which occurs several times in connection with confession of sins (Mt 3:6; Mk 1:5) or forgiveness of sins.<sup>52</sup> The second word is *paraptoma* which literally means “trespass”. A third term which is equally important is *anomia* (lawlessness). Matthew is fond of using this to refer to hostility towards God, the antithesis of what is right and good.<sup>53</sup> Going back to Johannine literature, it is clearly evident that the implications of sin form a major part in Jesus’ teachings. The commonly used word for sin is *amartia* which is always used in the singular and sums up the idea of sinfulness rather than individual sins.

The first verse where “sin” appears in the Gospel according to John is 1:29. It is regarded as opposition to God and a denial of all that is best for man. Looking at the society today, one can see the effect of sin on the world. Ironically, churches are found in all the nook and cranny of the society. “I am born again” has become a common phrase everywhere; yet sin is not decreasing, it is rather increasing. One is tempted to ask whether Jesus truly died for the sin of the world or for something else. What John the Baptist

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<sup>52</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, p.187-188.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.189.

meant is that Jesus would die for the sin of the world. He would take away the sin of the world. This implies that sin of those who believe in him would be taken away. Nevertheless, the reverse is the case. The more churches we have the more sinful habits and vices increase. This does not imply that the increase in the number of churches contributes to more sinful habits that pervade the society.

What could have accounted for this? Can it be that most of those who claim that they are born again or Christians do not know the implication or the meaning of being born again?<sup>54</sup> Most of them do not doubt the fact that Jesus can take away their sins, but how he can do so is not their concern. Yoruba Christians are among armed robbers, kidnappers, drug addicts, political thugs, and other social miscreants. Some church leaders are also guilty of many of the vices in the society. One may want to ask for the reason why there is proliferation of churches which has not reduced crime rate. Can it be traced to the economic hardship in the country and the undue emphasis on prosperity and material wealth? It seems as if some church founders are interested in their bank savings than salvation of sinners. Hence, Christian churches in Yorubaland need to realize that the Church will lose its relevance in the society because of crime rate (which is regarded as sin) in the society. Christian leaders need to speak vehemently against sin and make their congregations to realize the provision God has made in Christ to conquer sin. At least, the Church must be able to appropriate the provision if the society cannot do so.

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Pastor E. Olaniyi, aged 76, Baptist pastor, Ile-Ife on 02/07/2008



In addition, the phrase “who takes away the sin of the world” implies that sin is a major problem in the world (crimes are regarded as sins in Christian belief). “The world” includes Yorubaland. Crimes ranging from embezzling of public fund to lackadaisical attitude to work, kidnapping, human trafficking, no respect for the rule of law, looking for money at the expense of other people’s lives and even bribery and corruption, which are regarded by the Church as sins are very rampant in the society. Hence, the phrase (i.e. who takes away the sin of the world) is an urgent call for Christians in Yorubaland to appropriate the relevance and importance of the death of Christ by making others see it. They should also know that once they have given their lives to Christ, their sins are atoned for.

Worthy of notice is the fact that Jesus is the only person identified as the Lamb of God in the whole of the NT. He is also the only person that is believed to have died for the world. There are many instances of people who were offered as sacrifices in the Bible. Isaac the son of Abraham, the daughter of Jephthah, Achan, the Amalekites destroyed by Saul, and the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices are just a few among many. None of these people died for the sin of the people. Even Stephen and James who were martyred did not die for atonement of sin. The implication of this is that it is only Jesus that really died for people’s sin. He is the only lamb provided by God. This implies that God is not going to provide another escape from sin. No wonder the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews says “How can we

escape if we neglect such great salvation” (Hebrews 2:3). It is also stated that “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit (I Peter 3:18).

From the interaction the writer had with some *babaláwo*, they affirmed that Christians do patronize them. Sometimes, they ask such Christians to offer sacrifice which they do or pay for the sacrificial elements if they are afraid to offer it. It was reported on a state television station that a church founder buried human body parts in her church in order to have a good turn up of members.<sup>55</sup> This is a deviation from the purpose for which the church was founded by Christ who gave his life for it. Moreover, there are churches that practice some forms of sacrifice as alleged by Babalola.<sup>56</sup> They refer to them as *itope àánú*, or *èètò*. The implication of Jn 1:29 for such churches is that Christ is the only sacrificial element of the Church.

Of what use are sacrificial elements like alligator pepper, dry gin, chicken, palm oil and palm wine, honey, just to mention a few, in Christian naming ceremonies and marriage ceremonies? It is alleged that some Christians pour wine on the ground before they pray when laying foundation of their house.<sup>57</sup> There are some dietary laws that some Christians still observe. For example, in Ogbomoso, there is a family that makes it compulsory for the

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<sup>55</sup> The case was reported in the news bulletin of Ondo State Radio-vision Corporation (OSRC) of 20<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

<sup>56</sup> E.O. Babalola, “The Continuity of the Phenomenon of Sacrifice in the Yoruba Society of Nigeria” in *African Theological Journal*, vol.21, NO. 1, 1992, p. 79.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with E. Adeyera, aged 34, Clergy, at Ile-Ife on 19<sup>th</sup> August, 2008.

newly married wife in their family to eat lizard. Participating in *Ògún* festival is another example of cases where Christians play active roles. This demands that they sacrifice a dog to the “god of iron”. *Egúngún* festival is another example. Church goers are found among the masquerades. Christians still participate in family rituals. In 1:29 is a reminder for such Christians that no sacrifice is required of them. They should understand Jesus as the Lamb of God – the final sacrifice. To be candid, Yoruba Christians, sometimes, find it difficult to disassociate themselves from the religious aspect of their culture. This is the place where the verse (1:29) comes in. Christian churches need to reiterate the fact that Christ sacrificial death does not allow Christians to offer other sacrifices, be it community or individual ones. Christian leaders need to inform their members who still participate in traditional rituals to desist from it. They should make them to understand that Christ’s death is the only efficacious sacrifice. It is the greatest sacrifice as it involves human being and blood. It is the greatest sacrifice to appease or seek the favour of God who created the heaven and earth.

### **5.5. Conclusion**

Christ’s death is seen in the Christian church as the fulfillment of the types and shadows of the Mosaic Law. It has been pointed out that his sacrificial death can also be compared with the death of some Yoruba heroes. The concept of sacrifice is not new to the Yoruba. This implies that the understanding of sacrifice in the OT and in Yoruba Traditional Religion can be

of a help to Christians who want to know more about the vicarious death of Christ. It will help them to fully understand and appreciate his sacrificial death. Hence, a comprehensive understanding of the death of Jesus should be emphasized by Christian leaders.

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## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

If God is spirit, a man's gifts to  
God must be gifts of the spirit.  
Animal sacrifices and all man-  
made things become  
inadequate...<sup>1</sup>

#### 6.0. Introduction

So far, the study has addressed some themes such as sacrifice in Old Testament, sacrifice among the Yoruba and interpretation of Jn 1:29. To be precise, in Chapter One, a general introduction is given which includes stating the problem and the methodologies adopted in the study. Chapter is the review of available literature on the issue. It is pointed out in the chapter that sacrifice is one of the ways man can approach the Supreme Being and get his problems solved. In the third chapter an exegetical study of Jn 1:29 is carried out as well as the interpretation of the pericopes. Jesus is portrayed as the Lamb of God whose saving work included dying for the world. He is also pointed out as the Paschal Lamb as understood in the Hebrew Bible as well as in Christian theology. Chapter Four centralises on the concept of sacrifice among the Yoruba while Chapter Five is the interpretation of Jn 1:29 within the context of Yoruba understanding of sacrifice.

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<sup>1</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 1, (Philadelphia: the Westminster Press, 1975), p. 161

This chapter attempts to elucidate the hermeneutical and theological importance of Jn 1:29 which contains a declaration and the summary of the mission of Christ on earth.

### 6.1. The Hermeneutical and Theological Importance of Jn 1:29

Jn 1:29 opens the door for the testimony of John the Baptist about Jesus. The first thing to be noted here is the fact that the verse (Jn1:29) clearly depicts the function and character of John the Baptist. It shows that John was to point men to Christ. He was to tell them the mission of Christ as distinguished from his own mission.<sup>2</sup> It also shows that John was humble in the sense that he never claimed any superiority over Jesus. He was only a man, as pointed out by Barclay, who drew back the curtain and left Jesus occupying the lonely centre of the stage.<sup>3</sup> Though he was to die prematurely, he never claimed that he was the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. Rather, he claimed that “He must increase, but I must decrease (Jn 3:30). This explains the reason why some scholars believe that one of the purposes for which John wrote the Gospel was to correct the notion of a sect which tended to exalt John the Baptist above Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup> To be specific, the verse depicts one of the reasons for the writing of the fourth Gospel.

The verse introduces another title which sheds more light on the Christology of the Gospel. In the Prologue, the writer introduces Jesus as the

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel M. Ngewa, *The Gospel of John*, (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 2003), p. 413.

<sup>3</sup> Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 1, p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> Wilbert F. Howard, “The Gospel According to St. John” in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), p. 439.

Word who was with God and was God. He is also introduced as the light which darkness could not overcome. Now he is introduced as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This makes the Gospel to be more advanced in its Christology than the Synoptic Gospels. No where in the Synoptic Gospels is Jesus regarded as the Lamb of God.

The verse also contains the idea of the providence of God in the sense that it emphasizes the solution God provided for the problem of sin that has bedevilled humans. "Behold! The Lamb of God" reminds one of what happened in Gen 22: 1-14 when Abraham wanted to offer Isaac as a sacrifice and was told to refrain from doing so. He was shown a ram and Abraham called the place *Jehovah Jireh* which means God will provide. John the Baptist is known for his stand against sin and injustice in the Synoptic Gospels where his sermons are recorded. He had been calling people to repent from their sins because the kingdom of God is at hand (Mt 3). Many people responded positively to his sermon and were baptized but this could not take away their sin. When Jesus appeared on the scene, John did not mince words to point his audience to the solution of their sins. Hence, he declared Jesus to be the Lamb provided by God to die on the same mountain where Abraham wanted to offer Isaac.<sup>5</sup> In Jesus he saw the true and only sacrifice which can deliver people from sin. Commenting on this, R.E. Brown notes that "If the Lamb is the Servant, then John's phrase is patterned after the Servant of Yahweh. If the Lamb is the paschal lamb, then the genitive may have the sense of

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<sup>5</sup> . Interview with E.B.O. Makusota, Head of Ife Circuit, Celestial Church of Christ, Ile-Ife, aged 50 on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2008. This is also supported by Kayode Olamoyegun, Pastor, Ile-Ife, aged 27, interviewed on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2008.

“supplied by God”.<sup>6</sup> The Lamb belongs to God in both cases. Thus, Jn 1:29 is pointing to the fact that Jesus is the provision God made for the problem of sin the world is facing. The “the Lamb” cannot be disconnected from the “sin of the world”. It requires death if the Lamb will take away or remove the sin of the world.

It is noteworthy to know that John was the son of a priest, Zachariah, who participated in the daily sacrifice of a lamb in the temple for the sins of the people as commanded in Exodus 29. He remembered vividly how the priests would select the lamb without blemish for sacrifice in the temple. He also knew how the priest slaughtered lamb during the Passover feast. This implies that John knew what he was talking about. He was talking out of experience. He was not a novice in making sacrifice.

The word “behold” or “see” makes the picture more vivid. There are frequent references to seeing, looking or beholding in this Gospel. This marks it as being the visual gospel in distinction from the Synoptics.<sup>7</sup> It is by beholding that the world can see Jesus and recognise him and his mission just like John the Baptist. “It is our duty,” according to Matthew Henry, “to behold the Lamb of God so that he can take away our sin.” Seeing him taking away our sin will increase our love to him and also increase our hatred to sin.<sup>8</sup> This seems to

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<sup>6</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John (I-XII)*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1966), p. 56

<sup>7</sup> B.W. Robinson (ed.), “A Study of John 1:29-34” in *The Biblical World*, Vol 37, No 1, (Jan, 1911), University of Chicago Press, pp.30-39.

<sup>8</sup> *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the whole Bible*, (ed.) L.F. Church, (Jos: Challenge Publications, 1960), p.309



reiterate the fact that the Gospel according to John is both theological and historical.

“Who takes away the sin of the world”: this is to be understood in the light of I John 3:5-6, which tells us that in Christ we no longer sin, for we enter into fellowship with Christ who is free from sin, and abide in that fellowship.<sup>9</sup> What is sin? It has been defined as rebellion against and alienation from God.<sup>10</sup> To take away sin is to remove or bear it. This involves death and thereby pointing to the sacrificial death of Christ. It also involves shedding blood as it was in the OT time. The blood of the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12) delivered the Israelites in Egypt from death. The blood of Jesus, the true Passover Lamb according to Paul in I Cor 5:7, delivers us from everlasting death and destruction. The writer of Hebrews also points out that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22). The blood of Jesus was shed as the Lamb of God in order to take away and procure forgiveness of sins for the world. It is more precious and powerful than the blood of goat or any human being in the sense that Jesus himself lived a sinless life and thus qualified to die as the Lamb of God (I Peter 1:19). The importance of this is that the work of redemption was costly to God. It cost him the death of Jesus Christ his only begotten Son. Therefore those who have been redeemed should not just take their redemption for granted by continuing to commit sins.

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<sup>9</sup> Robinson, *A Study of John 1:29-34*, p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> *Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions*, edited by Rosemary Goring (Herefordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1992), p. 487.

Lastly, the text poses a challenge for all believers in Christ. It makes it mandatory for them to make the world see Jesus as the Lamb of God who can deliver it from sin and destruction. The blood of the Lamb is efficacious in delivering sinners from their sins. The Church is in the best position to reveal this to the world. Believers are to renew their availability to collaborate with the mission of Christ by helping people to be free from evil and sin. As John the Baptist made the Lamb of God known to the people, so also the contemporary Church should make him known to the world which is battling with sin and unrighteousness.

## 6.2. Recommendations

Jn 1:29 has been interpreted within the context of the Yoruba understanding of sacrifice. The passage has also been contextualised and the implications for Yoruba Christians pointed out. It has been noted during the course of this study that some Yoruba Christians are almost inseparable from their traditional background. Writing on this, Omoyajowo notes that African Christians “are so firmly entrenched in traditional religion that no iconoclastic alien religion could make them so gullible as to readily compromise their beliefs”<sup>11</sup> For example, it is not uncommon to see Christians as well as Muslims who still take active part in the worship of their family deities. One can cite the examples of *Ànbogún* festival in Iṣẹ̀sàadú, Ogbomoso, *Egúngún* festival, *Olojo* festival, *Odoje* festival, *Osun*

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<sup>11</sup> A. Omoyajowo, *Religion, Society and The Home* (Ijebu-Ode: Vicoo Publishing House, 2001), pp. 42-43.

*Osogbo* and other traditional festivals in Yorubaland which are celebrated (whether consciously or unconsciously) by both Christians and Muslims in conjunction with adherents of African Traditional Religion.<sup>12</sup> All these festivals require sacrifices in one form or the other. Omoyajowo correctly points out that “Today, despite the influence of education and contact with Western culture and civilization, Africans still believe in the existence of witches and wizards.”<sup>13</sup> This means that sacrifice as well as other traditional rituals cannot be eradicated in spite of Western culture that seems to have overwhelmed African cultural beliefs.

In the light of the things discussed above and the implications derived from the interpretation of Jn 1:29, the study seeks to recommend some of the steps the Yoruba Christians can take to tackle the problems. Firstly, the Church needs to present Jesus Christ to the society in the way it (that is, the society) will understand it. This is where the issue of contextualisation comes in. The message of the Bible needs to be contextualized. African culture should not be discarded by those who want to propagate the Gospel if the message will be effective. Understanding the culture will help a lot of Christians to understand the message of the Gospel. It has been demonstrated in this study that the Yoruba understanding of sacrifice can help one to understand the vicarious and sacrificial death of Christ.

On the other hand, there is no doubt about the fact that the Christian faith grew out of a culture – the Jewish culture. Hence culture played a vital role in its

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Revd. Elijah Oluseye Ajadi, Pastor, Ile-Ife, aged 29, on 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Omoyajowo, *Religion, Society and The Home*, pp. 48-49.

development. However, culture should not be allowed to dictate on the issue of faith. Jesus Christ who is the object of faith in Christianity is not limited by a culture. He is a universal Christ. Consequently, there should be deviation from cultural practices that are against the belief in Christ. Hence, offering sacrifices to ancestors and divinities should be discouraged among Christians by making them to know that Jesus died as a final sacrifice for all. Iyede expatiates more on this thus:

Christ in African Christology is the one who bears our sin. He is the substitute for the human victim. The African religious belief in sin – bearing victim finds fulfilment in Christ thereby putting to an end all forms of human sacrifice. The Gospel speaks to the African in their own context: sacrifice in Africa must see in Christ the perfect example.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, doctrinal messages on sin and salvation which have gone into oblivion should be resuscitated so that youths will have an in-depth knowledge of sacrificial death of Christ. If Christians do not understand who Christ is how will they know the reason why he died to atone for their sins? The shout of “I am born again” that is very common in the society is always out of shallow knowledge of what it takes to be born again.

The Church should intensify its teaching against sins and social evils. The drastic shift from preaching holiness to prosperity has cost the Church a lot. It has cost her dignity and respect. The emphasis on money instead of souls should be reduced. Since sin is ravaging the society, the Church should do like John the Baptist who was vehemently speaking against sin in the Jordan wilderness. It was

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<sup>14</sup> M.O. Iyede, “The Death of Christ in the Light of Scapegoatism in the Old Testament” in *Christology in African Context*, Biblical Studies Series, Number 2, NABIS 2003, p. 214.

during this period that he saw Jesus and declared him as the way out of sin for mankind. The Church in Yorubaland and other places should also be doing the same thing. It should be pointing people to Christ who is believed to have died for the sin of the world.

Finally, ritual killing is very rampant in the society nowadays. Government and the people need to take a radical step to curtail it before it goes out of hand. The government needs to be more sensitive to the security of the people. Anybody that is guilty of ritual killing prosecuted irrespective of whoever he/she may be.

### **6.3.Final Conclusion**

As pointed out earlier, it is better to expand the meaning of Jn 1:29 beyond the earlier Western interpretation which did not give room for contextualization. However, interpreting the verse within the context of Yoruba understanding has helped to see Jesus from an African perspective. He was the one who died for the sin of the world. Since human sacrifice is the greatest sacrifice among the Yoruba Jesus is regarded as the greatest sacrifice by Yoruba Christians. He died willingly not for an individual, a town, or a set of people but for the whole world. It has also helped to discover that blood of human being was sacred among the traditional Yoruba. It was regarded as the most powerful. Hence, it must not be shed in vain. Being the Lamb of God, Jesus' blood was shed to atone for the sin of the world. For this reason, there should not be any sacrifice for any reason among the Yoruba Christians.

This, however, does not imply that Yoruba Christians should abandon their culture totally. They should not hesitate to jettison aspects of their culture which are inconsistent with the Christian faith. Other aspects that are consistent with their faith should be encouraged. For instance, the Yoruba culture encourages humility, hospitality, respect for human life, moral uprightness, just to mention a few. These are congruent to the Christian faith and should not be jettisoned.

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| 2   | Obe, A        | 47              | Pastor   | Male | Ogbomoso           | 09/11/07          |
| 3   | Oyebode, M    | 67              | Pastor   | Male | Ogbomoso           | 11/11/07          |
| 4   | Adeleke, A.   | 70              | Custodian of cultural heritage, Diviner & Traditional Healer   | Male | Ogbomoso           | 11/11/07          |
| 5   | Adediran, A.  | 65-70           | Diviner & Traditional Healer                                   | Male | Ogbomoso           | 09/12/07          |
| 6   | Aborisade, K. | 30              | Diviner & Traditional Healer                                   | Male | Ogbomoso           | 09/12/07          |
| 7   | Adelani, E    | 45              | Diviner  | Male | Ogbomoso           | 09/12/07          |
| 8   | Adunoye, A.   | 75              | Custodian of cultural heritage                                 | Male | Modakeke-Ile-Ife   | 11/02/08          |
| 9   | Ogundiran, I. | 70              | Custodian of cultural heritage, Diviner and Traditional Healer | Male | Modakeke-Ile-Ife   | 11/02/08          |
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|    |                      |       |  |        |          |          |
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| 21 | Abodunrin, G.        | 35    | Pastor                                   | Male   | Ogbomoso | 10/05/08 |
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| 32 | Ajadi, E.O        | 29    | Pastor  | Male | Ile-Ife | 30/07/08 |
| 33 | Ayodele, M        | 45    | Pastor  | Male | Ile-Ife | 18/08/08 |
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| 41 | Abiona, A         | 48    | Pastor  | Male | Ile-Ife | 13/09/08 |
| 42 | Adebayo,<br>E.A   | 32    | Pastor  | Male | Ile-Ife | 13/09/08 |
| 43 | Awoleke,<br>J.A.  | 63    | Pastor  | Male | Ile-Ife | 13/09/08 |
| 44 | Alagbe, A.        | 68    | Pastor  | Male | Ile-Ife | 14/09/08 |
| 45 | Adesanya, P       | 50    | Pastor  | Male | Ile-Ife | 15/09/08 |
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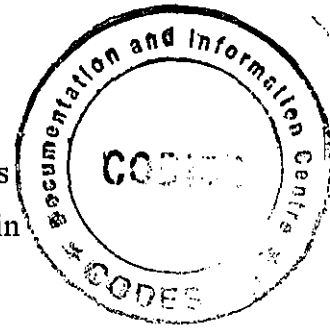
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