

**THE COMMUNICATIVE POWER OF BLOOD
SACRIFICES: A PREDOMINANTLY SOUTH AFRICAN
PERSPECTIVE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE
EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS**

BY

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, the researcher discusses the topic: “The Communicative Power of Sacrifices: A Predominantly South African Perspective with Special Reference to the Epistle to the Hebrews”. It investigates blood sacrifices among Xhosa people, and includes some Zulu and Tsonga thoughts, as well as a few examples from elsewhere in Africa. The research findings support the fact that both animal and human blood sacrifices are still performed today.

The comparison between biblical blood sacrificial rituals and African ones reveals striking similarities and a few differences. The existence of such similarities poses a pertinent question: to determine whether or not African traditional religious sacrifices, like biblical sacrifices, could also be acknowledged as originating from God. This seems indeed difficult, because such an affirmation would suggest that God has revealed Himself through African traditional religious sacrificial rituals, and would therefore call into question the unique and exclusive biblical claim to revelation.

Neyrey’s (2005) model of benefactor-client, benefactor-patron has been instrumental in illustrating the mutually influential communication and exchange existing between deities and their worshippers. In order to obtain benefactions from superiors, subordinates have to use inducement and influence - inducement has to do with all sorts of gifts and services, while influence refers to reasons for doing what one does, hence requests, petitions and the like. In religious terms,

inducement is called sacrifice, and influence is called prayer. The intensification of the materialisation of anticipated benefits by worshippers entails the multiplication of interactive contact through blood sacrificial rituals, as well as the strengthening of ties between deities and their worshippers, creating a seemingly unbreakable bond. The results of this study's qualitative, empirical research in Gauteng, Kwazulu-Natal and North West provinces have substantiated the above ideas. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the communicative power of the blood sacrifice of Jesus provided worshippers with eternal salvation, forgiveness of sins and the removal of guilt feelings. Unlike Old Testament animal blood sacrifices, Jesus' once and for all blood sacrifice has communicated powers for soteriological, psychological and sociological benefits. This superior power should be scholarly defended through amicable dialogue.



SUMMARY

In this dissertation, the *communicative power of blood sacrifices: A predominantly South African perspective with special reference to the Epistle to the Hebrews* has been investigated. The researcher has focused mainly on blood sacrificial performances among the Xhosa people, as well as some Zulu and Tsonga peoples' sacrificial ideas, including a few examples from elsewhere in Africa.

Blood sacrifices have proved to be a way of life in all the contexts investigated. They have served as media of communication with supernatural powers in the metaphysical world, and as a means for acquiring material and spiritual benefactions from them. In the process of blood sacrificial performances, reciprocity is viewed as a fixed, ubiquitous element of the benefactor - client relationship. When a man provides a deity with a benefit (blood sacrifice in this specific case), he aims at serving and pleasing that deity. If the giver's intention is conveyed to the deity and stirs in him a joyful response, then he obtains what he was seeking.

Therefore, it is quite obvious that, in order to receive benefactions, subordinates have to use inducement and influence. In the language embedding religion, inducement is called sacrifice and influence is called prayer. The entire process in all the contexts considered in this dissertation can be assimilated in a scheme of exchanges and compensations through power and effects. Power seems to

invite and reciprocate power, and effects of power demand more power. The researcher has shown that there are many similarities between biblical and African traditional religious animal and human blood sacrifices. However, there are also a few dissimilarities. Biblical animal blood sacrifices are acknowledged as originating from God (YWH: the God of the Bible), if viewed from a Christian perspective. However, similarities in blood sacrificial performances in both contexts seem to support the idea of one unique origination, that is, the God of the Bible (YWH). The comparison between blood sacrifices in both the Old Testament and African traditional religion and blood sacrifices in the Epistle to the Hebrews has revealed the fact that the blood-sacrifice of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, is by far superior and more effective than Old Testament and African traditional religious blood-sacrifices. It fulfilled God's will, communicating super-abundant power for consecration and sanctification, and it has also achieved eternal forgiveness of sins for mankind by removing sin and guilt. It communicates power for soteriological, psychological, and sociological benefits. Inferentially speaking, this power has transformed millions of men and women who consequently have become centripetal forces in bringing many to the church.

The researcher suggests that the truth of Jesus' once and for all blood sacrifice should be exclusively adhered to and lovingly but convincingly defended at all costs. Theological studies should also aim at influencing various Christian communities by grounding them in the sound biblical teaching in relation to the



effectiveness and all-sufficiency of Jesus' blood sacrifice. As a result, entire communities, even the whole society of the human race, can experience the manifold benefits communicated by the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

TEN APPLICABLE KEY TERMS

God, Ancestors, Sacrifice, Communicative, Blood, Salvation, Power,
Forgiveness, Sin and Spirits.

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