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Author: Kijin J. Wu

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Sacrifice of Jesus and Sacrifice to Ancestors?—A Comparative Study of Sacrifice in Christianity and Confucianism

Kijin James Wu

Offering sacrifices has been a common religious feature found in the world religions. As Chinese ritual scriptures and the Christian Bible have respectively attested, offering sacrifices was a very common religious practice in the lives of the early Chinese, Hebrews, and Christians. There were various sacrificial rites serving various religious purposes for these people. Today, these rites, in one form or another, still supply religious values to the believers. In that case, what does sacrifice mean in these respective religious or cultural contexts? Is there a universal concept of sacrifice identified in the minds of these people? To answer these questions, we must examine the notion of sacrifice interpreted in its respective religious contexts.

This paper aims at presenting a comparative study of sacrifice in Christianity and Confucianism. While aiming at a comparative study, this paper first anchors its sources on the Christian Bible and the *Records of Rites (Li Ji)*; second, secures its approach in the context of East Asia¹ with a cross-cultural theological hermeneutics and interreligious dialogue between Protestant Christianity and Classical Confucianism,² and third, targets its ritual category on the Christian Eucharist and the Confucian rite of *ji zu* (offering sacrifices to ancestors; aka, ancestor worship).³ In so doing, this study has framed the question of sacrifice in a comparative context. Accordingly, we divide this paper into three sections: (1) *ji zu* in the classical Confucian context,

¹By East Asia, I mean the Confucian East Asia, the region profoundly influenced by Confucianism, such as China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

²By Classical Confucianism, I mean the Confucian tradition beginning with Confucius himself (c. 551–479 B.C.E.) and ending with Xun Zi (fl. 298–238 B.C.E.). For the epoch division of Confucian tradition, see John H. Berthrong, *Transformations of the Confucian Way* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 7–10.

³Too often the term *ji zu* has been translated into ancestor worship, which is regarded as a theological abuse to the term in this paper. Therefore, this paper uses my personal translation “offering sacrifices to ancestors” to grasp the original linguistic expression of *ji zu* in English.

(2) the Christian Eucharist in the Protestant context, and (3) theological implications in a comparative context.

***Ji Zu* in the Classical Confucian Context**

Ji zu (祭祖), often known as ancestor worship, does not suggest “worship of ancestors” but “offering sacrifices to ancestors” according to its original linguistic structure. Although the phrase “offering sacrifices to ancestors” still contains its religious meaning, we should not confuse this Confucian meaning with that of worship as conceptualized in the western Christian minds. To establish such a theoretical distinction, we must examine *ji zu* in its original context by investigating the meaning of offering sacrifices (*ji*, 祭) and the nature of ancestors (*zu*, 祖).

In the *Records of Rites*, most authors use the term *gui shen* (鬼神) to symbolize something in reference to ancestors.⁴ To translate *gui shen* into English is difficult and risky. Rendering *gui shen* literally as ghost-god or ghost-spirit is superficial, for they suggest a demonic, as well as a divine, nature of spiritual beings. Although such renditions are acceptable in modern translation, they blur the Confucian idea of *gui shen* interpreted according to the *Records of Rites*. As attested in the chapter of *Zhongyong*, Confucius said, “How magnificent are the virtuous effects of *gui shen*! We look for them but cannot see, we listen but cannot hear. They enter into all things and nothing is there without them.”⁵ What Confucius exemplified here is an analogy to the mystic way of *zhong yong* (equilibrium, *zhong yong zhi dao*). Confucius used *gui shen* as a metaphor to mystify the way of *zhong yong* that often revealed itself through the virtuous effects of ancestors.

⁴The *Records of Rites* (禮記 祭統) 25.10. “見事鬼神之道焉...鋪筵設同几爲依神也 詔祝於室 而出於枋 此交神明之道” See Müller, *Sacred Books*, 28:245.

⁵The *Records of Rites* (禮記 中庸) 31.13. See Müller, *Sacred Books*, 28:307.

To some extent, this analogy demonstrates Confucius' rationalistic turn on the interpretation of *gui shen* from a religiously mystic belief to a philosophically rational investigation. As the modern scholar Lao Siguang indicates, viewing *gui shen* as spiritual beings was common in ancient China. The conventional concepts of *gui* and *shen* come from a primitive religious belief in the immortal soul. For that reason, the people of ancient China often identified *gui shen* as spiritual beings who exist after the death of human beings.⁶ This mystic nature of *gui shen*, however, was different from Confucius' view of *gui shen*. As recorded in the chapter of the *Meaning of Offering Sacrifices* (祭義), a disciple of Confucius once asked Confucius about the meanings of *gui shen*. Confucius said, "The animating force (氣) of life is an exuberance of *shen* (神); the material body (魄) of life is an exuberance of *gui* (鬼). Combining *gui* and *shen* forms the supreme doctrine of teaching."⁷ Introducing education into the concept of *gui shen* has characterized Confucius' interpretation of human life. For Confucius, ancestors had educational functions, teaching what life was all about. The material body and the animating force were the constitutive elements of human beings, *shen* and *gui* were the ontological elements of human life, and nurturing the meaning of life in education exhibits human civilization.

For the early Confucians,⁸ this rationalistic trend was worthy of advocacy. The authors of the *Records of Rites* also interpreted *gui shen* on a rational ground by following Confucius' interpretive scheme. They attempted to break away from mysticism as Daoists had inherited. This rational route was to differentiate a philosophical approach from a religious approach—Confucian rationalism as opposed to Daoist mysticism. For instance, while the nature of *gui* was

⁶勞思光 (Siguang Lao), *新編中國哲學史* [Chinese Philosophy], 1:91–4.

⁷The *Records of Rites* (禮記 祭義) 24.13. See Müller, *Sacred Books*, 28:220.

⁸By "the early Confucians," I mean the authors of the *Records of Rites* in general.

called into question, these Confucians did not hesitate to reconstruct its meaning with concrete rational terms. As stated in the chapter of the *Method of Offering Sacrifices*, “All born between heaven and earth are life. The death of all things is named *zhe* (折); the death of people is named *gui*. Naming such has never been changed within five dynasties of antiquity.”⁹ The author, then, obviously appealed to historical records to designate two specific names for death, *zhe* and *gui*. With respect to the death of things, *zhe* was used. With respect to the death of human beings, *gui* was its name. Moreover, another Confucian author continued to explain the substance of *gui*.

As stated,

All living beings must die and return to earth. This is named *gui*. Bones and muscles rot away, turn into ashes in earth. Its animating force ascends to the high above, turns into the sensible light, odor, and feelings of sadness. This is the essence of all beings, a manifestation of spirit. For the sake of preserving the spiritual essence, people honor it with supreme status, name it *gui shen*, frame it as a living pattern of populace so that people are so in awe of them as to comply with them. The sages do not consider these actions sufficient, and thus they build palaces and temples to distinguish the kinship relationship, to teach people to remember their ancestors, not to forget their own origin.¹⁰

The meaning of *Gui* as interpreted here is clearly a process of corporal body returning to earth in ashes at the point of death, not a ghost as understood in the modern world. For the early Confucians, death separated what had been unified in human beings. What departed to heaven was *shen*, the spirit or quintessence of a person, and what returned to earth into ashes was *gui*, the corporal body of a person.¹¹ Most importantly, the spirit of a person was what should be preserved and remembered.

⁹The *Records of Rites* (禮記 祭法) 23.3. See Müller, *Sacred Books*, 28:203–4.

¹⁰The *Records of Rites* (禮記 祭義) 24.13. See Müller, *Sacred Books*, 28:220–1.

¹¹The *Records of Rites* (禮記 郊特牲) 11.9. “魂氣歸於天 形魄歸於地.” See Müller, *Sacred Books*, 27:444.

While breaking away from the religious mysticism prevailing among the folk beliefs, the early Confucians believed that the spirit of a person, or the so-called ancestor, was the source of ethical inspiration. Ancestors must be ethical, worthy of being remembered. They were either extraordinary people who had vital contributions to society while they were alive or ordinary people with virtue worthy of advocacy and remembrance.¹² Their good deeds, not bad deeds, inspired ethical devotion from living descendants. This spirit of ethical inspiration was the essence of all beings and should be remembered.

Referring *gui shen* to the ancestral spirit of ethical inspiration is clearly a Confucian-oriented interpretation of ancestors. In a general sense, offering sacrifices to ancestors is not mystic and superstitious in expression, but educational and rational in function. For the early Confucians, people commemorated ancestors by remembering who they were in terms of ethical, not biological, heritage. For the sake of preserving and remembering these ancestral spirits as the source of ethical devotion, people offered sacrifices to them. Although there were two separate sacrificial rites designed for serving *gui* and *shen*, the common end of celebrating these rites was “to teach people to love one another and to interact with affections.”¹³ Ancestors were the traceable source of ethical devotion. They were neither Heaven as the Ultimate nor the human beings as the sentient agent of transcendence. Offering sacrifices to ancestors inspires people to be ethical, to act properly in relationships, and thus to educate people to embody ritual propriety (禮, *li*) in person. No wonder an author of the *Records of Rites* stated that offering sacrifices was the most important ritual category among all ritual practices.¹⁴

¹²The *Records of Rites* (禮記 祭法) 23.8 and (禮記 祭統) 25.12. See Müller, *Sacred Books*, 28:207–8 and 28:251.

¹³The *Records of Rites* (禮記 祭義) 24.14. “教民相愛 上下用情.” See Müller, *Sacred Books*, 28:221–2.

¹⁴The *Records of Rites* (禮記 祭統) 25.1. “禮有五經 莫重於祭.” See Müller, *Sacred Books*, 28:236.

This understanding of offering sacrifices has shifted the focus of the sacrificial rite from the deceased ancestors to the living family. Offering sacrifices points to something beyond a physical act of offering, namely, a “symbolic engagement”¹⁵ of ritual propriety (禮, *li*) so to speak. According to the chapter of the *Foundation of Offering Sacrifices*, there are ten ethical references engaged by offering sacrifices.¹⁶ These ten aspects of ritual ethics suggest ten different norms of ritual etiquette (禮儀), but one universal value of ritual propriety embodied through offering sacrifices. Offering sacrifices is no longer about religious prayers¹⁷ and ritual blessings as defined in the mundane world, but about perfection (備) in every domain of life through deference (順).¹⁸ Perfection signifies what these early Confucians meant by prayers and blessings in offering sacrifices and thus reveals the value of ritual propriety.

Ritual propriety bears its educative and transformative power,¹⁹ which teaches a person to honor rulers and elders in the society and to be filial to parents in the family.²⁰ Hence, the early Confucians believed ritual propriety should not be left unlearned²¹ and offering sacrifices should be the foundation of education.²² Seen in this light, the purpose of ritual propriety and the

¹⁵Borrowing this term from Robert C. Neville’s theology of symbolic engagement, see Robert C. Neville, *Symbols of Jesus: A Christology of Symbolic Engagement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1–6.

¹⁶The *Records of Rites* (禮記 祭統) 25.10. See Müller, *Sacred Books*, 28:245.

¹⁷The *Records of Rites* (禮記 禮器) 10.5. “祭祀不祈。” See Müller, *Sacred Books*, 27:403.

¹⁸The *Records of Rites* (禮記 祭統) 25.2. “賢者之祭也 必受其福 非世所謂福也 福者 備也 備者 百順之名 無所不順者之謂備。” See Müller, *Sacred Books*, 28:236.

¹⁹The *Records of Rites* (禮記 經解) 26.3. “故禮之教化也微。” See Müller, *Sacred Books*, 28:259-60.

²⁰The *Records of Rites* (禮記 祭統) 25.9. “是故君子之教也 外則教之以尊其君長 內則教之以孝於其親。” See Müller, *Sacred Books*, 28:244.

²¹The *Records of Rites* (禮記 曲禮上) 1.11. “禮也者 不可不學。” See Müller, *Sacred Books*, 27:65.

²²The *Records of Rites* (禮記 祭統) 25.9. “祭者 教之本也已。” See Müller, *Sacred Books*, 28:245.

function of offering sacrifices are identical, namely, to engage a person in remembering the origin of being, honoring ancestors, harmonizing all resources, fulfilling righteousness, and promoting humility illustrates.²³ Ritual propriety underlies offering sacrifices, which aims at harmony with all under Heaven.

The Christian Eucharist in the Protestant Context

Offering sacrifices is not a ritual tradition that exclusively belongs to Confucianism. According to the Christian Bible, offering sacrifices was prominent in the religious life of the Israelites.²⁴ The Hellenistic Jews and Christians also inherited this religious heritage from their Israelite predecessors. Nevertheless, offering sacrifices contains comparatively different meanings for the first generations of Christians. The authors of the New Testament do not literally follow the sacrificial systems and institutions of Israel to continue the practice of offering sacrifices, but continue the concept of sacrifice by rooting itself in the event of Jesus' crucifixion as a perfect sacrifice offered by God to the world for a soteriological purpose.

For these authors, the meaning of Jesus' death was considered symbolic in relation to sacrifice. It was symbolic because Jesus death pointed to something beyond his corporal death. They identified Jesus with the image of invisible God (2 Cor. 4.4; Phil. 2.6; Col. 1.15; and Heb. 1.3) and Jesus' death as a perfect sacrifice reconciling sinners with God once and for all (Heb. 9.1–10.18). They extended the meaning of Jesus' death to a perfect sacrifice in an act of self-giving (Phil. 2.5–8). The nature of Christian sacrificial imagery and language is deeply rooted in the event of Jesus' death. In addition, Paul associated this Christological sacrifice to the notion of new Christian identity. For Paul, Christians are the “new creation” in Christ (2 Cor. 5.17) and

²³The *Records of Rites* (禮記 祭義) 24.12. “天下之禮 致反始也 致鬼神也 致和用也 致義也 致讓也.” See Müller, *Sacred Books*, 28:219.

²⁴See Lev. 1–5, *passim*.

thus offering oneself as a sacrifice to God is holy and acceptable to God (Rom. 12.1). Jesus' death has called a Christian to self-transform into a new creation in discerning the will of God and thus has sanctified the body and spirit of a Christian (Rom. 12.2). In a sense, Christians are now a new temple of God in which the spirit of God dwells (1 Cor. 3:16-17). This "new creation" underscores Paul's theology of Christian identity as a result of Jesus' sacrifice.²⁵ Paul has framed the meaning of Christian sacrifice in relation to the event of Jesus' death and that of followers, which in turn has had a great influence on the later Christian notion of sacrifice.²⁶

In the Christian tradition, the Eucharist has always been the ritual symbol representing Christian sacrifice.²⁷ This symbol has carried its theological significance through generations of Christians. According to the synoptic gospels, the Jewish paschal meal was the origin of the Lord's Supper, later called the Eucharist. These authors attested Jesus instituted this new covenant in a time of eating paschal meal (Mk. 14.22–25; Mt. 26.26–29; Lk. 22.15–20).²⁸ Bread and wine symbolize a new covenant instituted through Jesus' death. For Paul, the Lord's Supper symbolized a new covenant in which sacrifice and reconciliation were offered through Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Bread and wine were the symbols that respectively represented Jesus' body and blood offering to God and to human beings for the purpose of reconciliation.

²⁵The Catholic theologian Robert Daly also indicates that Paul's theology of sacrifice concentrates on the sacrifice of Christ, the sacrifice of Christians, and the Christians are the New Temple. For his analysis, see Robert Daly, *Christian Sacrifice: The Judaeo-Christian Background before Origen* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1978), 230–56.

²⁶For the historical development of the Christian sacrifice, see Daly, *Christian Sacrifice* and his *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

²⁷There has been another religious symbol associating with the Christian sacrifice, namely, the Cross. Christian theology of the Cross, often associated with the theology of atonement, also explains Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross with a divine soteriological purpose. As significant as it is in theologizing Jesus' sacrifice, the Cross is not a ritual symbol after all. For the purpose of this paper, we concentrate on the discussion of the Eucharist.

²⁸Although this story of Jesus' institution disappears in the gospel of John, a similar linguistic expression describing Jesus as the bread of life appears in the sixth chapter of John (Jn. 6.53–58).

While the Christian liturgical tradition was evolving during the first centuries, the Eucharist came to be known as a central ritual symbol that symbolized a “spiritualization of sacrifice” structured in a heavenly worship.²⁹ Nevertheless, along with the spread of the church, Eucharistic theology and its historical practices have grown more complex, diversified, and contextual than ever.³⁰ The Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Protestant Churches have produced their respective theologies of the Eucharist in the course of church history. Themes, such as thanksgiving, communion, commemoration, sacrifice, liberation, symbolic reference, the presence of Christ, a work of Holy Spirit, and an eschatological event, have been respectively emphasized by these church bodies in one form or another.³¹ Particularly in the West, the ecclesiastical debates over the doctrines of transubstantiation (Catholic), consubstantiation (Lutheran), commemoration (Zwinglian), spiritual parallelism (Calvinist), and transignification (Catholic) have substantiated the fact that theological interpretations of the Eucharist have been multilayered.³² Nevertheless, no doctrine is definite enough to officially represent *the* Christian understanding of the Eucharist.

Understandably, agreement and disagreement on these Eucharistic theologies raise a series of ecclesiastical debates among these church bodies. Too often, disagreement has led to

²⁹For an overview of the history of the Eucharist and the Christian concept of sacrifice, see John H. McKenna, “Eucharist and Sacrifice: An Overview,” *Worship* 76, no.5 (September, 2002): 386–402. For an account of the Eucharistic theology as developed in the patristic period of Christianity, see Kenneth Stevenson, ““The Unbloody Sacrifice”: The Origins and Development of a Description of the Eucharist,” in *Fountain of Life*, ed. Gerard Austin (Washington D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1991), 103–30.

³⁰On this account, see Edward J. Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West*, ed. Robert J. Daly (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998) and Enrico Mazza, *The Celebration of the Eucharist: the Origin of the Rite and the Development of Its Interpretation*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999).

³¹James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 239–41; and Horton Davies, *Bread of Life and Cup of Joy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 180–256.

³²I follow the Methodist theologian Geoffrey Wainwright’s example to apply these labels in a general sense to roughly discern the general positions that Christian denominations respectively uphold. See, Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 268.

the denial of admission to the Eucharist from one Christian denomination to another, displaying a sense of disunity in Christianity.³³ However, Christian churches have come to realize the importance of the ecclesiastical unity since the past decades. Some Christian denominations have begun to dialogue on the notion of sacrifice to better understand the theological positions that other church bodies have upheld.³⁴ This notion has remained a source of misunderstanding among Christian bodies for centuries.³⁵ For Protestants, the notion of the Eucharist as sacrifice is tricky. Since Martin Luther rejected the Roman Mass as a sacrifice and a good work, the privilege of a priest in offering the sacrifice of Christ on behalf of the church, and the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation which taught the real changes of the Eucharistic substance in the sixteenth century; Protestants have been reluctant to conceive the Eucharist as sacrifice.³⁶ Luther's interpretation of the Catholic position has become a critically historical source of Protestant understanding regarding the Eucharist. Protestants generally believe the medieval Catholic theology had abused the category of sacrifice, which framed the Eucharist in a form of "propitiatory sacrifice" and a "good work" offered in the mass.³⁷

Nevertheless, contemporary Protestant liturgical theologians attempt to frame the category of sacrifice in their respective interpretations of the Eucharist to encounter challenges

³³ Davies, *Bread of Life*, 257–66.

³⁴For instance, Lutherans and Catholics began to dialogue on the issue of the Eucharist in the 1960s. See Representatives of the USA National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation and the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue*, Vol. 3, *The Eucharist as Sacrifice* (New York: the USA National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation, 1968?).

³⁵Roch A. Kereszty, ed., *Rediscovering the Eucharist: Ecumenical Conversations* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), ix–xiii.

³⁶Gustaf Aulén, *Eucharist and Sacrifice* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 80–9.

³⁷For a discussion of Reformed liturgy in Europe, see John M. Barkley, "'Pleading His Eternal Sacrifice' in the Reformed Liturgy," in *The Sacrifice of Praise*, ed. Bryan D. Spinks (Roma: Edizioni Liturgiche, 1981), 123–40.

brought by this misunderstanding and the abuse of this biblical category.³⁸ As the Reformed theologian Jean-Jacques von Allmen argues, sacrifice is a biblical category that cannot be dismissed easily in a theological interpretation of the Eucharist.³⁹ To preserve this category, the World Council of Churches uses phrases, such as Thanksgiving to the Father, Memorial of Christ, Invocation of the Spirit, Communion of the Faithful, and Meal of the Kingdom, to explain the meanings of the Eucharist from a Protestant perspective.⁴⁰ Among them, the notion of sacrifice is confirmed in a sense of praise, thanksgiving, communion, and participation through the expression of “sacrifice of praise,” calling attention to God’s creation and redemption. Max Thurian, a Frère of Taizé and the main architect of the WCC document on the Eucharist, also defends this theological expression in the use of Eucharistic interpretation. The Eucharist is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God’s creation and redemption, a sacramental presence of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, a liturgical presentation of the sacrificial Christ, and a participation in the intercession of salvation for all people.⁴¹ Thurian’s theological interpretation makes the Eucharist a God-centered and human-centered event. It is a “both-and,” not “either-or,” event. For Thurian, the Eucharist is a divine sacrifice offered to us and a human participation in the intercession of salvation for all people. “Participation” is a theological word signifying the nature of Protestant sacrifice, which in turn separates itself from that of Catholic sacrifice.

³⁸For instance, to name a few, Aulén, *Eucharist and Sacrifice*, 185–200; Wainwright, *Doxology*, 271–4; Allmen, *The Lord’s Supper*, 75–100; and Max Thurian, “The Eucharistic Memorial, Sacrifice of Praise and Supplication,” in *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, ed. Max Thurian (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), 90–103.

³⁹Jean-Jacques von Allmen, *The Lord’s Supper* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), 75–100.

⁴⁰World Council of Churches, Faith and Order No. 111, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 10–17.

⁴¹Thurian, “The Eucharistic Memorial, Sacrifice of Praise and Supplication,” 92.

It is clear that contemporary Protestant theologians try to avoid the image of offering sacrifices in worship on the one hand and confirm the legitimate concept of sacrifice in theology on the other. However, Protestants in general do not “offer” sacrifice in worship. As the Lutheran liturgical theologian Gordon W. Lathrop argues boldly, “Christian worship is not sacrifice, however, at least not in a literal sense of the word.” Lathrop would agree to use the term sacrifice if this notion would not cling to the talk of human offering but to that of the self-giving of Christ.⁴² Sacrifice, for Protestants, is a matter of Christ’s self-giving on the cross, once and for all, and our consistent participation in this sacrificial journey as Christians. Phrased in Geoffrey Wainwright’s terms, Christian sacrifice is a loving surrender of oneself to God from whom one receives back one’s life.⁴³ Sacrifice in the Protestant view embraces Christ’s self-giving and disciples’ participation. As the Catholic theologian Robert Daly indicates, if sacrifice is understood as primarily an external act of cultic worship carried out in a sacred place and involving the “offering up” of some material objects, the Eucharist is not a sacrifice. But if, one’s notion of sacrifice is a highly spiritualized one which centered the sacrificial act in the every life of the Christian, the Eucharist is sacrificial.⁴⁴ From a Protestant perspective, the notion of Christian sacrifice needs to be interpreted in relation to Christ’s self-emptying and Christians’ participation if the category is ready for use in any future Protestant theology of the Eucharist.

Theological Implications in a Comparative Context

In a religiously pluralistic context, the theological implications aroused from this study can be challenging to both Protestants and Confucians. After our analysis of offering sacrifices

⁴²Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 140–1.

⁴³Wainwright, *Doxology*, 273.

⁴⁴Daly, *Christian Sacrifice*, 498.

to ancestors according to the *Records of Rites*, Protestants should ask themselves why the Confucian rite of *ji zu* is idolatrous. While Christians often view the Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian rite of *ji zu* altogether as one comprehensive Chinese rite, do they question their Christian epistemological approach to the religions in China? Given that ancestors are neither Heaven the Ultimate, nor the spiritual beings in mystic sense, and offering sacrifices to ancestors does not embody an act of worship, is it possible for Christians to re-conceive of this Confucian rite of *ji zu* as a symbolic vehicle of the Ultimate without claiming its ultimacy for itself?⁴⁵

In terms of Christology, the notion of sacrifice has always been encapsulated in the theology of atonement and interwoven with the theology of the cross. After studying the notion of sacrifice in early Christianity, Frances Young anchors her theory of sacrifice on the concept of symbolic atonement, which can be translated into worship, thanksgiving, communion, and forgiveness of sin, and goes on to ask what this concept of sacrifice can mean anything to Christians today. For Young, the power of symbolism is important today and sacrifice is surely the symbol carrying the death of Christ.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, in a pluralistic society today, the traditional Christian theology of atonement can be paradoxical in a sense that Jesus' death is given in a form of God's divine violence against God's innocent son in order to save all people. For that reason, as the American theologian Mark Heim points out, the traditional theology of atonement stands on trial in front of other religions and thus requires re-interpretation of the theology.⁴⁷ Why must a human sacrifice be made for a soteriological purpose? Why is human

⁴⁵Borrowed from Tillich's phrase, see Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1:13.

⁴⁶Frances M. Young, *Sacrifice and the Death of Christ* (London: SPCK, 1975), 85–138.

⁴⁷Having pointed out the paradoxical characters of the theology of atonement, Heim does not relinquish the theology of atonement as a whole, but tries to reinterpret the theology of atonement to encounter challenges raised from other religions. S. Mark Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 20–33.

violence so evil as opposed to divine violence? These can be the hard questions that contemporary Christian theologians encounter.

Comparatively speaking, Confucians must ask themselves if eating flesh and drinking blood of Jesus denigrate Christianity. Is the Eucharist literally a cannibalistic rite as read in the Bible? The American Methodist theologian Robert C. Neville takes this issue in his *Christology* and points out that the Eucharistic sacrifice is a broken religious symbol representing complex finite meanings in the networks of symbol systems that all point to the infinite. The Eucharist is a symbolic cannibalistic rite in which eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood is an act of symbolic engagement of resurrection, transforming the partaker into a new creation. This state of resurrection is a state of "realized eschatology" taking place in this life by cultivating a personal sanctification to transform oneself into a new creation in a larger Eucharistic community.⁴⁸ Neville's theology of symbolic engagement brings Confucians and Protestant Christians closer to a mutual understanding of sacrifice in both traditions. His theology of symbolism can mediate between a Protestant theology of the Eucharist and a classical Confucian philosophy of *ji zu* with his emphasis of personal transformation through symbolic engagement. Given that offering sacrifices to ancestors characterizes a symbolic engagement of ethical devotion, Confucians are able to dismiss the notion that the Eucharist is literally a human sacrifice to the point of divine violence against innocent human beings.

In addition to this question, Confucians also need to address other sensitive issues, such as (1) Christians are immoral in terms of filial piety and family value, (2) other sources for ethical engagement besides ritual practices, (3) religious dimensions of offering sacrifices in

⁴⁸Robert C. Neville, *Symbols of Jesus: A Christology of Symbolic Engagement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 60–92. The Eucharist as a symbolic cannibal rite is not the only layer of symbolic meanings that Neville analyzed. He illustrates the complex meaning of Eucharistic symbol in nine layers. See Neville, *The Truth of Broken Symbols* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 77–86.

relation to Heaven the Ultimate, and (4) the rationalistic character of Confucian thought in encounter with other religions. These can be the hard questions that scholars of Confucianism encounter. In a framework of interreligious dialogue, addressing these issues helps Christians and Confucians engage in comparison and dialogue, which in turn transforms their respective understandings of religions other than their own. A carefully comparative study of religions cannot afford to ignore sensitive religious insights in a comparative context. Comparative theology certainly can help clarify some areas of misunderstanding, as presented in this paper, to transform sensitive religious insights embedded in Confucianism and Christianity.