

THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

The problem of meaning in gemeinschaft societies in Eastern Africa

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Western theology and the reality of sacrifice

Having participated or observed these two sacrificial ceremonies on numerous occasions, the division between them was clearly not the relatively simple and well documented division between the systematic theological and intuitive popular views of what is involved in the Eucharist. A division which is thought to have occurred as Christianity became more centralised and the priests more educated and less dependent on the good will of their parishioners.

The Eucharist in Roman Catholic theology is clearly entitled the Sacrifice of the Mass. To most if not all Roman Catholics in the western world the word 'sacrifice' is understood to mean in practice foregoing something or some practice so that someone or some other institution can benefit.

The Oxford dictionary has five meanings listed. 1. Primarily the slaughter of an animal as an offering to God or a deity. Hence in the wider sense the surrender to God or a deity for the purpose of propitiation or homage of some object of possession. 2. That which is offered in sacrifice; a victim immolated on the altar. Anything (material or immaterial) offered to God or a deity as an act of propitiation or homage. 3. The offering by Christ of Himself as a propitiatory victim in his voluntary immolation on the cross; the Crucifixion in its sacrificial character. 4. The destruction or surrender of something valued or desired for the sake of something having, or regarded as having, a higher or more pressing claim; the loss entailed by devotion to some other interest; the thing so devoted or surrendered. 5. A loss entailed in selling something below its value for the sake of getting rid of it.

Few western Christians, possibly only those who have lived for significant periods outside the expatriate business ghettos overseas, have ever witnessed, much less participated in a sacrifice which involved the killing and eating of an animal, certainly not that of a human being. Sacrifice for them are ethical choices from which material and spiritual benefits accrue to them or their families. It is related more to a sense of enhanced personal goodness. There is little element of exchange, communication with the spirit world, much less negotiation.

Sacrifice in the sense of killing a living creature for a religious purpose must have disappeared from Western religious and social life with the effective imposition of Christianity in the very early middle ages. In the long centuries since then this form of sacrifice has disappeared from the social repertoire of possible religious ritual alternatives as well as from the social consensus thinking of every contemporary Westerner.

Thus systematic theological ideas of sacrifice could and indeed were developed by Christian thinkers without the obvious quotidian competition from alternative meanings and practices which were patently sacrificial in the Old Testament sense, and which were occurring on a regular basis within the communities under discussion. Christian theology developed in Africa in what might be called a socio-religious vacuum in which the 'enemy' was the extremes of traditional religious practices and popular intuitive devotions which were seen as magic.

Whereas in the western world trends in popular devotions can be related to fluctuations in the power of the Church and the politics of European religion so that the resulting official views could be imposed as religious and political institutions became better organised and communications from the centre improved. These arguments and definitions were not in an ideological battle with existing forms of what could be called pagan sacrifice.

The dichotomy of Eucharistic theology and practice

In this analysis it is not a question of what participants in the Eucharist are doing theologically according to the subtle differences between denominations whether Roman Catholics, Copts or Uniates, enunciated by councils and the heads of these Churches. What do the participants in the Eucharist think they are doing there or can be analytically found to be doing? It can be assumed that any coincidence between theological definitions and expectations and these religious practices is likely to be minimal in any large congregation which must contain a wide variety of people who range from the simple minded to the intellectual.

There are factors of primary and secondary socialisation, the need for company, belief in the dogma fulfilled at the Eucharist, fulfilling the requirements for Church membership combined with all the permutations of age, sex, education, ethnicity, marital status, location, employment and health. The permutations in a western heterogeneous congregation are endless. But of one thing we can be sure is that participating in a sacrifice, even in the widest symbolic sense, is not likely to rate highly if at all for most communicants. It is just not part of the consensus thinking of Western societies.

Certainly the elite believers and practioners understand the theological meanings and aims of the Eucharist in which they are participating. Challengers to these beliefs hive off into unbelief or alternative Christian interpretations. The discontinuities between systematic theological intentions and intuitive popular socio-religious practices are as much social as religious for most communicants. The practitioner is there at the

Eucharist for a multiplicity of interrelated reasons which are being acted out within a single orthodox ceremony, and not in a variety of ceremonies.

It is these theological ideas under the impetus of western missionary dominance which have moved into the societies of eastern Africa. A theology which talks in terms of sacrifice but does not include in its rituals the practice of actually sacrificing anything. A system of religious thinking developed in the western world as a result of over a thousand years of Christian argument and in societies moreover which in the Biblical sense, no longer sacrificed.

These admirable men and women who over generations have sacrificed their lives, furthering the Christian definitions of the Eucharist as developed in their own denominations, could scarcely be blamed for seeing African traditional religious practices which regularly involved real sacrifice as the antithesis of their detached religious thinking. Idolatry at best, paganism at worst.

Traditional sacrifice in eastern Africa

Sacrifice in these gemeinschaft societies of eastern Africa in which survival depends on their own unaided efforts has a totally different meaning in both theory and practice to that of western theology. Virtually everyone will have seen or at least heard of sacrifice as involving the killing and eating of an animal. Not only are there existing social and religious practices involving sacrifice but they are so widespread as to provide a background of practical reality to their religious thinking. Moreover these practices have existed for so long that they are part of their religious paradigm which are thus part of their sensed alternatives when individuals or groups experience misfortune.

So African converts and those baptised or joined at birth to Christianity or indeed Islam, had these essentially alien religious ideas imposed on and running parallel to existing traditional religious ideas and practices which had existed for centuries and which thus formed an important part of their repertoire for coping with suffering. The East African cultural paradigm for approaching the Eucharist is totally different to that of the western communicant.

The most conspicuous difference between the two systems of religious thinking and practice is in their accepted methods of communicating with the Divine. In western Christian theological thinking it has long been accepted that the sacraments are the principal means of contacting and receiving contact with and from the Divine. Both public and private prayers are efficacious but prayer in proximate contact with the Eucharist is considered to be especially efficacious, burning a candle is considered to be more important than prayer. We should perhaps remember that 'looking' is the principle religious activity of the majority of Christians everywhere. The Divine is permanently available for contact with Christians regardless of the situation, while it is of course considered likely that Christians will make such contacts more frequently

while under stress or on the occasions of linear and cyclical rites of passage (Van Gennep 1960).

In the traditional and continuing religious systems of the Sukuma (Tanner 1956, 1958, 1969) of Tanzania and the Lugbara of Uganda (Middleton 1979) the invisible world is outside any such regular contact with mankind except through the manifestations of illness and disaster which are seen as warnings of deviations from what is proper conduct.

A certain number of acts are liable to upset relations of authority within the lineage or family, anti-social acts which challenge the authority of the elders and which thereby threaten the survival of the social group on which the ancestors depend for survival in the invisible world. Illness is the typical form of religious communication which has a regulatory social and political function in forcing sick persons to reconsider their social behaviour to see if they have upset the necessary even balance of group life.

Thus the sufferer is an offending individual who is now in a dangerous state of 'heat' (Sukuma-busebu) and in order to return to the normal state of 'coolness', he has to sacrifice. Such a sacrifice makes the ancestors or spirits retire from contact with human society since the social body has been healed by the recognition and cessation of behaviour previously diagnosed by a traditional practitioner as disrupting it. The sacrifice restores equilibrium and the desirable separation of the living from the other world of the spirits.

The diagnosis and cure is not so much related to individual suffering and is not a punishment but a reminder of ideal social relations. Thus these sacrifices do not set up nor are they designed to attempt to set up any maintainable or desirable intimacy between men and the spirit world. They are thought to be done in gratitude to the spirits or ancestors for inflicting disease and misfortune upon a member of the group, thus showing the individual that he did not respect the rules of the social game. It reaffirms the division between the realms of men and that of the ancestors and spirits.

Sacrifices which are seen to end social disorder, immediately reestablish the difference between the visible and the invisible, putting ancestors and the spirits at a distance. It returns them to their own areas. The offence which entailed a discordant conjunction of the two spheres of activity, must remain separated. However the traditional neutrality of the spirits has been replaced today by the Sukuma expecting the benevolence of their ancestors. They hope that they will stay in contact and actively insure the welfare of their descendents. It is noticeable that the number of spirit shrines in house compounds is on the increase from the relatively small number in the 1960s.

To what extent to the traditional religious ideas of the Sukuma vary from those of the Lugbara. The traditional Sukuma do not see God as being responsible for the world which He did not create. He is largely indifferent to men's activities and He is not the guardian of the social order. More basically He refrains from doing either good or evil which the Sukuma conceive of as a 'good' in a sense unknown to Christian thought which considers God to have an active benign interest in humanity.

The Sukuma thus had a religious paradigm in which they did not expect or indeed want God to be involved in their lives. They want God to keep out of their lives as divination could interpret their misfortunes as due to His actions. Sacrificial action

would appear to initiate His return to a separate state of desired indifference to their activities. Thus there is a theological discontinuity between the Christian ideas of a loving God and the Sukuma traditional one of a largely indifferent one.

Much the same idea of distancing applies to their relationship with their ancestors who were expected not to concern themselves positively with their descendents, but to abstain from doing evil to them; they do not protect the family nor dispose of individual misfortunes. The purpose of sacrifice is to return malevolent ancestors to the neutrality of distance in the other world and not to maintain them in some benevolent dichotomy by regularly performed rituals. Only traditional religious practitioners have any semi-permanent relationship with the other world to which they are professionally committed. Thus the main function of sacrifice is to unify the family in response to any challenge to its continuity.

Let us hypothesize that the Sukuma Christian ›buys‹ this concept of a loving God. It is an attractive idea which even those peripherally involved in the invasive practices of the western world can see to have an obvious utility if it works. Once the word ›work‹ becomes involved, we are involved in the widely held belief that the practice of religious rituals alone will bring about significant practical changes in the lives of these practitioners. In this belief no moral change or obligation is a necessary prerequisite, and theologians have anguished for centuries trying to separate a slot-machine concept of religious action from the requirements for obtaining some abstract beneficial relationship with God.

Almost certainly Sukuma participants at the Eucharist hope that it works as indeed statistically it must in a high proportion of cases in the ordinary course of events. If it does not, it would be foolish in Sukuma terms to reject the concept of God's concern and its possibilities. It remains in their repertoire of alternative courses of action in times of misfortune, while they go off to consult a traditional diviner as to possible alternatives. As one non-practising Roman Catholic Sukuma expressed it ›he was on leave from Catholicism for a year‹. He had not left the Church and his Christian beliefs and ritual obligations were on hold. Overall Christianity may have become an option, an added alternative to what could be done already to alleviate suffering within the traditional magico-religious paradigm.

The significance of Sukuma traditional rituals and the paradigm within which their religious thinking operates is hard to assess. Firstly they have never had large corporate rituals which attract attention and which could be said to advertise themselves and suggest to outsiders that there is a religious system. Their small scale ceremonies are come across by accident or heard about subsequent to their performance. Only the small spirit shrines in their compounds are visible to passers-by. Metal bells on live-stock and personal amulets dedicated to the ancestors are just seen as personal decorations or put on cattle to advertise their whereabouts.

Secondly the Sukuma language is tonal and much of their expressions and comments are almost ›haiku‹ like in their brevity. Outsiders can know the language adequately in a day to day sense without knowing its range in relation to the spirit world or the semantic restrictions which seem to be implied by its grammatical forms.

During the author's earlier research among the Sukuma between 1955 and 1965, he concluded that there appeared to have been little change in their thinking processes as a result of their contacts with Christianity, Islam and demand economics. Subsequent research in conjunction with those having more recent contacts with the Sukuma seems to suggest that there has been little discernable change since then. The time-span for changes in the paradigm of religious thinking of ordinary people is a long one.

The problem of attendance at the Eucharist

If this analysis of the meaning of sacrifice is even partially correct then we must ask why do African Christians from these societies attend the Eucharist which is advertised and taught to be a sacrifice. The Eucharist is well attended and yet large numbers find these religious performances an insufficient answer to their psychological and physical needs. Why do they come at all if it is so markedly unsuccessful in meeting their needs?

The history of the Eucharist (James 1962) tends to be about theological developments in which the practices of communicants are usually described in terms of their deviations from orthodoxy. The fact that most of them must have had expectations of material benefits and similarly must have been ignorant of the theological niceties in which the Eucharist was being performed, does not figure prominently in such analyses.

It is hard for instance to believe that the views of Albertus Magnus (1200–1280) that the Faithful must offer themselves to the Father in union with the Divine Victim, can have had any relevance to the practical needs of the communicants nor indeed contributed to popular religious thinking and understandings.

It is hard to think that contemporary theological thinking has any greater relevance unless the faithful have already moved in that direction which in the case of the Sukuma very clearly they have not. The paradigm within which the Sukuma think about their relations with the spirit world are unlikely to have been influenced to any great degree by any Christian theological statements and discussions. A magico-religious paradigm amongst the Sukuma is not likely to be shifted by a series of catechetical lessons and a period of probation before baptism.

The Church tells its members and prospective members that regular attendance at the Eucharist is a necessary part of religious practice and that an equally necessary part is to have a dogmatic belief in the Eucharist as a sacrifice. It is in reality what the Church says it is. It is not a symbol. Matthew 26;26 ›Take eat, this is my body‹ in translation is absolutely clear ›Twaeni, mle; huu ndio mwili wangu‹. This is no abstract statement, indeed in the Swahili it is even more forceful as the enclitic ›w‹ prefacing ›wangu‹ makes the pronoun only applicable to a human being. These and other biblical statements when presented to the faithful with the need and desire to believe are words of enormous potency. These men and women live in a world in which there may well not

be any clear division between the real and the symbolic, if indeed there is any such practical separation in any culture except in theoretical terms.

It is possible that among subsistence farmers the symbolic cannot be detached from their every day lives and the need for subsistence. To talk and discuss symbolic meanings suggests not only a sophistication of thought which clearly some traditional ritual practitioners have and which V. Turner describes so movingly at the end of his *Forest of Symbols* (1970), but much more besides. Firstly to have the time to do so when there is no immediate return from abstract thought but also that such talk should not be with those in the community with whom there is regular contact, since it would weaken their professional status by imposing doubt in situations where their patients expect dogmatic assertions. Abstract thinkers have to work with abstract thinkers for their ideas to develop.

The theological ideas of any group of people are unlikely to be stabilised for any length of time unless these ideas have been formally taught from books and this formalism regularly maintained. Even then there are likely to be variations as individuals find practical utility in some beliefs, neglect some and reject others.

In non-literate cultures and cultures that do not involve any high degree of religious literacy, there can be no such formalisation of ideas. The religious paradigm in *gemeinschaft* societies is perhaps more in the minds of such a society generally. Since there are no institutions interested in such formalisation, these ideas can change unobtrusively and regularly, while the people concerned are convinced that they are continuing their traditional beliefs. A practical benefit for non-literate societies.

There is no distinction in either theory or practice between traditional religious practitioners and their clients. They do not have a theological detachment which comes from such thinkers having their livelihoods assured independently of any client oriented relationship.

The Christian priest of any denomination is part of a religion based on literacy and even if he does not read much, he is well aware that his Church has got it all written down somewhere and that his conduct will be assessed against this written record of rules, definitions and procedures.

The extent of magical thinking about their religious practices is certainly widespread if not universal in the western world. It would not be far wrong to state that in traditional religious practices there is no other way of considering their efficaciousness. They would not spend precious time and resources on ritual activities unless they believed from previous experience that it could in the end have a reasonable chance of being efficacious. Subsistence farmers are pragmatists. These ritual systems are functionally useful for a wide variety of reasons of which the religious need not be the greatest or the most important.

Let us examine whether the Eucharist is seen or not seen in Christian theological terms. Is it attractive to those who have broken the social rules of their own societies (and who has not done this at some time or another) and who have experienced some misfortune (and who has not some personal suffering)?

It may well be that they are praying and practising within the Eucharistic sacrifice as provided by the Church but within a framework of semantic thinking which wants God

and his manifestations to return to the state of separation from human affairs to which they have always aspired in their traditional relationships with the spirit world.

However in the past sacrifice was related and only useful for matters concerning their immediate tribal world and indeed there was no other so that their system of religious thinking and practice developed functionally within an homogeneous culture. Now these tribal ritual remedies can by definition only be useful for a diminishing range of misfortunes which are perceived by them as to have originated within what is left of their tribal culture.

For the contemporary Lugbara or Sukuma most of their experiences and misfortunes originate or involve outsiders and it is presumed that a detribalised spirit world exists, which is going to influence them in the same ways as the spirit world of the tribal culture used to do. The Eucharist is an overarching ritual which is advertised as applying to all humankind wheresoever they may be and covering their contemporary concerns. Certainly there is ample evidence for the assumed utility of these supra-tribal Gods but not for the more detailed functions of these beliefs in the new social and economic world in which the people live.

If there was a functional utility in one system of belief and its ritual practices, can we not assume that if there is a substantial movement into another system of beliefs and practices, then very few of these functions are going to be altered under these new circumstances. The rituals may have changed but their functions will be very near to those of the system which they have replaced.

From what we know of their continuing interest in or anxiety about spirit influences on their lives and the proliferation of traditional religious practitioners in contemporary societies, it seems very unlikely that there has been any change in their thinking about the relationship between the living and the world of spirits and ancestors.

Any society has a paradigm of consensus thinking in current use and while individuals may possibly abandon this for short periods or for specific situations, it does not seem possible that large numbers of people should do so because of their adherence to a non-African religious system and its externally developed theology in which they have only intermittent contact and involvement.

These Christians come to the Eucharist. They are devout, regular in their religious practice and clearly admirable in the eyes of western observers who are enured to the declining participation of people in the mainstream denominations in their own countries.

It is suggested that their ideas about the nature of sacrifice which were part of the paradigm of tribal traditional thinking have been carried forward into their Christian participation in the Eucharist. Modern society as most Africans experience it, is markedly unpleasant. The 'golden age' enshrined in tribal memory filled with the certainties of a known environment almost entirely peopled by known individuals acting according to known norms is at the back of their thinking. Uncertainties certainly existed but they were within known and acceptable parameters of environmental hazards, death and disease. All these misfortunes they saw and experienced as at least partially controllable by their own ritual systems developed by themselves independently as functionally useful.

The dominance of magical practices

We can assume that most people have at some time in their lives had a religious experience; an emotional peak. The conversion to a belief whether by the medieval saint to the Christian God or a tribesman realising the influence of a particular ancestor. Both types of conversion require a behavioural change in the recipient. Some people can experience these emotional highs on a regular basis but this is not the case with most communicants.

Most believe even if they do not articulate this belief, that they will acquire material benefits by their mere presence at the Eucharist or traditional sacrifice. Attentiveness in the sense of mental or behavioural concentration is not an obvious characteristic of those attending either the Eucharist or a traditional sacrifice. During the ceremony a few are periodically involved, the remainder are attending the ceremony in an essentially passive sense; they are >viewing< the ceremony. It is so and it has always been so. Their dominant characteristic is that they are there at the ceremony and not somewhere else.

To what extent can the theological objections to magical concepts apply to a congregation of African Christians any more than they can apply to a western congregation. There is an essential difference between the traditional ceremonies of sacrifice and the rituals of an universal faith. With the former the rituals have developed functionally within a particular society subject to both internal and external influence. With the later the Eucharist has no direct or functional relationship to the community within which it is celebrated or to particular communicants, unless it is made so by the celebrant. In any case these popularising changes are peripheral to the orthodox order of service.

Contemporary traditional ceremonies are a response to a tension experienced by an individual. We can assume that those involved have a direct reason for being there which is usually that they are related by blood and marriage. These ceremonies are usually long and those attending drift in and out of the circle of celebrants just as they drift in and out of concentration on the ceremony. Those at the back may well be gossiping and others will leave to urinate. The comparative brevity of the Christian Eucharist is very noticeable; some even comment that it cannot be an important ceremony because it is always so brief.

It seems that while there may be individual reasons for attending and individual reactions to the ceremony, close and continuing connection with what is going on is not and never has been an essential requirement for what those involved consider to be a satisfactory ceremony. From this we can conclude that the fulfilment of religious requirements for the Sukuma are rather more functional for the group rather than for the individual and that individuals will be involved in interpreting what initiated the ceremony and its consequences rather than any particular interest in what may or may not happen at the sacrifice itself.

Can the Eucharist in comparison be expected to provide any variations on this pattern of anticipated behaviour? The sheer frequency of the Eucharist is likely to increase the

feeling of magical action. The traditional sacrifices are infrequent, the pressures to have them vary and the organisation which has to be put together to fulfil these needs is harder to create than it would be within a parish structure. If a Christian is required to attend the Eucharist regularly as a condition of church membership then the regularity will increasingly dominate over any personal needs. On the other hand attendance at the Eucharist accompanying rites of passage and crisis management will have a higher interactionist input and very little magical expectation.

So it seems likely that these Christians in eastern Africa attend the Eucharist in expectation that their presence there alone will provide them with a material return and that is a good and sufficient reason in itself. In this respect they do not see any difference between attendance at a Christian ceremony and attendance at a traditional sacrifice.

Magical action as a continuing expectation

If the paradigm for the function of traditional religious activity is the expectation that it will yield material rather than spiritual results, then this paradigm will continue for those practising Christian rituals.

Amongst the Sukuma and the Lubara the *gemeinschaft* paradigm of religious thought and behaviour is not likely to be changed by a single generational new experience or because of the influence of a few individuals who have left the community to work elsewhere and are no longer seen as community members. If there is such a person as an urbanised Sukuma this is more likely to be a geographical than a socio-religious distinction.

The changes in thinking patterns which have occurred in elite minds in western societies over centuries will not have extended to the thinking of Sukuma Christians with a different cultural heritage and different social experiences.

Their attendance at the Eucharist is thus in hope of material benefits and we are left with a statistical chance of such benefits occurring, the proportion varying with the nature of the misfortune and the interpretation of the sufferers as to its continuation or amelioration. It is probable that those with serious illnesses and misfortunes which cannot be reduced will attend since the Eucharist in practice is a single ritual in form and then move on to the traditional religious sector in search of relief where there is a variety of ritual forms which can be tried.

The Legio Maria in Kenya which is a breakaway Roman Catholic independent sect uses the Latin Mass and has services specifically directed at healing draws large crowds with its plainly magical appeal. The appeal and the response is up front, while that of the orthodox Eucharist is far from clear and privatised with its dedications for special intentions.

The traditional rituals for the amelioration of misfortune are focused on specific people with publically known difficulties; a cash and carry situation in which those involved are focused on their problems rather than diffused over a large congregation

and a multiplicity of intentions. In the Eucharist the power to ameliorate is diffused, its magical strength is by definition questionable to some degree.

Modern society and the experience of the Eucharist

We must start with the fact that modern society for these Christians is much less certain than anything produced from largely fictionalised tribal memories. They have been invaded mentally and physically by aliens, not just in the sense of having had the experience of being the colonies of European powers for a short period in their histories. Aliens white, brown or black who do not share and have never shared their cultural environment and the paradigms of their thinking. In this process their abilities and efforts tend to be downgraded in the scale of national needs and the world processes impinging on them from outside.

So with what hopes are they going to attend the Eucharist with its regular reiteration of the theme of sacrifice? We cannot expect that there will be any widely understood theological understandings of the Eucharist, any more than we would expect to find similar high levels of explanation among the Sukuma about their traditional rituals. Participants in religion can rarely explain why they are taking part except in very simplistic and dogmatic terms. We must examine the two rituals and see to what extent they replicate each other in functions.

The Sukuma traditional sacrificial ceremony is divided into five parts. Three of these can be broadly identified with the Eucharist; the presentation, the consecration and the consumption of the sacrifice. One part does not coincide at all; the killing of the sacrifice as part of the ceremony. Finally the examination of the sacrifice to see whether it confirms or not the intentions of the initiators of the sacrifice and the communicants. This could be said to occur theologically but not in the Sukuma form of haruspiciation, the examination of the victim's entrails to see the results.

Even though there are three parts which analytically coincide, it needs a particularly detached examination to identify these coincidences in what actually happens in the two different ceremonies. The format and style are so distinct, let alone the paradigms of thought within which they are performed, so that a Lugbara or Sukuma schoolchild would not even begin to think that the traditional sacrifice and the Eucharist had similarities. The same school child if pressed, would say that the point of Christianity is that it is not the same; it is the opposite to traditional practices and that the latter is not on a scale of change from the former, nor a development.

Since the traditional sacrifice is an outdoor affair, the enclosed nature of the Eucharist ceremony is a clear contrast. The formalism of the seating in which antithetical groups are forced to sit near each other, contrast with the disorderly groupings round the traditional sacrificial ceremony in which those attending closely are usually agnates with affines in the outer circle.

The regularity with which the Eucharist is performed is quite distinctive. Traditional sacrificial rituals have no such calendrical regularity and they cannot be scheduled to a

time since they are demand oriented. The Eucharist thus does not have in their eyes the occasional and responsive element which relates it to particular problems.

Thus perhaps the most basic difference apart from paradigmatic differences in religious thinking, is this unrelatedness of the Eucharist to the immediate concerns of the communicants. Since more than a single family or community is likely to be present, the intentions expressed by the celebrant has to be generalised. The Eucharist tends to have a single bland intention.

Traditional sacrifices have restricted intentions and only overarch families when there is some general danger as with a sacrifice for rain in 1954 which had an attendance of hundreds but even then the intention was for local not general rain. A priest at a later date refused to pray for rain on the grounds that he was not a meteorologist. In theory all Sukuma have a tribal uniformity and togetherness but in practice they are competitive for success. There is no benefit in sharing a sacrifice with others who are not relatives and whose success would only reduce the possibility of success for themselves; rain is not unlimited in the amount that can fall and if it falls nearby, it will not fall elsewhere so generously.

The Eucharist is concentrated on literacy. The priest reads from a book placed centrally on the altar. Even if he is speaking largely from memory, the book is central. It appears to be the key to what is being performed and thus is the central and continuing element in what the Church states is the most important part of Christian participation and practice.

Traditional sacrifice has no such permanent material objects, other than those kept by each family ›shitongerejo‹. Perhaps to outsiders the sacrificial object is focal although varying in shape and form, but this is because to him the practice of sacrifice is so entirely new that it attracts his attention. To those used to observing sacrifice the celebrant is the focus of attention particularly as he acts to attract attention within the varying paradigm of what is considered to be traditionally acceptable. He can repeat the form of previously performed sacrifices or he can invent something new as with the Sukuma traditional practitioner who introduced walking on fire into his sacrificial performance (Tanner 1958).

So the Eucharist appears to be book centred, as afterall the Bible is even kissed before the reading of the Gospel; a product of a system. The traditional sacrifice appears to be action centred round people and their intentions.

While there is movement in both rituals, there is less in the Eucharist and what movement there is is ritualised, formal and has been seen many times before by the communicants. Movement in the traditional sacrifice is much less formal and much less controlled by what is expected of the situation. Movement can happen anywhere within the ritual area and at no particular preordained time. If anything the traditional sacrifice could be described as a fidgetty affair and most of the time is spent waiting for something to happen. The Eucharist is a set piece affair and the communicants are part of a regular process in which the sermon is the only variable element.

In the traditional sacrifice the communicants are connected to the sacrifice by touch (Tanner 1958). Although the sacrifice may be for a particular person's misfortunes, it is offered by and on behalf of the kin group, the members of which are collectively

rather than individually involved. The connection is quite clearly visible to both participants and non-participants alike.

In the Eucharist there is no such connection other than that the communicants are in the same building. The elements to be used on the altar are brought forward by certain individuals to be received by the priest. These people may be those for whose intentions the Eucharist is being offered but this is not the common practice. Even if this was so their intentions are not those of a congregation of several hundreds. Thus the sacrifice which is theologically connected to the whole congregation is clearly one which in social terms has no such connection with most of those present.

In sound there is a clear distinction between the Eucharist and traditional sacrifices. The traditional sacrifice has a conversational background. The loose groupings of participants and the length of the rituals leads to participants talking amongst themselves; it is the necessary cement for their social relationships, the material that makes and unmakes alliances. Presence at a ritual is as good an occasion as any other for such talk.

The celebrant's words are addressed to the spirits and so those attending do not expect to hear or consider it necessary to do so. They are not auditory participants; there are no verbal responses which should be made to connect them to the ceremony.

During the Eucharist the communicants are expected to join in; there are fixed responses, chants that precede and terminate the ceremony. From the earliest days missionaries injected music into their rituals; they required singing and gave singers in their choirs special prominence and privileges in seating and costume. Talking is frowned on during the Eucharist and conversation is expected to take place afterwards outside the church.

Traditional ceremonies and divinations have glossolalia as a regular feature from either the diviner or celebrant or the divined. At its crudest it could be said that unintelligible verbal sound is seen as an essential part of Sukuma ceremonies. It is the vehicle for religious imagination when contact is being made with the other world. So understanding what is said has no part to play in traditional sacrifices. Why should this be so when their language is a perfectly adequate vehicle for all that they want to say? Perhaps the spirit world cannot be contacted in such a straightforward way and that it would reduce the implied powers of all those involved to consider otherwise.

It is in this context that the value of a specifically religious language has to be considered. The Sukuma see glossolalia as the language of the ancestors and spirits generally and of outsiders who they think may have had a more successful and wider knowledge of the other world. The extraordinary nature of their contacts with the other world requires extraordinary mediums of which a special and 'meaningless' language is the most obvious.

Few if any Sukuma understood a word of Latin and yet they attended the Latin Mass without questioning its intelligibility. Perhaps it was seen as a form of glossolalia and that yet again attendance alone was a sufficient reason for their participation.

The length of the ceremony is clearly a factor. Traditional ceremonies are spun out for social as much as religious reasons. The take-off time depends on when enough

participants have arrived and that depends as much as anything on cloud cover; overcast mornings delay arrivals.

The traditional ceremonies tail off into a meal, the consumption of the sacrifice; the need for protein as much as protocol delays departure. It is not so much that the participants have to stay until the end of all that is going on but that there is no reason for them to leave. The whole ceremony is an interesting if not pleasurable interruption in the monotony of their subsistence agricultural lives.

The brevity of the western Eucharist is a social requirement for religious ceremonies under their social and economic conditions. This has no attractions to the Sukuma in whose lives there may be more time available for ceremonies. In western societies time is a scarcer commodity and competition for its use stiffer.

In some ways the Eucharist underlines a religious division of labour which could be seen in economic terms. The Christian celebrant is full-time, whereas in the traditional religious system unless the celebrant is unusually well-known, is almost always part-time, depending for his clientele on his integration into the community in which he lives. With Christians such a division of labour implies and develops distinct patterns of social behaviour in which the needs of the communicants in the Eucharist are not a dominant feature of religious practice which they are in the traditional system.

What then are the coincidences between the Eucharist and traditional sacrifices? The principal performers wear distinctive costumes which are only worn on these occasions. However the traditional practitioner retains some items of personal wear which identifies him as connected with the world of the spirits, whereas the Christian priest who dresses as a layman does not.

There is a parallel in the way that both celebrants do not talk in a normal way; there is a religious voice. The Christian celebrant intones and the traditional celebrant uses glossolalia so the parallels are limited except in that the sound used is not that of everyday discourse.

Each traditional Sukuma family has some inherited venerated objects ›shitongerejo‹ which are necessary for the proper performance of traditional sacrifices. The retention of the Blessed Sacrament and church ornaments would appear to have some parallels to these as would holy medals if only they were not quite so obviously mass produced.

A dominant feature of traditional sacrifices is the person on whose behalf the ceremony is being performed and his or her family and they all eat some part of the sacrifice. No one is excluded because of what he or she might have done (De Heusch 1985). Here there is a parallel with the Eucharist in which communicants share in eating the sacrifice. Irrespective of what meaning is attributed to the Eucharist, it is consumption of a small piece of food and thus could be seen to have a tenuous relationship to the traditional sacrifice. If the traditional sacrifice involves an animal and the participants are few, then the portions of food available to everyone are likely to be large, a source of scarce animal protein. If the participants are many, then the corresponding portions are small and in this there are parallels to a Sunday parish Mass when there could be hundreds of communicants.

Conclusions

We can conclude that although the verbal symbol of sacrifice is common to both traditional sacrifice and the Eucharist, there is very little socially understood coincidence between their performers' intentions and the rituals themselves. To all intents and purposes these rituals are parts of different paradigmatic thinking. The Christian Sukuma should be and the Christian priest will be performing the Eucharist with different intentions to those performing traditional sacrifices.

Many of these difficult issues appear to have been made into problems because the Eucharist has become a regular obligation. In situations in which the Eucharist is not regularly available to Christians because they are travelling or because priests are not available, the Eucharist tends to have an added importance. A much more focal social and religious activity which parallels many aspects of traditional sacrificial rituals.

In these quasi-tribal circumstances the carrying out of the Eucharist is a working misunderstanding. The vast majority of Christian Sukuma are participating for magical reasons relating to their current lives within what is essentially a traditional paradigm of religious thinking. The reasons for attendance must be sort in this traditional paradigm and in social factors which make membership of the Roman Catholic Church preferable to membership of other religious, social and economic institutions which are consumers and providers of resources whether they be of time, goods or sociability.

It is further postulated that this conclusion could apply with some strength to western communicants except that their paradigm of religious thinking involves a loving and concerned God which the traditional pattern of thinking excludes.

It is also likely that the Christian Sukuma does not see Christianity and its core ritual the Eucharist, as an either/or situation and thus that the Eucharist is not an alternative which excludes traditional practices. There is thus for them a scale of values and utility and where the Eucharist lies on this scale is a function of time, place, social status and the extent of the misfortune.

For the Christian Sukuma with their experience of misery and misfortune, it is hard to see that any foreseeable developmental process will work to expunge their traditional paradigm of religious thinking in the way that industrial development and scientific thought combined with an improved standard of living has done for the westerner. The Christian Church in quasi-tribal Africa must learn to be satisfied with the Eucharist as a working misunderstanding.

Summary

The author as a bilingual researcher into Christianity, Islam and traditional religions in Tanzania culminating in his *Transition in African beliefs* (1969) described the successes of Roman Catholicism as a working misunderstanding. The Church and its priests thought that the Sukuma, a pastoral people living to the south of Lake Victoria were converted to certain fundamental Christian principles in their practice of the Faith

whereas the Sukuma had very different ideas as to why they should be and were practising. This analysis compares the meaning which participants attribute to traditional sacrifices and the sacrifice of the Mass in Christian *gemeinschaft* self-contained communities (Tonnies 1957) in Eastern Africa, in which individuals and Sukuma society generally are mainly concerned with subsistence survival.

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