



The Jewish *Yom Kippur* (Lev. 16:11-22) and its Relationship with Effutu *Aboakyer* Festival: A Theological Reflection

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ABSTRACT

This paper explored the parallels between the Jewish *Yom Kippur* ritual as described in Leviticus 16:11-22 and the Effutu *Aboakyer* festival celebrated by the Effutu people of Ghana, West Africa. Drawing upon anthropological and sociological methodologies, the study conducted a close exegesis of Leviticus 16:11–22, elucidating its atoning rituals and practices. By situating these rituals within the cultural context of the Effutu community, the paper unveiled remarkable similarities between the *Yom Kippur* observance and the *Aboakyer* festival. The chosen methodology acknowledged Scripture's inherent socio-cultural insights and engages with anthropological research to enrich understanding. The study argued that atonement in traditional festivals does not achieve salvation for humanity; only Jesus' sacrifice saves. Ultimately, this exploration offers theological reflections that resonate with both African and biblical contexts, shedding light on the enduring relevance of ancient rituals in contemporary cultural frameworks.

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Publication History

Received: 12th February, 2024

Accepted: 10th April, 2024

Published online: 3rd May, 2024

Keywords: *Christ, Effutu Aboakyer Festival, Christ, Leviticus 16, Yom Kippur*

INTRODUCTION

The Old Testament text is one that an indigenous African will always read with ease. A careful African reader will always notice a relationship between the Old Testament text and that of African society because concepts such as atonement, sacrifice, priesthood, sin, and family, among others, relate well with the African worldview. Hence, research in these areas makes Africans appreciate the message of the Old Testament text in their cultural framework. A close reading of the Leviticus 16 passage reveals a relationship with the *Aboakyer* festival celebrated by the Effutu people in Ghana, West Africa.

Therefore, using anthropological and sociological approaches, this paper undertakes an exegesis of Leviticus 16:11–22 and explores how atoning rituals and practices associated with Leviticus 16:11–22 relate to the Effutu *Aboakyer* festival with theological reflections for the Effutu community.

The principles underlying the methodology and data collection chosen are as follows: First, Scripture itself contains several 'proto-sociological' observations, clues to the social significance of

rituals or institutions.¹ Again, any serious attempt to deal with ritual in the Hebrew Bible must engage with the work of anthropologists.² Finally, studying the social construction of ancient Israelite life is an interdisciplinary approach that allows alternative models and theories about biblical Israel to complement more traditional biblical scholarship.³ Using this text and situating it in the Effutu context will therefore be fruitful for theological studies.

Historical and Literary Context

Leviticus, in Hebrew, is titled לֵוִיִּקֹּדֶשׁ. The English term ‘Leviticus’ resonates from the Greek word *Λευιτικόν*, which came up as a result of a medieval Latin translation (Vg.) derived from the Septuagint (LXX).⁴ Leviticus’s authorship and composition are integrally related to that of the entire Pentateuch which was traditionally attributed to Moses until Julius Wellhausen’s theory set the stage for the debate. His theory holds that the Pentateuch is a composite of four separate, complete, and coherent documents: the Yahwist (J), the Elohist (E), the Deuteronomist (D), and the Priestly (P), together (JEDP).⁵ Since then, the date and authorship have continued to be the source of much disagreement among scholars on choosing either a pre-exilic or post-exilic date based on the P Source and Holiness (H) code.⁶

Within the Pentateuch, Exodus and Numbers are the immediate context of Leviticus. Jacob Milgrom suggests that Exodus and Numbers would not have a complete meaning without Leviticus because these laws occupied the center of the Pentateuch. When read chronologically, Leviticus forms part of the regulations from Exodus 19 to Numbers 10. This records the Mount Sinai event where God made a covenant with Israelites and gave them various laws to abide by. They must therefore be the foundation of Israel’s life.⁷ There is no doubt that Leviticus contains several laws and their atonement sacrifices. There are diverse structures of Leviticus, and how Chapter 16 stands out in its treatment of rituals.⁸ Lev 16 is mostly seen as serving a transition between the previous sections (Chs 1–7, sacrifices and offerings; chs. 8–10, ordination; and Chs. 11–15, purity and impurity) and the “Holiness Code” of Chs 17–26. Therefore ch 16 “has a pivotal function in the book, structurally and theologically.”⁹

The text under consideration is vv. 11–22, sandwiched between vv. 1–10 and vv. 23–34. The beginning vv. 1 and 2 place Lev 16 in a historical context by linking it to the sons of Aaron; Nadab, and Abihu stated-in 10:1–7. The priestly dress and the animals needed for the ceremony are described in vv. 3–5. Verses 6–10 outline the actual ceremony and are detailed in vv. 11–22. Verses 23–28 report on the cleansing of the participants after rituals. The vv. 29–34 concludes the passage with the people’s duty.

An Exegesis of 11-22

The vv. 11–22 is selected because it details the rituals. It will suffice to have a brief overview of atonement in this context. The verb כָּפַר is at the center of the atonement debate. The Hebrew verb כָּפַר

¹ Charles E. Carter, "Opening Windows onto Biblical Worlds: Applying the Social Sciences to Hebrew Scriptures," in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*, ed. David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books: Apollos, 1999), 421.

² William K. Gilders, "Anthropological Approaches: Ritual in Leviticus 8, Real or Rhetorical?" in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen.*, Resources for Biblical Study 56 (Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 235.

³ Naomi Steinberg, "Sociological Approaches: Toward a Sociology of Childhood in the Hebrew Bible" in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen.*, Resources for Biblical Study 56 (Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 258.

⁴ William H Bellinger, *Leviticus and Numbers* (NIBCOT 3; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001), 3.

⁵ Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, ed. Ray Clendenen (NAC 3A; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 31.

⁶ Tamar S Kamionkowski, *Leviticus: A Wisdom Commentary*, ed. Laress Wilkins Lawrence and Barbara E. Reid, (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2018), ii-iv.

⁷ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 61.

⁸ Gordon J Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 228.

⁹ Rooker, *Leviticus*, 60.

can mean to “cover, paint, smear” in the *Qal*, “atone, appease, make amends” in the *Piel*, “be atoned for” in the *Hithpael*, and “be atoned, be appeased” in the *Niphal*.¹⁰ כפר relates to the Arabic *kafara* meaning ‘to cover’, and the Akkadian *kapparu* meaning ‘wiping on or off, or purifying.’¹¹ To understand the concept of atonement, both notions are essential. There is a need to propitiate relationships, and the need to remove hindrances in the relationship.

Verse 11

Verse 11 begins with the repetition of the sin-offering approach stated in v. 6 with the addition of the bull slaughtering. The relationship between v. 11 and v.6 is seen as a repetitive resumption. Milgrom explains that v. 11 is resumptive repetition, picking up where v. 6 left off after a tangent concerned with distinguishing between the goats, and regards this as a stylistic repetitive resumption. Thus, v 11a was attached to v 11b despite the resulting redundancy to effect the resumptive repetition.¹² The high priest presents a bull to make atonement for himself and his own house (vv. 6, 11). John E. Hartley suggests that the term “his house” signifies “all the priests” because the priesthood was hereditary.¹³ He therefore needed to purify the whole body of the priesthood. On a social level, a degree of holiness is expected from the priest and his family. The book of Leviticus expresses that, as a result, the purification of the priest and his family.¹⁴ Both ideas are relevant because Nadab and Abihu are sons of Aaron and priests as well. It can also be argued that the priest is also a human and therefore polluted by sin and needs purification for himself and his family. This purification made him an intermediary and also gave him the mandate to perform the rest of the rituals.

Verses 12 and 13

Verses 12 and 13 report on the placing of the censor. Before taking the blood of the bull into the innermost sanctuary, the high priest is to fill a censor, full of glowing coals taken from the altar and two handfuls of sweet incense behind the curtain (v. 12). He then lights the incense after entering the *adytum*. The smoke of the incense was to cover the “mercy seat” so that the high priest would not be killed (vv12–13). There are two schools of thought concerning incense smoke. First, the smoke functions as a screen, thus the “incense smoke” creates a screen that would prevent the high priest from gazing upon the Holy Presence.¹⁵ Secondly, the “incense smoke” functions as a means of propitiating YHWH, thus the incense is the people’s prayers, entreating YHWH to accept their prayers and forgive them.¹⁶ Milgrom supports the assertion that the “incense smoke” serves as a screen referring to the phrases “יָמִיתָ לֹא” and “not die”, in v. 13bβ.¹⁷ If the goal here is to protect the priest so “he will not die”; then is possible that YHWH will appear in that cloud of incense made known in v. 2 “for I will appear in the cloud over the cover.”

Having offered the incense, the high priest takes the blood of the slaughtered offerings and performs the blood purification. The entire ritual activity is then carried out before YHWH as opined in v. 13. After this, the vv. 14-15 gives a detailed description of bull blood sprinkling and its repetition with the blood of the goat.

Verses 14–19

There are several blood manipulations in vv. 14-19. The blood is used for Aaron and his family (vv. 11, 14), for the congregation (v. 15), for the “mercy seat” seven times with his finger (vv. 14–15), for

¹⁰ R. E. Averbeck, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Academic, 2012), 689-710.

¹¹ Kathelijne Steens, “Sin, Impurity, and Community in Leviticus 16” (Honor’s Thesis; Wellesley College, 2018), 17.

¹² Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1024.

¹³ John E Hartley, *Leviticus* (WBC 4; Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1992), 243.

¹⁴ Philip P Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (OTS; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 115.

¹⁵ Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 216.

¹⁶ Carl F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1982), 586.

¹⁷ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1030-1031.

the Holy Place and Tent of Meeting (vv. 16–17) and the Altar purification (vv. 18–19). The significance of blood is attested within the large scope of Leviticus itself. Within the wider context of Leviticus alone, atoning blood goes beyond just purification, it extends to burnt offerings, peace offerings, reparation, or guilt offerings among others. Again, blood is seen as the seat of life of all flesh, and in no circumstances may blood be consumed (Gen 9:4, Lev 3:17; 7:26–27; 17:10–14, 1 Sam 14:33).

Verses 14 and 15

In v. 14, the blood sprinkling ritual was the atonement of the Holy of Holies using the blood of the bull for Aaron and his family. This act consisted of a single sprinkling towards the front (east side) of the “mercy seat” and a sevenfold sprinkling towards the “mercy seat” (in the air).¹⁸ This bears certain resemblances to the purification offering described in 4:3–12. In both cases a bull is the sacrificial animal (16:11; 4:3), there is a seven-fold sprinkling of its blood (16:14; 4:6) and the unused parts are burned outside the camp (16:27; 4:11–12). The difference is the place where the blood is sprinkled.¹⁹ On the atonement day, the blood of the bull was taken into the innermost sanctuary and sprinkled once “on the front” and seven times “before” the “mercy seat” rather than the outside of the curtain leading into the holy of holies.

Although no explanation is given for the twofold rite of sprinkling the blood, some scholars suggest that the first rite was for the expiation of the sins of the priests and the people, and the second rite was for the cleansing of the sanctuary.²⁰ Again, the sevenfold sprinkling is indicative of the seriousness of this particular blood rite and that the blood “on the front” purifies while the blood “behind” re-consecrates.²¹ In each case, there is no textual support to prove or disapprove both views and such scholars may depend on an external source(s) from the ancient Near East. The seven-time aspersion of the blood could also mean the complete cleansing of the *adytum*. Since the number seven is mostly associated with completeness. The next step of the ritual is sacrificing the YHWH goats.

In v. 15, Aaron slaughters the goat that fell by lot for YHWH. A lot was cast on two goats, one for YHWH and one for *Azazel* (vv.7–8). Erhard Gerstenberger suggests that ‘normally yes and no stones are placed in a container and shaken, the one that comes first becomes the answer to the question posed. In this context, the stones may be named YHWH (יהוה) or *Azazel* (עֲזָזֵל).’²² The lot rite possibly prevented Aaron and the congregation from making the wrong choice, so they do not sin again. The YHWH goat is sacrificed as a sin offering for the people. Since there is no confession of sin or laying of hands on the goat for YHWH, it can be argued that its blood did not carry sin. Hence, clean for the sanctuary purification. Aaron does with the blood of YHWH’s goat as he did with the blood of the bull for himself and his family through the sprinkling of blood seven times on and before the “mercy seat” (v. 15).

Verses 16 and 17

The כפר action in v. 16 is followed by the על and מן prepositions; he will purge *over* The Holy Space *from* the uncleanness of the people, and *from* their transgressions and all their sins. This indicates the purgation is for the Holy Space, the people, and the Tent of Meeting.²³ The altar needs to have כפר performed over it, to purify and consecrate it (קדש and טהר). The temporal clause and prepositional use of כפר in v. 17 indicate the purgation of the priest himself, the household, and the people.²⁴ Verses 16–17 are summary verses informing what has taken place so far and they give a stated meaning for the people of Israel.

¹⁸ Martin Noth, *Leviticus: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SMC Press, 1977), 123.

¹⁹ Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 231.

²⁰ Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, 586

²¹ Frank H. Gorman, *Leviticus: Divine Presence and Community* (ITC; Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1998), 97.

²² Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, 219.

²³ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1034-1035.

²⁴ Roy Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 110-111, 142, 232-235.

The term “uncleanness” (v.16a) refers to “ritual impurities described in chapters 11–15 and the moral impurities generated by the violation of the prohibitive commandments,” *pesha* refers to “rebellion” or “transgressions” and “all their sins” which together emphasize that all of Israel’s sins, rather than their physical impurities alone, pollute the sanctuary.²⁵ He further adds that the inadvertent misdemeanor of the high priest or the entire community pollutes the shrine, which is purged by the high priest by placing the sin offering blood on the inner altar and before the curtain.²⁶

In v.16b, the ritual is to be performed in the Tent of Meeting which is the outer sanctum. Because the inner sanctum is already purified, it cannot refer to it. Again, the phrase “he shall do the same” indicates that the same procedure is followed at the outer sanctuary. Verse 17 underlines the fact that only the high priest must be in the Tent of the Meeting. Milgrom suggests that “No one” literally “everyman” is a warning in practice directed solely to the priest and not to the Israelites, who have no access to be in the Tent of Meeting.²⁷ As to why no one, Milgrom further opines that just as severer precautions are invoked when the Tabernacle is dismantled-even the sacrificial altar, normally seen by everyone, may not be viewed by a non-priest (Num 4:20). So special precautions are taken when the purgation is in process.²⁸ For Martin Noth, it was a time of special intimate, and dangerous procedure and no one was to stay in the Tent of Meeting.²⁹ Both assertions support the idea that there is a need for necessary precautionary measures to be taken.

Verses 18–20a

Verses 18 and 19 prescribe a further special cleansing and hallowing for the altar before the Tent of Meeting. After the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place had been cleansed, the courtyard altar had to be purified by a seven-fold sprinkling of the main altar of burnt offering with the blood of the bull and the goat (v. 18). In this sprinkling, the blood of the bull and that of the goat are used together. It is argued that using the blood of both animals symbolized the fact that the altar had to be cleansed from the defilements of the priest and the people.³⁰ Milgrom suggests the dual blood application is to purify it of the past (impurities) and reconsecrate it for the future (sacrificial use). Reconsecrate because the sanctuary and its *sancta* were consecrated at the time of their completion and installation (8:10–11).³¹

On the kind of altar used, Levine thinks this altar is the incense altar.³² Milgrom disagrees and argues for a sacrificial altar because the verb ‘come out’ implies that he emerges from the Tent.³³ Milgrom’s idea of a sacrificial altar is appropriate since v. 17 had already indicated the exit of the high priest from the Tent of Meeting into the courtyard. At the end of the blood purifications, he presents the live goat (v. 20). The purpose of v. 20a is to stress the fact that the purging of the sanctuary must be complete before beginning the *Azazel* rite. This precaution is well advised: all of the blood sanctuary’s impurities must first be released by the blood rite before the high priest can transfer them onto the head of the live goat.³⁴

Verses 20b–22

Once the priest is done with the sprinkling of the blood and purifies the community and sanctuary, the live goat for *Azazel* is brought forward (v 20b). After being chosen by the lot cast (vv. 7–8), the animal is brought before the high priest who places both hands on the head of the goat to confess all the nation’s sins and then sends it away. The *Azazel* ritual comprises three characteristic elements. The

²⁵ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1034.

²⁶ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 257.

²⁷ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1035.

²⁸ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1035-1036.

²⁹ Noth, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, 124.

³⁰ Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 232.

³¹ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1039.

³² Baruch A. Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989), 105.

³³ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1036.

³⁴ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1040.

first element is the laying on of hands; the second is the imputation of sin to the goat and the third is the sending of the live goat into the לְאִזָּזֵל by a different person appointed for this task.³⁵

Laying hands on animals for sacrificial purposes is a common practice in Leviticus (1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33; 16:21) and other Pentateuch books (Exod 29:10, 15, 19, Num 8:12), but there are striking differences here. First, Aaron lays both hands instead of the usual one hand and secondly, it is the high priest who does the imposition instead of the individual. For Aaron laying his hands on the goat instead of the individual, there seems to be a consensus that Aaron serves as a representative for the people. Therefore, he meditates for the entire community and so imposes his hands as a means of imposing the sins of the entire community on the animal. Nonetheless, the use of two hands is debated. The first argument is that one hand is transferring the sins of the high priest and the other transferring the sins of the community.³⁶ Roy Gane explains this as Aaron and his household having one hand, and the people also having one hand.³⁷ Another argument is that the use of one hand expresses identification with the worshipper, and the use of two hands expresses transferal in non-sacrificial contexts.³⁸ In simple terms, Lev 16:21 action shows the transfer of sins to the goat.

This goat is then led off into the wilderness by a man appointed for the job. This is in line with the purpose of the *Azazel* rite introduced in v.10. After the imposition and confession of sins, the goat is sent away. The identity of the goat (לְאִזָּזֵל), translated as the *Azazel* goat has attracted scholarly debates. It is also important to note that apart from Lev 16: 8, 10, 26, the word לְאִזָּזֵל does not occur anywhere in the Bible. The first interpretation is based on the goat's destination. The destination is explained as being a precipitous and flinty rock. This interpretation is found in Rabbinic literature.³⁹ The midrashic translation of the expression " $\text{לְאִזָּזֵל יִשְׁלַח אֶת הַזֵּבִי}$ " in verse 22 as "a rough and rocky terrain" is based on the Arabic word, '*azazu* meaning "rough ground" or '*azâzilu* meaning "jagged cliff or precipice."⁴⁰ The Mishnah records that the goat was led to a steep cliff and pushed over backward to kill it (Yoma 6:6).⁴¹

The second interpretation renders *Azazel* as a 'departing goat,' hence 'scapegoat.' This is an early interpretation found in the Septuagint and Vulgate, which translates the Hebrew word in Leviticus 16 as 'for the one sent away' (vv 8, 10), 'the goat which is determined for release' (v 26).⁴²

The third interpretation gives *Azazel* a proper name. This name is for a demon, deity, or spirit living in the wilderness where the live goat is sent to. Here, the syntactic parallel between "for YHWH" and "for Azazel" in v. 8 as well as the meaning of *Azazel* in post-biblical Midrashic literature are used to support this view.⁴³

The last interpretation explains *Azazel* as an abstract reference to "destruction" or "entire removal."⁴⁴ Gordon Wenham indicates it is a rare Hebrew noun meaning complete destruction.⁴⁵ For Milgrom, this interpretation, for *Azazel* signifies the entire removal of guilt.⁴⁶

There is no consensus on the exact meaning of the *Azazel* as given by scholars but its theological foundation can be established based on the rite performed. That is, it must be used as atonement for the people before being sent to the wilderness (vv. 5, 10). The conclusion of this *Azazel* goat ritual therefore means sin is removed from Israel since the animal carries Israel's sins on its head away. Hopefully, never to return.

³⁵ Isaac Boaheng, "A Contextual Theology of Atonement for the Akan Community of Ghana" (Ph.D. diss., University of Free State, 2021), 84-87.

³⁶ Boaheng, "A Contextual Theology of Atonement for the Akan Community of Ghana," 85.

³⁷ Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy*, 58.

³⁸ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1041.

³⁹ Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 234-235.

⁴⁰ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1020.

⁴¹ Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 234.

⁴² Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1020.

⁴³ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1020.

⁴⁴ Rooker, *Leviticus*, 271.

⁴⁵ Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 234.

⁴⁶ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1021.

Effutu Aboakyer Festival

The *Aboakyer* (literally, animal catch) festival will begin with a brief history of the people of Effutu. Apart from the author's observations, experiences, and interviews, other anthropological written works will complement this write-up. The Effutu people are natives of Winneba originally known as *Simpa* a town in the coastal south of Ghana. They are called *Simpawo* or *Simpa abe* meaning "people of *Simpa*." The name *Simpa* is believed to be derived from *Osimpam*, an appellation of the first priest-king and founder, King Bondzie-Abe I, who was a builder. *Osimpam* means builder.⁴⁷ The name Winneba is the corrupted form of Windy Bay, a name given by the colonists. The main occupation is fishing. The presence of tertiary institutions has brought a form of enlightenment and additional occupation to supplement traditional fishing, farming, and trading. Effutu is the language spoken.

The word Effutu means 'mixed' in the Akan dialect.⁴⁸ The community is surrounded by the Akan⁴⁹ which has influenced them in most of their activities. An exception to this influence is the *Aboakyer* festival which has not been eclipsed. "The *Aboakyer* festival is a distinct cultural practice that uniquely identifies the Effutu. This festival is of national interest in Ghana."⁵⁰ The *Aboakyer* festival culminates in socio-cultural life dictated by a cycle of rituals. According to George P. Hagan, the culture and societal values rest on [this] cycle of communal rituals which comes to a climax in an annual Deer Hunt festival celebrated in honor of their god.⁵¹ Politically, the Effutu tribe is headed by the *Oma Odefey* (King of the State). The king's sacred role in the festival rituals is to step on the first deer caught, to ritually endorse its choice for the sacrifice.

In terms of religiosity, the Effutu people like any indigenous African, have a ritual lifestyle from birth to death as embedded in most African Traditional Religions (ATR). In terms of cosmology, they believe in the Supreme God who is called *Atte Nyimpo*, the father of rain.⁵² God is approached indirectly through the lesser gods. The Effutu pantheon is made of seventy-seven (77) gods. They can be grouped into two: *Tente* gods (not man-created) and *Mire* (man-made).⁵³ There are also two groups of people (known as *Asɔw* literally priests and *Abirew* literally mediums) that serve as intermediaries between the people and the gods. These intermediaries champion the preparation of the warriors for deer hunting and the ritual sacrifice of the deer. They are led by *Osɔw Nipa* (high priest).

The Festival and its Ritual Activities

The *Aboakyer* festival cannot be complete when not linked to the migration history of the people. The festival is an annual ritual in appreciation of their deity god (*Ope Penkye Otu*) who guided them safely to their new settlement, thus *Simpa*. A live deer is always hunted and sacrificed for this celebration. This live deer ritual sacrifice is a later substitutionary one. Oral tradition indicates the forefathers of the land consulted the god to show their appreciation for bringing them to their present settlement. The response was to offer an annual sacrifice of a human being from the royal family. They obeyed the god and sacrificed human beings until they realized that it was declining the royal population. They therefore pleaded for an animal substitute. They pleaded to offer three cows but the god rejected it. It is opined that the god even indicated, that he would not accept even if they offered twenty cows. The reason for the rejection was that domesticated cows were unclean because they were in constant contact

⁴⁷ Anthony Ephirim-Donkor, *The Making of an African King: Patrilineal and Matrilineal Struggle among the Effutu of Ghana* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2000), 5.

⁴⁸ Kwesi Ewusi Brown, "Social Conflicts in Contemporary Effutu Festivals" (Master's Thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2005), 1.

⁴⁹ They are known as the largest ethnic group in Ghana

⁵⁰ Emmanuel H Takyi, "A Comparative Study of the Atonement Concept in the Aboakyer Festival of the Effutu Tribe in Ghana and the Yom Kippur Festival of the Old Testament: Implications for Adventist Mission Among the Effutu." (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 2015), 59.

⁵¹ George Panyin Hagan, *Divided We Stand: A Study of Social Change among the Effutu of Coastal Ghana*, Trondheim Studies in History. African Series no. 29, no. 2 (Trondheim: Dept. of History, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2000), 173.

⁵² Hagan, *Divided We Stand: A Study of Social Change among the Effutu of Coastal Ghana*, 174.

⁵³ Takyi, "A Comparative Study of the Atonement Concept in the Aboakyer Festival of the Effutu Tribe in Ghana and the Yom Kippur Festival of the Old Testament: Implications for Adventist Mission Among the Effutu," 78.

with women who were defiled by menstruation or sexual intercourse.⁵⁴ Catching a live leopard with their bare hands was the conclusion and that started the first *Aboakyer* festival.

After a while, the royal family realized the loss of human lives in hunting for the live leopard was of great concern. They pleaded again, which finally led to the live deer hunting. Anthony Ephirim-Donkor opines that the choice of the deer was acceptable because the god revealed that “*wansein mo dase kye osa mo dase* meaning the deer’s blood was akin to that of a human being.”⁵⁵

Since 1965, the first weekend of May has been selected as the time for the celebration. Before this date, it was celebrated in April.⁵⁶ The festival begins on the Thursday preceding the first Saturday of May and continues till Sunday with a series of activities. One month before the actual week of the celebration, the high priest informs the King that the time is approaching. The high priest, his assistants, and the “mediums” meet for purification at the grove. They do this by special ritual baths, preparing the sacred place for deer sacrifice, and avoiding sexual activity during this period. Except for the *Asafo* group, no special preparation is needed from the community members.⁵⁷ The Effutu community is made up of two groups of people (*Dentsewo*- red color group and *Tuawo* – white colored group). Any Effutu native belongs to one of these groups. This forms the basis of the two *Asafo* groups, hence a full representation of the community.

On Saturday, the day of the animal catch, there is a ritual bath by the men of the *Asafo* group in the sea just after midnight while the women prepare an early breakfast for them.⁵⁸ From there, they eat their breakfast (between 1:00 to 2:00 GMT) and move to their groves (*siwso*) to receive sprinkling protection from their respective gods (around 3:00 to 4:00 GMT). After the sprinkling, “each *Asafo*, led by its drummers, *Safohenfo*, and the gods carried by ‘mediums’ moves to the palace for the king, and his officials to ensure they are set for the task. After the king’s review, he gives his blessing and the hunters move to the high priest and his team for the final sprinkling at *Akyeampoano*. The hunters then rush to hunt for the deer while the King and his officials prepare for the reception of the deer.”⁵⁹

On the hunting ground, when a deer is seen, it is caught alive without harming it. The deer is placed over the shoulders of the one who caught it or a strong person to quickly bring it to the ceremonial ground. The first deer caught is believed to be an incarnate of the god and is therefore used for the rituals. Though the second deer is also killed, it has no ritual importance. Here, it can be argued that the divine catch of the first deer is the lot casting falling on it.

The first deer is placed on the skin on which the king’s feet rest with its limbs facing away from the king. The king pours libation to show appreciation and dedicate the deer to the god, he then sits for the consecration of his right foot. Afterward, he removes his right foot from his *ahenemaa* (royal slipper) and steps on the live deer three times, dragging his foot from right to left.⁶⁰ This shows that the deer is chosen for the sacrifice. The live deer is carried through the community to *Akyeampoano* for another series of rituals. The *Asafo* group retired to their homes after handing over the deer to *Akyeamomma*⁶¹ at *Akyeampoano*. The priest of *Akyeampoano* pours libation three times while the deer is firmly held on the ground for a mysterious touch. While being placed on seven sticks and lying on its abdomen, another set of three libations is poured after which the deer is carried, like a royal corpse.⁶² This is followed by the sacred procession to the grove of the god. The live deer lies at the sacred grove until it is slaughtered on Sunday afternoon.

⁵⁴ Hagan, *Divided We Stand: A Study of Social Change among the Effutu of coastal Ghana*, 131.

⁵⁵ Ephirim-Donkor, *The Making of an African King: Patrilineal and Matrilineal Struggle among the Effutu of Ghana*, 32.

⁵⁶ Robert W. Wyllie, “The ‘Aboakyer’ of the Effutu: A critique of Meyerowitz’s account,” *JSTOR* 37.1 (1967): 81–85.

⁵⁷ Neenyi Ackom Gyeedu, “Preparations for Aboakyer festival,” Interview, 31 October 2023.

⁵⁸ Ephirim-Donkor, *The Making of an African King: Patrilineal and Matrilineal Struggle among the Effutu of Ghana*, 76.

⁵⁹ Takyi, “A Comparative Study of the Atonement Concept in the Aboakyer Festival of the Effutu Tribe in Ghana and the Yom Kippur Festival of the Old Testament: Implications for Adventist Mission Among the Effutu,” 97-98.

⁶⁰ Takyi, “A Comparative Study of the Atonement Concept in the Aboakyer Festival of the Effutu Tribe in Ghana and the Yom Kippur Festival of the Old Testament: Implications for Adventist Mission Among the Effutu,” 100.

⁶¹ They are the servants of the god, *Akyeampon*. The *Akeamponmma* are the state executioners (slaughterers)

⁶² It is lifted from the ground, made to touch the head of the carrier, and placed down again three times. It is the third time it is made to finally rest on the head of the person carrying it.

The high priest with assistance from the priests supervises the slaughtering of the deer on Sunday afternoon (exactly 2:00 p.m.). Neenyi Ackom Gyedu, a sub-chief from the ritual family indicated the *Abrafo* can only kill with instruction from the high priest. A special attendant will carefully catch the deer's blood. The blood is given to the god by placing it on the altar at the shrine.⁶³ The carcass is cut up into pieces and placed in a wooden bowl to be cooked. The high priest now comes and picks seventy-seven pieces with his bare hands to be given to the seventy-seven gods. With prayers of petition, he also selects pieces of the flesh and places them before the god. The remaining meats are sent to the spiritual leaders of the community.

After these rituals, the high priest asks the gods for *Ebisatsir* literally, what the future holds or the fate of the Effutu people for the coming year. The high priest and his team stay at the sacred place for eight days to purify the grove, themselves and also to re-consecrate for the year ahead.⁶⁴ If it rains within these eight days, it indicates acceptance of the people's offering, and rainwater is collected to wash the ritual utensils. No rain means a bad omen. Rites of purification are done and sea water is fetched at midnight by the priests to wash all the ritual utensils.

Similarities and Differences between Leviticus 16 and *Aboakyer* Festival

Similarities

The similarities and the differences will be grouped under these thematic areas: the historical background, the atonement animals for ritual, the high priest role and ritual purity, and the community people. The similarities are analysed next followed by the differences.

Both atonement in Leviticus 16 and *Aboakyer* have historical backgrounds that initiated the sacrifices and rituals carried out. Leviticus 16 atonement can be linked to the sons of Aaron and other related sins of the Israelites. Similarly, *Aboakyer* is linked to the Effutu migration history. The aftermath of each atonement has led to an annual celebration of *Yom Kippur* on the tenth day of the seventh month and the *Aboakyer* festival on the first week of May.

Concerning the atonement of animals for ritual, animals are used for ritual sacrifice in both Leviticus 16 and *Aboakyer*. These animals are both provided by the community people, presented alive and sacrificed in a sacred place (the Most Holy Place in Lev 16:11-16 and the sacred grove of the god in the *Aboakyer* context). The selection of the animals for YHWH and *Azazel* in Lev 16 was done by lot casting. The *Aboakyer* lot casting is seen in the mysterious catch of the animal by the two *Asafo* groups. The lot cast automatically falls on the first deer caught.

The YHWH goat animal is slaughtered in the outer court and the high priest brings the blood into the Most Holy Place, where the Covenant Ark rests (Lev 16:11–16). Similarly, when the live deer is slaughtered, the blood is brought in and placed on the altar of the deity. Hence, in both contexts, the victim was killed and their blood was placed on the altar.

The *Azazel* goat animal is another similarity in the transference of sin into the sacrificial animal. Leviticus 16:20–22 indicates the transfer of sin into the *Azazel* goat and its elimination. The sins of the people are ritually transferred onto the live goat and banished into the wilderness (Lev 16:10, 21, 22). Similarly, the *Aboakyer* transfer of sin is done by the king as he steps on the live deer three times. There is a significant ritual transference to the animal here. The three-time stepping indicates a transfer of any bad omen into the animal to take away. The live deer is then taken away for ritual tying, and finally the actual sacrifice at the sacred grove of the god. The live deer plays a dual role in both elimination and purgation.

The high priest's role and ritual purity. The high priest is the key figure in performing all the ritual activities of Lev 16 on behalf of the Israelites. Similarly, in the *Aboakyer* Festival, it is the high priest who oversees the ritual sacrifice of the deer for the atonement. The other priests and "mediums" only assist him in performing the rituals. The holiness of the high priest is relevant in matters of atonement in both contexts. Leviticus 16 gives several indications which call for the holiness of the

⁶³ Gyeeedu, "Preparations for *Aboakyer* Festival."

⁶⁴ Takyi, "A Comparative Study of the Atonement Concept in the *Aboakyer* Festival of the Effutu Tribe in Ghana and the *Yom Kippur* Festival of the Old Testament: Implications for Adventist Mission Among the Effutu," 61.

high priest beginning with a reminder of Aaron's sons in (16:1), the bull offering for Aaron (the high priest himself), and his family. In the same manner, one month before the *Aboakyer* festival till the end of the rituals, the high priest and his assistants move from their house to the grove to prepare themselves for the rituals of the festival. Together with these assistants, they do not sleep in their houses so that they can keep themselves pure from all kinds of contaminations. Priestly purity for the rituals and holiness is therefore seen in both contexts.

With the community people, the people of Israel provided two goats and one ram for the atonement sacrifices (Lev 16:5). The two *Asafo* groups, representing the whole community have been providing live deer for the rituals of the *Aboakyer* festival.

The Differences

Though each has a historical background, the approach is different. The atonement in Leviticus 16 is a command from God while in the *Aboakyer* festival, the forefathers went to the deity god to show appreciation and in effect the request from the deity. This request started from human life to leopard and finally deer which has led to the *Aboakyer* festival celebration.

Concerning the atonement animals for rituals, Leviticus 16, offers five different kinds of animals for the atonement rites. Thus, a bull, two rams, and two goats. Each of these animals in Lev 16 has their ritual relevance, including the Lord's goat and the *Azazel* goat. With *Aboakyer*, only two animals are presented, thus the two deer. Only the first deer is of ritual significance, though both deer are killed.⁶⁵ The first deer plays the dual role of both the Lord's goat and that of *Azazel*.

The Lord's goat in Leviticus 16 also emphasized diverse blood manipulations from vv. 14-19. This is not seen in the *Aboakyer* festival though the blood is collected. Again, in the *Aboakyer* festival, the meat of the deer used for the atonement is shared among the lesser gods and the community spiritual heads, but in Leviticus 16:27, the Lord's goat is burned on the altar and the carcass is incinerated outside the Israelite camp.

On *Azazel*, though the *Azazel* rite is seen in the *Aboakyer* festival, a different *Azazel* goat is not seen. Rather, the first deer caught plays such a role. As indicated earlier, the first deer play a dual role.

On the high priest role and ritual purity, Aaron the high priest slaughters the bull in v.11 and the goat in v.15 and makes the atonement by himself, his family, and the community. In the *Aboakyer* festival, the *Obrafo* does the slaughtering.⁶⁶ Again, the transfer of sin is done by Aaron the high priest in v. 21 but that of the *Aboakyer* festival is done by the King when he steps on the deer. The details of preparation concerning the time frame are not seen in Leviticus 16 but that of Effutu which is about one month may seem longer than in Lev 16. Moreover, the offer of incense in vv. 13-14 is not applicable in the *Aboakyer* festival, the *Aboakyer* context may be the pouring of libation.

With Community people, while the people in Leviticus 16 fast, abstain from work, and rest as the high priest does the atonement, the same cannot be said of the Effutu people. Except for those who are engaged in the rituals, all other people go about their normal daily activities.

Theological Reflections for the Effutu Community

Having examined the relationship between atonement in Leviticus 16 and the *Aboakyer* festival, this paper proceeds to outline key continuities between atonement in Leviticus 16 and *Aboakyer* to offer theological reflections that will help the Effutu people, Africa, and the world at large to appreciate God's salvation works.

Atonement and Holiness

This study shows a clear relationship between atonement and holiness. The argument that the second half of Leviticus 16 is part of the 'Holiness Code' is evident because the Leviticus 16 text keeps reminding us of the need for holiness of life from v. 1. Sin becomes a barrier between God and humanity (Gen 3). The concept of atonement here is based on human sinfulness. Sin can be an

⁶⁵ Gyeeedu, "Preparations for Aboakyer Festival."

⁶⁶ Gyeeedu, "Preparations for Aboakyer Festival."

individual issue but can also be communal. Lev 16 acknowledges the communal effect of sin as in the case of Aaron's sons (ch 10). It is not surprising that God expects Aaron the high priest to purify himself before making the atonement (16:6,11). Biblical references indicate the holiness of the high priest, to be an unblemished person (Exod 28:29; Lev 21:6 8).

Hyam Maccoby posits that scripture emphasizes that the place to which the remains of the animals must be borne (even though it is outside the Temple) must be pure, and also that the human participants must be in a state of purity when they undertake the rite.⁶⁷ Maccoby indicates that the person who performs the last stage of the scapegoat ritual becomes unclean and must wash his clothes. This is usually interpreted as the effect of his participation in the transfer of sin.⁶⁸ Maccoby's emphasis is not only on the lead participant but all human participants in Leviticus 16, the place of sacrifice, and the sacrificial victims. Similarly, in the Effutu community, the high priest, his assistants, the live deer, and all other things used for the rituals are expected to be holy. This is a clear indication that atonement cannot be separated from holiness.

To appreciate atonement and holiness for the Effutu community, it is important to provide an Effutu definition of sin. Sin in Effutu is *peemi* (literally, 'to err' or 'erring'). This can be done against God, gods, and other human being(s). The effects are mainly broken relationships, sickness, and to some extent death. To address this, there is the need for confession for reconciliation, forgiveness, healing, or pacification through sacrifice. It can be argued that Lev 16 atonement and the diverse laws that deal with morality and rituals (Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7; 21:8) rest on the core basis of holiness. Hence, holiness is one of the most important attributes in understanding God and ourselves. God calls us to be holy because He is holy (Lev 11:45) helps us to appreciate the holiness of Christ.

The holiness of Christ (rebuking sinners (Matt 23:12), love of righteousness, and hatred of iniquity (Heb 1:9) are seen in his deeds and words (1 Pet 2:22; John 8:29). Other witnesses that testify to the holiness of Christ include Pilate and his wife (John 18:38; 19:4, 6; Matt. 27:19), Judas Iscariot (Matt 27:3-4) and the Unclean Spirit (Mark 1:23-24). Christ is the high priest who meets our needs, one who is holy, blameless, pure, and set apart from sinners. Holiness is therefore a key concept in the atonement sacrifice (Heb 7:26). The call for holiness of life therefore has implications for the Effutu people and the world at large. In this contemporary society, the concept of holiness seems irrelevant to most people even in the Christian communities. Holiness now looks like an outdated fashion. Gaining the vision of the beauty of holiness has a positive impact on our relationships with God and one another, at Church, workplaces, families, and in every aspect of life. Hence, the call of God to be holy is a call to shape diverse human lives and cultures for the good.

The Atoning Power of Blood

The atoning power of blood can be seen right from the several blood manipulations in Lev 16:14–19. This begins with blood used for Aaron and his family (vv. 11, 14), for the congregation (v. 15), for the "mercy seat" seven times with his finger (vv. 14–15), for the Holy Place and Tent of Meeting (vv. 16–17) and ends with the Altar purification (vv. 18–19). The significance of blood is attested within the large scope of Leviticus itself. Within the wider context of Leviticus alone, atoning blood goes beyond just purification, it extends to burnt offerings, peace offerings, reparation, or guilt offerings among others.

In the Ghanaian context too, blood is not only for the purification of sin but also for thanksgiving, healing, cleansing, and protection. In the *Aboakyer* festival, the blood is collected and given to only the gods for appreciation and purification. The *Borbor Kumkumfi* tribe who are the closest neighbors of the Effutu community celebrate the *Ahobaa* festival to commemorate the death of *Egya Ahor*. Oral tradition tells how the people lost their lives when the tribe was hit by famine and an epidemic. The oracle of the people indicated only human sacrifice is acceptable to end the epidemic. *Egya Ahor* (a traditional chief priest) willingly offered himself to use his life as an atonement for his

⁶⁷ Hyam Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and Its Place in Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 82-83.

⁶⁸ Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and Its Place in Judaism*, 85.

people. After he was killed, his blood was mixed with water and sprinkled on the people for healing and cleansing. His sacrifice brought an end to the plagues that threatened to annihilate their population. As a young pastor stationed to serve seven communities belonging to this tribe, the researchers recall how the king tells this story with passion and zeal. This act of *Egya Ahor* not only averted the plague but also strengthened the faith they had in their god.

The atoning power of blood is therefore evident among the ancient Israelites and many cultures today. For blood is seen as the seat of life of all flesh and in no circumstances may blood be consumed (Gen 9:4, Lev 3:17; 7:26–27; 17:10–14, 1 Sam 14:33). Therefore, if the shedding of blood is understood as the substance of life which is sacred to God, then it signifies the offering of the lives of those whom the sacrifice is made. This shows a close relationship between blood and life in the Levitical concept of atonement and the biblical tradition. This is the same in African life and thought. The belief that blood contains a mysterious power that permeates all things, both animate and inanimate is common among Africans. There is a strong belief that every human life is found in blood. This is one of the major reasons why most African societies do not take kindly to the legalization of abortion.

There is no doubt that the current use of blood is the opposite in most contemporary African communities of which the Effutu is not an exception. Today, blood is not only used to appease gods in situations of adultery, fornication, incest, and other related taboos. People also use blood for ritual purposes such as initiation, protection, and power-seeking. The researchers think blood in this Levitical context is more of the sanctity of life since blood cannot be used to appease God. Therefore, understanding the Old Testament blood rituals must lay the foundation to comprehend the sacrificial blood of Christ. The efficacy of Jesus' blood in achieving what was foreshadowed in the Old Testament is evident in its once-for-all nature as compared to the repetitious nature of the Levitical blood sacrifices (Heb 9:10–12) as well as the annual blood sacrifices in most Ghanaian festivals. By implication, humanity needs to appreciate the sanctity of life and put an end to many occult practices and the killing of lives for power, protection, and others which has become prominent in most contemporary African societies.

Atonement by Transfer of Sin

In many religious traditions, the atonement process may involve particular actions, a declaration of faith, a ritual sacrifice of an animal, or the performance of some other ritual. In the book of Leviticus, references can be made to animals, such as lambs, bulls, and goats, being killed or sent out into the wilderness to make up for the sins of the people. In Lev 16, one part of the atonement was through the transfer of sins to the sacrificial animals (vv. 21–22). Though the idea of the transfer of sin to make up for another person or other people's sins might be quite unfamiliar in the Western world, is a common belief in Africa. Most Ghanaians believe that the challenges people go through are mostly the result of the sins of their predecessors. The predecessor can be a parent, grandparent, family member, or ancestor. The belief is that the sins of these predecessors have been transferred to their generation. These people then need to make atonement to have their freedom. Various sacrifices are therefore carried out to atone for such sins. This is mostly termed as a generational or ancestral curse.

Atonement through the transfer of sin in Leviticus 16 and the *Aboakyer* festival can also be seen in substitutionary sacrifice. The substitutionary sacrifice is given on behalf of a person who should have suffered privation, discomfort, or even death. Two goats and one deer played such roles in Leviticus 16 and *Aboakyer* respectively. The killing of the YHWH goat in Lev 16 signified the transfer of life of the human worshipper who had sinned and deserved death. The goat died to cover sins committed by humans, something that it was not guilty of. In *Aboakyer*, the deer replaces the human life that was used from the beginning prior to the leopard leading to this festival. These animals are killed and their blood is placed or used on the altar. Again, the transfer of the calamity to the sacrificial victim is done symbolically through the laying on of hands as in the case of the *Azazel* goat in Lev 16:20–22 or Effutu where the King steps on the live deer three (3) times to transfer evil (*musu*) of the people to the animal to carry it away.

The Leviticus 16 substitutionary nature of the atonement and the *Aboakyer* festival must serve as the background to prepare the Effutu believer to appreciate the vicarious nature of Christ's death. This is echoed in John the Baptist's description of Christ as the Lamb of God who carries away the sin of the world (John 1:29; 1 Tim 2:5-6). Jesus himself said he came to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). From the Effutu background, *Christus Victor's* atonement offers a profound solution to the challenges, including their fears of death, evil forces, and economic hardships. The *Christus Victor* idea emphasizes that Christ, the sacrificial lamb not only forgives sins but also dispels the fear of death and diminishes the power of Satan.⁶⁹ Thus, Christ has triumphed over all powers to rescue people from bondage. Therefore, the work of Christ, His love, meekness, death, and resurrection demonstrate his victory in the battle. Rather than using repetitious sacrifices to serve as a means of atonement, for protection, power, and purification, the people of Effutu should embrace God's ordained means of atonement through Christ's vicarious and substitutionary death.

Atonement and Sacrifice

To restore their relationship with YHWH, the Ancient Israelites made regular sacrifices. The regular sacrifices climaxed with a yearly sacrifice that was offered only by the high priest in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement.⁷⁰ The atonement sacrificial animals were innocent and deserved not to die. Hence, their death constituted a sacrifice. Similarly, the human lives, the leopard, and the deer used in the *Aboakyer* festival were and are all innocent and deserve life. The sacrifice in Lev 16 and *Aboakyer* is, therefore, necessary for the Christians in general; and Effutu people in particular to appreciate the sacrificial nature of Christ's death.

In contemporary Ghana, making sacrifices to gods for protection, wealth, peace, power, fame, and longevity, among others seems to be normal. Shrines and other fetish activities now are advertised daily on television. This implies that most people including Christians do not acknowledge the purpose of what the atonement of Christ seeks to achieve for humanity, which is a perfect fulfillment of any sacrifice. To appreciate Christ as the ultimate sacrifice, one must acknowledge that Christ's sacrifice was made to God, not to lesser gods or ancestral spirits. The blood that was sacrificed on the cross is not that of animals but God's unblemished blood which achieved what the blood of animals could not achieve (Heb 9:12, 1 Pet 1:19). So, Christ served simultaneously as the sacrificial victim and the high priest who offered himself as the sacrifice.

Christ being sinless and innocent did not deserve death. His death, therefore, depicts a sacrifice. Hence, the concept of using intermediaries such as lower deities and ancestors to make sacrifices and offerings to the Supreme Being has no place in African Christianity. The only legitimate Receiver of all sacrifices and offerings is God and the only legitimate Mediator between God and humanity is Christ.

CONCLUSION

This paper carried out an exegesis of Leviticus 16:11–22 and compared it to the *Aboakyer* festival of the Effutu community of Ghana. The study reveals these two rituals relate especially in terms of what necessitated the rituals, the high priest and ritual purity, the animals used, and the engagement with the community people. Based on their relationship, the following theological reflections were made. They include atonement and holiness, atoning power of blood, atonement and transfer of sin, and atonement and sacrifice. The rituals discussed in this paper must lay the foundation for African Christians to appreciate the atonement of Christ. The superiority of Christ's atonement should serve as an encouragement for believers to refrain from any form of traditional religious sacrifices because such sacrifices have no salvific value. More studies on the Bible and the African context are therefore recommended. However, one must guard against syncretism.

⁶⁹ Boaheng, "A Contextual Theology of Atonement for the Akan Community of Ghana," 247.

⁷⁰ Boaheng, "A Contextual Theology of Atonement for the Akan Community of Ghana," 275.

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