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THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER IN THE BLOOD OF CHRIST IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

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The African Church grapples with practical issues relating o its ability to survive rather than abstract theological matters. Most of the Africans feel more prone to be attacked by evil forces than to commit evil acts. The solution is found in the protective force of the blood of Jesus. This popular theology is sweeping like wild fire across denominational lines in our land. People pray and cover various objects with the blood of Christ as protection against demonic attacks, epidemics, natural disasters, accidents and other suchlike experiences. Does the blood of Christ have a physical and material protection? Does Scripture support prayer for the blood of Christ to protect against perceived enemies and dangers? In whose authority do we challenge is it in the blood or in the name of Jesus? Dr. Olarewaju in this article addresses these questions.

INTRODUCTION

In the light of the numerical growth of Christianity in Africa, not only has Africa ceased to be the dark continent as far as the gospel is concerned, it is increasingly being recognised as one of the areas to which Christianity's centre of gravity is shifting in this new millennium.[1] Given its sheer size, Christianity in Africa has become a potent force to reckon with politically, socially, religiously, and educationally on the continent. But while the church is growing numerically, the same cannot be said of the spiritual depth of the

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church. The horizontal growth of Christianity in Africa is to be measured in mileage; its vertical growth can only be measured in inches! So in reality it is the numerical centre of Christianity that can be said to have shifted from the West and North to the East and South. The theological centre of gravity of Christianity still remains a Western and Northern phenomenon. It is in Europe and North America that the theological agenda of Christianity are still being determined, even for the church in Africa.

The church in Africa is far too busy grappling with practical issues relating to its ability to survive in an environment diametrically hostile to its physical well-being, so that it does not worry about purely abstract theological matters. Thus the popular theologising that is done, especially by the mostly lay leaders of the church, often has to do with matters of physical survival. While the average life-expectancy in the rest of the world is on the increase, that of the African is rapidly on the decline. The need to enhance his longevity in the face of various threats such as earthquakes, famines, floods, epidemics, road accidents and suchlike has therefore made the issue of physical well-being an urgent matter in Africa.

Faced with such an important question of safety of life and property, the church had to come up with some solution, and this has been found in the blood of Jesus. To be sure, there is nothing wrong with this method of theologising. In his epochal inaugural address delivered at the University of Altdorf in 1787, Johann Gabler, while distinguishing Biblical Theology from Dogmatic Theology, defines the latter as bearing a didactic character, so that every theologian through use of his reason philosophises about divine things in accordance with his understanding, in keeping with the circumstances of the time, the age, the place, the school, and similar matters of this sort.[2]

Therefore, what is unfolding before our very eyes in Africa today is a popular attempt to theologise about the blood of Jesus in a way that addresses the common felt-need of safety among the believers. After all, any theology that does not address the need of a people is not worthy of their acceptance. So, it is not uncommon to hear across denominational lines various appeals being made through prayer to the protective force of the blood of Jesus.

For example, it is commonplace in Nigeria to hear Christians pray using the blood of Jesus for an apotropaic effect (that is, having power to avert evil influence or bad luck). On several occasions when I have travelled by public transport, some minutes into the trip some passengers would pray aloud

symbolically covering various objects with the blood of Jesus and thereby ensuring themselves of safety on the trip. In such prayers usually the driver and passengers are said to be "covered with the blood of Jesus"; then the vehicle itself is said to be "covered with the blood." Not even the pavement is left unprotected with the blood of Jesus! Other objects protected with the symbolic covering of the blood of Jesus include buildings, tools, food items, jobs, family, etc. The list is endless. Anything that is perceived as amenable to personal or demonic attacks is coverable with the blood of Jesus.

There is no doubt that this popular protective theology of the blood of Jesus may be meeting the needs of the African Christian subjectively. Whether the felt need for protection is being met in actuality as a result of such a liturgical use of the sacrificial blood of Christ is seriously open to question.

At this point, we must ask the crucial question whether, apart from its primary cleansing effect on sin, the sacrificial blood of Christ has any direct bearing warranted by Scripture on physical and material protection? In other words, does the biblical understanding of the efficacy of the sacrificial blood of Christ include physical protection of life and property as suggested by the popular theology now sweeping like a wildfire across denominational lines in our land?

Before we address this question, we would like to look at some instances of the apotropaic function of sacrificial blood in extra-biblical sources.

TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND APOTROPAISM

Among the nomadic Arabs, ante-dating the time of Moses, it has been observed that protective powers were attributed to sacrificial blood employed to protect the herds from demonic influences.[3] It is not clear how the sacrificial blood was applied to effect the desired protection of the animals. Being a nomadic group at this point, it is not likely that the Arabs required any sacerdotal officials to make this sacrifice. Every shepherd most likely offered an apotropaic blood sacrifice whenever a demonic threat to the herd was perceived. An epidemic could possibly have been perceived as a demonic attack too.

Apotropaic sacrifices are very common in Africa. Even when a sacrifice is offered with the primary intent to appease a deity or to expiate a sin, a secondary intent is usually not absent to ward off evil forces by means of the same sacrifice. A.O. Mojola writes about the scapegoat purification ritual

among the Chagga of Tanzania, that the scapegoat is sacrificed "to take away sin or some serious violation of a taboo, or some serious disease or calamity in the family or community."[4] For the Chagga, we can see, a sacrifice can have the dual function of expiating the sin of the offerer on the one hand, while also protecting the offerer from harm.

This perception of the dual function of sacrifices is not unique to the Chagga in Africa. J.O. Awolalu notes that among the Yoruba of Nigeria it is strongly held that not only are sacrifices believed to *remove* evils from individuals and/or communities, but sacrifices are also taken as possessing the efficacy to *prevent* evils, such as preventing an epidemic from coming upon a person or into a village.[5] Awolalu's emphasis on how strongly the Yoruba hold to the dual function of sacrifices to remove and prevent evil is very noteworthy. The ascription of a dual function to sacrifices makes them more affordable to the average offerer. By one sacrifice the offerer is given both a curative and a preventive assurance that evil, whether physical or spiritual, is taken care of.

The protective intent is obviously more dominant than the expiatory intent among Africans in general. This is so due to the African worldview that is much more perceptive of the evil forces (physical and spiritual) that are constantly seeking to destroy him than it is perceptive of its own evil acts. The African mind-set is more susceptible to the evils that militate against it than to the evils it commits and which require atonement. Because the African feels more prone to be attacked by evil forces than to commit evil acts, he finds himself offering more protective sacrifices than expiatory ones.

Before embarking on any major project, a sacrifice or libation for protection would usually be made. For instance, at the beginning of the farming season, to avert any accident while using the farming implements, a Yoruba *Ogun* devotee would pour a libation of palm-wine and cold water on his implements. Next, he would break the pointed tip of a snail and allow the fluid to drip on the implements.[6] Such a blood baptism of the farming implements is believed to have the efficacy of protecting the farmer from any harmful accident, resulting from the use of the implements. The sacrifice is not so much to consecrate the implements as to protect the farmer.

In his book, *The Prayers of African Religion*, J.S. Mbiti discusses an apotropaic prayer to the living dead. It is a prayer by the Acholi people of Uganda; and it goes thus:

Your food is here, here it is,
Let the children have good health,
Their wives, let them have children
So that your names may not be obliterated,
Your chicken is here;
Today we give you blood, here it is.
Let us have good health.[7]

The prayer was actually occasioned by the offering of sacrificial blood to the dead ancestors. The purpose of the sacrifice is two-fold: for the women to be fertile and for general protection from ill health. The Dinka of Sudan have similar prayers which accompany sacrifices for protection. One such sacrifice is offered to the Earth, which is regarded as a divinity. The sacrifice is offered with these words:

O nurturing Earth, we offer thee this chicken; accept it, we beseech thee, and in exchange give us bountiful harvest, numerous herds and flocks, and many children.
Keep us free from sickness, epidemics and all evils.[8]

And to yet another divinity the Dinka would sacrifice a cow and pray specifically for the protection of the homestead:

You Divinity (God), protect the homestead.
Shall I not propitiate you with a cow?
Divinity, Father, you protect the home.
Husband of the cows,
Husband of the women,
It is you who protects the home.[9]

Even though propitiation is mentioned in this second prayer, the salient thrust of it, is protection of the homestead. Geoffrey Parrinder rightly notes that even when propitiatory sacrifices are made in Africa, they are, nevertheless, "directed against misfortune, sickness, barrenness, quarrels, drought, and any disruption of normal life."[10] Animals were not the only victims previously sacrificed for the purpose of protection. Even human beings were sometimes sacrificed to ward off physical evils! The last of such sacrifices known to Parrinder was in Abeokuta in 1891 when, at the instance of Ifa oracle a slave was sacrificed to ward off evils such as "warfare, death of chiefs, slavery, drought, [and] a plague of locust." Parrinder notes further that

at other times sacrifices were offered in order "to strengthen the foundation of a town or protect it from enemies . . .."[11]

Among the Jaba people of Nigeria blood sacrifice is employed predominantly for purposes of protection against demonic attacks. Byang Kato states that for the Jaba in central Nigeria,

> Blood sacrifice is used at different occasions. It is usually for deliverance from the power of the evil spirits. If a woman is troubled by evil spirits, she is told the type of rooster to offer for sacrifice . . .. When the rooster is ceremonially killed, the blood is applied on each side of and on top of the door post. The feather is dipped in the blood and pasted on the forehead of the patient.[12]

Certain aspects of this obviously is reminiscent of the inauguration of the Jewish Passover in Exodus 12. The Jaba believed that the blood stained on door posts would keep evil spirits from entering the house to torment its inhabitant. Such apotropaic uses of the sacrificial blood, as we have considered thus far, is not unique to Africa. F. Laubach observes that, in classical Greek, the Greeks were known to use different blood sacrifices for various purposes including the search for welfare. The blood was usually drunk or sprinkled "especially in magical rites to bring rain, welfare, love and harm."[13] The point is clear, sacrificial blood can be manipulated magically either to harm somebody or to secure protection from evil.

The foregoing provide striking parallels to contemporary prayer calling on the blood of Christ among Christians in Nigeria. In the traditional religions literal blood is used for protective purposes, while in popular Christianity many Christians mentioning the blood of Christ in prayer symbolically for protection. The fact remains, however, that both concepts believe in the protective efficacy of blood, either the blood of animals in traditional religions or the blood of Christ. The crucial question at this point is whether or not the Bible supports prayer for the blood of Christ to protect against perceived enemies and dangers. This will be the focus of the next section.

SCRIPTURE AND APOTROPAISM

The prayer for the blood of Christ to symbolically cover persons and other material objects for protection against demonic physical attacks is a popular theology today that is espoused by Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Roman Catholics and indigenous church members. However, orthodoxy is not

determined by popular opinion but by faithfulness to Scripture. Proponents of the protective application of the blood of Jesus have based their theology on certain texts of the Scripture, both Old and New Testaments. We shall look at these passages critically to see whether they provide the warrant allegedly ascribed to them.

THE USE OF BLOOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The strongest argument in defence of this theology derives from Exodus 12 which narrates the establishment of the Jewish Passover feast. The Israelites were instructed by God that each household was to sacrifice a lamb and "Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs" (Ex. 12:7). They were further told in verse 13 that "The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt" (Ex 12:13). The blood smeared on the door posts, it is argued, was what protected all the firstborn of Israel from destruction. And since the lamb here foreshadows Christ, the sacrificial Lamb of God, it is concluded that the blood of Christ cannot but have the same protective effect over those on whom it is symbolically applied.

Roland de Vaux, in his *Ancient Israel,* sees a parallel between the Passover sacrifice in Exodus 12 and the rite practiced by nomadic Arab shepherds whereby blood was sprinkled on the door post "to drive away evil powers." According to de Vaux, the Passover "was, in a more general way, an offering for the welfare of the flock, like the old Arab feast which fell in the month of Rajab."[14] Obviously depending on de Vaux, G. von Rad also concludes that:

> In the Passover of the keepers of flocks and herds, a festival which seems to have been observed long before the time of Moses, the significance of the manipulation of the blood is to some extent clear—it had an apotropaic function, and was intended to protect the herds from the influence of demons.[15]

Buchanan Gray expressed the same view much earlier. He is quoted as saying that, "What the ancient Hebrews endeavoured to repel from their houses were spirits, demons of plague, or sickness and the like, much as the modern Beduin or Syrian peasant."[16]

While the manipulation of the sacrificial blood might be similar between the Jewish Passover and other religious rites observed by nomadic shepherds

in the region, that is far from being a conclusive evidence that the Jewish Passover shared the apotropaic purpose of the others, namely to protect against demons. Similarity in practice does not necessarily suggest an identical intent. Therefore, caution must be taken so that we do not jump too quickly to a conclusion.

G. D. Kilpatrick's view on the Jewish Passover in Exodus 12 smacks of a magical rite. He opines that the Passover sacrifice served to release power to reinforce the doorway. The sprinkling of the blood reinforced the doorway thereby preventing the destroyer from entering the houses.[17] Unfortunately, Kilpatrick fails to realize that, according to Exodus 12:24b, it was the Lord, not the blood on the door post, that prevented the destroyer from entering the houses: "And he [the Lord] will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down." R. J. Daly observes that blood sacrifices have two basic functions in the Old Testament: one is positive, to make persons or objects eligible to participate in Israel's religious life; the other, which is negative, is said to have an "apotropaic function of interrupting or averting the course of evil set in motion by sin or transgression . . .."[18] In my opinion Daly confuses the expiatory effect of sacrificial blood in the Old Testament with the apotropaic function of blood in other religions. Sacrificial blood in the Old Testament does not serve an apotropaic function, but rather expiates sin symbolically.[19]

Daly also seems to confuse God's punishment of sin with evil demonic forces against whom people seek protection. God's punishment comes as a result of sin, whereas demonic attacks result from refusal to do the bidding of the devil. Scripture nowhere states that God requires blood sacrifice to protect His own against the onslaught of the devil; but it states categorically that God requires sacrificial blood without which there can be no forgiveness of sin (Heb. 9:22). One crucial aspect that proponents of the apotropaic function of the Passover blood fail to reckon with, is the statement in Exodus 12:13 which describes the function of the blood as ". . . a sign for you on the houses where you are." This verse makes clear that the function of the blood was not apotropaic, but rather it functioned as a "sign". That means, it pointed to something other than itself. What it pointed to could not have been protection, otherwise how does one explain the previous protections that Israel enjoyed from the plague of flies, the deadly plagues on livestock and the one of hail? God protected Israel from these three plagues without any sacrificial blood until the final plague on the firstborn, at which time, He then required the

sacrifice. J. Jeremias seems to suggest that the blood represents the Israelites' obedience to God's command which was handsomely rewarded by the destroyer "passing over" their houses.[20] While the obedience motif is not totally absent from the Passover in Exodus 12, it is nevertheless not the dominant idea signified by the blood. Keil and Delitzsch argue that the blood was "a sign and pledge that Jehovah would spare them, and no plague should fall upon them to destroy . . .."[21] If Keil and Delitzsch are right, we wonder why the same sign was not required before the Israelites were delivered from previous plagues. We submit, therefore, that the blood of Exodus 12 was symbolic of Israel's cleansing and consecration to God.

When the destroyer got to the houses with blood on their door posts, God did not permit him to enter those houses because the blood indicated that the inhabitants had been cleansed from the disobedience of the land of Egypt, and were therefore consecrated to God.[22] As W. O'Donovan rightly notes, "In the Old Testament, blood and anointing oil were used to set apart (sanctify) objects (Lev. 8:15), clothes (Lev. 8:30), and people (Lev. 8:23-24, Num. 8:17) for God."[23] T.D. Alexander on his own part sees a parallel between the description of the Passover meal and the consecration of the Aaronic priests in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8. He concludes, therefore, by pointing out that "the slaughter of the animal atoned for the sin of the people and that the blood smeared on the door post purified those within the house."[24]

The purification motif, which re-echoes in subsequent observances of the Passover, attests to the cogency of our position. Anyone deemed ceremonially unclean could not eat the Passover meal or participate in the celebration. Israel celebrated her first Passover after leaving Egypt in the desert of Sinai. According to Numbers 9:6-7 some of the Israelites were unable to participate in the celebration or eat the meal due to ceremonial uncleanness, resulting from contact with a dead body. At the re-establishment of the Passover during Hezekiah's reign (2 Ch. 30:13-20) many who came to Jerusalem could not kill the Passover lambs themselves because they were ceremonially unclean. The Levites had to kill the lambs on behalf of those that were unconsecrated. But, contrary to the provision of the Passover, many from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun ate the Passover meal without having consecrated themselves. Hezekiah had to offer a special prayer to God on behalf of the unclean partakers of the meal. The Lord, we are told, "Heard Hezekiah and healed the people" (v. 20). That means the people were already stricken with illness for their unlawful eating of the meal.

When Ezra dedicated the temple (Ezr. 6:19-22), the Levites and priests had to be ceremonially clean to kill and offer the lambs respectively. In Exodus 12, there were then no priests and Levites to officiate, so the heads of the families and the entire members who inhabited the houses had to be purified as symbolised by the blood-stained door post before they could eat the Passover meal. In Ezra 6, the source of uncleanness was involvement in the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbours (v. 21). The same sentiment was echoed in John 18:28 when the Jews refused to enter Pilate's palace so that they might not be defiled and thereby be disqualified from celebrating the Passover. If, as we have seen from these references, involvement with Gentiles could defile and inhibit one from participating in the Passover, then the Israelites must have had a lot to be purified from having mixed freely with the Egyptians prior to the establishment of the Passover in Exodus 12. Again the Gospel of John informs us that "When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover" (11:55).

These references from both the Old and New Testaments show conclusively that ceremonial cleansing was an absolute requirement for anyone wishing to participate in the Jewish Passover Feast. It makes perfect sense, therefore, to conclude that the blood on the door post in Exodus 12 functioned as a sign pointing to the ceremonial cleansing and consecration of the Israelites before they actually ate the Passover meal.[25] The centrality of purification to sacrificial blood in the Old Testament was so compelling that A.F. Rainey asserts that "even with non-expiatory offerings, the principle of blood atonement was not entirely absent."[26] And just as subsequent Passover feasts served Israel as reminders of "one of the ways in which the covenant between God and Israel was maintained in being,"[27] it could also be said that the original Passover formally inaugurated the covenant between God and Israel.

It is interesting to note the length to which certain proponents of the apotropaic view are willing to go in defence of their position. Oesterley and Theodore, for instance, compare the Passover blood to the *Mezuzah*, i.e. a small tube made of wood, metal, or glass, in which is rolled up a piece of parchment containing the *Shema'* (Deut. vi. 4-9 and xi. 13-21). "The Rabbis in Talmudic times attributed to it a protective power against demons . . .. The Mohammedans have a similar custom of inscribing verses from the Koran on their doors . . .."[28]

The Rabbinic and Islamic practices thus described are nothing short of magic; and to compare them to the sacrificial function of blood in the Old Testament is absolutely unjustifiable. We also strongly take issue with the speculation of T.H. Gaster to the effect that, apart from the provision of purity, biblical sacrifices also served to avert noxious and untoward demonic influences. He cites the use of salt with offerings (Lev. 2:13), the blowing of ram's horn over sacrifices (Num. 10:10), and circumambulation of the altar (Ps. 26:6) as other instances of apotropaic practices in the Old Testament.[29]

A careful investigation of these references by Gaster shows that they cannot bear the weight he puts on them. In Leviticus 2:13, salt was recommended to season the grain offerings and possibly to symbolize the enduring character of the covenant. There is nothing apotropaic in the trumpet blast of Numbers 10:10; rather the trumpet blast served a commemorative purpose as made clear by Leviticus 23:24. Concerning the Psalmist "going about the altar" (Ps. 26:6), it was an expression of the Psalmist's sense of innocence as he offered his sacrifice to God. If Gaster's view with respect to these three alleged instances of apotropaism do not stand critical scrutiny, does that not open to question his conclusion concerning the function of blood as well?

Before we leave the Old Testament, a look at another germane point from Exodus 12 is in order. In verse 22, Moses instructs the people to "Take a bunch of hyssop , dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe." The use of hyssop, here, is probably paradigmatic for the rest of the Old Testament.[30] Hyssop is a plant that, due to its close association with ceremonial cleansing in the Old Testament, has come to be used synonymously with the cleansing motif in the Old Testament. The ceremonial cleansing for anyone healed of an infectious skin disease requires *inter alia* the use of hyssop to sprinkle blood on such a person (Lev. 14:4-7). G.J. Wenham is, in my opinion, correct in seeing here an echo of the Passover ritual purification in Exodus 12.[31] Of particular relevance is verse 49ff, which deals with the ceremonial cleansing of a house rendered unclean by mildew. Hyssop with other paraphernalia were used to sprinkle and purify such a house from defilement. This is the closest parallel to Exodus 12 we can find in Scripture where blood is used to purify a habitation. By the time we get to the Psalms, we hear David, in penitence, asking God to "Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean," (Ps. 51:7a). The use of hyssop here is metonymic, i.e., though "hyssop" was used, yet, "blood"

was actually meant, due to the close ceremonial association between both words. Commenting on "cleanse me with hyssop," W.E. Shewell-Cooper says it "obviously refers to the application of the blood of the lamb, for it is only . . . with the shedding of blood that there can be remission of sin."[32]

Against those represented by Leon Morris who maintain that, "In the original Passover . . . there is mention of the blood as a means of averting destruction,"[33] we say there is no mention of such a function of blood in the text. What was mentioned, rather, was the symbolic function of blood, which, as we have argued, pointed to the purification of the Israelites. It was essential for the Israelites to be thus purified before they could eat the first Passover meal, and thereby set the standard of purity required of all subsequent celebrants of the Passover.

During the previous plagues, God delivered Israel without the use of blood, but now that the Passover meal was envisaged, blood was necessary to purify the people ceremonially so that they could partake of the meal. Having thus cleansed Israel, God then used the blood (which represented the fact of their purification) to identify those destined for deliverance.[34] We cannot agree more with Clippinger's conclusion that "there is no trace of superstitious use of blood in the OT, unless perchance in I K 22:38 . . . but everywhere it is vested with cleansing, expiatory, and reverently symbolic qualities."[35] And it must be noted that the superstitious instance in I Kings 22:38 was not reported approvingly. It probably refers to washing with royal blood which "was supposed to be beneficial to the complexia."[36] In that case, even this single instance of superstitious use of blood in the Old Testament still relates to the purificatory motif, albeit a non-ceremonial one.

THE USE OF BLOOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We now focus our attention on the New Testament. There is overwhelming evidence in the New Testament attesting to the fact that the sacrificial blood of Christ is expiatory and redemptive in its efficacy. While eating the Lord's Supper with His disciples, Jesus took the cup which represents His blood and said: "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28). One of the best known passages in the New Testament on this issue is Hebrews 9:22, which says, "The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." M. J. Erickson rightly observes that New Testament "references to Christ's blood are not to His actual physical blood *per se*, but to

His death as a sacrificial provision for our sins."[37]

The text most commonly used in the New Testament as an anchorage by proponents of the apotropaic function of the blood of Christ is Revelation 12:11, which reads: "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death." When isolated from its context, it would seem this verse is addressing, *inter allia*, victory over the physical assaults of the Devil. But a careful look at the verse in context makes clear that such an interpretation of verse 11 does violence to the text. There are two pertinent questions that we believe will help us unravel the correct meaning of this verse. The first question has to do with the identity of the overcomers: who really were they? The second question relates to the vanquished: how was the vanquished one identified?

First who were the overcomers? According to verse 10c, the overcomers were the brothers of those speaking with a loud voice in heaven (vv. 10-12). And in all probability, the group speaking in verses 10-12 is the same as the innumerable multitude of Revelation 7:14, who were described as those "who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Our reason for arriving at this conclusion is three-fold: both groups were presented using their voices in a loud manner (7:10, cf. 12:10); both groups were located in the same place, namely, at heaven (7:9[38]; cf. 12:10), and finally, both groups started by addressing virtually the same subject matters: 7:10 addresses salvation, God, His throne and the Lamb; while 12:10 addresses salvation, God, His power and kingdom, and His Christ. We believe this evidence is compelling enough to warrant our conclusion that the brothers of the overcomers (Rev. 12:10) were not on earth, but in heaven, through martyrdom. And, contrary to the suggestions that the overcomers were martyrs of the tribulation,[39] they were alive on earth, though persecuted by Satan (12:17). If the overcomers were martyrs, they would have been with their brothers (12:10) in heaven.

That the overcomers were on earth and "did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (12:11b) suggests that to overcome the accuser by the blood of the Lamb does not mean protection from satanic attacks on us and our effects. If overcoming the accuser by the blood of the Lamb here means immunity from satanic attacks, sicknesses and accidents, then it is redundant, almost to the point of absurdity, to talk about the overcomers not loving their lives so much as to shrink from death. But if despite their victory through the

blood of the Lamb, the overcomers were still liable to satanic attacks, diseases and other hazards, then it makes perfect sense to talk of their readiness to die like their martyred brothers already in heaven on account of their testimony for Christ (12:17). So, the blood of the Lamb here does not protect us from physical attacks by the devil, but it grants us victory over our accuser, even when we have to die for our loyalty to Christ. Yes, there is victory on account of the blood of the Lamb even in death.

The second question regards how the vanquished was identified. The vanquished was identified by two names: the devil, and Satan (Rev. 12:9). It is significant to note that the name, "devil" is the Greek for "accuser, or malicious slanderer," while "Satan" is Hebrew for "accuser." That these two different names, with the same meaning of "accuser", are used by John to identify the evil one is no mere coincidence; rather it was deliberate. The names are not meaningless designations but are reflective of the slanderous character of the enemy, as vividly depicted by his verbal assaults against the saints before God in heaven day and night (12:10c). The term used for Satan's verbal assault is *kategoreo*, which is a legal technical term meaning to bring charges in a human court against someone. While presenting their case before Felix, the Jews, we are told, "brought their charges against Paul before the governor," (Ac 24:1b). In verse 8 they concluded thus: "By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him," (cf. Mat. 12:10; Mk. 3:2; Ac. 24:8 and 28:19). The term is used twice in the New Testament with respect to bringing charges against someone before God's tribunal. Jesus told the Jews, "Do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses," (Jn. 5:45a); the other passage, of course, is Revelation 12:10.[40]

Usually when the evil one appears before God in heaven it was to accuse the saints of their sins and not to attack them physically or materially. Compare the case of Job, when Satan appeared before God and accused Job of being upright only for the sake of the material blessings and protection he got from God (Job 1:6-12). Another case in point was when, in a vision, Zechariah saw Satan accusing Joshua the high priest before the angel of the Lord (Zec. 3:1-2).

Therefore, what Satan was actually doing in heaven when he was vanquished by the blood of the Lamb was accusing the saints on earth before God's tribunal. It was in this legal battle that he suffered his decisive defeat. On account of the blood of Lamb, Satan's accusations against the saints on earth

were nullified and thrown out along with the accuser from the heavenly court (Col 2:11-15). Therefore, to quote Rev 12:11 in support of apotropaic function of the blood of the Lamb is to miss the real point at issue. G. R. Beasley-Murray is right on target when he comments on Revelation 12:11 to the effect that, "The blood . . . that had done such wonderful things in heaven . . . in blotting out sin, and bringing it to naught, had a similar power over Satan. He has now no longer any right to accuse." On the strength of Revelation 12:11, ". . . there is no possibility of Satan lodging an accusation against the people of God. *The blood of the Lamb has prevailed"* (emphasis original).[41]

The battle between the saints and Satan, as depicted in Revelation 12, is therefore not physical but spiritual and legal. And thanks be to the blood of the Lamb that the saints have been acquitted of the malicious slanders brought against them by Satan (Col 2:14-15). Caird has been quoted as putting it thus: "Although John depicts the battle between Michael and Satan in military terms, it is essentially a legal battle between opposing council in which the loser is disbarred."[42] That is the end of Satan's malicious legal practice as far as God's tribunal is concerned. Having thus been vanquished before God's heavenly tribunal, Satan, like a wounded lion, is all out to attack the saints physically, materially and otherwise. If anything, on account of their victory, Satan is going to be more vicious in persecuting the saints.

CONCLUSION

To pray and cover various objects with the blood of Christ as protection against demonic attacks, epidemics, natural disasters, accidents, and other such experiences is, in my opinion, without scriptural warrant. The practice is paralleled in various traditional religions where, as we have demonstrated, there is strong belief in the magical use of sacrificial blood to avert evil. Therefore, we should consider it syncretistic for Christians to ascribe the same efficacy to the blood of Christ. This is not to deny the reality of demonic activities today, even though some Christians have inadvertently promoted the presence of demonic activities today far beyond the reality by finding a demon under every bush! Rather, this is a corrective measure to what we consider a popular, but a dangerously syncretistic theology of the blood of Christ. The biblical way to challenge demonic assault is in the authority of the name of Jesus, at which every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:11).

END NOTES

[1] A.F. Walls, "Towards Understanding Africa's Place in Christian History," in J.S. Pobee, ed., *Religion in a Pluralistic Society*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), pp. 180-9.

[2] J. F. Gabler cited by W.G. Kummel, The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems, New York: Abingdon Press, 1970; pp. 98-9.

[3] G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* vol I, London: CMS Press, 1973; p. 253:1. Cf. also Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel II: Religious Institutions*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book, 1965) p. 489:2.

[4] A. O. Majola, "The Chagga Scapegoat Purification Ritual and another re-Reading of the Goat of Azazel in Leviticus 16", *Melita Theologica*, 50, 1999) pp. 156-8.

[5] J.O. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, (London: Longman, 1979), pp. 156-8.

[6] Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs*, p. 139.

[7] J.S. Mbiti, *The Prayers of African Religion*, (London: SPCK, 1975).

[8] Ibid., p. 85.

[9] Ibid., p. 60. Cf. Aylward Shorter, *Prayer in the Religious Traditions of Africa*, (New York, Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 104.

[10] Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions*, (London, Sheldon Press, 1976) p. 73.

[11] G. Parrinder, *West Africa Religion*, (London: Epworth Press, 1978), pp. 71-2.

[12] B.H. Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, (Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1975), 42.

[13] F. Laubach, "Blood", *DNTT* vol. 1, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p. 221:1.

[14] Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel vol. 2: Religious Institutions*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book, 9165), p. 489.

[15] G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* vol. I, (London: CMS Press, 1973), p. 253:1.

[16] Cited by W.O.E. Oesterly and T.H. Robinson, in *Hebrew Religion,* (London: Society of Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1944), 132.

[17] G.D. Kilpatrick, *The Eucharist of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 27.

[18] Robert J. Daly, *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 27.

[19] Compare Walther Eichrodt thesis that the expiatory effect of OT sacrifices were dependent "on the gracious willingness of Yahweh to accept this gift as expiatory, and no exact correspondence with the punishment incurred is in mind . . .. And the offering of a pure, innocent life for the one which has become guilty serves to drive home afresh again and again the life-destroying power of sin, which, were it not for atonement, would inevitably deliver the sinner into the annihilating wrath of God," in *Theology of the Old Testament, vol. II, trans.* J.A. Baker, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967): 447:2.

[20] J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p.226.

[21] C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch, vol. 2*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., (n.d.), p. 19:2.

[22] This is a somewhat different position than that held by J.H. Kurtz to the effect that "the blood was to be a sign and pledge to the inhabitants of the house, that when Jehovah saw it He would pass by and spare them from the plague . . .. Israel needed an expiation, for it could not stand in its sin when God arose to judgment. But God desired to rescue and spare the Israelites for the sake of their calling, and because of their faith," *Sacrificial worship of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book, n.d.); p. 367. Kurtz seems to hold that the blood symbolizes both protection from harm and cleansing of sin.

[23] W. O'Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective*, (Carlisle:

Paternoster Press, 1995), p. 114. Cf. Oesterley and Robinson who emphatically assert that "*All* sacrifices, whether bloodless or bloody, effect reconciliation (cp. Ezek. xlv. 15, 17); i.e. they are the means of obtaining divine forgiveness. The term *le - kapper*, 'to effect atonement,' expresses the basic idea, and the sin-cleansing power of blood becomes very marked (see, e.g., Lev. iv. 5, 7, 16-18)," *Hebrew Religion*, p. 335.

[24] T.D. Alexander, "The Passover Sacrifice," in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, eds. R.T. Beckwith and M.J. Selman, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book, 1995), p. 8.

[25] Cf. Keil and Delitzsch in what apparently contradicts their earlier view of the blood (see page 12), "The smearing of the houses of the Israelites with the atoning blood of the sacrifices set forth the reconciliation of Israel and its God, through the forgiveness and expiation of its sins," *Pentateuch*, p. 20.

[26] A.F. Rainey, "Sacrifices and Offerings," *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 5, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), p. 201:5.

[27] I.H. Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, (Carlisle, U.K.: Patternoster Press, 1993), p. 77.

[28] Oesterley and Theodore, *Hebrew Religion*, p. 132

[29] T.H. Gaster, "Sacrifice," *IDB, R-Z*, ed. G.A. Buttrick, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 157.

[30] Cf. J.C. Trever, "Hyssop," *IDB*, ed. G.A. Buttrick, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 669; and E.W.G. Masterman, "Hyssop," *ISBE*, gen. ed. James Orr, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986; p. 3.

[31] G.J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), p. 27.

[32] W.E. Shewell-Cooper, "Hyssop," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, III, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), p. 235:3.

[33] Morris, *Apostolic Preaching*, p. 117.

[34] Cf. Alexander's conclusion to the effect that the smearing of the blood of the

Passover victim on the door posts sets the Israelites apart as holy and "consequently, they are delivered from the destructive power of the Destroyer . . .," "The Passover Sacrifice," p. 18.

[35] W. G. Clippinger, "Blood," p. 489:1.

[36] G.B. Eager, "Bath," *ISBE,* gen. ed. James Orr, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), p. 414:1.

[37] M. J. Erickson, *Christian Theology,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1986), p. 809.

[38] According to Revelation 4:2 the throne before which John was standing was in heaven; and it is the same throne that is mentioned in 7:9, before which the multitude was also standing.

[39] So E.W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book, 1968), 168; D. Guthrie refers to the overcomers as "martyrs" in his *New Testament Theology,* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), p. 186; and C. S. Keener, *Bible Background Commentary,* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), p. 795.

[40] W.F. Arnt and F.W. Gingrich, "kategoreo," *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament,* trans. W. Bauer, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 423.

[41] G.R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation,* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1974), p. 203.

[42] Caird, quoted by Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 243.

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