



The Victory of the Blood of Christ in the New Testament and in Ethiopia

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Abstract

Western evangelical theology has rightly pointed out that the blood of Christ purifies from sins and mends our broken relationship with the Triune God through the penal substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. However, western evangelical theology rarely articulates or emphasizes the *Christus Victor* aspect of the blood of Christ in its theological formulations. On the other hand, Ethiopian grassroots theologians — while agreeing with the western understanding and articulation of Christ's blood — emphasize the fact that the blood of Christ not only purifies and reconciles but is also a powerful element in the struggle against malevolent spirits and the fear of death. In this article, I will trace the motif of the blood of Christ in the NT with the help of Ethiopian gospel singers who affirm the purifying function of Christ's blood but also employ Christ's blood in their struggle against the devil.

Résumé

La théologie évangélique occidentale a souligné à juste titre que le sang du Christ purifie des péchés et rétablit notre relation brisée avec le Dieu trinitaire grâce au sacrifice substitutif et expiatoire du Christ. Cependant, la théologie évangélique occidentale exprime ou met rarement l'accent sur l'aspect *Christus Victor* du sang du Christ dans ses formulations théologiques. En revanche, les théologiens populaires éthiopiens — tout en adhérant à la conception et à l'expression occidentales du sang du Christ — soulignent le fait que le sang du Christ non seulement purifie et réconcilie, mais constitue également un élément puissant dans la lutte contre les esprits malveillants et la peur de la mort. Dans cet article, je retracerai le thème du sang du Christ dans le Nouveau Testament à l'aide de chanteurs de gospel éthiopiens qui affirment la

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fonction purificatrice du sang du Christ, mais qui l'utilisent également dans leur lutte contre le diable.

Resumo

A teologia evangélica ocidental tem sublinhado, com razão, que o sangue de Cristo purifica dos pecados e restabelece a nossa relação rompida com o Deus trinitário, graças ao sacrifício substitutivo e expiatório de Cristo. No entanto, a teologia evangélica ocidental raramente expressa ou enfatiza o aspecto *Christus Victor* do sangue de Cristo nas suas formulações teológicas. Em contrapartida, os teólogos populares etíopes — embora adiram à concepção e à expressão ocidentais do sangue de Cristo — sublinham o facto de que o sangue de Cristo não só purifica e reconcilia, como também constitui um elemento poderoso na luta contra os espíritos maléficos e o medo da morte. Neste artigo, irei traçar o tema do sangue de Cristo no Novo Testamento com a ajuda de cantores de gospel etíopes que afirmam a função purificadora do sangue de Cristo, mas que também o utilizam na sua luta contra o diabo.

Keywords

αἷμα, blood, blood of Christ, death, life, atonement, purification, Christus Victor, Ethiopia, oral theology, grassroots theology, songs, ethnodoxology

Mots-clés

αἷμα, sang, sang du Christ, mort, vie, expiation, purification, Christus Victor, Éthiopie, théologie orale, théologie de base, chants, ethnodoxologie

Palavras-chave

αἷμα, sangue, sangue de Cristo, morte, vida, expiação, purificação, Christus Victor, Etiópia, teologia oral, teologia básica, cânticos, etnodoxologia

Introduction

In his recent work, Stephen Pardue makes a clarion call to evangelical churches and theologians of North America and Europe to engage with and be influenced by Majority World churches, their theologies and their theologians. Pardue contends that evangelical theology will benefit from the diverse contextual theologies the Majority World churches are offering.¹ My aim in this paper is to demonstrate, standing on the shoulders of Pardue, that Western evangelical theology could benefit from Majority World theological output. As an example, I will discuss how the blood of Christ is depicted in the New Testament and demonstrate how Ethiopian grassroots theologians (non-

¹ Stephen T. Pardue, *Why Evangelical Theology Needs the Global Church*, 32, quoting William Dyrness, *Learning about Theology from the Third World*, 185–88.

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academic theologians, particularly gospel singers) understand the blood of Christ in their task of theology and in their everyday life. Western evangelical theology has rightly pointed out that the blood of Christ purifies from sins and mends our broken relationship with the Triune God through the penal substitutionary sacrifice of Christ.² However, western evangelical theology rarely articulates or emphasizes the *Christus Victor* aspect of the blood of Christ in its theological formulations. On the other hand, Ethiopian grassroots theologians — while agreeing with the western understanding and articulation of Christ's blood — emphasize the fact that the blood of Christ not only purifies and reconciles; it is also a powerful element in the struggle against malevolent spirits and the fear of death. I will trace the motif of the blood of Christ in the NT with the help of Ethiopian gospel singers who affirm the purifying function of Christ's blood but also employ Christ's blood in their struggle against the devil. The incorporation of the grassroots theologians in this article is to showcase that in many non-western contexts the prevalent theological output is done by non-academic theologians, who appeal to the Scriptures in their everyday contextual realities. As such, genuine confessional and contextual theology is found among grassroots theologians. In fact, grassroots theologians are often closer to explicating the meaning of blood than the academic theologians who confine its meaning. As such, academic theologians, particularly western evangelical theologians, will do well to engage grassroots theologians.

Stephen Pardue rightly contends that we do not “see things whole.”³ The theological emphasis of theologians depends on their social locations and the issues that they grapple with in their respective contexts. As such, they articulate a certain aspect of the truth while being unaware of or indifferent or uninterested to the other aspects of the truth. The perception of the blood of Christ and what it achieves is one example where we see a difference between Western evangelicals and the Global Church. Before we delve into the discussion of the understanding of the blood of Christ in the West and in the Majority World, it is appropriate to define what the term “blood” means.

The Meaning of Blood

When we think about “blood” what comes to mind is the animal sacrifices conducted in the old cultus and the application of the blood of the lamb on the lintel and doorposts in the land of Egypt. For Ethiopians — in addition to the biblical image — “blood” also brings to mind a vivid picture of cows, sheep, and

² For instance, see Michael Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*, 456–457.

³ Pardue, *Why Evangelical Theology Needs the Global Church*, 32; quoting William A. Dyrness, *Learning about Theology from the Third World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Zondervan, 1990), 185–188.

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goats slaughtered during Christian (Christmas, Easter/Passover) or Muslim (*Qurbani*) holidays.

The term “blood” refers to the ending of life: indeed, scholars have debated vigorously whether the lexeme “blood” denotes the idea of life or death. Those who favor life utilize Leviticus 17:11 as a proof that blood means life: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.”⁴ Others who contend that blood does not literally mean life but death marshal their argument using the numerous OT passages whereby דָּם (*dam*, ‘blood’; αἷμα / *haïma* in LXX) appears to indicate the termination of life through violent death.⁵

Without getting into the debate in detail, suffice to state here that I concur with Morris that “blood” (αἷμα) stands for “life yielded up in death.”⁶ Behm rightly states: “To shed blood is to destroy the bearer of life and therefore life itself. Hence αἷμα signifies ‘outpoured blood,’ ‘violently destroyed life,’ ‘death,’ or ‘murder’.”⁷ Stibbs also asserts a similar notion when he writes: “Bloodshed stands, therefore, not for the release of life from the burden of the flesh, but for the bringing to an end of life in the flesh. It is a witness to physical death, not an evidence of spiritual survival.”⁸

The Blood of Christ in the New Testament

In the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (NA²⁸) the term αἷμα (blood) appears more than ninety times and close to half of them refer to the blood of Christ: some of them declare the innocence of Jesus in the face of betrayal (Matt 27:4, 6, 24), his agony in the Garden (Luke 22:44),⁹ the New Covenant/Eucharist (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; John 6:53–56; 1 Cor 11:24–25), and the sacrificing and justifying sacrificial death of Christ (Acts 20:28; Rom 5:9; Eph 1:7; Heb 10:19; 1 Pet 1:2).

⁴ E.g., Vincent Taylor, *The Atonement in New Testament Teaching*; Jay Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions*; David M. Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*; and Tammy Wiese, “The Blood of Christ: Sacrificial Death or Moral Authority?,” 369–377. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the ESV.

⁵ E.g., Leon Morris, “The Biblical Use of the Term ‘Blood,’” 217–218.

⁶ Morris, “The Biblical Use of the Term ‘Blood,’” 219. See also George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 190.

⁷ Johannes Behm, “αἷμα,” 1:173.

⁸ A. M. Stibbs, *The Meaning of the World ‘Blood’ in Scripture* (London: Tyndale Press, 1953), 12; quoted in Morris, “The Biblical Use of the Term ‘Blood,’” 220.

⁹ *Novum Testamentum Graece* (2012). I am aware of the textual variance concerning this passage.

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The New Testament use of the blood of Christ denotes his sacrificial-victorious work on behalf of sinners.¹⁰ George Hunsinger rightly observes: “the motif of Christ’s blood actually embraces the entire sweep of Christian soteriology.”¹¹ Although the expression “the blood of Christ” was later used metaphorically in the Scriptures, it indeed refers to the historical fact that Jesus shed his blood and died a substitutionary and vicarious death. John declares “But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear and at once there came out blood and water” (John 19:34).

John, prior to Christ’s substitutionary death, has exclaimed that the Logos of God, the unique Son of God, is the sacrificial Lamb who will “take away” (αἴρω, *airō*) the sins of the universe: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).¹² The statement evinces the fact that blood obtained through sacrificial death is the only way to deal with sin. Anyone who consumes Christ’s flesh and drinks the shed blood will receive the promised eternal life and experience the resurrection (John 6:54). Christ’s church is birthed through Christ’s blood (Acts 20:28) because God purified, sanctified, justified the church from her sins and inequities (Rom 3:25; 5:9; Heb 10:29). The church of God experienced divine forgiveness and redemption “through his [Christ’s] blood” (Eph 1:7). As such, the enmity between God and sinners was removed and those purified by the power of the blood are able to draw near to God (Eph 2:13) and enter his holy presence (Heb 10:19). The blood on the cross was the means by which Christ secured believers’ eternal redemption (Heb 9:12).¹³

The New Testament presents Christ’s blood as a sacrificing, purifying, redeeming and justifying blood that deals with the problem of sin.¹⁴ In addition to what has been highlighted above a few other passages reveal this fact:

Hebrews 13:12: “Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.”

1 Peter 1:18–19: “you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.”

1 John 1:7: “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have

¹⁰ See Victor Babajide Cole, “Blood,” in *Africa Bible Commentary* (2006), 139; and David K. Ngaruiya, “Blood,” in *Africa Bible Commentary*, second edition (2025), 151.

¹¹ George Hunsinger, “Meditation on the Blood of Christ,” 134.

¹² Samuel M. Ngewa, *The Gospel of John: For Pastors and Teachers*, 26–27; Isaac Boaheng, “A Soteriological Reflection on Priestly Christology from an Akan Perspective,” 14.

¹³ Abeneazer G. Urga, *Intercession of Jesus in Hebrews: The Background and Nature of Jesus’ Heavenly Intercession in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 216.

¹⁴ Lyman Abbott, “The Blood of Jesus Christ: The New Testament Doctrine,” 507; Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, 128; and Cornelius Olowola, “Sacrifice in African Tradition and in Biblical Perspective,” 5–7.

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fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

Revelation 1:5: “and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.”

Revelation 5:9: “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

The New Testament also indicates that the blood of Christ not only purifies, justifies and sanctifies, but Christ’s blood also functions to destroy the works of the devil. Colossians 1:20 states that “by the blood of his cross,” God is reconciling everything to himself. This blood is also the blood by which God “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” (Col 2:15). The exact term “blood” is wanting in Colossians 2:15. However, in 2:14, the term cross (σταυρός, *staurós*) — I contend — hearkens back to 1:20 where Paul argues that peace and reconciliation occurs “by the blood of his cross.” Hence Colossians underlines the fact that reconciliation and victory over the cosmic powers occurred through the blood of Christ.

Hebrews 2:14 is another text that indicates the “blood and flesh” of Christ is the agent in the disempowerment of the devil and the defeat of death through death. The term “blood” is given an emphatic position, as in Ephesians 6:12, by inverting the common New Testament expression “flesh and blood” (σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα) to “blood and flesh” (αἷμα καὶ σὰρξ).¹⁵ Although some Western evangelical scholars downplay the inverted order, I believe that the inversion has two major functions.¹⁶ First, it gives importance to blood. Second, both in Hebrews 2:14 and Ephesians 6:12 the inversion occurs in relation to the malevolent cosmic powers. According to Hebrews 2:14, the blood of Christ is a decisive element in dealing with the dark spiritual forces. Jesus, the sanctifier, not only purifies sin but also disempowers the devil and deals with death by his “blood and flesh.”¹⁷ Revelation 12:11 also reveals that the blood of Christ enables the saints to overcome the accuser: “And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives unto death.” Despite these clear passages, our evangelical brothers and sisters in the Global North usually tend to only emphasize the sanctifying, justifying,

¹⁵ Abeneazer G. Urga, “The Victorious High Priest in Africa: Christ and the Logic of Atonement in Hebrews 2:14–18,” 13.

¹⁶ Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on Hebrews*, 110n101.

¹⁷ Urga, “The Victorious High Priest in Africa,” 12–17; Olowola, “Sacrifice in African Tradition and in Biblical Perspective,” 7.

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cleansing, and reconciling functions of the blood of Christ.¹⁸ How do Ethiopians, particularly grassroots theologians, understand and do theology of the blood of Christ?

The Blood of Christ in Ethiopian Christianity

Blood sacrifice is not just an ancient phenomenon in Ethiopia. Animal sacrifices are still common practices in various parts of the country, be it for initiation, appeasing the gods or the ancestors during calamity or disasters, or religious rites. During *Eid-al-Adha* (a “Festival of Sacrifice”), sacrificial animals, usually cows, sheep, goats, and, in certain regions, camels, are slaughtered to remember Ibrahim’s obedience to sacrifice his son Ishmael and to thank Allah for his intervention and provision of a ram in place of Ishmael. Ethiopian Christians are also seen slaughtering animals during Christmas and Passover/Easter (*Fasika*). The point here is bloodshed (whether sacrificial or celebratory) is not foreign to Ethiopians.

The Blood of Christ Purifies, Washes and Justifies

Ethiopian grassroots theologians understand that the blood of Christ has power to purify and cleanse from every sort of sin. The prominent text utilized in the purification of believers’ and unbelievers’ sin is 1 John 1:7, 9: “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have a fellowship with one another, and the blood of his Son cleanses us from all sin . . . If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Throughout all expressions of Ethiopian Protestant Christianity, most worship services and prayer meetings begin in a formulaic manner, giving thanks to God for his provision, mercy, grace and protection. This is usually followed by a confession of sins while seated or kneeling. The confession includes an appeal to God using 1 John 1:7, 9 to recall to God that his Son’s blood is potent to wash sin and unrighteousness: “Oh Lord, let my sin and transgression be washed away by the blood of your Son Jesus Christ.” The person leading the worship service will restate this in concluding of the confession. “Oh Lord, let our sins and transgressions be washed away by the blood of your Son Jesus Christ!” He or she might add the Scriptural assurance from Isaiah 1:18 in tandem with 1 John 1:7, 9: “though your sins are like scarlet,

¹⁸ This does not mean whatsoever that there are no Western theologians who discuss the victorious aspect of Christ’s atonement. See, for instance, Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, and Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition*, 181–201, who discuss the *Christus Victor* atonement theory. The point here is about the general proclivity of Western theologians and their theology of the blood of Christ.

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they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.”

The potency of the blood to purify is also acknowledged in numerous songs. Ethiopian gospel singers recognize that the blood functions as an element that sanctifies, purifies and speaks as a mediator.

Asrat Mulachew sings¹⁹

Your blood has power
It cleanses from sin
Your blood has power
It brings closer to the Father

Your blood washed my sin
I have become a new creation
It took away my rebellious evil
I have put on your righteousness

What [good] works do I have
that drew me to you
and made me your friend?
It is you who finished it on the cross
Who reconciled me with the Father by your blood.

Another singer — Tigist Ejigu — stresses that the blood of Christ is instrumental for her reconciliation with and justification by God:²⁰

It is your blood that reconciled me
It is your blood that sanctified me
It is your blood that made me closer
It is your blood that justified me.

Other singers have highlighted that the blood is the only mediator and speaker on their behalf. Zerfe Kebede, a former Ethiopian Orthodox Church member who is now an evangelical, asserts:²¹

It is your blood
with which I am reconciled with God
with which I entered the Holy of Holies

¹⁹ Asrat Mulachew, “ኃይል አለው ደምህ [hayl alew demih / ‘Your Blood Has Power’],” my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUQuM10wqP0>

²⁰ Tigist Ejigu, “ደምህ ነው [demih nehwi] / ‘It is your Blood’],” my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAh40CHzM6I>

²¹ Zerfe Kebede, “ደሙ ነው ደሙ ነው [demu nehwi, demu nehwi] / ‘It Is His Blood, It Is His Blood’],” my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kdsFDuoTg4>

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that which cries out on my behalf.

It is obvious that Zerfe Kebede is alluding to Hebrews 12:24 where it states “and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” The shed blood of Christ functions as the active mediator on her behalf. Zerfe Kebede is not alone in highlighting the blood of Christ as an advocate or intercessor. Bereket Tesfaye also denotes:²²

The blood of Jesus is still fresh today — it is my intercessor
The blood of Jesus is still fresh today — it is my intercessor

...

If the blood of Jesus did not reconcile me,
whose prayer could reconcile me?
If the blood of Jesus did not purify me,
whose prayer could purify me?
If the blood of Jesus did not reconcile me,
whose intercession could reconcile me?
If the blood of Jesus did not wash me,
whose intercession could wash me?

The expected answer to this string of questions is “no one.” It is only the blood of Jesus that has effected reconciliation through washing and intercession. Indeed, Bereket Tesfaye and others are declaring the superior mediation of Christ and his blood vis-à-vis the mediation of the saints, angels and Mary, which is propounded by a certain segment of the Ethiopian society that puts other mediators in the limelight. These singers are attempting to address a burning theological issue in the Ethiopian theological landscape.

Bereket Tesfaye continues:

the one that reconciled me
the one who became a mediator for me
the one who has stood before the Father for my sin

For me who was judged to die
the only one at the right hand of the Father
because of my transgression he is the one to bail me out
who stands in on my behalf

...

His precious blood is a mediator
with which the heaven made peace with me
It is only through the blood of Jesus.

The uniqueness, superiority and effectualness of the blood of Christ is also reflected in a number of songs. Many have sung that the blood of Christ is better than the blood sacrifices of the old cultus. In a country where the sacrifices of

²² Bereket Tesfaye, “አማላጅ [amalaje / ‘My Intercessor’];” my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDouF71O24w>

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animals' blood plays a significant role, the theology of the superiority of the blood of Christ is more relevant.

Selam Desta — after underlining the purifying power of the blood of Christ based on 1 John 1:7, 9)—exclaims:²³

It's not according to the priesthood of the sons of Aaron
nor according to the order of the tribe of Levi
My dear one's [his priesthood] is not like that
My dear one's [his priesthood] is not like that
to justify me He did not enter [into the Holy of Holies]
with the blood of bulls and pigeons
He offered his body once and was beautiful forever
His blood was shed and my sin was forgiven
He died at Calvary, and I was born again
I called the Father, my Father, and I was told that I was his
daughter

Another prominent singer Azeb Hailu also points out the better high priest shed his blood because of her sin:²⁴

My priest, the one at the right hand of the Father
My priest, who is the advocate of my soul
My priest, so that my suffering stops
My priest, so that my sorrow ends
My priest, you broke down,
My priest, the wall of hostility
My priest, you shed your blood
My priest, as a sacrifice for my guilt.

This cursory overview of the blood of Christ resonates with many of the theological formulations and assertions of western evangelical theologians. The blood of Christ purifies, justifies, reconciles and draws sinners closer to God the Father. Many Ethiopian singers agree with our western evangelical brothers and sisters that Jesus Christ shed his blood as a substitute sacrifice “who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). However, Ethiopian grassroots theologians recognize another significance of the blood of Christ: they acknowledge the fact that the blood of Christ is a decisive element in their struggle against the dark cosmic powers.

The Victorious Blood of Christ

To the chagrin of those like Rudolf Bultmann, Ethiopian grassroots theologians believe that the spirit world exists. The spirit world is far from being

²³ Selam Desta, “ደሙ [demu / ‘His Blood’],” my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZq2tjgSS4E>

²⁴ Azeb Hailu, “ከህኔ [kahne / ‘My Priest’],” my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFD85JleeXs>

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mythical and superstitious. For Bultmann, such a theological position is tantamount to unscientific, pointless, and impossible thought and as such it needs to be demythologized.²⁵

Africans in general, here Ethiopian grassroots theologians, are not disillusioned by such an assertion. The devil and his compatriots exist. The dark spiritual forces are part of their everyday reality.²⁶ Although he is skeptical of the use of the blood of Christ, Samuel Waje Kunhiyop observes that Africans are accustomed to using blood ritual for “cleansing, purification, atonement, initiation and protection.”²⁷ Ethiopian Christians are seen dealing with malevolent spirits through prayer, Scripture reading, songs and exorcism. This is where the blood of Christ is claimed and utilized in dealing with demonic forces and their active work in their surroundings.²⁸

Ethiopian Christians use the blood of Christ in exorcising demons from individuals. Exorcists are heard commanding demons to “leave so and so by the power of the blood of Jesus Christ.” Sometimes they use water as a symbol for the blood of Christ and sprinkle it on the possessed individual. The blood of Christ is also used as a protective element before a difficult journey, speaking engagements or evangelistic efforts. The prayer goes like this: “I cover myself or so and so in the blood of Jesus Christ.”

The *Christus Victor* aspect of the blood is also seen in many Ethiopian songs. These vernacular theologies underline that the blood of Christ not only shields believers from God’s just judgment by purifying sinners and making them anew, but the blood of Christ also protects Christians from malevolent powers, principalities and the fear of death. Here again we see grassroots theologians demonstrating their encompassing view of the blood of Christ in accordance with the NT texts in contrast to the traditional academic theologians’ narrower focus on the blood of Jesus as a purifying and sanctifying element. Meheret Etefa, for instance, sings that the blood of Christ has shielded her from the Angel of Death:²⁹

Because the blood was smeared on my doorposts

²⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, 4.

²⁶ Robert Falconer, *Spectacular Atonement: Envisioning the Cross of Christ in an African Perspective*, 93–98, 105–11.

²⁷ Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, 125; see also Samuel Olarewaju, “The Efficacy of Prayer in the Blood of Christ in Contemporary African Christianity,” 31–49.

²⁸ Edison M. Kalengyo, “The Sacrifice of Christ and Ganda Sacrifice: A Contextual Interpretation in Relation to the Eucharist,” 310, 316; B. Moses Owajaye, “Pleading the Blood of Jesus’ in Grassroots Pentecostal Practice: A Study of Kenyan Pentecostals Studying at AIU-NEGST, Nairobi,” 150–151.

²⁹ Meheret Etefa, “ደሙ [‘demu / ‘His Blood’];” my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6iK1HdTp-4I&list=RD6iK1HdTp-4I&start_radio=1

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Because the blood was smeared on my lintel
Death passed over, it went away from me
Seeing the blood of my Lord
Seeing the blood of my Jesus
Death passed over,
It went away from me.

The Angel of death doesn't scare me
I am covered, he won't find me
I am surrounded by the blood
How can he pass the hedge and enter?

It is a day of sadness for my enemy and a day of gladness for me
Death is entering my enemy's village
Although he prowls around me like a roaring lion
He won't succeed, he can't because of the blood.

For Meheret Etefa, the blood of Christ is like the blood of the Passover lamb that covered and protected God's people from the Angel of Death. Similarly, Temesgen Markos declares poetically that the blood of Christ both purifies and protects.³⁰

It has forgiveness, healing
By removing the old, it makes new
It has absolute power to remove transgression
That is the precious blood of Jesus.

His blood, my power, my strength
His blood, my foundation
His blood, my qualification
His blood, my medicine

It is impossible to break a blood covenant
Nor the attempt to scratch off or erase
My enemy understood this so he swore with blood
To kill and destroy me, he sharpened his teeth.

When he [the enemy] came to me swearing by himself
My Lord Jesus taking my place
destroyed that [the enemy's] blood covenant with his blood
He became my life by covering my shame.

Temesgen Markos also denotes the fact that the devil made a blood covenant — which is common in a witchcraft dominated areas — to attack, kill and destroy,

³⁰ Temesgen Markos, “ደሙ [demu / ‘His Blood’],” my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TsQnUNMglYs>

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but the powerful blood of Christ overpowered the demonic blood covenant. Hence, he has obtained life.

Bereket Tesfaye states that Jesus' death was a redeeming and life-giving death. She sings:³¹

It is his blood that helped me escape
It is his blood that gave me life
It is his blood that broke my yoke,
and lifted my head up.

The Angel of Death is not afraid of anyone
He enters into the king's house, kills whomever he wishes
He goes out in search of another
But when he gets to my house, he never comes close.

Bereket Tesfaye alludes to the Exodus story and claims that she is spared from the Angel of Death because of the protective blood of Christ on her abode.

An Ethiopian Lutheran Church choir also highlights the protective aspect of the blood of Christ by echoing the Exodus tradition:³²

His blood is on the doorposts
The Angel of Death does not frighten me
I am covered, he won't find me.
I see from afar my enemy making a loud cry
Glory to the Lamb, I rejoice
Amen, I ululate.

Let power and richness be to the slain Lamb
He is worthy to receive strength, glory, praise and blessing.

His blood is on the lintel
Who could bypass the sign?
Who could reach the fortress of the blood?
It is the day of crying and death to the enemy
And a day of joy and salvation for me
I say "Amen," "Amen."

Glory, glory to the Lamb
Because he was slain to redeem me
To free me from the slavery of death

³¹ Bereket Tesfaye, "ደሙ ነው [demu neh / 'It Is His Blood'];" my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sq7V7D7pVmI>

³² Lideta Mekane Eyesus Choir, "ደሙ በመቃኑ ላይ ነው [demu behmeqanu lay neh / 'His Blood Is on the Doorposts'];" my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zez6miffbOQ>

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Behold he saved me by sprinkling his blood
By defeating my enemy, Amen!

Glory, glory to God
To me who was far off
Despised by people and [fallen] angels
[But] today the veil is torn
Behold [the way] is opened by Jesus
Amen, I am able to enter.

It is clear that these oral theologians here appropriated the Exodus tradition where the story narrates God's redeeming, protective and freeing action in the land of slavery, death and exile. The Exodus story depicts two essential facts. First, it is God who delivers his people from slavery and death. Second, the means of the divine deliverance was through the blood of a slaughtered lamb put on the houses of the Israelites. The only way to escape the plague of the Destroyer is by means of the blood. The New Testament takes this redemptive event and applies it to Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 5:7b Paul states: "For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed." Here Paul links the Passover lamb of the Israelites to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. In so doing, he indicates that the adumbration of the Exodus story found its ultimate and eschatological fulfillment in Christ's sacrificial death. In the words of Dean O. Wenthe, "Paul sees Jesus as the antitype, of which the Old Testament Passover lamb was a type."³³

Ethiopian singers have detected the link between the shadow and the body, and have rightly pointed out the centrality of the blood of Christ — the new Paschal Lamb — in the redemptive act of God. Jesus Christ is the Paschal Lamb who offers deliverance from death and the oppression and attack of the dark cosmic powers through his blood. The blood of Christ — according to their poetic contention — is put on their life, ministry, and house. As such, the Angel of Death does not have the slightest chance to inflict eternal death or put an obstruction from experiencing God's presence. They are no longer under the rulership of the devil or the fear of death.

The frequency of the appropriation of the blood of Christ in a manner of the Exodus tradition demonstrates the fact that Ethiopian grassroots theologians are very aware of the presence of malevolent spiritual beings in their day-to-day reality. They know — not merely cognitively but also practically and experientially — that "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John

³³ Dean O. Wenthe, "An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 5:7b," 134–140; quotation from p. 138; also see J. K. Howard, "Christ Our Passover: A Study of the Passover-Exodus Theme in 1 Corinthians," 97–108.

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5:19). However, they also know that the blood of Christ has the potency to shield them from their powerful enemy.

In their construction of theology, Ethiopian grassroots theologians give primacy to the biblical story that traces God's purifying and delivering act through the Scripture. Their theological task appeals to the authority of Scripture as they believe that the story of Exodus and the story of the substitute-victorious Lamb of God is also *their* story.³⁴ They are also sensitive to their contextual realities. The existence of demonic possessions, attacks, and activities nudge them to find a biblical and theological solution. And this biblical-theological solution is grounded in the rescuing act of God in the biblical narratives. These oral theologians do not just utilize Leviticus-Christ but they also employ Leviticus-Exodus-Christ in their construction of faithful and relevant biblical theology.

Conclusion

Western evangelical theologians have rightly explicated the blood of Christ as the element that deals with the problem of sin. The blood of Christ indeed purifies, justifies, and washes every kind of sin and unrighteousness. Ethiopian grassroots theologians wholeheartedly concur with this biblical and theological formulation, but their songs suggest that the blood of Christ, as the element to counter and disempower and overcome malevolent cosmic powers, is also vitally important — yet is not given due attention in typical Western evangelical theology. This gap in western evangelical theology can be rectified if western evangelical theologians are willing and humble enough to “eat theology with us.”³⁵

The conversation with Ethiopian oral theologians can help our western brothers and sisters “see things whole” and appreciate the other side of the theological landscape. The blood of Christ offers more benefit in addition to the purification of sins and the sanctification of sinners. If evangelicals from the Global North “eat theology with us,” they will be able to appreciate what others in the Global South have been tasting and enjoying because of the substitutionary and victorious work of Christ. If western evangelicals are open to eat our theology — where Scripture is offered as the main dish, spiced with local ingredients and cooked in our own pots with the help of the Spirit and the community in Christ — they will be able to nurture themselves biblically and

³⁴ Contra Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, 128. In his zeal to critique the misuse of the blood of Christ, Kunhiyop overstates his case when he writes, “The idea that the blood of Christ is protective derives more from an African approach to blood sacrifices than it does from the scriptures.” Kunhiyop, 128. In doing so, like many Western theologians he excises the biblical notion of the *Christus Victor* aspect of the blood of Jesus.

³⁵ John S. Mbiti, “Theological Impotence and the Universality of the Church,” 17.

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theologically in areas that may be deficient because of lack of variety of food. They will be able to expand their culinary experience outside of their confined cultural zones, so that they do not remain like the person in the Ugandan proverb “who has not traveled widely [and so] thinks his or her mother is the only cook (the best cook).”

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³⁶ See also Leon Morris's later work of the same title, "The Biblical Use of the Term 'Blood'," *Journal of Theological Studies* 6, no. 1 (1955): 77–82. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/VI.1.77> and <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23955979>

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³⁷ Archived at https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ajet/22-1_031.pdf

³⁸ Archived at https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ajet/10-1_003.pdf

³⁹ There are two different Ethiopian singers named Bereket Tesfaye. The singer of "My Intercessor" is male and the singer of "It Is His Blood" is female.