

## Animal Sacrifice in South African Churches

The wriggly brain, which operates bodily functions and emotion, is present not only in humans, but also in animals as well. The small carmine heart, which rhythmically beats nonstop to circulate blood throughout the entire body, is existent not only in humans, but in animals as well. The animals’ brain and heart, likewise, are able to recognize pangs of pain as the flesh are torn and their freedom to live raped. For some humans, though, the unfortunately inevitable killings of these animals for products such as meat and even apparels are not enough. They cross the line by slaughtering these animals alive as sacrifices simply to please gods and deities. Although it is doubtful that any creator would promote bloody massacre, murder even in the name of religion, is no less serious. Accepting animal sacrifice is no different from slowly evolving back into underdeveloped savages and cavemen. Or are we transforming into callous sadists emotionless and deprived of the human essence which differentiates us from robots? These animal sacrifices which occur from time to time and place to place among different religious groups even today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, must be stymied as soon as possible.

It’s a myth that animal sacrifices do not happen anymore. Sure, it is a totally uncivilized retrogression in the human time scale, but it happens. For example, a few years ago, the Roman Catholic Church in South Africa made its way into the news in the London Telegraph and media for committing animal sacrifice. Some video recordings of the sacrifice process revealed that the animals, especially chickens, goats, and cows, were

“slaughtered and their blood was poured into a hole outside of the church.”(Collins)

Their Archbishop, Buti Tlhagale, nonchalantly proclaimed that animal sacrifice is not an uncommon activity in many African households, and further pressed that animal sacrifice is vital in “inculturating” traditional practices back to the Roman Catholic Church, especially since the practice had been absent in official church activities, or the Mass, for so long. (Linzey)

The issue of “inculturation” was actually first brought up in 1995 “at the end of the African synod in Rome.” Then, the “idea of integrating indigenous religious practices was cautiously welcomed...But the pope stressed that the process must be compatible with the Christian message and communion with the universal church.” (Maranville, Palmer)I believe preserving the culture and religious African traditions in the Church are perfectly acceptable, so long it does not involve, oh, say, murder. There has to be a stronger reason for torturing and killing moving, breathing creatures, than just hoping that they would please spirits that may or may not exist and miraculously prevent force majeure. Out of all the other possible “inculturation” methods, why must it be murder and slaughter?

Some of the reasons why the issue of animal sacrifice is not raised as an urgent issue are because of the unconcerned priests. For example, Archbishop George Daniel of Pretoria feels like the issue of animal sacrifice in the Roman masses an insignificant debate at the moment. He feels like this is not a debate over morality, but over, again, “inculturation.” (Hyland)

Views against animal sacrifice may raise heated arguments related to religious bias, or even racial bias. The Archbishop had expressed that he thinks others are against animal sacrifice because they are all closed-minded with their own European ideals, unable to fathom the significance of inculturation. (Hyland) I believe that Buti and his supporters are purposefully trying to shoot this issue down by pointing the finger at the opponents of animal sacrifice, accusing them of being ethnocentrists. After all, his only big chance of convincing others that animal sacrifice is unproblematic is by stubbornly pressing that this is a racial injustice. George Daniel who is neutral regarding animal sacrifice, however, admitted that although "foreign missionaries have been blamed for undermining traditional religious practices and beliefs, many of us realize today that they had no option [and] had to [ensure the] complete break with evil practices." (Pulford) Although I support Daniel's view against animal sacrifice, I feel these scathing squabbles are unnecessary. Religious practices can proceed effectively without any of the gore. I find it ironic that religion is usually considered a vessel of promoting peace. Sacrificing goats and chickens to use their blood as offerings to the divine seems like a huge step back in history to barbaric primitiveness that does not match our modern world today. (Linzey)

The promoters of animal sacrifice argue that animal sacrifice served a historically epic role in religion that even Jesus committed. Theologian Andrew Linzey, who is also the director of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, rebuts the argument by pointing out that churches have abolished this practice since the New Testament. A practice that even

Jesus rid – what is the point?(All-Creatures.org) Even other Catholic theologians support Linzey’s side by stating that “Catholic theology does say that since the sacrificial death of Jesus 2000 years ago, there is no longer any need to offer animal sacrifices to God.”

(Hyland) It is humorous that Archbishop Buti desperately tries to refute Linzey’s view with invalid points. Archbishop Buti, instead of continuing on with his argument that the animal sacrifices are dedicated to the gods, shifts his focus that the blood from the sacrifices is “a gift to the ancestors, not to God.” (Hyland) If animal sacrifice is not a religious issue, but a cultural issue, then does animal sacrifice become justified? Can we tolerate cannibalism so long as it is part of the culture? Can we tolerate incest so long as it part of the culture? Linzey stated, "I support inculturation as a principle, but it would be an odd view to argue that everything about a culture is right."(Pulford) Are we going to ignore the preposterous phenomena and not point out the twisted and flawed cultural practices in fear of being framed as “racist”? Archbishop Buti assumes that animal sacrifice in the name of “culture” is tolerable, but he can not guilt us into remaining silent.

I am concerned about animal sacrifice because I am afraid this practice will spread. Archbishop Buti’s debates started in the year 2000, but there were more cases of animal sacrifice before that, and will certainly be in the future as well if people do not realize the moral wrong. For instance, in southern India in 2003, the government created a law prohibiting the sacrifice of animals. The massacre, however, continued as the villagers, like the African Catholics, also pressed that this Hindu practice had been a part of their culture for a long time. (Dorairaj) This is why during the summer of 2008, I

collaborated with my friend who was to visit her cousins in India, and made posters and fliers promoting the serious mistake of continuing the practice of animal sacrifice. My friend in India would try to hang those up in bulletins. We would email each other about every two days and discuss our progress. At home, I designed the graphics and brochures and my friend translated them. We are not sure if our messages penetrated the hearts of the Indian Hindus, but I plan to continue my awareness action not only in India, but even in Buti’s habitat, Africa.

More recently there was another “goat” case that appeared in the BBC news in 2007, that “Nepal's state-run airline has... sacrificed two goats to appease a Hindu god, following technical problems with one of its aircraft.” (Goats sacrificed to fix Nepal jet) Buti’s statements about animal sacrifice may have attracted the most attention, but unfortunately, the South African Roman Catholics are not the only perpetrators of the crime. Numerous animals are killed alive for the sake of religion, including in Satanism and some Native American worships.

For Buti to promote animal sacrifice just because it is part of his master “inculturation” plan is ridiculous. People have lived in ignorance all throughout history. Yet, we were not afraid to learn and progress with new enlightenment. Buti is rejecting progress and stubbornly insisting that he would like to remain stagnant in the past, and continuing on with an antediluvian and illogical practice. Why are we trying to deliberately repeat the same mistake - the same outrage? I realize that the use of animals in our world today is inevitable. Humans are biologically meant to be omnivores and

millions of products are made out of meat. We are already harassing and usurping their niches. Because of humans, animals are endangered and displaced. To cross the line furthermore by gruesomely chopping off their heads and limbs for their bloods for an extremely vague cause is to abandon our identities as logical humans and instead assume the role of a monster.

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