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Stories of sacrifice from below: From Girard to Ekem, Kalengyo and Oduyoye

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Abstract

In the Global North, the notion of "sacrifice" is highly controversial in contemporary discussion. In recent years, the influential work of René Girard has succeeded in putting sacrifice back on the intellectual agenda, but his story of sacrifice has primarily emphasised the theme of violence. Today, many theologians consider sacrifice inherently problematic and some would like to do away with it altogether. In Africa, however, the notion is highly popular across a wide range of theological traditions. The work of three African theologians – John Ekem, a Ghanaian mother-tongue biblical scholar, Edison Kalengyo, a Ugandan inculturation theologian, and Mercy Oduyoye, a Ghanaian women's theologian – challenge Girard's theory in three important ways. First, they challenge his traditional typological approach with a dialogical typological one. Second, they challenge his focus on violence by highlighting multiple themes. Third, they challenge his lack of an ecclesial dimension with fresh ways of appropriating Jesus' sacrifice today.

Keywords

African Theology; Global North; Global South; René Girard; sacrifice

1. Introduction

In the Global North, the notion of "sacrifice" is highly controversial in contemporary discussion and contested across a wide range of academic fields, from biblical studies to philosophy, to anthropology, psychology and even evolutionary biology. In recent years, the influential work of the philosopher of culture, René Girard, has succeeded in putting sacrifice back on the intellectual agenda, but his story of sacrifice has primarily emphasised its negative aspects, especially the theme of violence. Today, theologians continue to wrestle with the implications of Girard's thought.

Is sacrifice essentially violent? And, since sacrifice is at the heart of many religious traditions, what are the implications for the core beliefs and practices of these traditions? Also, what are the ramifications for human flourishing more generally, especially since religious traditions are growing rapidly? Some theologians defend a traditional concept of sacrifice, others attempt to spiritualise it in some way and still others argue that it should be renounced entirely.[1] In Africa, however, the notion is highly popular across a wide range of theological traditions. Since the third wave of evangelisation first reached African shores in the middle of the eighteenth century, sacrifice has been a key theme in missionary and African theological discourses. Biblical scholars have wrestled with the relation between biblical and African concepts of sacrifice, liturgical theologians have focussed on the appropriation of Christ's sacrifice in the celebration of the Eucharist, and systematic theologians have reflected on the meaning of Christian sacrifice in African social contexts.[2]

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1 Bruce Chilton, who engages with Girard in his work, defends a traditional concept of sacrifice in light of Jesus' actions in the Temple and his language at the Last Supper. See Bruce Chilton, *The Temple of Jesus: His Sacrificial Program within a Cultural History of Sacrifice* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992) and Bruce Chilton, "Sacrificial Mimesis," *Religion* 27, no.3 (1997): 225–30. Robert Daly, who has been deeply influenced by Girard, argues for a spiritualised understanding of sacrifice. See Robert J. Daly, *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978) and Robert J. Daly, "Is Christianity Sacrificial or Anti-Sacrificial?" *Religion* 27, no.3 (1997): 231–43. Many liberation and feminist theologians reject the notion of sacrifice. For a liberationist critique of sacrifice, in conversation with Girard, see Hugo Assmann. ed., *René Girard com teólogos da libertação: um diálogo sobre ídolos e sacrifícios* (Petrópolis: Ed. Vozes, 1991). For an important feminist critique of sacrifice that engages with Girard, see Nancy Jay, *Through Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion and Paternity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

2 On the relation between biblical and African concepts of sacrifice, see Harry Sawyerr, "Sacrifice," in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, ed. Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), 57–82; Justin S. Ukpong, *Sacrifice, African and Biblical: A Comparative Study of Ibibio and Levitical Sacrifices* (Rome: Urbaniana University Press, 1987) and Samuel Ngewa, "The Biblical Idea of Substitution versus the Idea of Substitution in African Traditional Sacrifices: A Case Study of Hermeneutics for African Christian Theology" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1987).

On eucharistic sacrifice, see Francis A. Arinze, "Ibo Sacrifice as an Introduction to the Catechesis of Holy Mass" (PhD diss., Urbaniana University, Rome, 1960), the first part of which was later published as Sacrifice in Ibo Religion (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970); Ted Nelson-Adjakpey, "Penance and Expiatory Sacrifice among the Ghanaian-Ewe and Their Relevance to the Christian Religion" (PhD. Diss, Urbaniana

In this essay I explore how stories of sacrifice "from below" (the Global South) challenge those "at the top" (the Global North) by examining how discussions of sacrifice in contemporary African theology challenge Girard's work. Unfortunately, Girard never explicitly engaged with African theologians. His only engagement with theology from the Global South was a now famous conference with Latin American liberation theologians in Brazil in 1990.[3] In this article I take an intercultural approach, setting up an "encounter" between thinkers from different times and places for the purpose of comparison.[4] First, I discuss the notion of sacrifice, explaining why it is so controversial and developing an interpretive framework for a theological approach. Second, I examine the story of sacrifice in the work of the philosopher of culture, René Girard and suggest areas of his thought that could benefit from engagement with African theologians. Finally, I examine the stories of sacrifice in the work of John Ekem, a Ghanaian mother-tongue biblical scholar, Edison Kalengyo, a Ugandan inculturation theologian, and Mercy Oduyoye, a Ghanaian women's theologian. In addition to being from the Global South, these stories of sacrifice are also "from below" in the sense that they have been developed in the process of addressing pressing questions in African churches. As such, their lived character and ecclesial situatedness provide an important counterbalance to Girard's philosophical and abstracting discursiveness. I argue that they challenge Girard's theory in three important ways. First, they challenge his

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University, Rome, 1982) and Joseph K. Ssempungu, *Ganda Sacrifice and the Catechesis of the Eucharistic Sacrifice* (Rome: Urbaniana University Press, 1985).

On Christian sacrifice, see Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011); Olumuyiwa O. Familusi, "Voluntary or Subtle Compulsion? An Ethical Context of Giving as Sacrifice in Contemporary Christianity," in *Sacrifice in Religious Traditions: Essays in Honour of Ven. Prof. J. Omosade Awolalu*, ed. Deji Ayegboyin and Adekunle O. Dada (Ibadan: University of Ibadan, 2018), 173–188.

3 S. Mark Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 256 and Michael Kirwan, *Girard and Theology* (Ann Arbor, MI: Bloomsbury, 2009), 109.

4 Mark J. Cartledge and David A. Cheetham, (eds.), *Intercultural Theology: Approaches and Themes* (London: SCM Press, 2011), 2–3. This encounter is necessarily a metaphorical one. The "debate" or "conversation" is a classic method in theology for conceiving of the relationship between two or more thinkers that goes back to Aquinas. While it is frequently used to compare thinkers from different times, it is equally useful in an intercultural approach for comparing contemporary thinkers from different places.

traditional typological approach with a dialogical typological one. Second, they challenge his focus on violence by highlighting multiple themes. Third, they challenge his lack of an ecclesial dimension with fresh ways of appropriating Jesus' sacrifice today.

2. The notion of sacrifice

One reason that the notion of sacrifice is so controversial in northern discussions is related to the question of scale.[5] As the historian of religion, Jeffrey Carter, observes, "the process of understanding is always comprised of a series of choices over how to construct generalities out of diversity."[6] For the researcher approaching the subject of sacrifice, the singularity and variability of the empirical data is simply bewildering. The sociologist, Michael Bourdillon, indicates that there are a multitude of ideas and practices associated with it, for example, a gift to a deity, a means of controlling death, substitution, a communal meal, a means of releasing or getting rid of power.[7] Different theorists make different decisions about what themes to include and what to ignore. Large-scale approaches involve significant generalisation to account for as much diversity as possible. Small-scale approaches pay attention to the complexity of a particular case. As Carter writes, "there are different, and equally legitimate, ways to answer the question of scale. How a researcher answers this question, the choices he or she makes regarding which details (differences) can be legitimately generalized (seen as similar), lies at the root of diverging understandings."[8] Small wonder, then, that different understandings of sacrifice abound, from the grand theories of sacrifice of the modern era to more modest recent attempts.

The question of scale is closely related to the question of metanarrative. The process of understanding sacrifice also involves choices about how to deal with the dominant stories of sacrifice found in modern thought. As the

5 Jeffrey Carter, (ed.), *Understanding Religious Sacrifice: A Reader* (London: Continuum, 2003), 451.

6 Carter, *Understanding Religious Sacrifice*, 451.

7 Michael C. F. Bourdillon, "Introduction," in *Sacrifice*, ed. Michael C. F. Bourdillion and Meyer Fortes (London: Academic Press, 1980), 10–23.

8 Carter, *Understanding Religious Sacrifice*, 451–452.

Anglican theologian, John Sykes, observes, the notion of sacrifice has long been central in Christian theology.[9] The New Testament interpretations of Christ's saving work as a sacrifice were taken up by the church fathers. Athanasius and Augustine played a key role in the development of the traditional Christian account of sacrifice, which was primarily a typological or figural one. The sacrifice of Christ was understood as ending and fulfilling all sacrifice. In Erich Auerbach's classic definition, figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves or fulfils the first. The two poles of a figure are separated in time, but both, being real events or persons, are within temporality. They are both contained in the flowing stream, which is historical life, and only the comprehension, the *intellectus spiritualis*, of their interdependence is a spiritual act.[10]

During the European Reformations, both Protestant and Catholic reformers took a traditional typological approach to sacrifice, but they treated the concept of sacrifice as an immanent and fully grasped principle. For Luther, Christian sacrifice was primarily the penitential offering of the self with and in Christ; for the Council of Trent, it was the offering of Christ in the mass.[11] Both superimposed their respective concepts of sacrifice on Hebrew beliefs and practices, which limited the extent to which the latter could enrich the former.

During the modern era other approaches to sacrifice became increasingly common. Julius Wellhausen popularised the notion of spiritualisation

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9 Stephen W. Sykes, ed., *Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 3.

10 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 73. See also Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974) and Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

11 Martin Luther, "First Sunday after Epiphany," in *Luther's Epistle Sermons,* vol. 2, *Epiphany, Easter and Pentecost*, trans. John N. Lenker (Minneapolis, MN: Luther Press, 1909), 10; Council of Trent, Session 22, "Doctrine Concerning the Sacrifice of the Mass," 17 September, 1562, in *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent: Original Text with English Translation*, trans. Henry J. Schroeder (London: B. Herder Book Co., 1941), 149.

in the new "higher criticism" of the Old Testament, arguing that the centralisation of worship in Jerusalem transformed sacrifice into moral self-giving.[12] The spiritualisation approach remains influential today, but it assumes an essence of sacrifice, a spiritual and ethical kernel that can be freed from the shell of ritual practice. As the historian of Greek religion, Marcel Detienne, observes, the new science of religions that emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century also made sacrifice central, but the dominant account was an evolutionist one.[13] Over time, "lower" violent forms of sacrifice were understood as necessarily giving way to "higher" moral forms. Detienne rejects all of these metanarratives. As he concludes,

> the notion of sacrifice is indeed a category of the thought of yesterday, conceived of as arbitrarily as totemism – decried earlier by Lévi-Strauss – both because it gathers into one artificial type elements taken from here and there in the symbolic fabric of societies and because it reveals the surprising power of annexation that Christianity still subtly exercises on the thought of these historians and sociologists who were convinced they were inventing a new science.[14]

Nevertheless, the African ethnographer, Luc de Heusch argues that this conclusion may be too hasty and suggests that a minimum definition of sacrifice, such as "the immolation of a human or animal victim," enables a researcher to study a phenomenon that occurs in many different contexts.[15] As he writes, "One must listen patiently to the ideological speeches of a multitude of sacrificers, in the most diverse societies, before reaching a conclusion."[16]

The related questions of scale and narrative offer a helpful interpretive framework for a theological approach to the notion of sacrifice. As the

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12 Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1885), 81, 513.

13 Marcel Detienne, "Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice," in *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Ancient Greeks*, ed. Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989), 15.

14 Detienne, "Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice," 20.

15 Luc de Heusch, *Sacrifice in Africa: A Structuralist Approach*, trans. Linda O'Brien and Alice Morton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 15.

16 Heusch, *Sacrifice in Africa*, 23.

Anglican theologian, John Milbank, argues, "sacrifice is not a pure, intact genus."[17] A minimum definition of sacrifice, like that of de Heusch, can identify "a cultural feature nearly always present, and sufficiently distinctive to be recognizable," but "it does not at all follow that a universal feature must possess a universal identity, and then a universal meaning and explanation."[18] Put differently, sacrifice is a polythetic concept, encompassing a number of features that are often shared by species of a genus, but none of which is essential for belonging to that genus. Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance is helpful here. I am the eldest of five brothers. Although people often claim that it is easy to tell that we are all Busseys, they find it difficult to say exactly why. There is no one feature that is common to us all; rather, there are a series of overlapping similarities. If sacrifice is a polythetic concept, any theological approach to sacrifice must be sufficiently dialogical if it is to do justice to the wide variety of stories, practices and concepts of sacrifice in different cultures and come to a fuller understanding of the sacrifice of Christ. As Milbank writes, "in the face of many different cultures Christian sacrifice discovers many different modes of fulfilment, and so itself again, as possibly arrived at by an *infinity* of different narrative routes."[19]

3. René Girard

The work of René Girard reveals an interesting tension between an evolutionist and a traditional typological approach to sacrifice. First, however, a brief orientation to his work is necessary.[20] Scott Cowdell

17 John Milbank, "Stories of Sacrifice: From Wellhausen to Girard," *Theory, Culture & Society* 12, no. 4 (November 1995): 16.

18 Milbank, "Stories of Sacrifice," 16.

19 Milbank. "Stories of Sacrifice," 32. Emphasis his.

20 René Noël Théophile Girard was a French Catholic philosopher of culture who lived from 1923–2015. His intellectual journey spans over fifty years and multiple academic fields. He began his career in France as an historian. Shortly after the war he moved to the United States, where he began to teach French literature and established his reputation as a literary critic with his account of "mimetic desire" in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*. Girard then became interested in Greek tragedy and anthropology, developing the idea of the "scapegoat mechanism" in *Violence and the Sacred*. His study of anthropology prompted engagement with the Bible and psychology, leading to a more systematic account of his "mimetic theory" in *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*. Further engagement with Christian theology, as well as the fields of biblical

helpfully divides Girard's work into three parts: "early Girard", "middle Girard" and "late Girard". "Early Girard" is primarily concerned with mimetic desire and its negative effects. "Middle Girard" further unpacks this dense insight, developing his scapegoat theory of religion, society and culture and demonstrating how the scapegoat mechanism is unmasked and rendered ineffective in the Bible. "Late Girard" re-examines key aspects of mimetic theory, including his position on sacrifice.[21] Nevertheless, it seems to be "middle Girard" that most people – including African theologians – remember best.

Over the course of Girard's work there is a shift from an evolutionist approach to a more traditional typological approach to sacrifice. Middle Girard is strongly evolutionist. He hypothesises that "the development of ritual constitutes a normal evolution," and argues that "to understand ritual it is necessary to begin with the most manifestly conflictual forms rather than with the most pacific."[22] Over time, "lower" violent forms of sacrifice give way to "higher" moral forms.[23] Nevertheless, he acknowledges the value of a traditional typological approach, thanks in part to the work of Auerbach.[24] As Girard observes

> Throughout the Middle Ages, traditional interpretation taking its cue from particular passages in the Gospels and the Epistles of Paul, tried to read the Old Testament in the light of the New … The religious intuition finds a systematic justification now that it coincides with the idea suggested by the Prologue to John: that, to clarify the whole Bible in the light of the New Testament and to re-read it in a genuinely Christological light, we must recognize

studies, palaeontology, evolutionary biology, religious studies and history, led to an important reassessment of mimetic theory in *Evolution and Conversion*. For a helpful introduction to Girard's life and work, see Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, 13–19.

21 Scott Cowdell, *René Girard and the Nonviolent God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 6–8. Kirwan also sees a significant shift from *Things Hidden* to *Evolution and Conversion*. See Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, 17.

22 René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (London: Continuum, 2003), 20, 21.

23 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 239–240.

24 Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, 10.

> the Word of truth as the true knowledge of the victim, continually eluded and rejected by mankind.[25]

Late Girard maintains something of an evolutionist understanding, but firmly embraces a traditional typological approach.[26] He connects it to his first book, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* and speaks admiringly of Auerbach's work on figural interpretation. As he writes,

> remember reading and rereading [Auerbach's essay "Figura"] because of its relevance to the Christian notion of prophecy. Auerbach sees something essential about the mimetic structure of these relational configurations. It is this mechanism that provides a sense of totality within which myths can be reread in the light of Christianity.[27]

Such an approach has important implications for how Girard interprets both the Old Testament and archaic religion. From the point of view of the Gospels, "it becomes viable to say that the primitive, the archaic, is prophetic of Christ in its own imperfect way."[28]

Middle Girard's story of sacrifice begins with his notion of mimetic desire. As he writes, "Desire itself is essentially mimetic, directed toward an object desired by the model."[29] A person wants what others want because, at first, a baby learns everything from others, including to desire what they desire. Furthermore, "Two desires converging on the same object are bound to clash. Thus, mimesis coupled with desire leads automatically to conflict."[30] Augustine gives a classic example of this when discussing infancy in his *Confessions*: "I have personally watched and studied a jealous baby. He could not yet speak and, pale with jealousy and bitterness, glared at his brother sharing his mother's milk. Who is unaware of this

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25 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 274.

26 René Girard, João Cezar de Castro Rocha and Pierpaolo Antonello, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture* (London: Continuum, 2007), 168–169, 180–182, 207–211.

27 Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 181–182.

28 Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 215.

29 René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (London: Continuum, 2005), 155.

30 Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 155.

fact of experience?"[31] While babies are somewhat limited in their capacity for action, adult rivalry leads to violence. For Girard, the normal form of desire is rivalrous and violent.[32]

The notion of mimetic desire is the basis for Girard's account of the "surrogate victim mechanism" or "scapegoat mechanism". Mimetic desire inevitably leads to rivalry and a vicious cycle of vengeance, which escalates until it threatens the very existence of a community. Such a mimetic crisis can only be resolved by an act of collective violence directed against an unanimously chosen surrogate victim, which establishes peace, unity and order.[33] Girard argues that ritual sacrifice is an attempt to re-enact the scapegoat mechanism to appropriate its social benefits. A sacrificial victim is substituted for the surrogate victim to divert violence away from the community. As Girard writes, "society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a "sacrificeable" victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it most desires to protect."[34] Religion limits "mimetic violence" through the preventative or curative application of violence in ritual sacrifice.[35] Furthermore, Girard theorises that scapegoat mechanism lies at the origins of religion, society and culture. He highlights Freud's "important discovery" that "all ritual practices, all mythical implications, have their origins in an actual murder,"[36] and argues that "All religious rituals spring from the surrogate victim, and all the great institutions of mankind, both secular and religious spring from ritual."[37] Following Durkheim, he argues that society begins with religion and, "religion is simply another term for the surrogate victim, who reconciles mimetic oppositions and assigns a sacrificial goal to the mimetic impulse."[38] For Girard, sacrifice is thus both a founding and a

31 Augustine, *Confessions*, I.11.

32 See Cowdell, *René Girard*, 38–38, 41–44; Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*, 41–42; Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, 21–23.

33 Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 72–93.

34 Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 4.

35 Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 21.

36 Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 212.

37 Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 321.

38 Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 322.

preventative act of violence that establishes and maintains religious, social and cultural order.[39]

For Girard, the Bible represents a breakthrough in that it both reveals and dismantles the scapegoat mechanism. The books of the Old Testament, especially the Prophets, increasingly tend to take the side of the victim and subvert primitive religion.[40] This process of deconstruction is completed in the Gospels. Jesus's teaching and Passion fully disclose the scapegoat mechanism.[41] In his teaching, "Jesus invites all men to devote themselves to the project of getting rid of violence."[42] In his passion, Jesus acts out this teaching to the bitter end, becoming "the most perfect victim that can be imagined, the victim that, for every conceivable reason, violence has the most reasons to pick on. Yet at the same time, this victim is also the most innocent."[43] As the perfect victim Jesus reveals the true nature of violence and, in doing so, dismantles the scapegoat mechanism and proclaims the possibility of a life of non-violence. Girard, however, insists that Christ's death should not be understood as a sacrifice. As he writes, "To say that Jesus dies, not as a sacrifice, but in order that there may be no more sacrifices, is to recognize in him the Word of God: "I wish for mercy and not sacrifices"."[44] The sacrificial reading of Christ's death is introduced by the author of Hebrews. Such an interpretation misses the revelation of the scapegoat mechanism in Jesus' teaching and Passion and represents a regression to the theology of the Old Testament.[45] Although Girard observes that "Christianity opposes all sacrifices of an object to the *self-sacrifice* exemplified by Christ – a type of sacrifice that ranks as the noblest possible form of conduct," he concludes that "any procedure

39 See Cowdell, *René Girard*, 27–30; Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*, 43–44; Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, 24–27.

40 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 154.

41 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 166–167. See Cowdell, *René Girard*, 32–41; Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*, 115–124; Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, 27.

42 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 197.

43 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 208–209

44 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 210.

45 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 225, 231.

involving sacrifice, even and indeed especially when it turns against the self, is at variance with the true spirit of the gospel text."[46]

Nevertheless, late Girard reassesses his account of mimetic desire and acknowledges a positive aspect of sacrifice. In an interview with Rebecca Adams, Girard says that "mimetic desire, even when bad, is intrinsically good, in the sense that far from being merely imitative in a small sense, it's the opening out of oneself."[47] Furthermore, he suggests that "Wherever you have that desire, I would say, that really active, positive desire for the other, there is some kind of divine grace present."[48] Thus for Girard, mimetic desire can be both peaceful and rivalrous and, therefore, should not be renounced entirely. Similarly, sacrifice can be both good and bad. Girard admits to scapegoating Hebrews and the word "sacrifice".[49] The problem with his treatment of Hebrews was a conceptual one. Although the word "sacrifice" can be used in different ways, his focus was on primitive religion, so he only used the term in reference to ritual sacrifice. He blames his rejection of a positive aspect of sacrifice on the influence of psychoanalysts and philosophers who have criticized the notion of "self-sacrifice".[50] In *Evolution and Conversion*, Girard clearly distinguishes between "archaic sacrifice", directing violence against a victim, and "Christian sacrifice", "the renunciation of all egoistic claiming, even to life if needed, in order not to kill."[51] For Girard, true sacrifice is now the self-sacrificial refusal of violence.[52]

Girard's reassessment of mimetic theory, especially his understanding of sacrifice, suggests three areas in which his thought could benefit from engagement with African theologians. First, Girard's traditional typological approach needs to be taken further. He treats the concept of sacrifice as an immanent and fully grasped principle and tends to superimpose

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46 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 236. See Cowdell, *René Girard*, 34; Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, 75.

47 Rebecca Adams and René Girard, "Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard," *Religion & Literature* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 24.

48 Adams and Girard, "Violence, Difference, Sacrifice," 25.

49 Adams and Girard, "Violence, Difference, Sacrifice," 29.

50 Adams and Girard, "Violence, Difference, Sacrifice," 29.

51 Girard, Rocha and Antonello, *Evolution and Conversion*, 215.

52 See Cowdell, *René Girard*, 66–73; Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, 75–79.

it on to other sacrificial systems, which limits the extent to which other stories, practices and concepts of sacrifice can enrich his understanding. African reflection on the relation between biblical and African concepts of sacrifice could be helpful in this area. Second, and closely related, Girard's reassessment of sacrifice suggests that there are other themes that need to be explored in order to develop a polythetic concept of sacrifice. Luc de Heusch's work on sacrifice in Africa suggests that African systems of religious thought offer rich resources for reflecting on these themes in relation to Jesus' sacrifice.[53] Third, Girard's rehabilitation of sacrifice calls for further reflection on the ecclesial form of Christian sacrifice. In particular, he is curiously silent about the sacraments. While Girard tends to emphasise the need to intellectually comprehend Christ's sacrifice in order to be changed, African theological discussions of sacrifice are especially concerned with the process of appropriation. As such they are well placed to fill up this dimension that is lacking in Girard's work.

4. John Ekem

First, we turn to the work of John Ekem.[54] In his book, *New Testament Concepts of Atonement in an African Pluralistic Setting*, Ekem reflects on "the vital subject of atonement" from an explicitly African Christian perspective.[55] He begins with a working definition of atonement.[56] Rather than confining himself to one particular model, he casts his net as wide as possible, describing atonement as "an all-inclusive soteriological concept involving the entire scope of God's redemptive work in Christ from the Incarnation to Christ's present heavenly ministry, and even beyond

53 Heusch, *Sacrifice in Africa*, 192–216.

54 John David Kwamena Ekem is a Ghanaian Methodist minister and academic who was born in 1959. He is professor of New Testament and director of the Institute for Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics at Trinity Theological Seminary in Legon, Accra, and a member of the prestigious *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*.

55 John D. K. Ekem, *New Testament Concepts of Atonement in an African Pluralistic Setting* (Accra: SonLife Press, 2005), iv.

56 Following Kirwan, it is helpful to distinguish between a doctrine of atonement – an account of God's saving activity – and metaphors or images of atonement. Sacrifice is one of a number of metaphors of atonement. See Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, 57, 68–70, 79–80.

that."[57] He views it as "a holistic, multifaceted event that transcends time and space."[58] Furthermore, he observes that "a death-centred approach to atonement is "woefully inadequate for the African situation where life leads into death and death into life."[59] In his work, he not only seeks to contribute to New Testament scholarship on biblical concepts of atonement, but also to revaluate the translation of several biblical texts into Ghanaian languages. In the process he develops a programmatic hermeneutical approach for African biblical interpreters and highlights the need for contextual insights to be made available to non-academic African readers through commentaries and study notes.

Ekem develops his hermeneutical approach through discussions of the cosmic Christology in Colossians and the priestly Christology in Hebrews. He explores the relation between "Christ" and "culture", opting for what Emmanuel Martey has described as a dualist view, in which they exist in a paradoxical relationship.[60] Ekem argues that although Christ can be encountered in any human culture, "he does not necessarily superimpose himself on those cultures, but is perceived with the eye of faith and borne witness to within a people's existential circumstances."[61] Ultimately, Ekem finds a model for African biblical hermeneutics in the creative typological approach of the author of Hebrews. He argues that the author was "an innovative thinker, aware of, and in dialogue with alternative world-views within his community."[62] In particular, the author treats Old Testament characters and events as "types of Christ and temporary anticipations of the Gospel" in a context characterised by religious pluralism.[63] In addition to his hermeneutical approach, Ekem has also developed a novel exegetical method, which he terms "dialogical exegesis". In short, his method involves:

- An examination of texts from a cross-cultural hermeneutical perspective whereby the biblical and other worldviews (e.g. African)

57 Ekem, *New Testament Concepts*, 3.
58 Ekem, *New Testament Concepts*, 4.
59 Ekem, *New Testament Concepts*, 123.
60 Ekem, *New Testament Concepts*, 89.
61 Ekem, *New Testament Concepts*, 94.
62 Ekem, *New Testament Concepts*, 94.
63 Ekem, *New Testament Concepts*, 107.

are brought face to face with each other on the principle of reciprocal challenge (*intercultural/cross-cultural hermeneutics*).

- Dialogue between the translated texts and their "originals" with the view to ascertaining their points of convergence and divergence as well as their impact on the community of faith (*intertextual dialogue*).
- Bringing the insights of (1) and (2) to bear on the development of context-sensitive Study Bible Notes and Commentaries (*applied hermeneutics*).[64]

Ekem's hermeneutical approach and method are important for understanding his "dialogical typological" approach to sacrifice. In contrast to a Girard's traditional typological approach which superimposes an essentialised and generalised concept of sacrifice on other sacrificial systems, Ekem stresses the need for constructive dialogue with other stories, practices and concepts of sacrifice in a dynamic and open-ended encounter that enables a richer understanding of Christ's sacrifice.

Ekem's story of sacrifice is set within a narrative of cosmic salvation: since the Fall, humans and the entire created universe have been corrupted by sin. In order for humanity and the cosmos to be saved, reconciliation must occur. Sacrifice is one of a number of ways in which reconciliation can be achieved. Before the birth of Jesus, God revealed something of his saving activity in the history of Israel and the histories of other nations. This saving activity reached its fulfilment in the life, ministry, death, resurrection and glorification of Jesus. Now humans can do the will of their Creator through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and the continuing intercessory ministry of Jesus.[65]

Ekem's most detailed discussion of sacrifice is in his article on Romans 3:25a, in which Paul describes Jesus as a *hilastērion*. Northern debates on this verse often remain at an impasse as to whether the term *hilastērion* should be interpreted in a propitiatory or an expiatory sense.[66] Ekem

64 John D.K. Ekem, "A Dialogical Exegesis of Romans 3:25a," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 30, no. 1 (2007): 77.

65 Ekem, *New Testament Concepts*, 1–4.

66 Against propitiation, see Charles H. Dodd, "*Hilaskesthai*, Its Cognates, Derivatives, and Synonyms, in the Septuagint," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 32, no. 128 (1931): 352–360, https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/os-XXXII.128.352. For propitiation, see Leon

suggests that these options hardly exhaust the meaning of the term.[67] He presents translations of the verse into European and Ghanaian languages, examining how they render *hilastērion*. Some of the Ghanaian translations bring out interesting aspects of the term but none are quite satisfactory. Ekem then analyses the sacrificial concepts among the Abura-Mfantse of Ghana.[68] There is a general word for sacrifice, which can be understood as "an expression of gratitude for what the benevolent spirit world has done," but also as "that act of giving which expects nothing in return.[69] The sacrificial system also includes a number of concepts related to propitiation and expiation and reconciliation. Furthermore, there are popular legends about people who willingly gave themselves to be offered as sacrificial victims to save their people from a calamity.[70] Consequently, Ekem argues that a better translation of *hilastērion* would be *ahyɛnanmuadze*. This term refers to the object of replacement or substitution on behalf of the group or individual. As he writes,

> Considering the idea that God takes the initiative to "put Jesus forward" as a means of *hilastērion* through his blood, which event should be *appropriated by faith for justification to be operational in a person's life*, it seems to me that *ahyɛnanmuadze* offers the most appropriate register for the process described in Rom. 3.25a. In this sense, Jesus becomes God's means of *ahyɛnanmuadze* through his sacrificial death. Precisely, he functions as God's potent revelatory means of atonement through his vicarious, substitutionary and representative death on the cross.[71]

Thus, *hilastērion* becomes "a representative revelatory sacrifice".

Morris, "The Use of *Hilaskesthai* etc. in Biblical Greek," The Expository Times 62, no. 8 (1951): 227–233 and Roger Nicole, "C.H. Dodd and the Doctrine of Propitiation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 17, no. 2 (1955): 117–157. For a more recent assessment of the evidence, see Daniel P. Bailey, "Jesus as the Mercy Seat: The Semantics and Theology of Paul's Use of Hilasterion in Romans 3:25." (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 1999). https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.17213. The last resource is freely accessible.

67 Ekem, "A Dialogical Exegesis," 79.

68 Ekem, "A Dialogical Exegesis," 88.

69 Ekem, "A Dialogical Exegesis," 88.

70 Ekem, "A Dialogical Exegesis," 89.

71 Ekem, "A Dialogical Exegesis," 90. Emphasis mine.

Ekem's main contribution is his dialogical typological approach. This allows him to envisage much more clearly the significance of Christ's sacrifice within Christian tradition compared with Abura-Mfantse tradition. Translating *hilastērion* as "a representative revelatory sacrifice" leads to a richer understanding of Christ's sacrifice, both for Abura-Mfantse Christians and Christians around the world. Jesus' sacrifice is not merely a pacifying sacrifice, but "God's potent revelatory means of atonement."[72] Ekem's dialogical typological approach also means that he pays attention to multiple themes related to Abura-Mfantse sacrifice, including the notion of the gift, as well as propitiation, expiation and reconciliation. Finally, a key factor in Ekem's choice to translate *hilastērion* as *ahyɛnanmuadze* is his concern for the appropriation of Christ's sacrifice among Abura-Mfantse Christians. The stories of self-giving in Abura-Mfantse tradition suggest ways in which notions of sacrifice might be lived out by Abura-Mfantse Christians.

5. Edison Kalengyo

Second, we turn to the work of Edison Kalengyo.[73] Kalengyo has made the theme of sacrifice his life's work, exploring it from biblical, cultural and liturgical angles.[74] As he observes "for all Christianity has meant to Africa, the Christian understanding of sacrifice has not been clarified in societies for which sacrifice lay at the heart of their traditional religion."[75] In his Ugandan context this is a pressing need because of its implications

72 Ekem, "A Dialogical Exegesis," 90.

73 Edison Muhindo Kalengyo is a Ugandan Anglican priest who was born in 1959. He is an Associate Professor of New Testament at Uganda Christian University in Mukono. He has also served as the director of theology and interfaith relations at the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC).

74 Edison Kalengyo, "The Sacrifice of Christ and Ganda Sacrifice: A Contextual Interpretation in Relation to the Eucharist," in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 302–318. Edison Kalengyo, *Sacrifice in Hebrews and the Pauline Epistles* (Nairobi: Acton, 2015). Edison Kalengyo, *Celebrating the Lord's Supper: Ending the Eucharistic Famine* (Carlisle: HippoBooks, 2018). Edison Kalengyo, "The Understanding and Practice of Sacrifice among the Ganda," in *Sacrifice in Religious Traditions: Essays in Honour of Ven. Prof. J. Omosade Awolalu*, ed. Deji Ayegboyin and Adekunle O. Dada (Ibadan: University of Ibadan, 2018), 315–351.

75 Kalengyo, "The Sacrifice of Christ," 302.

for Christian identity and practice, especially as traditional ritual sacrifices remain common. As he writes,

> The elaborate sacrificial system of the Ganda has, by and large, remained intact to date (albeit some of the sacrificial rituals being performed in great secrecy). There is even a reported increase in the once abandoned ritual of human sacrifice. This is in spite of clearly defined and stated Church dogma backed by extensive preaching of the gospel of Christ and relentless condemnation of the traditional practice of sacrifice from the pulpits every Sunday.[76]

Kalengyo seeks to address this pressing need by demonstrating how Jesus' sacrifice can be appropriated in the Ugandan context through the contextual celebration of the Eucharist.[77]

Kalengyo combines an inculturation approach, drawing on the work of Brian Hearne, with a tripolar interpretive process, drawing on the work of Christina Grenholm, Daniel Patte, and Jonathan Draper.[78] Following Hearne, Jesus is a "completely "inculturated" human being, a Jew, a Galilean, brought up in the religious and cultural traditions of his people."[79] At the same time "Jesus the Jew is now the universal man, the "transcultural person," the one who is the everlasting home for all peoples of all cultures."[80] For Kalengyo, this means that the risen Lord "is able to effectively communicate with people of all nations and effect the eternal salvation for which he came in the first place."[81] Kalengyo is very aware of the dangers of syncretism and emphasizes the need for contextual interpretations to be grounded in Scripture. As he writes, "All contextual inculturation studies and practices of the sacrificial death of Christ must have as their foundation a clear understanding of the sacrifice of Christ

76 Kalengyo, "The Sacrifice of Christ," 303.

77 Kalengyo, "The Sacrifice of Christ," 303.

78 Kalengyo, "The Sacrifice of Christ," 303n3, 312–313.

79 Brian Hearne, "Christology and Inculturation," *African Ecclesial Review* 22 (1980): 338, quoted in Kalengyo, "The Sacrifice of Christ," 312.

80 Hearne, "Christology and Inculturation," 339, quoted in Kalengyo, "The Sacrifice of Christ," 313.

81 Kalengyo, "The Sacrifice of Christ," 313.

in the New Testament."[82] First he examines the biblical text, arguing that sacrifice is a key concept in the Pauline Epistles and the Epistle to the Hebrews for explaining the death of Jesus and its benefits for believers.[83] Then he analyses the context, examining Ganda culture, especially the sacrificial system. He deliberately avoids espousing one theory of sacrifice as Ganda sacrifices are often "multifunctional": "What was a gift was at the same time a thanksgiving sacrifice that ended in a communal meal that enhanced communication, friendship and communion with the deity."[84] Finally he addresses the question of appropriation. Jesus' words at the Last Supper draw heavily on the language of sacrifice, suggesting that the Lord's Supper is the key to appropriating the sacrifice of Christ.[85]

Kalengyo's story of sacrifice is set within a narrative of incarnation and the concept of culture plays a significant role: since the Fall, human nature and culture has been tainted by sin. In order for humans to be saved and culture transformed, sin must be dealt with through sacrifice. Before the incarnation, God was at work in Jewish culture and other cultures to create an understanding of who he is and what salvation is. This process reached its fulfilment in Jesus, especially at the Cross. Now the process of incarnation continues, especially through the inculturation of the Eucharist.[86]

For Kalengyo, the Lord's Supper is the interface between Jesus' sacrifice and Ganda sacrifice. Historically Anglican missionaries in Uganda avoided the use of sacrificial language in the liturgy, but this needs to be reassessed in light of the Scriptures.[87] The sacrificial language used at the Last Supper suggest that Christ's sacrifice should be understood in terms of gift, atonement, substitution, covenant and communion.[88] Kalengyo, therefore, argues that language from the Ganda sacrificial system should be used to convey the meaning of Jesus' sacrifice as clearly as possible in

82 Kalengyo, *Sacrifice in Hebrews*, 232.

83 Kalengyo, *Sacrifice in Hebrews*, 1.

84 Kalengyo, "The Understanding and Practice of Sacrifice," 348.

85 Kalengyo, *Celebrating the Lord's Supper*, 47–99.

86 Kalengyo, "The Sacrifice of Christ," 312–13; Kalengyo, *Celebrating the Lord's Supper*, 31–33, 38–39, 44.

87 Kalengyo, *Celebrating the Lord's Supper*, 47–52.

88 Kalengyo, *Celebrating the Lord's Supper*, 52–56.

the eucharistic celebration. He observes that *ekitambiro*, the general word for sacrifice, is multivocal and is associated with well-being, protection and healing. Given this, he suggests that the Lord's Supper should be called *Ekitambiro eky'Okwebaza*, "a sacrifice of thanksgiving".[89] He also suggests that *ekyonziira*, the word for a traditional scapegoat sacrifice, should be used to convey the atoning aspect of Jesus' sacrifice.[90] Furthermore, Kalengyo notes that there is also a word for non-ritual sacrifices that can be used to translate the concept of living sacrifice in Romans 12:1, but he does not explore this further.[91]

Envisaging the significance of Jesus' sacrifice in relation to Ganda sacrifice has important implications for celebrating the Lord's Supper. First, Kalengyo argues that locally available food and drink, such as banana bread and banana beer or wine,[92] should be presented by members of the congregation to show that "they are not merely called to participate in Christ's sacrifice, but also to continue it by offering the fruits of their labour to God."[93] Second, believing ancestors should be acknowledged during the prayers offered at the eucharistic celebration.[94] Third, Kalengyo suggests that the daily concerns of the people, such as well-being, protection and healing should be sought in the blood of Jesus and one of the ways of doing this is by invoking the blood of Jesus in prayer.[95] Finally, just as sacrificial meals in Ganda culture included every clan member, the Lord's Supper should include the members of God's extended family from other denominations.[96]

Like Ekem, Kalengyo gives a dialogical typological account of sacrifice. In line with inculturation theology, he understands the sacrifice of Christ as ending and fulfilling Ganda sacrifice. Furthermore, he emphasizes multiple aspects of sacrifice, including the gift, the communal meal, and the strong

89 Kalengyo, *Celebrating the Lord's Supper*, 60.
90 Kalengyo, *Celebrating the Lord's Supper,* 60–61.
91 Kalengyo, *Celebrating the Lord's Supper*, 54.
92 Kalengyo, *Celebrating the Lord's Supper*, 66–73.
93 Kalengyo, *Celebrating the Lord's Supper*, 65.
94 Kalengyo, *Celebrating the Lord's Supper*, 75–81.
95 Kalengyo, *Celebrating the Lord's Supper*, 83–89.
96 Kalengyo, *Celebrating the Lord's Supper*, 91–99.

association in Ganda culture between sacrifice and life, especially well-being, protection and healing. Finally, Kalengyo's main contribution is in the area of appropriation. Understanding Christ's sacrifice in terms of Ganda sacrifice suggests important ways in which Ganda Christians can celebrate the Lord's Supper in a more biblical and contextual way.

6. Mercy Oduyoye

Third, we turn to the work of Mercy Oduyoye.[97] In one of her earliest papers, presented at the first Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) conference in Accra, Oduyoye highlights the theme of communal sacrifice. As she pointedly observes,

> African women have a traditional belief in the benefit of sacrifice for the community. Sacrifice, taken seriously, can lead to social reforms and to lifestyles that are less wasteful and more mindful of humanity's stewardship of life and ultimate dependence on the Source-Being. But I have difficulty in understanding why it is the prerogative of only one sex to sacrifice for the well-being of the community.[98]

In the same paper she connects this notion of sacrifice with the doctrine of atonement. As she writes,

> In both African religion and Christianity, when life is sacrificed, when it is given back to God, it is made sacred and harmony is restored. This belief is embodied in the Christian doctrine of atonement. A fresh statement of this belief, which makes use of

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97 Mercy Amba Ewudizwa Oduyoye is a Ghanaian Methodist theologian who was born in 1934 and is affectionately known as the grandmother of African Women's Theologies. She has been active in the World Council of Churches since 1966, serving as deputy general secretary from 1987 to 1994, and the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) since 1977, serving as the president from 1996 to 2001. In 1989 she cofounded the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians to give African women a voice in theological discussion. She is currently the director of the Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture at Trinity Theological Seminary in Legon, Accra, Ghana.

98 Mercy A. Oduyoye, "The Value of African Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology," in *African Theology En Route: Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17–23, 1977, Accra, Ghana*, ed. Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 112.

> African ideas of sacrifice and covenants, will enable African religion to make another contribution to the religious development of humankind.[99]

Sacrifice has been a recurring theme in her work ever since. Given that many feminist theologians in the Global North reject the notion of sacrifice, it is noteworthy that Oduyoye offers a carefully nuanced defence of the concept.[100]

Oduyoye's work is a response to both inculturation theology and liberation theology and draws on aspects of both in her attempt to give African women a voice in theological discussion. Her main starting point is her experience of the sacrifice of women in the African church, but she is also appreciative of the sacrifices that the missionaries made in their work.[101] As she writes, "The spirit of sacrifice and dedication found among workers in the missionary institutions was unique…it was this spirit that the African appreciated. The missionaries did not just preach sacrifice; they acted it out."[102] For Oduyoye, mission and sacrifice are closely connected. In her understanding of the church in mission, Christians are sent by Christ, which always means "forgoing one thing in order to undertake another."[103] Therefore, "Christians individually and corporately as the church are called to a life of sacrifice."[104] Nevertheless, she acknowledges that this takes on different forms in different times and places. For Oduyoye, African sacrificial beliefs and practices are fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ. First, she examines ritual sacrifice in African traditional religion and self-sacrifice in African society to situate her discussion in its particular context.[105] Second, she examines the sacrifice of women in the African

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99 Oduyoye, "The Value of African Religious Beliefs," 113.

100 Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, 75.

101 Mercy A. Oduyoye, "Churchwomen and the Church's Mission," in *New Eyes for Reading: Biblical and Theological Reflections by Women from the Third World*, ed. John Pobee and Barbel von Wartenberg-Potter (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), 68. Mercy A. Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 42.

102 Oduyoye, Hearing and Knowing, 42.

103 Oduyoye, "Churchwomen and the Church's Mission," 70.

104 Oduyoye, "Churchwomen and the Church's Mission," 70.

105 Oduyoye, "Churchwomen and the Church's Mission," 71.

church. Third, she turns to the example of Christ in the Scriptures and its implications for the African church.

Oduyoye's story of sacrifice is set within a narrative of liberation: since the Fall, humans have found themselves in oppressive and dehumanising situations. In order to be saved they need to be liberated and formed into a new community. In Jewish culture and African culture, God atoned for and reconciled people to each other by making covenants with them. At the Last Supper, Jesus proclaimed a new covenant in his blood, forming a new community. The process of community building continues through participation in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and the sacrifice of the whole community of women and men.[106]

Like Kalengyo, Oduyoye sees the Eucharist as central to appropriating the sacrifice of Christ. As she observes, "From the perspective of Africa, an interpretation of the Eucharist that highlights the aspect of sacrifice is one that will touch people's spirituality in such a way as to affect their lives."[107] Oduyoye, however, goes further than Kalengyo in her discussion of Christian sacrifice. She observes that in African traditional religions there are sacrifices made in response to crises that could harm the life of the community, which include both stories of human sacrifice and practices of non-human sacrifice. In the former, "in dire circumstances human beings have been sacrificed to restore health, wholeness and safety to whole communities."[108] In the latter, "what is given up has no will of its own; yet the sacrifice is, or is expected to be efficacious, because it represents the willingness of the human-offerers to "give up" what they see as their possession in order to bring about more good."[109] There are also sacrifices of thanksgiving that cultivate the gift economy, unity and identity within a group, all of which are essential for communal life. In African traditional society, the sacrifices of women are closely related to this notion of sacrifice for the community.[110] Nevertheless, Oduyoye draws a crucial distinction between making a sacrifice and being sacrificed. Many women

106 Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 70–119.

107 Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 119.

108 Oduyoye, "Churchwomen and the Church's Mission," 71.

109 Oduyoye, "Churchwomen and the Church's Mission," 71.

110 Oduyoye, "Churchwomen and the Church's Mission," 72.

are sacrificed against their will – in the home, in society, and even in the church – but there are also women who deliberately choose to give up their lives for others, making a "reasonable sacrifice" that can be characterized as a "a process of 'self-emptying'".[111] Oduyoye suggests that both men and women are called to make this kind of sacrifice. As she argues,

> If the church can begin to function more effectively as an instrument of Christ, it must follow the sacrificial life of the woman. Not as the sacrificed, but as the one consciously and deliberately becoming a living sacrifice, taking up the cross voluntarily. In this way it will be following its Lord who dedicated his whole life to the announcement of the kingdom by word and deed.[112]

For Oduyoye, such a vision has important implications for the question of women's ministry and the way in which the church practices hospitality.[113]

Like Ekem and Kalengyo, Oduyoye gives a dialogical typological account of sacrifice, but she explicitly makes women's experience the starting point for her approach. She pays close attention to concepts of both ritual sacrifice and self-sacrifice in African cultures in order to discover how they have shaped the sacrificial lives of African women. Like Ekem and Kalengyo she emphasizes multiple aspects of sacrifice, including reconciliation, expiation and the notion of the gift, and stresses that the goal of sacrifice is always fullness of life. Oduyoye offers a carefully nuanced articulation of Christian sacrifice that involves both women and men and has important implications for the life of the church.

7. Conclusion

Unfortunately, Girard never explicitly engaged with African theologians. If he had, it would have been a fascinating and fruitful encounter. On the one hand, Girard's haunting analysis of the human condition has much to offer African theologians as they seek to address the problem of violence in different contexts. On the other hand, stories of sacrifice from below,

111 Oduyoye, "Churchwomen and the Church's Mission," 73.

112 Oduyoye, "Churchwomen and the Church's Mission," 79.

113 Oduyoye, "Churchwomen and the Church's Mission," 78–79. Mercy A. Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 90–109.

like those of Ekem, Kalengyo and Oduyoye, pose a constructive challenge to Girard's theory. Girard's shift from an evolutionist approach to sacrifice to a more traditional typological one needs to be taken further if it is to do justice to the sheer diversity of sacrificial concepts in cultures around the world. Ekem's dialogical typological approach avoids superimposing an essentialised and generalised concept of sacrifice on other systems of sacrifice, allowing the universal and the particular to be brought together in a way that enriches the sense of the Christian tradition. Furthermore, Girard's reassessment of sacrifice suggests that there are other themes that need to be explored in order to develop a well-rounded polythetic concept of sacrifice. Ekem, Kalengyo and Oduyoye emphasise multiple themes, such as the notion of the gift, the communal meal and the existential game with death, which help to bring out further aspects of Jesus' sacrifice. Finally, Girard's rehabilitation of Christian sacrifice as the self-sacrificial renunciation of violence, needs to be given a more ecclesial form. Intellectual comprehension is no substitute for liturgical and spiritual formation. For Ekem, "appropriability" is an important criterion when choosing how to translate biblical concepts of sacrifice into African languages. For Kalengyo, the contextual celebration of the Lord's Supper is where "the incarnate and risen Lord Jesus Christ meets with the Ganda and bestows the benefits of his sacrificial death to the faithful through faith."[114] For Oduyoye,

> The Christ-event calls *both men and women* to the twin experience of cross and resurrection. The cross teaches the resistance of evil, but hope goes beyond the cross to its God-ordained denouement. We risk sacrifice and cross, we struggle against evil and endure many scars, because armed with hope we already see life defeating death.[115]

I hope that this "encounter" will encourage more engagement between theologians in the Global North and theologians in the Global South on the theme of sacrifice.

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114 Kalengyo, "The Sacrifice of Christ," 318.

115 Oduyoye, "Introducing African Women's Theologies," 118. Emphasis mine.

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III. Philosophy & theology