

**CHRIST THE SCAPEGOAT IN LIGHT OF *AGIKUYU GATITIKI*:  
TOWARDS CHRIST THE *GATITIKI* PER-EXCELLENCE AS  
*AGIKUYU* CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF ATONEMENT**

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**Publication Date: September 2025**

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**ABSTRACT**

The drift by the *Agĩkũyũ* people towards the cultural practices of sacrificing goats is a move experienced in our contemporary society that has attracted many people including those who confess the Christian faith. For this reason this has become a challenge within the practice of the Christian faith risking to get into syncretism where we see double allegiance on one hand one claiming to be a Christian but on the other hand one foot is in the African cultural practices. On one hand holding to the sacrifice of Christ as the final sacrifice but still retreating to the African culture and offering the sacrifices for the purpose of appeasing the so called the ancestral spirits. This paper holds that if the *Agĩkũyũ* Christians understood the supremacy, finality and the efficacy of the sacrifice offered by Christ on the cross they would be freed from the challenge of reversing to their culture for goats sacrifices and instead hold on to the atoning work of Christ on Calvary as the last and the ultimate sacrifice. The paper uses the *Agĩkũyũ* concept of the sacrifices particularly the use of the goat (*Gatitiki*) to introduce the Christian mystery of atonement. The methodology here used is Charles Nyamitis inculturation theology as one of the trends which is helpful in introducing the Christian mystery of atonement to the African context; crossing from 'atonement' by use of goats to the acknowledgement of the Supreme work of Christ's Atonement.

**Keywords:** *Gatitiki (sacrificial goat), atonement, efficacy, inculturation*

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**INTRODUCTION**

The *Agĩkũyũ* people had numerous sacrifices involving use of the goat as the sacrificial animal no wonder Cagnolo reference of a goat as the genius of the people accompanying them from the cradle to the grave. He goes on to give a catalogue of different instances that the *Agĩkũyũ* people had to slaughter a goat or goats for the purpose of addressing various challenges that would be feared to

occur just in case the goat sacrifice was not made (Cagnolo 1933:177). This article is set first to address the centrality of the goats in *Agĩkũyũ* ceremonies and sacrifices. The second part deals with the Doctrine of Atonement giving both the Old and the New Testament Perspective on Atonement. Third section deals with the methodology which is based on Charles Nyamiti inculturation in an effort to contextualize the Christian mystery as we look at similarities and differences between Christ Atonement and *Agĩkũyũ Gatitiki*. This is helpful in demonstrating the Supremacy of Christ's Atonement. Let us now start with the centrality of the goats in *Agĩkũyũ* ceremonies and sacrifices. As earlier noted Goats sacrifices among most African communities and particularly the *Agĩkũyũ* held a significant cultural and religious symbolism and their role in sacrifices was very central in various rituals and ceremonies. The Goats were often considered sacred animals in African traditional belief systems, representing fertility, abundance, and spiritual purity. They were used as symbol of wealth and the life of the *Agĩkũyũ* people revolved around goats which were even used in batter trade and settling different penalties if and when one was required to pay such penalties for their wrong doing (Cagnolo 1933:178). Sacrifices were believed to establish a direct connection between the human and spiritual realms, allowing for communication with ancestors, deities, or the divine. The choice of sacrificial animals was influenced by their perceived qualities, such as vitality, agility, and the absence of physical imperfections or blemishes (Wepener 2021, p3).

Among the *Agĩkũyũ* people goat sacrifices were commonly performed during important life events, such as birth, marriage, initiation rites, and funerals, to invoke blessings, protect against evil, or ensure the passage of souls to the other world. The act of sacrificing goats served as an expression of gratitude, humility, and devotion towards higher powers, acknowledging their role in human existence (Gatu 2006,p24).Therefore, in the *Agĩkũyũ* culture, goat sacrifices were accompanied by specific rituals, prayers, chants, or invocations, aimed at invoking the desired outcomes or appeasing spiritual realms or forces. Kenyatta cites one of the instances of such sacrifices in times of draught when the *Agĩkũyũ* people approached *Mwene Nyaga* (God) offering the sacrifice in order to appease him.

Reverend Elder (God) who lives on *Kere-Nyaga*. You who make mountains tremble and rivers flood; we offer to you this sacrifice that you may bring us rain. People and children are crying; sheep, goats, and cattle (flocks and herds) are crying. *Mwene-Nyaga*, we beseech you, with the blood and fat of this lamb which we are going to sacrifice to you.

Refined honey and milk we have brought for you. We praise you in the same way as our forefathers (*ndemi na mathathi*) used to praise you under this very same tree, and you heard them and brought them rain. We beseech you to accept this, our sacrifice, and bring us rain of prosperity (Kenyatta 1938, p249).

The distribution of sacrificial goat meat held social significance, fostering communal bonds and emphasising the value of sharing resources within the community. Sacrificing of goats was believed to bring spiritual purification and atonement, cleansing individuals or communities from taboos, sins, or negative influences and defilements. The centrality of goats among the *Agĩkũyũ* people and their sacrifices underscores their integral role in maintaining spiritual harmony, ancestral veneration, and the preservation of cultural traditions across generations. Cagnolo observes that the *Agĩkũyũ* people formed for themselves a body of beliefs and superstitions which developed into religious precepts which they regard as the laws of God. He states that;

On the most solemn occasion of life, in times of calamity and whenever he feels himself oppressed by the invisible world or the victim of some ill chance, he imagines himself to have offended his ancestral spirits and a kikuyu resort to the sacrifices of animals just as did the people in ancient history (Cagnolo 1933,p176).

On this Cagnolo points out that a goat as a sacrificial animal was regarded as very important, it was as he calls it the protecting genius that accompanied the *Agĩkũyũ* people from the cradle to the grave (Cagnolo 1933, p176). Therefore, the *Agĩkũyũ* acknowledged that one had to guard their life and how they lived in good terms with the other world. This brought the elements of worship which involved the priests or the diviner (*mũndu mũgo*) in order to intervene in different aspect of life. Further, he highlights different instances and efforts put to wade off the curses through a well-established system of sacrifices (Cagnolo 1933, p177).Cagnolo further state that;

The goat is a cure for an evil that has already happened. But a Kikuyu anxious to protect himself does not wait to remedy the evil he tries to avoid it instead by providing himself with amulets and talismans which possess the power to prevent accidents and diseases. Some of these are personal others are applied to places and things (Cagnolo 1933, p181).

Further, the *Agĩkũyũ* even after they had worked so hard to follow and adhere to those rituals and requirements and having all these talismans they were still not satisfied they still had to comply with many other endless observances in order to avoid any possible chance of mishaps. The last was the scapegoat and the ceremony of chasing away the epidemic (*kũingata mũrimũ*). This was mainly to address issues of national importance like when epidemics and catastrophe threatened

the community. On this ceremony two issues were addressed first was a ceremony of *kũingata mũrimũ* where people could gather and literally shout the plague away from one ridge to the other. Further, the ritual would involve a goat the *Agĩkũyũ* referred as *gatitika* (the carrier) because the goat would symbolically be stuck with insects into the mouth and stitched up. The goat could be released while blinded by sewing its eyelids; as the goat left, the people viewed it as symbolically taking away the sins of the people and thus would expect normalcy to resume (Githuku 2012, p70-71). Wachege is right in asserting that there is need for us to emancipate ourselves from such fears which are a reality in our contemporary society. One such way is to first understand that all the challenges are reversible and here then note that the most effective way to reverse them is by acknowledging the atoning work of Christ on the cross (Wachege 2012,p11). Let us now turn to the doctrine of atonement.

### **The Doctrine of Atonement**

The doctrine of Atonement in Christian theology remains to be central doctrine which deals with all that Jesus Christ did on the cross. This part gives a brief survey of the Biblical view of the doctrine of Atonement and the Anselm satisfactory theory of atonement. According to Douglas & Tenny in their *Bible Dictionary*, (1987) the word Atonement draws its roots meaning from the English word reparation which leads us to its meaning which is reconciliation rendered it *at-one-ment*. This implies bringing together in to harmony those who have for some reason been separated or in disagreement. Further this takes us to the important questions that we need to reflect on like what brought the separation and now what is it that brought the peace and how has it been realised or accomplished.? (Douglas &Tenny 1987, p108).

Morris in Ferguson and Wright, *New Dictionary of Theology* (1988) further points to the centrality of the doctrine of Atonement arguing that it is crucial and just as the cross is at the Centre of the Christian faith, the doctrine of Atonement is critical and actually the central doctrine within Christianity. Morris here notes that each of the Christian doctrine is important and takes its place within the Christian faith but the doctrine of Atonement is at the Centre point. This is so because of the need for atonement which arise from the sinfulness of humanity and the fact that humanity is unable to deal with the problem posed by sin; the separation from God.

That all are sinners is clear from specific expression in scripture...but perhaps more important is the whole thrust of the Bible. It is clear throughout scripture that we do not

measure up to the standards God laid down... This is serious for the wages of sin is death... The Bible makes it plain that sins excludes from the blessings of God... The sinner is in a desperate situation. But God in his love and mercy has always made provision." (Morris in Ferguson & Wright 1988, p54).

In the Old Testament, Atonement is drawn from the root K-ph-r which is translated as "to make Atonement- at-one-ment" or to cover over which brings the implication of using a ransom price to cover an offence which Douglas & Tenny points to not sweeping the offence out of sight but by making equivalent payment so that the offence done could be considered to have actually and equally been paid for through the paid ransom. This emphasises on removing an offence by equivalent payment of a ransom so as to bring the offender and the offended into fellowship and therefore together once again (Douglas & Tenny 1987:108). It is important to note that the means of atonement and the actual price paid as equivalent to the sin committed was the sacrificial blood rather the life laid down in death. The book of Leviticus gives us the laws which were to be followed on the Day of Atonement. The key purpose of the Day of Atonement was fourfold.

First to show God's hatred of sin, that the wages of sin is death...and that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness... second to show the contagious nature of sin for even the most holy place had to be cleansed because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whenever their sins have been. Third to point forward to the death of the Lamb of God our blessed saviour; and fourth by its repetition year after year to signify that the way into the very presence of God had not been made manifest before the death of Christ (Douglas & Tenny 1987, p109).

Human efforts to save themselves resulted in much sacrificial system to cover and seek reconciliation with God but we know that all this was in vain. The Israelites observed the Day of Atonement which was a day of solemn rest (Lev.16). On this particular day they had to cleanse themselves and in humility a sacrifice of Atonement could be offered for the sins of all people. According to Dyrness the Day of Atonement was the most important day for people's repentance and sacrifices to God. The Lord had directed for provisions to be made for daily and weekly sacrifices and offerings. However even after all these efforts; this was still not sufficient to cover the sins of the children of Israel (Dyrness 1977, p129). Further he states that;

On this day the high priest took the atoning blood into the holy of holies to make Atonement for the Priest and all the people because of all their sins.(Lev16:34). This was certainly solemn reminder that all could not be joy in their relationship with God, for sin had to be dealt with. Significant on the day was the scapegoat on whose head were put all the sins of the people before it was sent off into the wilderness. As it is

explained "the goat shall bear all their iniquities upon him to a solitary land" (Lev 16:22) Again the substitutionary character of Atonement is made graphically clear (Dyrness 1977, p129).

The two animals sacrificed took the central point on this Day of Atonement. The first animal was sacrificed for the Priest to take the atoning blood the Holy of holies. Secondly the animal that symbolically carried the sins of the people and was sent to the wilderness. As we note they both pointed the coming of the messiah who was to carry the sins of the world upon himself on the cross. It's noteworthy at this point that the *Agĩkũyũ* practice of offerings the scapegoat (*gatitiki*) resonate well with these Levitical directives. Let's now turn to the doctrine of Atonement in the New Testament. In the New Testament, Christ reference as a sacrifice of the new Temple and seal functioning as a priest are evident right from the Gospel of Matthew recorded of the celebration of the last supper taking note of how Jesus took bread broke it saying this is my body and afterwards took the cup saying drink this is the blood of the new covenant poured out for the forgiveness of sins. (Mat 26:26-28) St. John depict Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29) Apostle Paul on the other hand the points to Christ as whom God put forward as a sacrifice of Atonement by his blood which is affected through faith (Sherman 2004:183, Rom 3:24-45). Further, to the church in Ephesus Paul writes that Christ loved us and gave himself up for us a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Eph. 5:2) Sherman thus state that;

The priestly intercession and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, the incarnate son, the triune God provides what humanity needs to be reconciled to God and re-established as his covenant people. In the world corrupted by human sin the eternal son himself became human and representing humanity, took upon himself the guilt and bore the punishment that was its due even as he provides the means of overcoming this corruption (Sherman 2004, p183).

However, Morris points that the word Atonement occurs once in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans (Rom 5:11) but he admits that the idea is evident throughout the New testament making it clear that it is what God has done through Christ that enables us though sinners to approach God and enter into his blessings not only now but also in the eternity (Morris in Ferguson & Wright 1988, p55). Morris states that;

Christ atoning work is viewed from many numbers of angles. Thus sinners are slaves to their sins (John 8:34), but Christ has set them free (Gal 5:1). They were caught up in the sin of Adam: in Adam all die (1Cor 15:22). But Christ died for our sins (1Cor 15:3) and the effect of Adam's sin have been nullified (Rom 5:12-21). Sinners are subject to judgement, both a judgement in the here and now (Rom1:24, 26, 28) and a



judgement at the end of the age (Rom 2:10) but there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Rom 8:1) (Morris in Ferguson & Wright 1988, p55).

Further, Morris points to the reality that we are captives to the law of sin. However Christ has turned the wrath away from sinners which brings us to the propitiation through the sacrifice made by Christ. Christ has saved his people through his atoning death (Morris in Ferguson & Wright 1988:55). Douglas & Tenny concurs with this argument pointing out that there are two opposite facts that they ingenuity of theologians could not have reconciled without God offering the solution. In the first place we note that God is holy and hates sin which means that by God's law sin is a serious capital crime. Secondly, God is loves which takes us to the old age question of how God can be just and at the same time justify the sinner? (Douglas & Tenny 1987,p109). For this reason we come to acknowledge that as both state that;

He voluntarily emptied himself of divine trappings of omnipotence, omniscience and glory... that he might be truly human, becoming the babe of Bethlehem. For some thirty three years he perfectly fulfilled the law on our behalf... and then paid the penalty for our sins in his death for us on the cross... Our Lord's work of Atonement looks in three directions: towards sin and Satan...towards us... and towards the Holy father (Douglas & Tenny 1987, p109).

God extends his love to humanity who here stand sinful and in need of redemption and became sin for them to be reconciled to him. The debt of sin has fully been settled through the atoning work of Christ. The gospel shows evidence of Jesus depicted as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the people (John 1:29). The epistle of Hebrews further demonstrate Christ as the one taking our sins even as much as he is regarded as the one without sin. We note that Christ is depicted as the high priest as well as the final sacrificial lamb offered for the sake of humanity (Hebrews13:11). We have here noted the role played by the bull, the ram for the purification of the High Priest and the congregation as well as the Scapegoat signifying the carrying away of the sins of the people. Anselm substitutionary theory of Atonement mainly points to the concept of exchange, restoration, representation and finally substitution. His understanding of Atonement is that this could only be realised by God. The redemption of humanity could not be effected through other beings whether Angels, humans or by God declaring humanity sinless by his will. This is impossible because such would make humanity slaves to the other being involved in redemption which could lead to idolatry. Humanity was created to serve God alone and any other form of deliverance could not restore humanity to the original dignity which humanity enjoyed before they

fell into sin (C.D.H vi: 2). The death of Christ is not in any way the condemnation from the father but God's commitment through incarnation to atone the sins of humanity. The death inflicted on Christ was out of his will because humanity could only be saved from sin by the death of a human being yet they could not die for their sins and all their effort had proved futile.

God did not compel Christ to die; but he suffered death of his own will not yielding up his life as an act of obedience but on account of his obedience in maintaining holiness for he held out so firmly in this obedience that he met death on account of it (C.D.H IX, p17).

For this reason the son of God had to die so that he can bring the forgiveness and Atonement of the sin of humanity and finally that humanity could get to the state of eternal blessedness.

So the father desired the death of the son, because he was not willing that the world should be saved in any other way, except by man's doing so greater thing as that which I have mentioned. And this, since none other would accomplish it, availed as much with the son. Who so earnestly desired the salvation of man, as if the father had commanded him to die; and therefore as the father gave him commandments so he did, and the cup which the father gave to him he drank being obedient even unto death (C.D.H ix, p17).

The sinfulness of human requiring a sacrifice of blood from God brings in incarnation upon which God takes the human form in order to demonstrate his love for humanity. The concept of Atonement according to Anselm is centered on two critical issues. The first is sin and the second is satisfaction. Sin is punishable and therefore as long as one doesn't restore the honour due to God one remains in sin. So then everyone who sins ought to pay back the honour of which he has robbed God; and this is the satisfaction which every sinner owes to God (CDH XI:10). Humanity because of their sin must be made to make satisfaction to God for He cannot take sinful humanity without Atonement.

Therefore consider it settled that without satisfaction, that is; without voluntary payment of the debt, God can neither pass by the sin unpunished nor can the sinner attain that happiness... which he had before he sinned; for man cannot be restored or become such as he was before he sinned. (C.D.H xix, p20).

The satisfaction needed ought to be proportionate to sin and the guilt; the question further raised is how then do you pay God for your transgression? Anselm point out that humanity has nothing to offer God for satisfaction, simply because anything they wish to offer him ultimately and already belongs to God. Satisfaction cannot be made with something that is of lesser value.



So that as by man God suffered loss by Man also He might recover His loss... As in the fall of man all human nature was corrupted... So by Man's victory as many men may be justified from sin as are needed to complete the number which man was made to fill. But a sinful man can by no means do these for a sinner cannot justify a sinner. (C.D.H xxiii, p10).

Therefore, only God can make the satisfaction because he is the only one who is not sinful but he ought not to, this necessitate the one to make satisfaction being God and human at the same time so as human he takes the sinfulness of humanity and on the other part being God to receive satisfaction (C.D.H 25, p20).

### **Methodology: Inculturation**

This article applies inculturation as a methodological framework. According to Charles Nyamiti 2005, the framework begins by admitting the tension between Christianity and the African culture particularly in our contemporary context. The tension in our case has been noted on the increase in reversion of the *Agĩkũyũ* Christians to the cultural sacrifices. For this reason inculturation seeks to preserve the cultural identity of the African communities by acknowledging that each culture has its unique values, traditions, and ways of understanding the world. By integrating Christian beliefs and practices into the cultural context, inculturation allows people to maintain their cultural heritage while embracing Christianity. This is what Nyamiti calls theological insertion of the Christian message into various contexts (Nyamiti 2005, p4). According to Waliggo inculturation is;

...Honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his message of salvation ever more understood by people of every culture locality and time. It will also means the re formulation of Christian life and the doctrine into the very thought pattern of each people. It is the conviction that a Christ and his good news are even dynamic and challenging to all times and cultures as they become better understood and lived by each people (Waliggo 1986, p12).

Inculturation acknowledges that the Gospel message should be communicated in a way that resonates with the cultural background and lived experiences of the local communities. This relevance and contextualization make Christianity accessible and meaningful to people in their daily lives for it corresponds well with the present situation in the African context (Nyamiti 2005, p10). Further, Magesa 2004 argues that inculturation is;

The process whereby the faith already embodied in one culture encounters another culture. In this encounter, the faith becomes part and parcel of this new culture. It faces with the new culture and simultaneously transforms it into novel religious cultural reality. The process involves the interaction of mutual critique and affirmation (Magesa 2004, p17).

Similarly, Nyamiti argues that this is not a new phenomenon it is actually the way the Christian message has always been carried out elsewhere. “Thus the Church fathers like St. Augustine and the Cappadocians borrowed philosophical elements from various philosophies in the Graeco-Roman cultures and modified them for their own theological purposes”(Nyamiti 2005:13). Githuku 2012 affirms that the key objective of inculturation is to transform people as an effort to root the Christian message of the gospel in the African soul (Githuku 2012, p16). Having examined inculturation and its justification let us now turn to the inculturation as a methodology and seek to understand the key steps in the application of inculturation.

### **Contextualizing the Christian message**

On Inculturation as a methodological framework, Nyamiti argues that the process starts with first, identification or choosing the Christian mystery which in our case here identifies Christ work of Atonement through the concept of the Scapegoat as the Christian Mystery. Secondly this is followed by identifying appropriate African cultural item or theme which can be used for theological elaboration of the Christian mystery. On this we are using the *Agĩkũyũ Gatitiki* which was the *Agĩkũyũ* scapegoat as the African cultural item to be used for theological elaboration of the Christian Mystery of atonement. Thirdly is the undertaking of theological reflection on the meaning of the Christian Mystery-first in itself and afterwards in relation to its relevance to our spiritual and material welfare (Nyamiti 2005, p23).

Nyamiti's *Analogia entis* is based on the conviction that between God and his creation there is some similarity, more so correspondence in such a way that one can gain a deeper understanding of the revealed mysteries by examining them in the light of natural knowledge gained from human experience in the world. “Thus one can reason from a premise derived from faith and another from natural reason in order to arrive at a theological conclusion which is valid and contains deeper knowledge of the revealed mystery” (Nyamiti 2005, p32). For this case the Christian Mystery here used is the concept of Jesus Christ as the Scapegoat and that becomes the torch upon which we light the *Agĩkũyũ Gatitiki* concept to demonstrate the supremacy of Christ Sacrifice; therefore

Christ here becomes the *Gatitiki* per excellence. Having looked at inculturation lets us now turn to similarities between Christ Atonement and *Agĩkũyũ gatitiki*.

### **Similarities between Christ Atonement and Agĩkũyũ gatitiki**

This part seeks to compare the Atoning of Christ and the *Agĩkũyũ* act of sacrificing goats to wade off the evils with a particular focus on *Gatitiki*. We take note that of the fact that both are sacrificial act; in both the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the *Agĩkũyũ* sacrificial rituals involving goats are acts of sacrifice. They involve offering something valuable and important as a way to address spiritual concerns. The aspect of redemption and forgiveness: both types of sacrifices are aimed at bringing redemption and forgiveness. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is believed to offer Salvation and forgiveness for humanity's sins, while the sacrifices offered by *Agĩkũyũ* using goats are intended to appease the gods and seek forgiveness or blessings.

Blood sacrifices ensure peace, reconciliation and forgiveness in a temporary manner. This may be applicable to both African traditional religion and Old and New Testament situations, in that sacrificial victims' blood could have served as a medium through which the wishes of worshippers were communicated to deities, who in turn responded to their communication signals by bestowing anticipated blessings: the effects were reversible between the sender and receiver of the message. The expected gifts were spiritual, material and physical - peace and harmony in the community, reconciliation and forgiveness. Sacrificial victims' blood also dealt inappropriately with the communities' fear and guilt, and this is why blood sacrificial rituals had to be performed all the time and everywhere<sup>1</sup>

The blood symbolism whereby in both the blood plays a significant role. In Christianity, the blood of Jesus is seen as symbolising the Atonement for sins, while in *Agĩkũyũ* rituals, the blood of the sacrificed goat is considered vital for communication with and appeasement of the spirits (*ngomi*). The spiritual cleansing involved. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is believed to cleanse believers of their sins, while in some *Agĩkũyũ* traditions, the blood of the goat is thought to have purifying properties that cleanse the community or individuals. "Typically, atonement involves the process of covering up sins or expiatory deeds meant to divert divine wrath and to bring about reconciliation" (Edward & Mligo 2021, p14). Further, in both sacrifices they involve the idea of transferring or absolving sin. In Christianity, Jesus is seen as bearing the sins of humanity, taking them upon himself to free people from their burden (John 1:29) .

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<sup>1</sup> <https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/29248/03chapters11-12.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>

In *Agĩkũyũ* rituals, the goat is often believed to carry the sins or impurities of the community, which are then transferred to the animal through the act of sacrifice. Both sacrifices involve the offering of life. According to Christian beliefs, Jesus willingly offered his life as a sacrifice to reconcile humanity with God. Similarly, in *Agĩkũyũ* rituals, the life of the goat is given as an offering to the spirits to restore harmony and balance. Therefore, Sacrifice creates a bridge between humans and God and serves as a means of sustaining the established relationship (Edward & Mligo 2021, p16).

The sacrifices in both instances can be seen as the ultimate acts of love. In Christianity, Jesus is considered the embodiment of God's love for humanity, sacrificing himself to save humanity from eternal separation from God. Among the *Agĩkũyũ*, the rituals act of sacrificing a valuable animal like a goat is an expression of devotion and love for the *ngomis* (spirits). Therefore, the sacrifices serve as a means to establish or strengthen the connection between humans and the divine. The sacrifice of Jesus is believed to bridge the gap between God and humanity, making salvation and communion with God possible. Similarly, the *Agĩkũyũ* sacrifices are intended to establish communication and appeasement with the gods, seeking their favor and guidance (Edward & Mligo 2021, p16).

### **Differences between Christ Atonement and *Agĩkũyũ Gatitiki***

As noted earlier in our discussion on the doctrine of Atonement, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is rooted in the Christian faith, where Jesus, believed to be the Son of God, willingly sacrificed himself to redeem humanity from sin (1 Peter 1:18). In contrast, sacrifices offered by *Agĩkũyũ* using goats to appease the *ngomis* (spirits) are part of various endless traditional religious sacrifices and belief systems. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is seen as an ultimate act of love and Atonement for the sins of humanity, resulting in salvation and eternal life for believers (Hebrews 10:4). The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is considered a once-and-for-all sacrifice, with the belief that it was sufficient to cleanse all of humanity's sins (Hebrews 10:12). The *Agĩkũyũ* rituals, sacrifices using goats are often performed periodically or on specific occasions, recognising the need for repeated offerings to maintain a harmonious relationship with the spirit world. Further, in Christianity,

Jesus Christ is regarded as Divine, and his sacrifice is seen as a manifestation of God's love and mercy towards humanity. First, readers are urged to hold their confession in Christ (Heb. 4:14, 10:23) as well as the hallmarks of the Christian experience, namely boldness,

hope and endurance, despite all the challenges they may face (Heb. 10:32-34). Secondly, readers are summoned to approach the throne of God directly without interference from the intermediaries to receive the promises (Heb. 4:11). Lastly, readers are warned of the consequences of relapsing and being impatient (Heb. 10:13, 25, 29-31, 12:18-24). The above aims and message of Hebrews are still relevant for the African Christians who still face temptation to relapse or feel the desire to engage in ancestral sacrifices (Pali 2014, p150).

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is considered a universal act, applicable to all of humanity, regardless of culture, ethnicity, or geographic location. While the *Agĩkũyũ* sacrifices with the use of goats are tied to specific cultures and belief systems, often rooted in the local traditions, customs, and worldview of the respective communities. Similarly, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is perceived as taking on the burden of humanity's sins, offering total redemption and salvation to believers. On the other hand the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is symbolically represented in various Christian traditions, often drawing parallels to the sacrificial lamb or the Lamb of God. In the *Agĩkũyũ* rituals, the sacrifice of a goat symbolizes the offering of an earthly creature, representing a physical and tangible demonstration of devotion or appeasement. *Agĩkũyũ* sacrifices, while having their own symbolic and spiritual significance, may not have a unified theological interpretation. Therefore, Remigijus Oželis 2023 sums this up by stating that;

People are saved through the blood of Jesus Christ, as the Bible says: “we are justified by his blood” (Rom 5:9), we are redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Jn 1:7; Rev 5:9; 12:11). To understand the importance of the blood of Christ, we must understand the principle of the Scripture that “the life of every creature is its blood” (Lev 17:14). The body cannot stay alive without blood, so blood symbolizes life. This explains the appropriateness of Christ’s words: “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (Jn 6:53, Oželis 2023, p398).

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is interpreted within a rich theological framework, encompassing concepts such as atonement, grace, and divine reconciliation.

### **Supremacy of Christ’s Atonement**

According to Ndereba, Jesus Christ’s priestly ministry is distinguished for its dignity, excellence, and efficacy hence to go back to that practices would be to take the shadow instead of the reality. Therefore reverting back to the old system would be not only retrogressive but “shrinking back” to slavery. This is how he contrasts the atoning work of Christ verses the Old Testament sacrifices and this can be inferred even in the *Agĩkũyũ* cultural sacrifices (Ndereba 2021, p53).

Jesus Christ is also contrasted with the Old Testament priests in Hebrews 10:11-13. Although the Old Testament priests “stand” daily, and offer sacrifices repeatedly, their sacrifices cannot take away sins. On the other hand, Jesus Christ is “seated” at the right-hand God, offers a “single sacrifice” for sins which “perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Heb 10:14). Jesus Christ is truly the King-Priest that the Old Testament predicts. Jesus Christ is also seen as the mediator of the New Covenant, which takes effect through the shedding of Christ’s blood (Hebrews 8; 9:11-28).<sup>7</sup> In doing this, he makes some of the older religious practices obsolete (Hebrews 8:6-8; 13). In other places, Jesus Christ is referred to as the only mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5). The book of Hebrews sees Jesus Christ’s death on the cross as the better sacrifice – that the sacrificial system of the Old Testament was merely a shadow of this great sacrifice on the cross (Hebrews 10:1-14). Jesus Christ is greater than the Old Testament religious system and through his various roles procures redemption, reconciliation, and victory for his people (Ndereba 2021,p53).

While the Agĩkũyũ people are struggling with the resurgence of the goat sacrifices we can use this concept for us to appreciate that fact that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is supreme in as far as the Christian belief in the Atonement, which refers to the reconciliation of humanity with God and the forgiveness of sins is concerned. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is seen as the ultimate expression of God's love for humanity and His willingness to offer redemption and salvation (John 3:16). Christ's sacrifice was and is considered unique and efficacious because He is believed to be the Son of God, fully divine and fully human, capable of bridging the gap between God and humanity. The sacrificial death of Jesus is seen as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and the culmination of God's plan for the salvation of humanity which is evident in the New Testament. No other sacrifice can surpass this great ransom offered by Christ. “And God has provided the means of reconciliation.

1Timothy 2:5-6 says, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all.”<sup>2</sup> Through His sacrifice, Christ is believed to have paid the price for the sins of humanity, taking upon Himself the punishment that humanity deserved, thus offering the possibility of forgiveness and eternal life. The crucifixion of Jesus is seen as the ultimate example of self-sacrifice and obedience to God, serving as a model for believers to follow in their own lives. Christ's sacrifice is understood to have achieved victory over

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<sup>2</sup> <https://hbcharlesjr.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/The-Supremacy-of-Jesus-Christ-2017.pdf>



sin, death, and the powers of darkness, providing liberation from the bondage of sin and the promise of eternal life with God. Matt Perman 2011 states that;

Christ's death was a defeat of the power of Satan. "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him" (Colossians 3:15). Satan's only weapon that can ultimately hurt people is unforgiven sin. Christ took this weapon away from him for all who would believe, defeating him and all the powers of darkness in his death by, as the verse right before this says, "having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross" (Colossians 2:13-14, Perman 2011, p1).

## CONCLUSION

The sacrifice of Jesus is seen as an act of divine grace, as humans are unable to earn salvation through their own efforts and in the like of the goat (*gatitiki*) offered by the *Agĩkũyũ* people but all are invited to receive salvation and reconciliation freely through faith in Christ (*Gatitiki* per excellence). The New Testament often portrays Jesus as the "Lamb of God" who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29) drawing parallels to the sacrificial lambs of the Old Testament that symbolized Atonement. The centrality of Christ's Sacrifice in the Atonement highlights the core message of Christianity: the transformative power of God's love and the offer of redemption to all who believe in Him, leading to reconciliation with God and the hope of eternal life. Therefore this paper emphasises on the supremacy of the sacrifice of Christ above all the *Agĩkũyũ* sacrifices; "for there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

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