

CONFLICT PREVENTION, PEACE BUILDING AND SACRIFICE: THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION IN PERSPECTIVE

By

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of Study: The main objective of the study is exploring the use of indigenous traditional methods known to the indigenous people in conflict prevention and peace building in African traditional community. The study's focus is on the Dagara in the Upper Western Region of Ghana – Nandom to be precise.

Methodology: The descriptive analytical sample survey was the research design that was used. This design was employed because it was the most appropriate design for a phenomenological research method. As a descriptive design the researchers went to the field to observe things for themselves and to ask the traditional believers about their sacrificial rites and how these rites influenced their moral lives. The study was a qualitative one, the method for its data collection were interviews and participant observations as its main instruments.

Result: The findings of the paper reveal that sacrifice and reconciliation are sine qua non for true peace building and conflict prevention in African traditional community for they not only reconcile man to his neighbour but they also reconcile man to his ancestors and the other deities. Despite this important role in conflict prevention and peace building, it seems Africans are overly concerned with imported mechanisms of peace building based on 'imported' or western mechanisms which eliminates a diversity of cosmologies and worldviews, thereby leaving out African traditional religious beliefs and practices as outmoded and irrelevant. The study revealed that as bedrocks of peace building and conflict prevention in traditional communities, sacrifice and reconciliation should not be neglected in the process of peace building and conflict prevention in our communities, the paper concludes.

Recommendation: The paper, therefore recommends that despite the orthodox approaches to peace and conflict resolution, in situations where these modern approaches have failed, there will

be the need to revisit indigenous systems and mechanisms to achieve peace and resolve these conflicts.

Keywords: *African Traditional religion, Conflict Prevention, Reconciliation and Sacrifice, Peace Building.*

INTRODUCTION

The need for social harmony, wealth, and peace so that people might genuinely carry out their God-given purpose in life is one of humanity's enduring concerns. In other words, people want a place where they can truly enjoy life in all its manifestations, even as they wait for it to be finished. In his quest to realize such a lofty goal and desire, the African traditional believer has frequently recognized reconciliation and sacrifice as essential tools for societal change. (Kudadjie et al. others, (ed.) 2000: 10). The African recognizes that in order to fully experience life and complete well-being, he must maintain constant communication and discussion with the supernatural world through sacrifices. This will allow him to stay in intimate contact with the Supreme Being, who is the author of life and the decider of destiny. (Awolalu 1979: 92). The African traditional believer knows that there is orderliness in the administration of the world and if disorderliness or disruption of harmony occurs, this should be attributed not only to man's neglect of the Supreme-Being, the divinities and ancestors but also to the workers of iniquity such as witches, sorcerers etc. And sacrifices are the means of constantly soliciting the help of supernatural assistance for restoration, maintenance, and sustenance of this order. (Awolalu 1979).

The centrality of sacrifice in African Traditional Religion is acknowledged by Dominique Zahan who observed that "African spiritual life is so impregnated with the idea of immolation that it is practically impossible to find a people on that continent whose religious practices do not include the slaughter of the most diverse victims." (Zahan1970:33). Zahan, further observed the irreplaceable position of sacrifice in African Traditional Religion when he said, "It can even be said that sacrifice is the keystone of the African Traditional Religion. It constitutes the supreme prayer, that which could not be renounced without seriously compromising the relationship between man and the Invisible." (Zahan 1970: 33). Dominique Zahan, is right, for one can safely state, without any risk of being wrong that sacrifice is African Traditional Religion and African Traditional Religion is sacrifice. This centrality of sacrifice and reconciliation is not only peculiar to African Traditional Religion alone but is observed in other religions. In fact, Ringgren made the observation, quoted in Awolalu (1979:136) that "all over the world, and throughout history, wherever mankind has worshipped the divine being, we encounter the practice of sacrifice [and reconciliation]." This pivotal position of sacrifice and conciliation in all professions of faith is one of the reasons for the subject matter of this study.

It would appear that among many other things, sacrifice and reconciliation play an important role in peace building and conflict prevention in African traditional community. There is however little information about this. The lack of adequate information on sacrifice and reconciliation and their role in peace building and conflict prevention could be the reason why these mechanisms are ignored in the process of peace building in Africa today. This study is therefore aimed at investigating into sacrifice and reconciliation, so as to reveal the role they played and can play in the building of peace and the prevention of conflict in our communities. This, it is hoped, would make people to involve African traditional believers in the search for peace and the prevention of conflict through the rites of sacrifice and reconciliation. From the African Traditional Religion's

perspective, we tried to find out how sacrifice and reconciliation can be a source of peace building in the African society. This study chooses to focus on African Traditional Religion because of the fact that African Traditional Religion is the religious and cultural setting from which most Christians and Muslims in Africa live. As a religion that embraces the totality of life, it is often the basic source of inspiration in understanding and translating the concepts of sacrifice, penance, reconciliation, and atonement for sins, peace and harmony into reality. As such, it can serve as an initial opening for Christians and Muslims in their search for dialogue, understanding and collaboration in their search for peace. (cf Lineamenta: Second Special Assembly for Africa, 2005).

This work is a case study of the Dagara of northern Ghana. These people live in the extreme corner of the north western part of Ghana in the Upper West Region. The Dagara are mainly agrarian in occupation, engaging in subsistent farming and small scale rearing of animals and birds. Their traditional community, which is the knowledge community of this research, is illiterate in the main. The Dagara are a peace-loving people who would do all it takes to maintain peace and prevent violent conflicts in their communities. In their worldview, conflict between humans affects the relationship between man and the divine world; ancestors and the other deities and can lead to untold suffering in the life of a whole community. Among other ways, it appears that sacrifice and reconciliation emerge as the main ritual means of preventing conflict, restoring harmony and maintaining peace and mutual coexistence in the community. The goal of this study is to make an in-depth study of sacrifice and reconciliation to be able to discover and make expository remarks of their moral relevance in the life of the African Traditional Believer and how they help in the maintenance and building of peace in the African traditional society. Particular attention is paid to the reconciliatory elements in sacrifice in order to find the place of sacrifice and reconciliation in the religious life and practices of the African Tradition Believer and these contribute to peace building. In order to achieve our goal, the study has the following objective:

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To study how among the Dagara, sacrifice and reconciliation help in conflict prevention and peace building in African traditional community and juxtapose this with contemporary conflict resolution (alternative or otherwise).

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Understanding Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion

Though many researchers agree on the centrality and importance of sacrifice in the religious life and practices of African Traditional peoples, author differs when it comes to the definition of sacrifice, though they do not necessarily always conflict each other. Here we shall consider the different views on the understanding of sacrifice. The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics defines sacrifice 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 spiritual strength; for the benefit of the latter.” (Awolalu1979:136). Sacrifice is seen as a source of spiritual strength and a means of establishing and maintaining good relationship between two worlds; the world of spiritual strength and that of spiritual weakness with the aim of making the weaker share in the strength of the stronger. James attempted to explain the meaning of sacrifice by stating that it entails the destruction of a victim "for the purpose of maintaining or restoring a right relationship of man to the sacred order," as cited by Awolalu (1979:136). According to this definition, sacrifice serves to maintain positive relationships between people and their objects of worship and,

indirectly, between people and their neighbors. It may also have an impact on a bond of union with the divinity to whom it is offered or serve as a unique form of atonement to "cover," "wipe out," neutralize, or carry away evil guilt that has been contracted knowingly or unknowingly. The rapture is restored and man is reconciled to his divinity by sacrifice in the event that the bond is broken by any "evil guilt."

Francis Arinze (1970) distinguished between the ritual sense and the popular or personal notion of sacrifice. Arinze views sacrifice in the popular sense as a form of renunciation for a purpose. On the other hand, ritual sacrifice is only appropriate and strictly limited to religious public worship. Arinze also distinguished between sacrifice's general and specific meanings. When a faithful man dedicates his life to God, he is generally viewed as a sacrifice; similarly, when temperance chastises our bodies, our souls are also obedient to God. When interpreted strictly, Arinze believes that sacrifice is limited to the act that evokes the virtue of religion, which belongs to the genus of oblation. Arinze also makes a distinction between sacrifices made from within and without. Internal sacrifices are what we give to God, our Creator, Preserver, and Final Destination. According to Arinze (1970: 31–32), external sacrifices are the outward expression of this inward deed when "something is done" to the offerings made to God. According to him, interior sacrifice is the essence of exterior sacrifice and is necessary for its moral value. Formalism would replace the exterior rite in the absence of this inward sacrifice. Arinze ultimately came to what he calls a workable definition of sacrifice. Arinze (1970: 32) defines sacrifice as "an offering to God by a priest of a sensible thing through its immolation, in acknowledgement of his supreme domination and man's subjection."

According to Ted Nelson-Adjakpey, who wrote about the Ghanaian Ewe, sacrifice is the act of presenting something to a deity as a sign of one's complete reliance on that deity (Nelson-Adjakpey 1982:111). Because of the specific covenant that exists between the divinity and man, Nelson-Adjakpey adds, man uses the priceless gift of sacrifice to renew this covenant or to reestablish it when it is disrupted due to human weakness. Therefore, he believes that sacrifice is an act that symbolizes man's reliance on the supernatural. It also serves as a platform for reestablishing man's connection with the divinity and a way to make amends when man's frailty shatters that bond (Mwinlaaro 2005). In his work among the Dagaaba of Ghana, Edward Kuukure (1985: 89) states that "it is sacrifice each time an offering or part of it is destroyed; it is a symbolic act by which an object or person passes from the profane to the sacred." Kuukure goes on to explain that sacrifice is a process that ensures communication between the sacred and profane worlds through the intermediary of a victim, which is consecrated and destroyed during the ceremony. Through sacrifice, otherwise disparate beings can communicate.

There is no differentiation between sacrifice and offerings in any of the concepts given above. Thus, sacrifice and offerings would appear to have the same meaning. The J.S. However, Mbiti (1968:58) would prefer to save the word "sacrifice" for situations in which an animal's life is taken in order to deliver it whole to God, supernatural entities, spirits, or the living dead. After that, "offerings" will apply to any other situation in which an animal is not killed. The Mbiti difference is viewed by Kuukure as being "rather simplistic if not futile" (Kuukure 1985: 90). According to Kuukure, the primary purpose and significance of sacrifice is to provide something as a gift or as a way to ask for something, to make amends, or to express gratitude, depending on the situation and time of the sacrifice. We believe that Kuukure is correct when he emphasizes the gift component of all sacrifices, but we still believe that Mbiti's distinctions are important. Not all offerings presented to the gods are sacrifices, even though it may be the case that every sacrifice

includes a gift or offering. An offering must have a component that qualifies it as a sacrifice; without it, there would be none. And the blood of the animal used as a sacrifice is this substance.

As Dominique Zahan (1970:33) states, in Africa, sacrifice is defined as the pouring blood of a killed animal. Additionally, in Africa, the full significance of sacrifice comes from the blood of animals that have fallen on countless altars.

Because blood is a life-sustaining fluid and carries life, Africans are captivated by it. In addition to being a dangerous vital substance that can have major repercussions if carelessly spent, it includes the active force of the entities that carry it (Zahan 1970: 35). There is no more appropriate object for man to write his prayer on than this life-giving fluid. The blood of a chicken must flow during a sacrifice in the Dagara culture of Northern Ghana (Mwinlaaro 2005). Using the flowing blood of the sacrificial animal or animals, always including a chicken, the sacrificial-chicken (*bagr-maal-lile*), and offering the prescribed materials and victims to the object of belief in a ritual ceremony through the mediation of a ritual expert (the priest), they define sacrifice as a ritual act of repairing the damage caused by sin to the relationship between a believer and the supernatural beings. The significance of this sacrificial chicken in the Dagara sacrifice ceremony will become clearer later. Sometimes the purpose of the deed is to mend the relationship that has been strained, appease the angry deity, and regain its love and respect.

In order to prevent sin from occurring, it may also seek to preserve and/or nurture the relationship. In the latter instance, sacrifice is viewed as a ceremonial lubricant that promotes amity between the worshipper and the worshipped. The tone, language, and overall ambiance of the specific sacrifice session will inform the attentive viewer if the sin has already been committed and is atoned for, or if the purpose of the ceremony is to express gratitude or maintain a positive relationship between believers and their object of belief. Dagara research indicates that the Dagara people believe that sacrifice is made when a priest, using words, offers offerings to a deity and seals the presentation with the blood of an animal, particularly the "sacrificial chicken." Another significant point that comes to mind in this context is that domestic animals are typically used as the victims of religious rites such as sacrifices in Africa. It is almost as though man was attempting to give something of himself to the invisible powers through these sacrifices (Zahan 1970: 35).

The P.K. Though in a very different manner from Mbiti, Sarpong (1999) distinguished between sacrifice and offering in his work *Libation*. For him, offering a gift to a god or the ancestors or destroying a victim in order to appease them or gain their favor or affection is sacrifice. Furthermore, Sarpong notes that the difference between sacrifice and offering stems from the fact that the victim is destroyed in sacrifice but offered as is in offering; in his view, the difference is in the manner in which the victim is presented rather than in the character of the victim. After that, Sarpong says something significant about sacrifice that sparks our conversation. "Sacrifice seeks to establish communion and maintain relations with the gods and with fellow humans," he notes (Sarpong 1999: 9).

In summary, sacrifice is the ceremonial act of offering an animal's blood to a supernatural being in order to express gratitude, appease, or request assistance. By means of the priest's words, the offering given, the animal's blood flowing, and the potential sharing of a sacrificial feast, sacrifice establishes a platform for communication between the divine and human realms. An invocation, presentation, immolation, and communion are thus included in every sacrifice. We concur with the many writers who believe that immolation is the essence of sacrifice, but we disagree with Arinze (1970), who believes that immolation can also refer to the pouring of liquids or the burning

of solids. The killing of the sacrificial animals, particularly the chicken, which is a staple of all African Traditional Religion ceremonies, is what we mean when we talk about "immolation."

The Understanding of Reconciliation in African Traditional Community

Before we now move to the understanding of reconciliation in African Traditional Religion, it is important to quickly note here that sacrifice is closely tied to reconciliation in African Traditional Religion. In fact, the two are bed fellows. An obvious phenomenon that is closely linked to sacrifice and reconciliation is guilt; in fact, we cannot talk about reconciliation as a religious act in the absence of moral guilt. But the concept of guilt or sin must necessarily be viewed, at least in traditional religion, in relation to the thoughts and experiences of the African people. According to Nelson-Adjakpey 1982:85, among the Ghanaian-Ewe the word for sin is *Nuvo*, which Nelson-Adjakpey translates as, 'a horrible thing'. But he hastens to point out that *nuvo* connotes more than just 'a horrible thing;' it is a breach of prohibitions imposed on man by his object of worship or the doing of anything that is displeasing to the spirit powers, with the result that the displeased spirit powers manifest themselves adversely in human affairs. It is this that stamps a horrible and fearful nature on sin among the Ewes.

For the Dagara of Northern Ghana, the word for sin is *bagr* or *sangna* or *yelbier* or *faalu*. *Bagr* is a moral guilt incurred by a person through an offence he has committed against the Earth-Spirit (*Tengan*), the Ancestors (*Kpimɛ*) or any of the other deities of the land (*Tibɛ*). The offence can be a taboo (*kyiiru*) that is broken, a responsibility (*feru tome*) that is neglected or a vow (*nuor-kob*) to one of the deities, which the offender fails to pay. Just like all other African Traditional Believers every deity among the Dagara has some rules, norms, and taboos that its adherents must observe, which, when broken, brings guilt or sin on the offender (Mwinlaaro 2005). For instance, the Earth Spirit, the major object of worship among the Dagara, taboos the following: shedding of human blood, suicide (especially by hanging oneself), stealing, willfully induced abortion and sexual intercourse outside a residential home or on a bear floor. Taboos of the ancestors include incest, adultery, sale of ancestral property, especially land, killing a family member, starving a family member to death, etc. Anytime anyone of these taboos is broken, intentionally or unintentionally sin is committed, the consequence of which may bring disaster on the whole community.

Responsibilities that, when neglected would bring sin vary from deity to deity but there is one that the Dagara dare not neglect, that of offering regular sacrifices to the Earth-Spirit, the ancestors and the other deities. The Dagara believe that the greatest responsibility of human beings towards the deities is that of showing gratitude to them for their protection, providence and sustenance. When this responsibility is neglected or unduly delayed the community or family stands the risk of incurring *bagr*. A person with the stain of *bagr* (sin) brings disharmony, unrest and misfortune to the whole community. Sin is a state capable of collapsing an entire family, village or community if it is not identified and expiated in time through the appropriate rite of sacrifice. That gives sin a communal nature in the theology of African Traditional Religion. As sin introduces this fearful conflict between the divine world and the human world the rite of reconciliation is the concern of both divine and human worlds. In order to effect a true reconciliation, the sin must be carefully identified and defined through the expertise of the soothsayer (*Bagr-bogre*). Through divination, the soothsayer is able to locate the offended deity, find out the offence committed and prescribe the steps to be taken to remedy the situation; the sinner must show remorse and carry out the necessary penance. Oftentimes the act of reconciliation takes place in the context of sacrifice (Mwinlaaro 2005).

Penance may be described as the performance of an act to express repentance for some wrongdoing. The performance of this act usually takes the form of a self-imposed punishment, or is otherwise imposed by an external agent. In African Traditional Religious circles, it is the offended deity who imposes the prescribed rite for the penance (Nelson-Adjakpey 1982). The celebration of penance is a sine qua non for the re-establishment of peace, order and harmony into the individual and corporate relationships, which has been disrupted through sin. Sin is an act of horror; at the mere sight of which a person must shudder. And for that reason, something positive must be done to remove the horrific effect brought by such an act so that reconciliation can take place. That positive thing is sacrifice. As indicated earlier, sacrifice and reconciliation are closely linked and sometimes presuppose each other. Among the Dagara of Northern Ghana, for instance, the word for sacrifice is *Bagr-maalu* (the removal of sin or the repair of the damage caused by sin or the prevention of the occurrence of sin).

The rite of reconciliation can therefore be described as a situation in which a person accepts or realizes his guilt for an offence against a deity and then undertakes to perform the prescribed rites of propitiating the offended deity as atonement for the sin. It is a feeling of remorse for one's deviation from, and inability to live according to the rules and norms of the deity with a definite move at rectifying the situation. It may also be regarded as a rite, or a prescribed act, performed by a person, through an intermediary, to acknowledge his guilt for some sin committed against the ancestors, the Earth-Spirit or the other deities in the land, with the aim of reconciling himself with the object of the offence. "This means that it does not merely comprise remorse or a mental pain but also physical and material pains." Nelson-Adjakpey 1982:99, opines that in practical terms, reconciliation is viewed in the African religious and cultural traditions as peace and the return to a state of harmony, manifested in a person's interior and exterior state of being and devoid of harsh or rough conditions of living. It is also beneficial to others reflected in active goodness which shows itself in the care and concern shown for the well-being of the neighbour. The mediator at any rite of sacrifice and reconciliation within the religious sense is always a ritual expert, a priest. In African Traditional Religions sacrifices and reconciliatory rites are directed towards the deities, and in an indirect way, towards God. To a larger extent the individual concerned and the community in which he lives become the direct beneficiaries of the fruits of sacrifice and reconciliation. The next section focuses on the subjects and objects of sacrifices.

The Subjects and Objects of Sacrifices

The persons who make sacrifices and the recipients of sacrifices are the subjects and objects of discussion in this section. According to Peter K. Sarpong (1999: 9) in his book *Libation*, anyone can make a sacrifice. On exceptional occasions, the leader—whether the chief, the priest, or the diviner—offered the sacrifice on behalf of the group or community. Regarding the sacrifices' objects, he states that they are offered to God, the gods, and the ancestors. Which of them receives the spotlight depends on the situation (1999). As for the Ibo, Arinze (1970: 62) noted that not everyone is able to make sacrifices. A public act of worship done in the name of a community or a portion of it is what he defines as sacrifice. Through a unique individual, the priest, the community fulfills this duty. According to Arinze, not everyone has the ability to approach a deity in sacrifice, whether in a public or private setting. There is always a middleman to go through. So much so that sacrifice and priesthood stand and fall together, Arinze noted that the priest's role in offering sacrifices is very crucial. Regarding the sacrifice objects, Arinze noted that the three objects of Ibo religious belief and cult in the strict sense are God, the spirits, and the ancestors.

The table below, which Arinze drew to show the division of Ibo sacrifices, also contains the sacrifice objects among the Ibos for our purposes.

Table 1: Types of Sacrifices

Type of sacrifice	To whom offered	End
1. Sacrifices to GOOD spirits (joyful sacrifices)	1. God (are) 2. Spirits with shrines 3. Ancestors	1. Expiation 2. Petition 3. Thanksgiving 4. Homage (rare)
2. Sacrifices to BAD spirits (joyless sacrifices)	Evil spirits (Akalogeli)	Please leave us alone!

Among the Dagaaba (Dagara), Edward Kuukure notes that "God is the ultimate recipient of sacrifices although the reality of the intermediaries is often so heavy as to obscure this fact and make God appear as an indirect beneficiary" (Kuukure 1985:91). Kuukure provided an explanation for the apparent lack of direct sacrifices to God among the Dagaaba (Dagara). He notes that among these people, a gift is not given directly to a senior; instead, it is shown to him or simply explained to him; it is then given to an intermediary, usually someone who is close enough to the senior to be able to effectively and eloquently present one's request. For this reason, African traditionalists prefer to pass their sacrifices to God via the ancestors and other deities.

As a result, God, the Earth Shrine, and the ancestors are all connected in sacrificial devotion, and God—who also has no unique shrine—is addressed and worshipped at all shrines. Thus, Kuukure does not see any shrines or depictions of God, nor does he see any actual direct sacrifice among the Dagaaba. Benedict Der (1986) notes the opposite among the same people in his article "God and Sacrifice in the Traditional Religion of the Kasena and Dagaaba of Northern Ghana." Der notes that the Dagaaba (Dagara) practiced two different kinds of sacrifice: the bagr and the mwinbagr. Although the latter was addressed directly to God, both had him as their ultimate goal. As the name implies, God received the mwinbagr, or God's sacrifice, immediately. The ancestors and other spirit creatures had no interest in it. When sin was atoned for, he mentioned a few instances in which sacrifices were made directly to God. A serious transgression against God, not the ancestors, was the act of sin, or a "yelbier." Murder, theft, threats of death, and major disagreements or conflicts between people are examples of such offenses. Benedict Der also looks at sites where people offer sacrifices to God.

These were located in the house's main hall and in front of the household head's granary. Unlike the ancestors' shrines, which were typically found in another hall or chamber, this one was situated here. My stance on direct sacrifices to God is different from Der's, even if we both agree with the numerous experts that God is the ultimate beneficiary of Dagara sacrifice. In his book *Les Dagara, Leur Ecosysteme et son Fonctionnement interne face a la Modernite*, Joseph-Mukasa Deri (1989: 373) asserted unequivocally that the Dagara never offered a direct sacrifice to God. I want to think that this is reasonable. Deri's words, in French, are, "Le bawr-maalu comme sacrifice ne s'adresse jamais a dieu directement (bien qu'il n't a sacrifice sans evocation du non de dieu), but au bergers

de dieu (Naamwin nacinnbe), which are all the natural spiritual powers: Kontome (genies), esprit tutelaire du sol vilageois (Ti-gan), esprit de l'ensemble de puissances celestes (Saa), esprit de la nature sauvage (Wie), esprits des ancestres defunts (Kpime), etc." Deri's point is that the Dagara never offer sacrifices to God directly, even though God's name is invoked at every sacrifice. Although Deri admits that God is supreme in the Dagara's cult, he disapproves of the notion of offering sacrifices directly to God. I personally researched sacrifice among the same people, but I never saw any temples dedicated to God or sacrifices made directly to him.

Their conception of God is one of the reasons why many African traditional believers rarely offer direct sacrifices to God. Because God created the world and all in it, many traditional believers believe that God is good, kind, and loving. He is an enigma that nobody can understand, not even the soothsayer. Therefore, no one is able to keep him in a shrine. Nobody knows what he needs or desires so that he can give them to him in sacrifice, and no one knows how he looks so that he can create an image of him. Nonetheless, Africans are acutely aware of this Supreme Being's existence. He is aware that he is the creator of man and that God made the other gods to serve as his emissaries and to protect Man and all other creatures. The freedom to punish evildoers and reward good deeds is granted to these deities. The only option left to him is to seek these gods' friendship for his own gain. This idea is what forces the direct worship of God out of the African traditional believer's cultic life and causes the other deities' worship to protrude so noticeably.

Materials That Are Offered in African Traditional Sacrifices before Moving Forward

"Any kind of food, drinks, animals, and objects may be used in sacrifice," notes K. Sarpong (1999: 9), who views sacrifices as the offering of any gift to a god. He quickly adds, however, that "what is actually offered depends upon the taste of the god or the occasion." (1999: 9) J. According to O. Awolalu, sacrifice is "an offering of animal or vegetable, of blood, drink, or of any object(s) to a deity or spiritual being" (Awolalu 1979: 134), which is why he concurs with Sarpong. According to this, anything can be used as a sacrifice material. According to John S. Mbiti (1969), this is not the case. "The inclusion of an animal victim is the primary material that sets sacrifice apart from other ritual offerings," he argues.

Dominique Zahan (1970) defined sacrifice in Africa as the pouring blood of an animal that has been killed. For him, domestic animals are nearly invariably the ones selected as victims of religious rituals. Man seems to be attempting to give the invisible powers a piece of himself through these sacrifices. According to Zahan, the chicken holds a prominent position in African liturgies. Because it is utilized by both sedentary and nomadic peoples, farmers and pastoralists, and in both savannah and forest environments, he noted that the chicken is a universal sacrificial animal. This, he observes, is due to the chicken's low cost, ease of raising, and symbolic body features, color, voice, laying, and demeanor. Zahan also concurs that sacrifices are typically preceded by offerings, which are meant to help people make contact with the invisible by either making them feel relaxed, quiet, and tranquil or by making them feel agitated, moved, and energetic. Offerings that are said to be calming include cold water, milk, honey, and light cereal porridges. All fermented beverages, meats, beers, and palm wine make up the "erethistic offerings" that are utilized in sacrifices. The dosage and priority to be followed for these offerings are only known by the religious expert. The materials used in sacrifice are determined by the occasion, the community in which the sacrifice is offered, and the preferences of the deity. This is what this section highlights. However, it seems that materials and domestic animals are frequently favored here.

METHODOLOGY

This section of the work handles methodological issues. The research was done within the discipline of the Phenomenological Study of Religion following Husserl's phenomenological principles of *epoche* and *eidetic intuition*. This method was used because it allowed the researcher to interact creatively with the phenomena under investigation. In addition, this method challenged the researcher to remain objective as well as "get inside" the ritual life of the Dagara. The descriptive analytical sample survey was the research design that was used. This design was employed because it is the most appropriate design for a phenomenological research method.

The descriptive analytical sample survey was the research design that was used for the research. This design was employed because it is the most appropriate design for a phenomenological research method. As a descriptive design the researcher went to the field to observe things himself and to ask the traditional believers to inform the researchers those sacrificial rites that were observed and how these rites influenced their moral lives.

Since the research population is basically illiterate and since the study is aimed at an in-depth study we have chosen to use a qualitative research design for my data collection. The tools used were interviews and participant observations. I met the people in their homes to have discussions with them about the what sacrifice is, what reconciliation is, why they offer sacrifices, what the type of sacrifices are, the relationship between sacrifice and reconciliation, the moral relevance of sacrifice and reconciliation, the link between sacrifice and reconciliation, and prevention of conflict and the building of peace, etc. The reason for the choice of this type of interview in a discussion form is that it allowed a very open interaction with the people which allowed for clarifications leading to an in-depth knowledge of the subject matter. The problem of this method was that it was difficult to arrange meetings with the people since funeral in a nearby village or a sudden rainfall was enough to cancel an arranged meeting. One other thing is that interviewee could easily digress for a long time, making time management difficult. Despite these challenges this instrument was very effective. On few occasions the researcher was allowed to participate in some sacrificial rites to observe for myself and listen to the prayers that are offered and that occasion of the sacrifice and to ask for explanation of what we observed during the rite. Though these occasions were very rare they enabled me to see things for myself which helped my understanding of the information gathered.

The primary contact persons were the elders of clans, custodians and priests of Earth Shrines, soothsayers, medicine men and women. These are the religious leaders of the Dagara tradition community. In addition to these (often time, informally), a cross section of the community including men, women and the youth were interviewed. It was very revealing how these categories of people knew about the subject matter of the research. Their contributions were very relevant to the research.

The study also considered related works of some scholars on the topic in other African communities. Authors such as Arinze (1970), Awolalu (1979), Zahan (1970), Kuukure (1985), and Bekye (1991) are of particular relevance to this study. But the paper draws particularly much more heavily from a research that I made on *The Place of Sacrifice in the Moral Life of the African Traditional Believer: a Case Study of the Dagara of Northern Ghana*.

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

The PLACE of Sacrifice and Reconciliation in the Life of the African Tradition Believer

This section deals with the findings from the field which I consider as my contribution to knowledge. I have noticed from this study among the Dagara that sacrifice and reconciliation go hand in hand. I have considered the moral relevance of the objects and subjects of sacrifice and I have just finished considering the purposes and types of sacrifice in the African Traditional Religious view. I now want to consider the relevance of sacrifice and reconciliation in the daily life of the African Traditional believer, as we confer what authorities have said against what our study revealed. I shall consider how sacrifice influences the spiritual, psychological, moral, social, material, and eschatological domains of the believers' life.

Seeing sacrifice as a religious act, which through the consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it. (Herbert and Mauss 1968: 13). Herbert, and Mauss underline the spiritual element of sacrifice. Sacrifice is thus meant to change the spiritual condition of the supplicant. Through sacrifice, the person acquires a religious and spiritual character which he did not have before, or has rid himself of an unfavorable character with which he was affected. He also raises himself to a state of grace or emerges from a state of sin. In either case, he has been spiritually transformed. Sacrifice and reconciliation bring the African Traditional believer closer to the divinities and makes it possible for him to approach the divine and dare speak to his object of worship at a relatively close range, offer him gifts and even share a meal with the deity though the latter is invisibly present. Sacrifice is a means of cleansing, perfecting and renewing people spiritually, especially when sin defiles the religious person.

Psychologically, sacrifice gives moral strength to the believer who offers it. For one thing, the worshipper naturally feels comforted and consoled when he has done his part and it is accepted by the divine. He gets the renewal of courage. He faces life with renewed confidence and enthusiasm and with lessened pessimism. The culprit who has had an expiatory or propitiatory sacrifice offered to remove his abomination, feels forgiven, cleansed and once more set free to live according to the laws of the land and the invisible powers. (Arinze 19670:106) As part of the things we noticed, The Dagara traditional believer who observes the sacrificial chicken jump into the air and lands on its back "with its back to Tengan and its stomach to Naamwin" cannot hide his joy or sigh of relief, depending on the reason for the sacrifice. He feels accepted by the divine and with this he goes to live with optimism knowing that he is in the favour of the divine world. He can now go about his daily chores without any fears or worries.

As regards the moral significance of sacrifice in the life of the traditional believer, it can be said that moral uprightness is a precondition for the acceptance of sacrifice among almost all African Tradition Religious communities. Among the Dagara, for instance, the study discovered that the person who approaches a divinity with a sacrifice must first of all acknowledge his immoral state, ask for forgiveness before he can present his gift. That is why there is always a penitential rite at the beginning of each Dagara sacrifice. Even before approaching the divinity, the human actors in the sacrifice are always required to be in the right moral state and disposition to be able to approach the divine actors, hence feuding factions have no option but to reconcile before approaching these divine actors. This, the researchers found is especially true of the priest who mediates between the people and the deity.

In many thanksgiving sacrifices, especially the annual community sacrifices like the one offered to Tengan and the Ancestors, people are informed ahead of time to enable them purify themselves

and keep themselves at a morally sound level before the community can approach Tengan or the Ancestors. If this is not done the community and its offerings would be rejected. This is indicative of the fact that the objects of sacrifice of African traditional religion call on their adherents to remain morally good before, during and after the offering of sacrifices. Short of this the deity would visibly manifest its anger by rejecting the sacrifice.

As expiatory and propitiatory sacrifices rid a person of a moral guilt, they also serve as a reminder for them to watch out so that they do not fall foul of the rules and regulations of the divinities again. As Nelson-Adjakpey (Nelson-Adjakpey 1982: 129) observes, the rites of sacrifice and reconciliation are not “merely the fulfillment of religious observance, but are also acts that strive after good and eliminate the bad and thus perfect man himself” Sacrifice and penance, according to Nelson-Adjakpey, have morality as their main objective. Since they remind people of their intimacy with the divine and serve as a means of reconciliation between a person and the divine, the study found that sacrifice and penance remind people of the need to live a morally good life in order to sustain man’s relationship with the divine to his own benefit. Furthermore, the study found that frequent sacrifices, enhance the moral as well as the spiritual growth in the Dagara African Tradition believer. As all the definitions of sacrifice indicate that the main aim of sacrifice is to foster a good relationship between the divine and human beings, one can say that sacrifice makes the human beings move towards the moral state of the divine beings.

As Arinze (1970:106-107), observed among the Ibos, in many sacrifices, especially the community sacrifices, the spirits are asked to remove evil, antisocial and divisive men. Most prayers conclude with a petition for harmony and mutual love in the community: “Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch; whichever says the other will not perch let its wings break off.” This means that trouble makers are not acceptable by the spirits. Also, through the pain of propitiatory sacrifices people are afraid to live carelessly. People are always afraid that this or that will happen if they do this or that or if they do not do this or that. In this way the African Tradition believer, is influenced in his moral life by his sacrifices hence he/she tries as much as possible to keep the peace with his/her neighbour.

At the social level sacrifice is a source of unity and solidarity in the African society. At family sacrifices, members gather around their ancestors or other family divinities to present their collective needs and to renew family ties. They share the sacrificial meal and in that way they strengthen their oneness and bond. Sacrifice at the Tengan shrine, among the Dagara is a **source of peace and unity** in the village. It is from the Tengan cult that the village emerges as a socio-politico-religious unit, distinct from other villages, with demarcating boundaries. Sacrifice at the Tengan shrine serves as a foundation for solidarity and unity among the different descent groups in the village. This is because at Tengan sacrifices representatives from all these groups are present to pray for the welfare of the whole village. The eating of the sacrificial meal together serves as a renewal of the covenant to live in mutual support for each other.

Sacrifice also influences the material and economic welfare of the traditional believer in many ways. The African cannot tell any success story without necessarily referring to the ancestors or a divinity that has helped him. The many thanksgiving sacrifices in the life of the traditional believer attest to this belief. People offer sacrifice to petition the divinities to assist them in their farming, trade, studies and many other ventures. These sacrifices give them strength and courage to forge ahead and to work hard in these ventures with the assurance that the divinities are with them. To better showcase how the Dagara are able to use sacrifice as a means of conflict prevention

and reconciliation, it will be appropriate to look at types of sacrifices as we the researches gathered from the field.

The Types and Ends of Sacrifice

The African Traditional believer recognizes that he/she is not master of the world. He/she believes that there are superior powers, invisible spirits, the ancestors and human spirits of wicked deceased people (Arinze 1969). He is aware that an invisible universe is in action all around him and that his term of life is short if he happened to fall foul of its expectation. He/she felt that it was up to him, therefore, to propitiate them and treat them with courtesy and deference. That was the fundamental reason why he had such a penchant for sacrifice in all its forms. For the African traditional believer, behind the offering of sacrifice, there is usually a definite purpose. There is no aimlessness in making an offering and no one ever makes a sacrifice without having an intention or a goal in view. This goal in view always determines the type of sacrifice to be offered. The same thing was observed among the Dagara where this research was conducted.

Among the Ibo of Nigeria, Arinze (1969), identified four ends or purposes of sacrifice: Expiation, warding of molestation from unknown evil spirits, petition, and thanksgiving. J.O. Awolalu (1979), on his part identified eight reasons of sacrifice among the Yorubas. Sacrifice for him, is a means of; expressing gratitude to the spiritual beings, fulfilling a vow; establishing communion between man and the spiritual beings; averting the anger of the divinities and spirits; warding off the attack and evil machinations of enemies; purifying a person or a community when a taboo has been broken or sin committed; preventing or expelling epidemics; strengthening the worshippers against malign influences. Six types of sacrifice help achieve these goals: thanksgiving and communion sacrifice, votive sacrifice, propitiatory sacrifice, preventive sacrifice, substitutionary sacrifice and foundation sacrifice.

Similar purposes and types of sacrifice are also identified among the Dagara. The Dagara of Northern Ghana, like the Ibo of Nigeria, have two broad categories of sacrifice: “those which are festive, partaken of first by the supernatural beings and then by the community of worshippers and those which are intended to avert calamity and atone for offences which provoke such sacrifices” (Arinze 1969:31). While the first category of sacrifice is offered voluntarily amidst joy and jubilation, the second category is joyless and is offered amidst fear and tension.

Under the first category are thanksgiving and votive sacrifices; the second category cover all those sacrifices which are offered to expiate guilt, propitiate and pacify the deities for sin and all substitutionary sacrifices. For convenience sake we shall discuss one type of sacrifice in each category. In the first category we shall look at Thanksgiving sacrifice while in the second we shall consider propitiatory/expiatory sacrifice.

Thanksgiving Sacrifice

It was observed that thanksgiving sacrifice among the Dagara, serves as a means of expressing gratitude to, and of holding communion with, the divinities. The sacrifice of thanksgiving is almost always accompanied by feasting; the worshippers and the divinity (though the latter is invisible) share a common meal. When the African traditional believer has obtained his heart's request, he often makes a sacrifice of thanksgiving, which is almost always mixed up with hopes for future protection. When they receive their heart's desires, they know that the blessings have come from the supernatural beings. As J.O. Awolalu (1979) observed among the Yorubas:

When there is a bumper harvest, when hunting or fishing expedition is successful, when victory is won over enemies, when there is an escape from an accident, when a new child is born, all these instances necessitate the bringing of offerings to express gratitude to the divinities. As they praise their benefactors, so also do they praise and thank the benevolent divinities whom they believe to be the determiners of their good fortune.

The main benevolent recipients of Thanksgiving sacrifice among most African tradition religious communities are the Ancestors and the Earth-Spirit. In many traditional communities the Earth-Spirit whom the Ibo of Nigeria refer to as Ani; the Akan of Southern Ghana call her Saase Yaa (Mother Earth), and the Dagara of Northern Ghana call her Tengan (Protector of the land) is the major recipient of thanksgiving sacrifices in many African traditional communities.

Thanksgiving sacrifices can be offered at different levels though: a person can offer personal thanks to a deity for special favours received from it; a family can offer thanks to their ancestors for protection and a whole village community can offer thanks to their village deity for protection and other favours received during the year. It was observed that at the village level, the Dagara offered annual thanksgiving sacrifices to Tengan, the Ancestors and other significant local deities. This annual sacrifice to Tengan is referred to as Tengan_daa, offered in celebration for good harvest, material prosperity and peace and harmony in the community. At such sacrifices the whole village community came out to celebrate the joyful event of good harvest and protection from Tengan. Below is how the thanksgiving sacrifice leads to peace and reconciliation.

Before this Tengan sacrifice, there is a period of preparation. The Tengan-sob, the priest of Tengan, calls a meeting of all the clan heads of the village and together they fix a day for the sacrifice. Each elder is then mandated to inform their clan members to prepare themselves for the community celebration. People have to patch up their differences and reconcile with each other; thieves have to denounce their acts and confess their behaviour, and couples have to confess all infidelities and the necessary purificatory rites performed before the day of *Tengan_daa*. This preparation is necessary because Tengan would not accept any thanksgivings from any divided or immoral sacrificing community. Secondly, this sacrifice is meant to be a joyful occasion for everybody in the village and thus the reconciliations in the community. The belief is that during such occasions Tengan, the Ancestors of the various clans in the village and the other significant deities of the land pay a special visit to the village to bless the people and share a common meal with them as a renewal of their actual living together. As part of the preparation, every family brewed some pito (a local beer), grinds some flour and procures a fowl for the occasion. Each family elder also procures a fowl. The Tengan-sob provides a cow and the sacrificial chicken for the sacrifice. The shrine of Tengan and its surroundings is cleaned and made ready.

On the day of the sacrifice, the Tengan-sob and the clan elders are first to arrive at the Tengan shrine. A big locally woven basket is placed at the grounds. Each family brings a calabash of flour and pours it into the basket and present the hen to the Tengan-sob. The family also presents a pot of pito for the sacrifice. When all had gathered and the basket is filled with flour, the *Tengan_sob* and the elders fetch a calabash-full of the flour and with a calabash of cool water, a pot of unfermented pito (a local beer) and a calabash of ashes, they moved to the altar of Tengan. They took along the sacrificial chicken in a cage called *kasog*. The cow is, however not brought to the altar. With these materials they move into the groove where Tengan_altar is located, while the rest of the people remain outside in absolute silence.

Arriving at the shrine, all squat around the deity at some distance. Then the Tengan-sob stepped forward, closer to the *Tengan-kuur* (the altar of Tengan) there is absolute silence. The silence is broken by the Tengan-sob who then cleared his throat. He calls for the ashes; fetch some with his right hand and throws it towards the deity three times with these words:

After this he takes the water and looks upwards and say:

Saazu ngmen ti buoli fo na	God above we call on you
Fo n air sazu nit eng a ti buoli fo na	Creator of up and earth we call on you

Then he pours some water on *Tengan* saying:

Foo <i>Tengan</i> , de kuo	You Tengan take water
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He pours some again and again as he called on the ancestors, the hills, the rivers and other deities. Calling on them to receive water and listen to their message.

After he had invited Tengan and the ancestors to listen, he picks the sacrificial knife (*bagr suo*), knocks it on the deity three times and said:

N mhag ni a suo	I have picked the knife
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He takes the water, looked upward and pours some on the altar of Tengan while invoking the name of God. In the same way he invokes the names of all significant deities of the land ending with that of Tengan.

He then states the intention of the sacrifice in words like these:

Foo Tengan	You Tengan
Ti dang na wa a kan	We ever came here
Wa zeli fu	And begged you
A fu be sib tie	You did not refuse our plea
Ti zeli ni saa mharu	We asked for rain
A fo ko ti	And you gave it to us
Ti zeli dogfo	We asked for child birth
A to ko ti bibiir	And you gave us children

Ti zeli ni kukur	We asked for the hoe (harvest)
A fo koti a gur	You gave us more than we needed
Fo gu ti a ter a wie puo	You have protected us in the farm
Go faa be kyor nir e	No bad thorn pricked any one
Muo be guo nir e	No snake bid any one
Ti de ni a bome kpe dio	We have brought the harvest in
E be fo na tu do tia be na fo mi le tu sig	But where you climb the tree There you pass down the tree
Ti wan a e ti wa puori fo	We have come to thank you
E nu zagla sob na be kyogre baa a	And since they don't call a dog with empty hands
Ti wan ni a kukur bome	We have brought you the farm produce
Yang nuur ni dung sebla	Including fowls and a black animal (that is a cow)
Nab be puore baa i	The cow does not greet/thank the river
E kye ti wan a e ti wa bulbul	But we have come to mumble
Lieb kaa ti e gu a teng	Turn and see us and watch over the land
Nir wa ter yel waari a teng a	If any one brings evil to the land
Foo tuoru ber	You meet him on the way
Baal faa wa waar a	If an epidemic is coming
Ve ti won tobr	Let us hear with the ear But never see with our eye
E ta nye ni minmire	
De a baghr nga a ti ku a Naangmen a sazu	
Niim nyeru na e tiim be nyiire o e	Take this thanksgiving and give it to God above You see him but we don't.

At the end of the long prayer, the priest concludes:

Foo wa sag de ti a	If you have accepted us
Foo ve a lile o wul	You let the chicken show

He calls for the sacrificial chicken, caressed it three times and then brings its head back to meet the wings exposing the throat. He makes two attempts to cut the throat but stops. At the third attempt he slaughters the bird, holds it over the deity for the blood to drop on it. He then removes

the feathers from the tail and the neck of the chicken and sticks them on the fresh blood. The chicken is held over the deity till it starts to struggle. It is then thrown to the ground. All eyes turn to it in silence except the priest who keeps talking to Tengan:

Ti kaare na	We are watching
Fo bune na be?	Are you hesitating?
Ve I kyaa ti bang	Let it be clear for us to see

If Tengan has accepted the people and their offerings then the chicken jumps up all of a sudden and falls on its back with its back to Tengan and its stomach to Naamwin (God), amidst cheerful laughter. The people outside, hearing this, know that the sacrifice is accepted. They begin to talk and laugh in low tones.

The priest then puts some of the four on the deity and said:

“Take the flour from the farm produce” He does same with the pito. The cow is slaughtered outside and some of its blood poured on Tengan together with the tips of the tail and the ears. The other hens are also slaughtered once the sacrificial chicken is accepted.

The flour is used in preparing a meal (kpereme) for everybody. The meat of the victims is cooked there for all. Nothing is taken home. The pito is taken by all amidst joy and jubilation. Any passerby is invited to join in the celebration.

Everybody goes home very happy with himself, his neighbour and the deities of the land. The acceptance of this sacrifice by Tengan is a sign and an assurance of his protection throughout the year. Were the sacrifice not accepted, there would have been a cloud deep sorrow and sadness over the village. The Tengan-sob and the elders of the village would have to consult a number of soothsayers in order to locate the reason for the rejection by Tengan

It is obvious in this section that thanksgiving sacrifices facilitate good relationships in the community, relationship between man and his divinity and relationship between man and his fellow man. It is a moment for reconciliation between the various levels of human relationships. Here, the actual coming together emphasizes the common interests of the community: fertility of land, the sense of unity of purpose, peace, harmony and prosperity of all in the community. It is also an occasion for self-purification and moral renewal.

Propitiatory/Expiatory Sacrifice

“Man, in his entire attempt to live a righteous life, continues to meet situations and circumstances in which he finds it difficult not to defile, be insolent to, or show ingratitude to the holy. In such circumstances man must offer a sacrifice of appeasement in order to ‘undo’ what he has done against the holy. This enables him to win back the favour of the holy.” (Nelson-Adjakpey 1982:144). If this sacrifice is not offered, the anger of the divinities will manifest itself in calamities and disastrous events.

The researcher observed that among the Dagara, just as in the case of other African societies, failure of crops, famine, outbreak of plagues, and diseases, protracted illness and sudden death or similar calamities are attributed to the anger of the gods, the machinations of evil spirits or to some

ritual error or defilement committed by men. Efforts are made to locate the causes of the trouble and to remove them, calm the wrath of the divinities or spirits and win back their favour. The chief means employed by the African traditional believer is propitiatory and expiatory sacrifices – a sacrifice that is believed to be capable of propitiating the anger of the gods and spirits and of purifying individuals and communities, expiating their guilt and reconciling them with the offended divinities.

The origin and theology of propitiatory sacrifice emanate from the African believe that their objects of worship, though of a supreme nature than theirs, have similar temperaments as theirs: they can be happy or angry; they can be joyful or sad; they can be merciful or wicked; they can be generous or stingy; they can be caring or wicked or indifferent. The sure way of making them happy and positive is by obeying the norms and rules laid down by them and by observing the taboos of the land. On the other hand, violation of the norms and disregard for the taboos of the land would attract the anger and negative reaction of the divinities. Coupled with this is the belief that man can do nothing without the assistance of these divinities. The morally good person is sure of their support and the morally bad person is assured of their wrath or at best their neglect. Around this highly temperamental nature of the African deities is a positive aspect of kindness and mercy towards the person who accepts his guilt and approaches them for forgiveness.

The researcher gathered that the Dagara are especially careful not to offend Tengan (The Earth-Spirit) or the ancestors who are regarded as the special guardians of morality in the Dagara society and as such most of their propitiatory sacrifices are directed towards them. Tengan, as the protector of life and source of peace and harmony in the village, detests any act that threatens human life and peaceful coexistence among the various clans and families in the village. Thus, most of Tengan's laws and taboos are aimed at protecting human life and promoting peace and harmony in the village. Thus, feuds, which can lead to bloodshed, murder, suicide, especially that by hanging, willfully induced abortion, possession of poison for the purpose of killing others, etc. are Tengan taboos meant for protecting life. Tengan also forbids the sale of human beings as this can lead to the depletion of the village. Taboos that enhance human relationships are those against stealing, tale bearing, gossip, and above all, adultery. In fact, it is a grave offence against Tengan if one fails to respect sex. Sex with somebody's spouse, sex outside a residential home, sex in the field or bush, and sex on a bare floor can attract the anger of Tengan. Bestiality is especially abominable. Sex is sacred for the reason that it is through it the people come into the world. It must, therefore be used properly.

In the event that any of these taboos of Tengan is violated, the land is defiled. "In any of these cases, a cleansing sacrifice is necessary. There is no question of hiding such crimes or trying to omit the sacrifice. The Dagara believe firmly that if such abominations are not atoned for, be they ever so secretly committed, the penalty is sure to descend on the culprit's head or on his relations' and descendants'. To hide one's crime or to refuse to sacrifice is to lead a dangerous life, to walk a tight rope, to play with fire." Once, however, the necessary sacrifices are offered, the wrongdoer is regarded as cleansed and reconciled with Tengan and the society.

Take for instance an event of feud between two clans in the village leading to armed conflict. As P.K. Bekye (1991:124) observed, "It was not uncommon for two families or two clans to rise against each other in conflict." In many of the cases today as it was in the past land disputes are causes of conflict and could lead to armed confrontation leading to bloodshed. In such a case the Tengan sob would have to take steps to stop the conflict and to offer the necessary sacrifice to Tengan for the abominable act of shedding blood.

The Tengan sob would first of all plant the branch of an ebony tree on the land under dispute to temporarily dispossess it. With the planting of the ebony stick the land belongs to no one again but Tengan. If the conflict continued, the Tengan-sob accompanied by six men, takes a heavy lump of iron that is not cast, called zer, an anvil, a pair of tongs, an ebony branch, a calabash of water, and another full of ashes. (Bekye 1991). According to custom, a zer is never carried on the head. To have carried it in this case shows the gravity of the situation.

The curious group walks into the thick of the conflict, and the combatants, seeing this unusual group approaching stop the hostility immediately. The one carrying the ashes throws some of it at each pace in the direction of each party of the conflict. Once in the midst of the combatants the Tengan sob throws the zer on the ground together with the thongs and the anvil. The water is then poured over them. The ebony branch is planted in the ground, signifying that Tengan_has taken everybody prisoner. In some cases the Tengan sob walks home quietly or in very serious cases he utters some harsh words of reprimand against the two parties and returns home.

At this moment, all arrows returned to their quivers. The two parts were expected to come to terms now. While the fighters remain there, the leaders followed the Tengan_sob home for a discussion and solution to the conflict. No one has the right to go home. They are all prisoners of Tengan and have to stay there until an agreement is reached. With a solution found to the problem, the things brought by the Tengan_sob are returned to him.

There may be partial reconciliation between the two parties now but there is more the need to reconcile with Tengan. The two factions have to pay a penalty of: a cow, a sheep, a goat, seven hens and 3,000 cowries each for the expiatory and propitiatory sacrifice to Tengan. The shedding of blood on the land is a grave offence. The blood has to be “collected” (atoned for). Tengan has to be appeased and the warring factions properly reconciled to each other and with Tengan. At such a propitiatory sacrifice all the clan elders of the village are present but this time the rest of the villagers stay at home. They only hear of it. On the day of such sacrifices, sadness would descend on the whole village.

At such occasions, the prayers are brief. The penitential rite is rather prolonged a bit. Here the mood speaks for itself. All squat in silence and sadness. The Tengan sob calls on the deities of the land as in the thanksgiving sacrifice. After the introductory rite then he states the reason for the sacrifice in a very solemn tone. There is the mood of sorrow, fear, sadness and tension. He concludes in words like these:

We come before you today
Full of sorrow, shame and fear
We have offended you gravely
You know our offence
No need repeating it before you
Your sons Y and Z had wandered
But they have come back to you
They have soiled themselves
But when the child soils himself

It climbs on the adult's laps
When your foot steps on human excrete
You do not cut it off, you wash it
The tongue and the teeth live together
But they sometimes bide each other
Even the cow that has four legs
Yet it sometimes tumbles and even falls
What more weak being like us
Walking on only two feeble legs
They have realized their folly and have come for correction
They have offended you and are asking for forgiveness
The seven hens you ask for they have brought
They have also brought the cow, the sheep and the goat
The 3,000 cowries are also here
Wipe their tears and calm our fears; accept them back
Let the chicken tell us you have swallowed your anger.
Without you who can live?

(It is curious to note here that in this sacrifice God's name is not invoked). It was explained god cannot be associated with such an abominable situation shedding human blood.

He then slaughters the sacrificial chicken. The acceptance of the chicken brings a sigh of relief to the whole village. The sacrifice was concluded with the elders of the two parties eating the sacrificial meal together, a sign that they are brothers again. By this sacrifice the two clans find forgiveness from Tengan and at the same time they have reconciled with each other. The land cleansed and peace has returned to the whole community. Just as sin affects the whole community negatively so does the rite of reconciliation restore calm, repairs the broken relationships among people and return peace and harmony to society.

By the use of animal blood the sin is expiated and reconciliation is effected with the promise by the offender(s) that he would do better in the future. In other words, propitiatory sacrifice is "a rite involving the shedding of animal blood with the aim of atoning for man's sin against his object of worship and the reestablishment of the severed relationship caused by the sin"

Propitiatory sacrifice is of great importance in the life of the African traditional believer because it provides an avenue for one to confess one's sin ask for forgiveness and effect reconciliation between one and one's object of devotion. It's also a reminder to the people of their moral responsibility and obligations. Though this sacrifice is offered in fear and trembling, when it is accepted by the divinities it brings relief, calmness and the reassurance that the relationship between worshipped and worshippers is restored to normalcy. One can begin life again with hope, optimism and courage knowing that one can get the needed support and guidance from the divinities again. In sum, sacrifice has great relevance in the life of the African Tradition believer;

it modifies people spiritually and morally; it gives psychological support; it influences the material and economic life of the people and above all it serves as a means of promoting peace, unity and solidarity in the community. Sacrifice creates a forum for dialogue between man and the divine world thereby making it possible for reconciliation when sin blocks the channel of communication between the two worlds.

CONCLUSION

In this presentation, the study discovered the centrality of sacrifice in the life of the African traditional believer. There is therefore agreement with Dominique Zahan that sacrifice is the keystone of African Traditional Religion and that it “constitutes the supreme prayer, that which could not be renounced without seriously compromising the relationship between man and the invisible.” The research also brought to light how sacrifice affects all facets of the life of the African traditional believer. The study further observed the close link between sacrifice and reconciliation and the relevance of the two in the cultic life of these people. For the Dagara, who are the main concern here, there can be no true resolution of conflict without sacrifice and the ritual reconciliation of the conflicting parties.

Sacrifice and reconciliation as traditional mechanisms for conflict resolution and prevention used to work in the past and continue to work today to some extent in communities where majority of the members of the population are still traditional believers. They however “do not seem very applicable in many communities today because for religious, political and other social reasons they are not given a chance to work (Kendie (ed) 2010: 41). The Dagara who are especially dominantly Christian today and considerably Muslim appear to reject any diversity of cosmologies and worldviews. Nonetheless, it is still legitimate to ask whether the concepts of sacrifice and reconciliation articulated in this presentation can be brought into a meaningful encounter with Christianity when it comes to the maintenance of peace and harmony in society. Do the cosmic implications of Christ’s atoning death provide room for a dynamic interaction between Christianity and the traditional African concepts of sacrifice and reconciliation?

The study observed that though a lot is said about inter-religious dialogue in Africa, not much is done in the area of dialoguing with African Traditional Religion. The mistake made by many today is to think that African traditional religion is a dying religion which will soon pass away and should therefore be allowed to die in peace. But to imagine that African traditional religion will soon leave us in peace and disappear into the past is an illusion. For as long as life in traditional African societies continues to be characterized by the tension between suffering and salvation, conflict and peace, there shall always be attempts at dealing with all the negative factors that threaten society’s equilibrium. The search for holistic salvation, that is, deliverance from the influence of evil forces and the quest for the enjoyment of material prosperity, which the Dagara refer to as *Yangmhaaro*, will always be tackled through the door way of traditional sacrifice (Ekem, 2005: 87). It is from this fact that the subject matter of this study derives its value. Through the door way of sacrifice and reconciliation, we shall be in the process of entering into a meaningful dialogue with African Traditional Religion for the good of Africa.

RECOMMENDATION

Though not advocating for a return of African Christians and Muslims to return to African traditional sacrifice and reconciliation for conflict prevention and resolution, this study recommends that African traditional religious practitioners be involved and given the chance to participate and contribute to conflict prevention procedures and peace building programmes. A

complete neglect of African traditional religion renders the effort of peace building and conflict resolution in Africa incomplete and ineffective. This calls for change of attitude and consciousness that calls for a diversity of cosmologies and worldviews about which there is not necessarily convergence but respect for divergent cosmologies and worldviews.

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