

## 18. WHAT DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT DO?

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### **Sacrifices in animist cultures (Cameroon and Gabon)<sup>1</sup>**

1. Danger is everywhere -it comes from the constant interference between human actions, nature and the world of spirits.
  - 1.1. these interferences must be controlled
  - 1.2. to establish a certain reciprocity, blood is the preferred instrument of 'commerce', an instrument of exchange with the world of spirits
2. The sacrifice pays for access to a new state:
  - 2.1. becoming a creator/maker or knowledge of the beyond.
  - 2.2. it is an initiation into a power which goes beyond the condition of being human: to be like God, the human being must die.

### **The blood of Christ in the New Testament<sup>2</sup>**

3. The blood of Christ is mentioned constantly in the New Testament:
  - 3.1. "The new covenant in my blood" (Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; Mt 26:28 and Mk 14:24)
  - 3.2. The passages which speak of the eucharistic blood of Jesus (1 Cor 10:16 ; 11 :27; Jn 6:53-56)
  - 3.3. Heb 13 :20 f  
20Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, 21equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.
  - 3.4. "He purchased with blood" (Acts 20:28).
  - 3.5. "He redeemed us for God with blood" (Rev 5 :9).
  - 3.6. "Redemption through blood" (Eph 1:7; see 1 Pet 1:19; Rev 1:5)
  - 3.7. "Propitiation by blood" (Rom 3:25)
  - 3.8. Rom 5:9

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<sup>1</sup> Bureau R., "La mort rédemptrice du Christ à la lumière de l'ethno-sociologie des religions", dans *Mort pour nos péchés. Recherche pluridisciplinaire sur la signification rédemptrice de la mort du Christ*, Bruxelles 1979, 28-44.

<sup>2</sup> Most of what follows comes from Lyonnet S. et Sabourin L., *Sin, redemption and sacrifice. A biblical and patristic study*, Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Roma 1998.

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Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

3.9. “Making peace through blood” (Col 1:20).

3.10. “You have been brought near through the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13).

3.11. “The blood of Christ cleanses” (1 Jn 1:7; Heb 9:14).

3.12. “The sprinkling of blood” (1 Pet 1:2; Heb 12:24).

3.13. Sanctification by blood, Heb 13:12:

So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.

3.14. “To wash in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14)

3.15. Victory by the blood, Rev 12: 11:

They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death

3.16. Forgiveness by the shedding of blood, Heb 9:22.

Under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

4. To understand the references to blood in the New Testament we need to understand the rites involving blood especially in three forms of sacrifices prescribed in the Old Testament:

4.1. the sacrifice of the **Passover lamb**, omnipresent in the gospel of John, cf. 1:36  
35The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, 36and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!”

4.2. the **sacrifice of the covenant**, mentioned explicitly in the accounts of the institution of the Eucharist and in Heb 9:15-22

15Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. 16For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. 17For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. 18Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. 19For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, 20saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.” 21And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. 22Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

4.3. the **sacrifice of atonement** for corporate sins mentioned in Rom 3:25 and Heb 9:11-14

11But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 12he entered once for all into the holy places, not

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by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. [13](#)For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, [14](#)how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

### The sacrifice of the Passover lamb

5. Cf Ex 12:1-27, especially

[7](#)“Then they shall take some of the blood [of the lamb] and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it.

[12](#)For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. [13](#)The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt. [14](#)“This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast.

[21](#)Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb. [22](#)Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. [23](#)For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you. [24](#)You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. [25](#)And when you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. [26](#)And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ [27](#)you shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.’” And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

6. The role of blood here is not to appease God but to mark the elect, as is understood by the Apocalypse, through Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 9: [4](#)And the LORD said to him, “Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.

Rev 14:1 [1](#)Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him [144,000](#) who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.

Rev 7 [1](#)After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. [2](#)Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, [3](#)saying,[3](#)

“Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.” <sup>4</sup>And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

- 7. The sacrificial character of this rite is disputed. In any case, Judaism of the time of Jesus and the New Testament see the Passover Lamb as a sacrifice,

Cf. 1 Cor 5:7 Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

### The Covenant Sacrifice

Ex 24: <sup>3</sup>Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.” <sup>4</sup>And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. <sup>5</sup>And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. <sup>6</sup>And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. <sup>7</sup>Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” <sup>8</sup>And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

- 7.1. The essential rite is the sprinkling of the blood, while the immolation of the bulls is simply the preparation and is performed by servants.
- 8. The context is a promise of fidelity and of a mutual commitment. Blood is a means of expressing the union of the two contracting parties, God being represented by the altar.
- 9. This is the only meaning with which Christ appropriated the sacrificial symbolism of the blood, in the accounts of the institution of the Eucharist (Mat 26:28 et par.)
 

<sup>26</sup>Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” <sup>27</sup>And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, <sup>28</sup> for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>29</sup> I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

### The sacrifice of atonement

- 10. The essential rite was not the immolation of animals, but the sprinkling of blood, performed by the priest alone either directly on the mercy seat, on Yom Kippur, or indirectly on the veil of the Holy of Holies every day throughout the year, cf. Lev 16 and 4.
- 11. But what connection is there between the sprinkling of blood and the remission of sins, as evidenced for example by

Heb 9 <sup>22</sup>Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

**12.** Blood is assigned the function of purification:

Lev 16: **15**“Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. **16**Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses. [...] **19**And he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it and consecrate it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel.

**13.** The function of the blood is also that of sanctifying the altar and the priests (see Ex 29: 11-16 and 19-21 and par).**14.** Here, in particular, the use of blood resembles that of the covenant sacrifice of the book of Exodus:

**14.1.** the blood empowers people to draw near to God (or to use things for the worship of God), i.e. it unites with God.

**14.2.** Holiness, in fact, is one of the essential attributes of the God of Israel. The first idea is that of separation, inaccessibility, transcendence which inspires religious fear.

**14.3.** This holiness is communicated to that which approaches God or is consecrated to him (places, people, objects). This is why there is, in Leviticus,

i. a law of purity [Lev 11-16]: pure is that which can approach God, impure is what makes one unfit for worship or is excluded from it

ii. and a law of holiness [Lev 17-26]. The essence of holiness consists in belonging to Yahweh. The separation from the impure, implied by holiness, explains the sacrifices of atonement aimed at eliminating impurity to make the person making the offer ‘consecrated’ to Yahweh again.

**15.** But the reason why the cleansing of sins is attributed to this blood ritual is explained in Lev 17:11.**Leviticus 17:11****16.** There are two main ways in which this passage is translated from the Hebrew in modern Bibles

*New International Version:* For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.

*New American Standard Bible:* For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.

**17.** The context is that of the prohibition of eating blood, “For the life of all flesh is its blood” [14], recalling

Gen 9:4 But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

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and Dt 12:23: Only be sure that you do not eat the blood, for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh.

18. In all these passages, it is always the life or soul of the animal that is meant.
19. In Lev.17:11, the reason for this prohibition is explained by the atoning sacrificial function of the blood. According to a proper understanding of atonement, the meaning of the phrase is: 'the blood is that which I gave you for the purification of your souls/lives'. However, the difference between the translations carries an opposite meaning of atonement:
  1. the NIV by translating "it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life", implies an understanding of atonement in the sense of propitiation, of the appeasement of anger of God or at least of an exchange: the life of the animal is offered in place of the life of the person making the offer. The atonement for sin takes the form of a satisfaction or a penal substitution (aimed at producing a change on the side of God).
  2. the NASB closely follows the Hebrew text: "for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement", that is the blood owes its effectiveness in the rite of atonement because it is life. Atonement therefore takes the form of purification (the change is effected not in God but in the person making the offer).
20. Several elements militate in favor of this last translation:
  - 20.1. In view of the immediate context of Lev 17:11, it is not possible to understand that the blood would atone because it represents the life of the person offering the animal, as if one took the life of the animal in place of the life of the person making the offer. Lev 17:14 (and the parallel passages cited above) refers to the life or soul of the animal. The blood does not atone 'for a life', but 'because it is life'.
  - 20.2. Then, the interpretation 'for a life' (substitution) would contradict the legislation of Leviticus: the blood of the victims of the sacrifices does not atone for a person who has committed a sin deserving death, because in such cases it is indeed the death sentence that ensues – but it atones for sins committed inadvertently. Indeed, there is a distinction between sins committed inadvertently which can be erased by virtue of the sacrifice, and sins committed willingly which could not be atoned by any rite :

Num 15:28 [27](#)“ But if just one person sins unintentionally, that person must bring a year-old female goat for a sin offering. [28](#)The priest is to make atonement before the LORD for the one who erred by sinning unintentionally, and when atonement has been made, that person will be forgiven. [29](#)One and the same law applies to everyone who sins unintentionally, whether a native-born Israelite or a foreigner residing among you. [30](#)“ But anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or foreigner, blasphemes the LORD and must be cut off from the people of Israel. [31](#)Because they have despised the LORD’s word and broken his commands, they must surely be cut off; their guilt remains on them.’
  - 20.3. For this reason Psa 51:18ff recalls that for David's sin the ritual sacrifice was of no help; it required the direct intervention of divine forgiveness granted to the repentant heart:

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Psa 51:16

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,  
O God of my salvation,  
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.

[15](#)O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.

[16](#)For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;  
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

[17](#)The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

[18](#)Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;  
build up the walls of Jerusalem;

[19](#)then will you delight in right sacrifices,  
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;  
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

- 20.4.** Then, never in the ritual of Leviticus – except for the scapegoat, which was not a sacrifice – was it thought that the sacrificial victim bore the sin of the person who make the offer to be punished in his/her place. This would have contaminated the victim making it unsuitable to be offered and contaminated also all those who touched it – cf. how the person responsible for accompanying the scapegoat into the desert must then purify himself [Lev 16:26]. On the contrary, of the victim of a sacrifice it is said that:

Lev 10:17 [17](#) It is a thing most holy and has been given to you that you may bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD?

See also Eze 42:13 [13](#)Then he said to me, “The north chambers and the south chambers opposite the yard are the holy chambers, where the priests who approach the LORD shall eat the most holy offerings. There they shall put the most holy offerings—the grain offering, the sin offering, and the guilt offering—for the place is holy.

- 20.5.** Next, the prescription that the person making the offer should place his hands on the head of the victim does not allow to interpret atonement in the sense of “propitiation/satisfaction/substitution”:

“The victim is presented by a person who must be in a state of ritual purity. He places his hand on the victim's head. It is not a magical gesture which establishes contact between God and man, nor is it the symbol of a substitution of the victim for the person as if the animal sacrificed took on itself the person's sins. No doubt, in the ceremony of the scapegoat (Lev 16:21)<sup>3</sup> the animal is thus charged with the sins of the people but, precisely

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<sup>3</sup> Lev 16 [20](#)“And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. [21](#)And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. [22](#)The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.

because of this transfer, the animal becomes impure and unworthy of being sacrificed. The laying on of hands by the person is no more a simple *manumissio*, that is the handing over of the victim to God - it is the solemn attestation that this victim indeed comes from the person offering it and that the sacrifice which will be presented by the priest is offered in the person's name and that the fruits of the sacrifice will benefit that person.”<sup>4</sup>

## Conclusion

21. The crucial point is Yahweh's testimony in Lev 17:11: “It is I who has given this blood to you.”
  - 21.1. Blood does not have sacred value in itself, even independently of sacrifice.
  - 21.2. On the contrary, it is the blood of the sacrifice which is expiatory, and not the blood as such.
  - 21.3. The victim, immolated during a symbolic action prescribed by God, enters the sphere of the divine, provides the blood intended by God himself for atonement.
22. Unlike what happens in primitive religions where the idea of atonement is linked to purificatory rites which released powers capable of producing magical effects, in priestly legislation this power is *attributed to divine will*:

Lev 17.11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.
23. Rather than an offering made to God, sacrificial blood is therefore a gift made *by* God to people. In the ancient economy, rites played a role through the will of God: because of the offering God removed sin.
24. The priestly texts insist on a close relationship between the life of the people and the state of holiness or desecration of the holy places, of the altar in particular. By purifying the altar, the sacrificial blood keeps the people in communion with God. This atoning virtue of blood is linked to divine goodwill, excluding any magical interpretation.
25. Ultimately, the blood, in these three Old Testament rituals, fulfills a similar role: either to establish (in the covenant sacrifice of the Exodus) or to restore (in the sacrifice of atonement) the union of the chosen people with God. It is therefore not surprising that the two sacrifices are closely related to each other in

Heb 9 – **sacrifice of atonement:** 11 Christ, himself, appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, passing through the greater and more perfect tent which is not made with hands, that is say who is not of this creation, 12 entered into the sanctuary once for all, not with the blood of goats and young bulls, but with his own blood, having purchased for us eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of heifers, with which those who are unclean are sprinkled, sanctify them with purity of the flesh, 14 how much more does the blood of Christ, who through

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<sup>4</sup> Vaux, R. De, *Les institutions de l'Ancien Testament*, Paris Cerf 1958, vol II, p. 292

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an everlasting Spirit offered himself without spot to God, will he purify our conscience from dead works so that we may worship the living God.

**covenant sacrifice:** 15 Therefore he is mediator of a new covenant, so that, his death having taken place to redeem the transgressions of the first covenant, those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.

26. [181] Likewise, the Last Supper and the Cross contain references to the three blood sacrifices:
- 26.1. *paschal lamb*: the time of the crucifixion in John (when the Paschal Lamb was sacrificed) and the paschal context of the last supper in the synoptics (Jewish Passover)
  - 26.2. *covenant sacrifice*: Christ refers to it explicitly by speaking of his blood as the 'blood of the new and eternal covenant'
  - 26.3. *the sacrifice of expiation*: cf. Mt 26:28 "For this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"
27. Therefore, the meaning attributed by the Old Testament to "atonement" is that of a *purification* of the person, ultimately of a change in the person .
- 27.1. This excludes the interpretations of 'penal substitution' or 'satisfaction'.
  - 27.2. However, this does not mean that the theme, very present in the Old and New Testaments, of the wrath of God is neglected.
  - 27.3. Indeed, there is a true sense in which the sacrifices of atonement are intended to appease the wrath of God:
  - 27.4. not that of 'satisfying' this anger by punishing the sinner, directly or indirectly,
  - 27.5. but ultimately in the sense that, by purifying/wiping out sin, the atonement removes the cause in man of God's wrath. By changing man internally, by converting him to God, he unites him again with him.