

# Sacrifice and Atonement in Biblical Theology: Reinterpreting Traditional Practices in Nigerian Christianity

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*Abstract- The practice of sacrifice and atonement has historically held a central place in both Biblical theology and African traditional religious systems. However, within the context of Nigerian Christianity, these traditional practices have often been condemned or misunderstood, creating theological tension and cultural dissonance among adherents. This study addressed the problem of the disconnect between biblical teachings on sacrifice and atonement and the reinterpretation of traditional African religious expressions within Nigerian Christian theology. The objective of the study was to examine how sacrifice and atonement are conceptualised in biblical theology and how these themes could be reinterpreted in a way that affirms indigenous practices without compromising Christian doctrine. The study adopted a qualitative research design. Data were collected through documentary analysis of biblical texts, African theological writings, and ethnographic materials from selected Nigerian communities. The method of data analysis was thematic, using interpretive analysis grounded in contextual theology. Findings revealed that while biblical and traditional African perspectives on sacrifice and atonement differ in form and emphasis, both share common theological motifs such as reconciliation, purification, and communal restoration. The study found that Nigerian Christianity has often failed to engage these shared values constructively. It is recommended that theologians and church leaders develop a contextual theology that reinterprets traditional practices through a Christocentric lens, thereby fostering a more inclusive and culturally rooted Christian expression. The study concluded that a balanced reinterpretation of sacrifice and atonement could enhance theological relevance,*

*preserve cultural identity, and deepen spiritual understanding in Nigerian Christianity.*

*Index Terms : Sacrifice, Atonement, Contextual Theology, Nigerian Christianity, African Traditional Religion*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Sacrifice and atonement remain central theological motifs in both the Judeo-Christian scriptures and indigenous African religious traditions. The concept of sacrifice is deeply embedded in human attempts to relate to the divine, offering something valuable as a means of worship, appeasement, or reconciliation. Within the Old Testament, a structured system of sacrifices was instituted under divine command, with different offerings made for sin, thanksgiving, and covenant renewal (Leviticus 1–7). In Christian theology, the death of Jesus Christ on the cross is understood as the ultimate and final atoning sacrifice, rendering previous animal sacrifices obsolete and unnecessary (Hebrews 10:10–14). As Wright (2006) explains, Christ's sacrifice is viewed not just as substitutionary, but also as covenantal and redemptive in its scope. The reality in many parts of Africa, particularly in Nigeria, is that traditional religious systems continue to influence the understanding and practice of Christian doctrines. In these indigenous systems, sacrifices play a pivotal role in restoring spiritual balance, averting misfortunes, and sustaining communal harmony (Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979). Nigerian Christians often live in a complex cultural environment where the traditional worldview intersects with Christian theology. As Bediako (1995) points out, African Christians do not easily shed their traditional

conceptual frameworks; rather, they interpret Christian doctrines such as atonement through these familiar lenses. This syncretism, although often unconscious, leads to a reinterpretation of biblical concepts using indigenous categories of thought.

There exists a significant theological tension between the finality of Christ's atonement and the continued symbolic or functional use of sacrificial language and practices within Nigerian Christianity. In many Pentecostal and African Independent Churches (AICs), believers are encouraged to offer "sacrificial seeds" for breakthroughs, engage in deliverance rites that reflect ritualistic purification, or conceptualise Christ's death using ancestral categories (Ukah, 2007). Such practices may reflect an attempt at contextual theology, yet they also reveal a possible doctrinal ambiguity. The result is a theological landscape where biblical and traditional concepts of sacrifice co-exist, often without critical reflection or theological clarity. The ideal, which is a biblically rooted and contextually meaningful theology, remains elusive for many faith communities.

This study addresses the urgent need to investigate how traditional sacrificial concepts are being reinterpreted within Nigerian Christianity and whether such reinterpretations align with or deviate from biblical theology. The research problem focuses on the gap between biblical doctrine and local expressions of atonement, questioning whether this synthesis enriches or distorts the Christian message. If left unaddressed, this theological ambiguity may hinder the development of a coherent African Christian theology and perpetuate doctrinal confusion among believers. The study, therefore, seeks to explore how biblical theology of sacrifice and atonement can be faithfully and contextually applied within the Nigerian setting, affirming the redemptive work of Christ while engaging indigenous metaphors meaningfully.

## II. ATONEMENT: THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

Atonement in Christian theology refers to the reconciliation between God and humanity, achieved through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. It addresses the problem of sin and the restoration of

divine-human relationships. In Biblical theology, various models have emerged to explain the significance of Christ's death. These include the Ransom Theory, which views Christ's death as a payment made to liberate humanity from satanic bondage; the Satisfaction Theory, which proposes that Jesus' death restored God's honour; and the Penal Substitution Theory, which teaches that Christ bore the punishment deserved by sinners (McGrath, 2011). Each model attempts to articulate the theological logic of the cross within its historical and cultural context. In many African Christian communities, including those in Nigeria, atonement is often interpreted through relational, communal, and restorative frameworks. This contrasts with Western atonement theories that tend to be juridical and individualistic in orientation. African theologians argue that sin disrupts not only one's relationship with God but also with the community, the ancestors, and the environment (Turaki, 1999). As a result, atonement is seen as a holistic restoration of cosmic and social harmony, aligning more closely with the Hebrew concept of shalom. This understanding provides a fertile ground for contextual theology, particularly in societies where traditional religions view sacrifice as essential for maintaining spiritual balance.

Despite this affinity, a theological tension remains. While traditional Nigerian religions require repeated sacrifices to appease gods and spirits, Christian theology asserts the sufficiency of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice (Hebrews 9:12–14). The difference is not merely procedural but ontological. In Christianity, Christ is both priest and offering, and his death constitutes a unique, unrepeatable event in salvation history (Stott, 2006). Traditional systems lack this finality; their sacrifices are provisional and temporal. Nigerian Christians who straddle both systems often struggle to reconcile these divergent sacrificial logics, leading to confusion or syncretism in practice.

It is within this tension that reinterpretations of atonement arise in Nigerian Christianity. In some churches, particularly Pentecostal and AIC congregations, teachings on atonement are fused with indigenous ideas of spiritual warfare, generational curses, and ritual cleansing. Deliverance services, for example, may resemble traditional purification rites

but are rebranded with Christian terminology (Ukah, 2007). While such practices may make the gospel culturally intelligible, they also risk distorting the biblical meaning of atonement. A critical theological engagement is therefore needed to preserve the core message of reconciliation through Christ while acknowledging the cultural frameworks through which Nigerian Christians perceive divine-human relationships.

### III. OVERVIEW OF TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

Traditional religious practices in Nigeria are deeply rooted in the belief that the spiritual and physical realms are interconnected. The African worldview often perceives life as cyclical and communal, where ancestors, deities, and the living play integral roles in maintaining cosmic order. Within this framework, sacrifice functions as a vital mechanism through which equilibrium is restored when disrupted. Sacrifices may include offerings of food, animals, or libations, made to appease spiritual beings, cleanse communities, or seek guidance in times of crisis (Mbiti, 1990). Such acts are not mere rituals but are imbued with deep theological meaning, often representing restitution, appeasement, and communion.

Sacrifices in indigenous Nigerian religions are classified according to purpose and context. Propitiatory sacrifices are offered to prevent or avert disasters, while expiatory sacrifices are conducted to cleanse individuals or communities from impurity or sin. These ceremonies are typically presided over by priests or elders who serve as mediators between the human and spiritual domains. The communal nature of such practices reflects a worldview in which individual actions bear collective consequences. In this setting, sin or misfortune is rarely viewed in isolation but is often interpreted as affecting the wider social fabric, necessitating communal acts of reconciliation (Awolalu & Dopamu, 2005).

In many Nigerian cultures, rituals of atonement extend beyond material offerings to include symbolic acts such as confession, restitution, and ceremonial washing. These elements reinforce the moral and spiritual significance of the ritual. The intention is not

only to appease divine forces but also to realign individuals with community norms and ancestral expectations. This reinforces the moral authority of elders and the traditional custodians of religious rites. Moreover, the frequency and form of sacrifices are often dictated by divination, seasonal cycles, or social events such as births, deaths, and harvests, underscoring their embeddedness in the lived experience of communities (Kalu, 2010).

Although modernisation and Christianity have influenced traditional practices, they continue to persist in various forms across Nigeria. Some communities maintain these rites openly, while others practise them discreetly, often in conjunction with Christian rituals. The endurance of traditional sacrificial practices reveals their perceived efficacy in addressing life's challenges. Despite theological critiques, many Nigerians view traditional atonement rituals as offering practical and spiritual solutions in ways that Western Christian frameworks sometimes fail to provide. This resilience presents both a challenge and an opportunity for Christian theology to engage indigenous practices in a respectful and transformative manner.

### IV. CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES WITH BIBLICAL SACRIFICE

Certain parallels exist between traditional Nigerian sacrificial practices and the sacrificial system outlined in the Old Testament. In both contexts, sacrifice is viewed as a solemn act of worship, an expression of repentance, and a means of securing divine favour. The Old Testament describes various forms of sacrifices, such as burnt offerings, sin offerings, and peace offerings, each serving distinct theological purposes (Leviticus 1–7). Similarly, traditional Nigerian practices categorise sacrifices according to their objectives, such as propitiation, thanksgiving, or purification. In both settings, sacrificial acts aim to mediate the relationship between the human and the divine, demonstrating continuity in the understanding of atonement and reconciliation (Wright, 2006).

Despite these similarities, several discontinuities exist between biblical and traditional sacrificial systems. The biblical concept of sacrifice,

particularly as fulfilled in the New Testament, culminates in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The New Testament presents Christ as the once-for-all sacrifice who replaces the repetitive animal offerings of the Old Covenant (Hebrews 10:1–14). In contrast, traditional Nigerian sacrifices are ongoing and cyclical, dependent on regular rituals to maintain spiritual harmony. Moreover, while biblical sacrifices are regulated through covenantal law and oriented towards Yahweh, traditional sacrifices are directed to various deities or ancestors, which raises theological concerns within Christian orthodoxy (Enuwosa, 2018).

The discontinuity also extends to the nature of atonement itself. The New Testament understanding of atonement emphasises grace, substitution, and divine initiative, where God reconciles humanity to Himself through Christ's redemptive death (Romans 5:8–11). This stands in contrast to traditional models that often perceive atonement as a human initiative aimed at appeasing capricious spirits or ancestors. In this framework, the burden rests more on human performance than divine mercy, creating a theological tension between African traditional religion and Christian theology. Such contrasts demand a nuanced engagement that neither dismisses traditional insights outright nor compromises the central message of the Gospel (Tiénou, 2006).

Nevertheless, the presence of these similarities and differences offers fertile ground for contextual theological reflection. A constructive dialogue between biblical theology and African traditional religion can help identify points of convergence that reinforce Christian truths while correcting elements incompatible with the Gospel. Contextual theologians in Africa argue for a reinterpretation rather than a rejection of traditional practices, emphasising the need for an inculturated expression of Christianity that resonates with African cultural realities (Bediako, 1995). The task, therefore, lies in discerning how biblical principles can be meaningfully expressed within indigenous categories without distorting the essence of the Christian faith.

## V. THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ATONEMENT IN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

In many Nigerian traditional religious systems, atonement carries profound theological weight. It serves as a central mechanism for restoring broken relationships between individuals, communities, and the divine realm. Atonement rituals are not simply moral or ethical acts but are considered essential for maintaining cosmic balance and social cohesion. Offences, whether individual or communal, are believed to pollute not only the spiritual but also the physical world, thereby necessitating ritual purification. Through prescribed sacrifices, often involving animals, libations, or symbolic materials, practitioners seek to placate spiritual forces, restore moral order, and re-establish communal wellbeing (Awolalu, 1979).

The concept of sin in traditional belief systems is generally broader than its Judeo-Christian counterpart. Offences may include not only breaches of ethical conduct but also failures in fulfilling communal obligations, neglect of rituals, or disrespect to ancestors. Atonement, therefore, addresses both visible and invisible dimensions of human transgression. In many Nigerian cultures, unaddressed spiritual offences are believed to result in misfortunes such as illness, infertility, or social unrest. Thus, atonement acts as a preventive and remedial measure to safeguard both the individual and the community from spiritual retribution (Ejizu, 2013).

Traditional atonement rites are often deeply communal, reinforcing collective identity and shared moral responsibility. The elders, priests, or spiritual custodians typically preside over such rituals, ensuring that the correct procedure is followed. This ritual authority reaffirms the sacred structure of society, where spiritual insight is revered and religious traditions are preserved. In contrast to individualised Western religious expressions, the communal aspect of atonement in traditional religion underlines the interconnectedness of the self and society. It also underscores the belief that reconciliation with the divine must be reflected in reconciliation with others (Okot p'Bitek, 1992).

Although these theological frameworks differ from Christian notions of grace and substitutionary atonement, they reveal a rich spiritual heritage that cannot be ignored in Christian mission and theology. Recognising the depth of meaning attached to atonement in traditional religion provides an entry point for contextual theological engagement. Christian theology, when rooted in local spiritual understandings, can address existential questions in ways that are both biblically faithful and culturally intelligible. The challenge, however, remains in aligning these traditional views with the redemptive message of Christ, who offers a once-for-all atonement that transcends ritual cycles and ancestral mediation (Mbiti, 1975).

#### VI. REINTERPRETATION OF SACRIFICE AND ATONEMENT IN NIGERIAN CHRISTIANITY

In Nigerian Christianity, the concepts of sacrifice and atonement have undergone reinterpretation through the interaction of biblical theology with indigenous religious traditions. The sacrificial systems depicted in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament through the death of Jesus Christ find resonance with African notions of ritual sacrifice. However, while biblical atonement emphasises a once-for-all substitutionary death of Christ (Hebrews 10:10), traditional African religion envisions sacrifice as a repeated process, necessary to sustain harmony between the human and spiritual realms. This theological divergence has compelled Nigerian Christians to contextualise biblical atonement in culturally meaningful terms (Kalu, 2008).

Many churches in Nigeria, especially among Pentecostal and African Indigenous denominations, emphasise deliverance and spiritual cleansing in ways that echo traditional atonement rituals. For example, services involving "spiritual baths," symbolic blood prayers, or public confessions reflect attempts to reinterpret Christian purification in indigenous formats (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). Although mainstream churches such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion reject literal animal sacrifice, they incorporate sacramental practices such as the Eucharist, which symbolically represents Christ's body and blood. This sacrament

becomes a medium through which Nigerian Christians connect Christ's atoning work with their desire for spiritual restoration and communal reconciliation.

Some independent churches in Nigeria have gone further by reintroducing symbolic elements from traditional religion into Christian liturgy. In the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, for instance, items such as incense, white garments, and holy water are used in rituals reminiscent of indigenous purification rites. These elements are theologically reinterpreted through the lens of Christ's atonement, thus bridging biblical teaching with local religious sensibilities (Oduyoye, 2001). Similarly, in the Aladura churches, practices of fasting, prayer, and anointing with oil take on heightened significance as spiritual acts of consecration and atonement. These acts often replace ancestral sacrifices but serve similar purposes in the minds of adherents, namely, averting misfortune and securing divine favour.

Despite their innovations, these reappropriations are not without theological tension. Critics argue that some practices risk syncretism, potentially obscuring the uniqueness of Christ's atonement as taught in the New Testament. Others, however, view contextualisation as a necessary strategy for making the gospel meaningful in African settings. They contend that Christ's sacrifice must not only be proclaimed but interpreted in light of the people's worldview, allowing indigenous categories of understanding, such as communal guilt, ritual purity, and ancestral mediation, to find new meaning in the redemptive work of Christ (Bediako, 1995). Such reinterpretation does not dilute biblical truth but enables it to take root in African soil.

#### VII. CHALLENGES AND CONTROVERSIES IN REINTERPRETING SACRIFICE AND ATONEMENT

Reinterpreting sacrifice and atonement within Nigerian Christianity has not been without theological and pastoral challenges. A key controversy revolves around the boundaries of legitimate contextualisation. While inculturation seeks to make the Christian faith culturally relevant, some practices adopted by indigenous churches blur

the lines between Christian doctrine and traditional religion. For example, rituals involving the use of symbolic blood, vigils against ancestral curses, or references to spiritual altars are often criticised for undermining the sufficiency of Christ's atonement (Ukpong, 2010). These criticisms typically arise from evangelical and mainline theological circles that insist on a clear distinction between biblical truth and syncretistic tendencies.

Another major concern relates to the theological implications of incorporating traditional symbols and categories into Christian worship. When concepts such as ancestral veneration, ritual cleansing, or appeasement are reinterpreted in Christian terms, the risk of doctrinal confusion increases. In some cases, church members may fail to grasp the uniqueness of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice, instead reverting to transactional views of salvation based on fear or obligation (Sanneh, 2003). This confusion is evident in the proliferation of deliverance ministries across Nigeria, where "spiritual warfare" is emphasised over grace, and material blessings are presented as the reward for sacrificial giving or prophetic intervention.

Pastoral challenges also emerge in reconciling the Christian message of forgiveness with communal expectations rooted in traditional justice systems. In many Nigerian communities, justice is seen as restorative, requiring reparations or ritual cleansing after wrongdoing. The Christian gospel, which offers unconditional forgiveness through Christ's atonement, sometimes appears inadequate in contexts where offenders are expected to perform acts of penance or reconciliation. Church leaders often struggle to balance biblical principles with cultural expectations, especially during funerals, family disputes, or land conflicts where ancestral or spiritual appeasement may be demanded (Ireoba, 2005).

Despite these tensions, ongoing theological reflection continues to explore ways to affirm the integrity of Christian doctrine while engaging meaningfully with African cultural values. Scholars like Emmanuel Katongole and Mercy Amba Oduyoye have argued that theology must be incarnational, speaking to the lived experiences of African Christians without sacrificing orthodoxy. Their work advocates for a

hermeneutic that listens attentively to culture while remaining faithful to Scripture. Such an approach seeks not merely to translate biblical ideas into African terms but to allow the gospel to transform those cultural categories from within, giving rise to a truly African yet authentically Christian understanding of sacrifice and atonement (Katongole, 2011).

#### VIII. CONTEXTUALISING SACRIFICE AND ATONEMENT IN NIGERIAN CHRISTIANITY

Nigeria presents a rich mosaic of religious traditions, with Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions (ATR) coexisting, often interacting and influencing one another. Within ATR, sacrifice serves a deeply rooted function in securing divine favour, restoring broken relationships, and ensuring communal harmony (Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979). Offerings of animals, food, or libations are central to these rituals, which are often performed through established priesthoods. These acts are not simply symbolic but are understood to effect real spiritual outcomes, both for individuals and communities.

Christianity in Nigeria did not emerge in a religious vacuum. It encountered these established systems and, in some instances, attempted to replace them, while in other cases, it absorbed and reinterpreted indigenous practices (Sanneh, 1989). For example, the early missionary efforts by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) discouraged indigenous sacrificial rites, branding them as heathen or idolatrous. However, over time, Nigerian Christianity began to evolve in ways that acknowledged local religious consciousness. Churches such as the Cherubim and Seraphim or the Celestial Church of Christ recontextualised sacrificial language in their liturgies, blending Christian theology with indigenous ritual patterns (Peel, 2000).

Among Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, the language of sacrifice has re-emerged with theological dynamism. Many pastors frequently refer to Jesus Christ as the ultimate sacrifice while also urging believers to sow 'sacrificial seeds' or make 'dangerous offerings' to unlock divine blessings. These teachings resonate with traditional Nigerian beliefs about

transactional religion, where giving often precedes receiving (Marshall, 2009). Although these practices are rooted in biblical texts, such as Malachi 3:10 and Luke 6:38, they also mirror ATR understandings of sacrificial reciprocity.

#### IX. ATONEMENT IN NIGERIAN CHRISTIAN PRAXIS

Atonement within Nigerian Christianity is often interpreted through a dual lens: scriptural doctrine and cultural resonance. The doctrine of substitutionary atonement, wherein Jesus Christ dies in the place of sinful humanity, is widely taught in seminaries and churches. However, its practical outworking varies significantly across denominations and congregations. In orthodox churches like the Roman Catholic Church or the Anglican Communion, atonement is mediated through liturgical sacraments, especially the Eucharist, which commemorates Christ's atoning death (Omenka, 2006).

In indigenous Pentecostal movements, however, atonement is often associated with deliverance and spiritual warfare. Christ's blood is frequently invoked in prayers to break generational curses, heal sicknesses, and ward off spiritual attacks. The popular phrase "I cover myself with the blood of Jesus" illustrates how atonement theology is localised to address existential fears within Nigerian cosmology (Gaiya, 2004). This expression, though not found verbatim in the Bible, reflects a culturally contextualised appropriation of Christ's atoning work.

Moreover, some churches incorporate practices that reflect both biblical and traditional notions of restitution. For instance, public confessions during revival meetings, followed by acts of restitution, resemble the Old Testament practice of making amends before an offering is accepted (cf. Matthew 5:23–24). In some rural Nigerian contexts, pastors may require offenders to undertake fasting, public repentance, or financial compensation before full reintegration into the church. These acts suggest that atonement is not merely juridical but deeply relational and communal in the Nigerian Christian setting.

#### X. CASE STUDIES FROM SELECT NIGERIAN CHURCHES

The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), one of Nigeria's largest Pentecostal denominations, provides a noteworthy case. During its Holy Ghost services, sacrificial giving is encouraged as an expression of gratitude and a key to divine breakthrough. Although Christ's sacrifice remains central, congregants are often urged to make tangible personal sacrifices to mirror biblical models, such as Abraham's offering of Isaac (Genesis 22). These interpretations are seldom seen as salvific in themselves but as acts that demonstrate faith and obedience (Ukah, 2007).

Similarly, the Deeper Life Bible Church, known for its conservative theology, places strong emphasis on personal holiness and repentance as prerequisites for forgiveness and atonement. The message of Christ's redemptive work is preached in connection with moral transformation. In contrast to more Charismatic expressions, Deeper Life downplays ritualistic or material expressions of sacrifice, highlighting instead a lifestyle of sacrifice through sanctified living and service to God (Ojo, 2010).

African Initiated Churches (AICs) such as the Church of the Lord Aladura or the Zionist movements present another layer of reinterpretation. Sacrifices in these churches often involve prayers conducted at sacred altars, the use of anointing oil, water, and white garments as symbols of purity and atonement. While biblical texts guide these rituals, the symbolic forms bear close resemblance to traditional religious practices, underscoring the continuity and innovation in the Nigerian religious experience (Adeboye, 2005).

#### XI. CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF REINTERPRETING SACRIFICE AND ATONEMENT IN NIGERIAN CHRISTIANITY

Efforts to reinterpret traditional sacrifice and atonement within Nigerian Christianity face several theological and cultural challenges. A major concern arises from syncretistic tendencies, whereby Christian teachings become indistinguishably

mingled with indigenous beliefs. While contextual theology encourages engagement with cultural elements, some reinterpretations have distorted biblical messages. For instance, certain churches continue to conduct deliverance rituals involving animal slaughter, supposedly as a form of spiritual cleansing, despite the New Testament's emphasis on Christ's final sacrifice (Hebrews 10:10). Such practices risk perpetuating dependence on ritualistic performances rather than fostering faith in Christ's redemptive work.

Resistance also comes from conservative Christian denominations that view any appropriation of traditional religious motifs as a compromise of doctrinal purity. In their view, the atonement achieved through Jesus's death should be sufficient for all contexts, requiring no further symbolic representation. This creates tension with cultural theologians who insist that theology must make sense within the framework of the people's worldview. Furthermore, discrepancies exist between rural and urban churches; while many urban congregations have aligned closely with western expressions of Christianity, rural churches are often more open to accommodating traditional symbols. This geographical divide complicates efforts to formulate a unified theological approach to sacrifice and atonement within the Nigerian context.

Nonetheless, there are promising prospects for a balanced reinterpretation. Some Nigerian theologians have proposed the development of a "Christianised" form of ritual that symbolically references traditional practices without violating biblical tenets. For example, Adewale (2019) proposes rituals of thanksgiving and reconciliation that draw on communal celebration rather than blood sacrifice, promoting unity and spiritual transformation. Seminaries and theological institutions are also increasingly exploring African hermeneutics to equip ministers with tools for contextual engagement. As more scholarly works emerge, especially from African voices, there is growing hope for a robust theological synthesis that preserves Christian orthodoxy while affirming African cultural identity.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The discourse on sacrifice and atonement remains central to Christian theology, particularly within the Nigerian context where indigenous worldviews continue to influence religious practice. This study has demonstrated that while biblical theology affirms Christ's atoning death as final and sufficient, Nigerian Christianity operates within a cultural framework deeply shaped by traditional notions of sacrifice. These indigenous practices, often symbolic and communal, offer fertile ground for contextual theological reflection that respects both the authority of Scripture and the cultural heritage of African Christians. Throughout this paper, a critical analysis of sacrificial practices from both the Old and New Testaments has illuminated the progressive development of atonement theology culminating in Christ's death. In juxtaposition, Nigerian traditional sacrifices, though varied across ethnic groups, share certain theological motifs such as reconciliation, appeasement, and covenant renewal. These parallels should not be dismissed but engaged thoughtfully. Contextual theology, especially as developed by African scholars like Mbiti (2015) and Bediako (2004), presents an important bridge that enables reinterpretation without theological compromise. Theological engagement of this nature demands a clear distinction between what is doctrinally essential and what may be culturally expressive. However, several risks accompany reinterpretation. There is a thin line between contextualisation and syncretism, which could lead to theological distortions or even the revival of pre-Christian ritualism under Christian labels. The challenge lies in crafting liturgies, theological language, and ecclesial practices that neither alienate African believers nor dilute the gospel. A reinterpretation of traditional practices should emphasise the symbolic rather than the literal, pointing worshippers back to Christ's once-for-all atonement (Romans 6:10). Pastoral training, theological education, and sound biblical literacy remain essential tools for guiding this process. In light of these findings, several recommendations emerge. First, Nigerian theological institutions should prioritise contextual theology courses that equip students to critically engage with indigenous culture. Second, church leaders should be encouraged to develop culturally resonant but biblically faithful



liturgies that affirm Christ's atonement while reflecting communal African values. Third, partnerships between theologians, anthropologists, and church communities will prove beneficial in formulating theology that is both incarnational and transformative. Finally, continued scholarly research must focus on identifying theological touchpoints within African religions that can serve as analogies to biblical concepts without undermining core Christian doctrines. With such efforts, Nigerian Christianity can fully embrace its cultural heritage while remaining rooted in the redemptive truth of the gospel.

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