

Afɔdepreko Christology: An Akan Christian Theology of Jesus' Once-For-All Sacrifice

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ABSTRACT

The issue of blood sacrifice is of great importance to Christians because of its connection with Christ's death and with Christian soteriology (the doctrine of salvation). In the Akan community of Ghana, where traditional religion places high value on the atoning efficacy of blood sacrifice, a proper understanding of the atoning sacrifice of Christ has a high potential of enhancing people's appreciation of the work Christ did on the cross for human salvation. Yet, not much research has been conducted on the subject for Akan Christians. This literature-based research was therefore conducted to develop an Akan Christian theology of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ (referred to as *Afɔdepreko* Christology). After a brief study of the issue of blood sacrifice in both Akan and biblical contexts, the study proceeds to formulate an Akan Christian theology of Jesus' once-for-all atonement. In the process, the study engages relevant portions of the lyrics of Bernice Offei's song titled "mogya" ("blood") as a way of developing oral theology in the Akan community in particular and Africa in general. The study concluded that Jesus' sacrifice is enough to secure human redemption and to offer solution to all human existential needs; therefore, in the post-resurrection era all traditional sacrifices intended for atonement must be stopped.

Keywords: Africa, Akan, Atonement, Blood, Christ, Sacrifice

INTRODUCTION

The advent of Christianity in Ghana is traced to 19th January, 1482 when some Portuguese missionaries visited Elmina in the then Gold Coast (now Ghana) for both economic and religious purposes (Agbeti 1986: 4). The missionaries visited the Elmina chief, Nana Kwamena Ansa, after they had celebrated their first mass under a tree. They convinced the chief to accept the Christian faith and consequently, benefit from military and trade alliance with the Portuguese government (Agbeti 1986: 4). Nana Ansah agreed to the proposal and then offered the missionaries a piece of land where they built a fort and a chapel. Christianity spread from Elmina to other parts of the country and the West African sub-region.

Today, Christianity is the most dominant religion in the religious landscape of Ghana. The 2010 national population and housing census revealed that about 71.2 percent of the citizenry profess the Christian religion. There are some cultural issues that still have control over Christians in Ghana. For example, a Ghanaian believer may not curse someone but

may be cursed by an offended party to create fear and panic in the believer; again, a believer may not pour libation but may have his/her name mentioned by the family head during the pouring of libation to ensure the protection from the gods.

Though Christianity is widespread in Ghana today, there are many aspects of the Christian faith that need to be given contextual expressions to make the religion more meaningful to the people. Of interest to this paper is the atoning sacrifice of Christ, specifically the salvific significance that the blood shed on the cross has for the Akan believer. The issue of blood sacrifice is of great importance to Akan Christians because of the high value that both Akan primal worldview and Christianity place on its atoning efficacy. A survey of existing literature reveals that not much has been achieved in giving contextual expression to Jesus' atonement for the Akan community of Ghana. This literature-based research was therefore conducted to develop an Akan Christian *Afɔdepreko* Christology (the theology regarding the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ). After a brief study of the issue of blood

sacrifice in both Akan and biblical contexts, the study proceeds to formulate an Akan Christian theology of Jesus' once-for-all atonement. In the process, the study engages relevant portions of the lyrics of Bernice Offei's song titled "*mogya*" ("blood") as a way of developing oral theology in the Akan community in particular and Africa in general.

BLOOD SACRIFICE IN BIBLICAL CONTEXT

The Hebrew word for blood, *dam*, occurs three hundred and sixty times in the Old Testament with both literal and figurative meanings (Alexander and Baker eds. 2003: 87-90). The literal use of "blood" includes its references to the blood of animals (Gen. 37:31; Exod. 7:17ff.) or the blood of humans (1 King 22:35). It may also be used figuratively to mean "blood red" (Joel 2:31) or murder (2 Sam. 3:27, 28; 1 Kings 2:5, 9, 31, 32; 9:7, 26; Matt. 27:24) (Renn ed. 2014:123). "Blood" also signifies the legal guilt associated with murder, as evident the phrase "blood upon his head" (1 Kings 2:33; 2 Sam. 4:11). "Blood" is also used in the context of divine judgment against wickedness and rebellion, indicated by statements like "God will require their blood" (cf. Ps. 78:44; Isa. 9:5; 34:3; Ezek. 14:19; 21:32; 24:8; 28:3; Zeph. 1:17).

The story of the Fall of humanity may be considered as the earliest account of the concept of blood in the Hebrew Scriptures (or the Old Testament). In this story, God (after establishing Adam's and Eve's guilt and pronouncing their punishments) performs the symbolic act of clothing their nakedness with coats of skins obtained from slain animals (Gen. 3:21). The skins provided for the fallen pair were not only meant to serve as a better form of clothing, but also to serve as a constant reminder of their lost innocence, and of God's Messiah who would by his vicarious death not only destroy the works of the devil (cf. Gen. 3:15) but also take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Though the word "blood" is not used in this text, the provision of animal skins presupposes the shedding of blood; hence, one may trace the sacrificial system to this divine act. The story of blood continues after the flood in the context of God's prohibition against eating flesh with its life-blood in it (Gen. 9:1-6). The divine prohibition against murder is not only because it is the supreme crime, but because it undermines the dignity, sanctity, and inviolability of human life and hence effaces the divine image in both the murderer and the murdered.

Blood was very significant in the cultic tradition of Israel. Exodus 12, for example, mentions a ritual slaying of the lamb just before the Passover plague which resulted in the death of all Egyptian firstborns. In this event, the presence of the blood of the lamb on the doorpost and lintels of the Israelites' houses became a protective covering against the plague (Exod. 12:7, 13, 22, 23) (Renn ed. 2014: 123). The significance of blood in Israel's religious tradition is also evident in the consecration ceremony for the Aaronic priesthood (Exod. 29:12, 16, 20, 21; Lev. 8:15ff.; 9:9ff.); in the covenantal ceremony (cf. Exod. 24:3-8) meant to confirm a close relationship between both God and his people, and in the general cultic requirements prescribed under the Mosaic Law (cf. Lev. 1:5ff.; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:5-30; 6:27ff.; 7:2-33; 12:41ff.; 14:6, 14, 25, 51, 52; Num. 18:17; 19:4, 5) (Renn ed. 2014: 123). Leviticus 16 records an annual ritual that took place on the Day of Atonement in the life of the Israelites. This cultic act requires the high priest to asperse blood in the Holy of Holies to atone for the sins of the entire Israel community for that year preceding the festival (see vv. 14, 15, 18, 19, 27).

The Old Testament also has specific sanctions against those who consume blood (see Lev. 17:4-14; Deut. 12:16, 23, 27), and also against those who abuse revenge killing (cf. Num. 35:19ff.; Deut. 19:6-13; Josh. 20:3ff.) (Renn ed. 2014: 123). Leviticus 17:11 prohibits the eating of blood based on the close connection between an animal's blood and its life (cf. v. 14; Gen. 9:4). The two reasons given for this prohibition are: (1) the creature's life is in the blood, and (2) blood has been provided by God as means of atonement for life at the altar. According to Gordon (1977: 245) Leviticus 17:11 "is the most explicit statement about the role of blood in sacrifice. . . . Here it suffices to say that 'make atonement' literally means 'pay a ransom' or 'ransom,' and 11c could be paraphrased 'the blood ransoms at the price of life.'" That is to say, "the ransom price for man's life is not a monetary payment (as in Exod. 21:30) but the life of an animal represented by its blood splashed over the altar. Because animal blood atones for human sin in this way, it is sacred and ought not to be consumed by man" (Gordon 1977: 245). Gordon's point leads to the conclusion that the animal whose blood makes atonement for the worshipper dies in the worshipper's stead. The shedding of blood is the

offering of one's life because blood carries a person's life.

Hartenstein (2005: 133) however argues that since blood contains life, it follows that the one who sacrifices identifies him/herself with the sacrificial victim and participates in its death. Similarly, the priest also identifies himself with the sacrificial victim in the symbolic ritual involving the aspersion of blood on designated areas of the sanctuary. Therefore, the priest's act is both a symbolic and realistic presentation of the life of the offerer to the sanctuary (Hartenstein 2005: 135). Even though life and blood are closely connected, and so God prohibits the eating of blood, he permits the use of blood for atonement because he (being the Giver of life) has power to control life. Therefore, the blood manipulation associated with Israel's sacrificial system appeals to God's sole authority over life. In other words, offering sacrificial blood is the recognition that life is solemnly presented to God, the Life-Giver (Hartenstein 2005: 135).

According to Venter (2005: 288) sacrificial blood symbolizes substitutionary death, but in the ritual, blood reverses the process of death; at the altar the offerer presents his/her life to God as he/she identifies with the sacrificial victim. God however releases back the offerer's life to him/her after taking the victim's life as a substitute (Venter 2005: 288). The victim's blood therefore serves as a ransom for the offerer's life and restores the offerer's relationship with the Deity. By offering blood the worshipper accepts his/her sinfulness and declares his/her willingness to act in accordance with God's will and purpose (Venter 2005: 290). The entire sacrificial system of Israel points to God as the Author and the Giver of life who is willing to forgive his people as they follow his ritual prescriptions. Forgiveness and reconciliation based on the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant is therefore based on divine grace, not human works. The atoning effect of blood is also found in Ezekiel's vision of the new temple (see Ezek. 43:18, 20; 44:7, 15; 45:19) and other passages in the Old Testament (Renn ed. 2014: 123).

In the New Testament, the Old Testament idea of sacrifice is applied to Christ's blood. New Testament references to "the blood of Christ" usually signify his sacrificial death on the cross (cf. Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:19; Heb. 9:14). The expression "flesh and blood" metaphorically refers to "humanity" (Matt. 16:17; John 1:13; 1

Cor. 15:50; Gal. 1:6; Eph. 6:12; Heb. 2:14) (Renn ed. 2014:123). The shedding of blood as reference to murder and killing is evident in Luke 13:1; Acts 2:19; 20:26 and Romans 3:15. The Old Testament prohibition against the consumption of blood is repeated in Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25.

The most theologically significant usage of "blood" in the present discussion occurs in the contexts where 'Christ's blood' is the dominant theme. The New Testament uses the Passover cup as a symbol of Christ's blood, referring to his death on the cross (cf. Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:25ff) (Renn ed. 2014: 124). In the New Testament Jesus is seen as the lamb that was slain to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29) and to deliver Israel from destruction (1 Cor. 5:7). The New Testament (especially Hebrews 9:13ff.; 10:4ff.) further makes the point that the Old Covenant was ineffective and was just a foreshadow of the New Covenant inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Christ.

BLOOD SACRIFICE IN AKAN RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

The Akan are meta-ethnicity who live in the southern regions of present-day Ghana and Ivory Coast in West Africa. The Akan people speak the Akan language (Twi/Fante) and are the most populous ethnic group in Ghana. Akan primal religion holds belief in the Supreme Being, ancestors, lower divinities, and spiritual entities. The Akan believe that the living lives under the watch of ancestors, the spirits of the dead. Since ancestors are capable of punishing the living for wrongdoing and rewarding them for doing what is right, the living must strive to maintain cordial relationship with the ancestral spirits. The Akan closely connect blood with kinship and so it is believed that the blood of the ancestors run through their clans. Therefore, there is a kind of blood covenant that binds the dead, the living and the yet-to-be born members of a family together. The traditional Akan seeks means of avoiding punishment from supernatural powers. A way to restore a broken relationship with the spirit world is to offer sacrifices. The traditional priest acts as a mediator in this sacrificial system.

Akan traditional (blood) sacrifices may be performed to fulfill a vow; to show appreciation to a deity or the spirits; to unite oneself with a deity; to seek good health, long life, peace, prosperity, growth of crops, bumper yield and harvest; to appease the gods, to seek super

natural protection against sickness, famine and premature death; and for purification purposes (see Awoniyi 2015:68-69; Wiafe, Anson, Enam 2016:2519-2520). Animals such as goats, sheep, fowls, and cattle are common sacrificial animals. Ngewa (2006:1529) outlines three factors that determine the suitability of an animal for sacrifice— a sacrificial animal must not be a stolen animal; a uniform-colored animal is preferred; the animal must be free from defects and injuries. The value of the sacrificial animals depends on the reason for the sacrifice and expectation of the worshipper, and event or person involved in the sacrifice (Wiafe, Anson, Enam 2016:2520). After obtaining the blood different rituals can be performed with it including sprinkling it on the offerer, the people in a community or a deity, and others.

TOWARDS AN AKAN AFɔDEPREKO CHRISTOLOGY

The Akan society, being an oral society, experiences a high level of oral theology through songs, stories, poems and prayer, among others. Different mother-tongue theologians have expressed their theology in different ways especially through songs. One song that deals well with the Akan Christian understanding of the atoning blood of Jesus is Bernice Offei's song "mogya" ("blood"). The study engages the lyrics of this song together with the biblical and Akan concepts of blood sacrifice to formulate a contextual theology of Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice for the Akan Christian community. The lyrics read in part:

The blood, the blood, I've been saved by the precious blood

The blood, the blood, I've been purchased by a king's blood

The blood, the blood, not the blood of bulls and he-goats

The blood, the blood, through which we are made complete ...

In time past when the children of God sinned

They had to slaughter cows and goats as sacrifice

Because God's word says that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins

However, the blood of cows and goats could not remove sin...

Because of the power of his blood, we've received forgiveness of sins,

Everlasting life, healing and salvation

The blood, the precious blood which was shed at Calvary

The blood that never loses its power

It is our mighty weapon

The devil is defeated

God's children have won the victory.

The study now continues to develop an Akan *Afɔdepreko* Christology based on Offei's theology expressed in her song. The thematic areas considered include: the ineffectiveness of the Old Testament sacrificial system; the superiority of Christ's priesthood and the superiority and finality of Christ's sacrifice. This is followed by a brief discussion of key benefits that Christ's *afɔdepreko* brings to humanity, more so the Akan Christian.

INEFFECTIVENESS OF OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM

Offei's *Afɔdepreko* Christology begins with her contrast between the "the precious blood" or "a king's blood" that saves and "the blood of bulls and he-goats" that has no salvific value (lines 1-3). She then moves on to include all humanity in the benefits of the blood, saying, through that blood "we are made complete" (line 4), by shifting from the first-person singular "I" to the first-person plural "we." Here, Offei's Akan communal worldview comes to play. According to Asante (2017: 35) for the Akan "the value of humanity is, intrinsically, linked with that of the unity of all people, whether biologically related or not." The theological point made by Offei is that that all who come to Christ in repentance will be made part of the community of believers. Such an idea promotes ecumenism and church unity.

As noted earlier, God instituted a sacrificial system under in the Old Covenant era to deal temporarily with human sins. Offei acknowledges the Old Testament sacrificial rites, saying, "In time past [before Christ's death and resurrection] when the children of God sinned. They [humans] had to slaughter cows and goats as sacrifice." She then moves on to highlight the inability of the Old Testament animal sacrifice to remove sin and its guilt when she states, "However, the blood of cows and goats could not remove sin." The limitations of the Old Testament sacrificial system in dealing with sin have been given by Ojo (cited in Yashim and Umar 2020: 219) as follows: (a). "Limitation in time; for it applies only to one sin. Every new sin required a new atoning

sacrifice”; (b). “Limitation in content; for not every sin could be atoned for. Deliberate sin’s atonement is execution of the sinner”; (c). “Limited personality; for it applied to the people of Israel. There was no atoning sacrifice for people outside Israelites tribes”; therefore, it was not a universal atonement (d). “Limited to effectiveness; for it did not conquer death. It only conquered some characteristics of death by promising forgiveness. Death therefore is stronger than the atonement of the sin offering.” Considering these limitations, the need for a perfect priest becomes evident.

THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST’S PRIESTHOOD

The superiority of Christ’s priesthood is a key foundation to *Afɔdepreko* Christology. Christ would not have achieved his *afɔdepreko* without being superior to other priests. The inability of the Old Testament sacrificial system to achieve atonement in the strict sense necessitated the institution of the New Covenant under which Christ serves as a priest. The qualifications of Christ as high priest are outlined in Hebrews 5:1ff (see Amevenku and Boaheng 2020: 130). First, the high priest was selected from among humans, meaning the high priest was human (5:1). Christ was fully human who (like other humans) suffered, endured temptation and tasted death (2:11-18). The humanity of priest leads to the second qualification, namely, the high priest represents humans before God (5:1). As human, Christ qualifies as a perfect representation of humans before the Father (1:14ff). Third, the high priest approaches God with gifts (*dōra*) and sacrifices (*thysiai*) for sins (cf. 5:3; 8:3; 10:11). In the same way, Christ also offered his own blood as a propitiatory offering (2:17). Fourth, the high priest, like other humans, is not immune from the infirmities common to humankind (5:2, cf. 4:15). Christ’s experience of human weaknesses equipped him to sympathize with and render help to his fellow humans amidst their troubles (1:18; 4:15). Lastly, Christ, like the Levitical high priest, did not seek after his own glory as a high priest but emptied himself and took upon himself human nature for the benefit of the entire human race (5:4-5; Phil. 2:5-11).

Though the above relationship between the Levitical high priests and Christ qualify Christ as a high priest, they “must be taken as typological correspondence, not absolute identification” (Amevenku and Boaheng 2020: 130). One, Christ’s priesthood was established

and sealed with a special oath from God (Psa. 110:4; cf. Heb. 5:6; 7:15, 17), something which is absent in the Levitical priestly tradition. Two, Christ is a sinless and perfect priest (4:15; 7:27-28) and hence needs no sacrifice for his own benefit; the Levitical priests, being sinful humans, were “prone to human failures and had to offer sacrifices for his own sins and then the people’s” (Amevenku and Boaheng 2020: 131). Three, Christ needs no replacement because he is priest forever, unlike the Levitical priests who had to be replaced from time to time. Four, Christ operates in the heavenly sanctuary and presents to God, not animal blood, but his own blood (Heb. 9:11-12). The obvious conclusion is that Christ’s priesthood surpasses all other priestly traditions.

THE SUPERIORITY AND FINALITY OF CHRIST’S SACRIFICE

The expression *Afɔdepreko* Christology underlines the fact that Christ’s sacrifice is both final and complete. This section of the study considers this issue. The repetitious nature of the Levitical priestly sacrifice (and Akan sacrifices) and the inability of these sacrifices to deal with certain sins are limitations which have been dealt with through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. As a permanent priest, the sacrifice Jesus offered on the cross has a permanent effect. Offei’s idea of the permanence of Christ’s sacrifice is expressed in these words: “The blood [of Jesus] never loses its power.”

Christ became a priest “not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life” (Heb. 7:16 NIV). Commenting on this text, Bourke (2011:936) states, “the emphasis is on Jesus’s eternal priesthood ... in contrast to the transitory Old Testament priesthood; here the emphasis is on the eternity of Jesus’s one and only sacrifice, in contrast to the annually repeated sacrifices of the Jewish high priest on the Day of Atonement (v. 25).” Bediako (2000: 33), in his study of Hebrews 1:3b in relation to the *Odwira* (Purification) festival, also argues that Jesus “secured eternal redemption for all who cease from their own works of purification and trust in him and his perfect *Odwira*; that is Christ himself... who has become our *Odwira*. The *Odwira* to end all *odwiras* has taken place through the death of Jesus Christ.” Both scholars show that the repetitious sacrifices associated with Akan traditional priesthood and the Levitical order have been replaced by Christ’s complete, final and efficacious sacrifice

on the cross. Therefore, there is no need to make any sacrifice to any being for anything because the unique achievement of Jesus' sacrifice "renders all other priestly mediations obsolete and reveals their ineffectiveness" (Bediako 2000:28-29). The repetitious nature of Akan traditional sacrifices and the lack of a universal effect of these sacrifices, make any Akan sacrifice far less than being *afɔdepreko* (once-for-all sacrifice). Thus, Christ's *afɔdepreko* annulled and ended all other sacrifices; therefore, ancestral sacrifices are wrong and unnecessary and must be discontinued.

BENEFITS FROM CHRIST'S AFɔDEPREKO (ONCE-FOR-ALL SACRIFICE)

Offei outlines some key benefits of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice in the following lines.

Because of the power of his blood, we've received forgiveness of sins,

Everlasting life, healing and salvation

The blood, the precious blood which was shed at Calvary

The blood that never loses its power

It is our mighty weapon

The devil is defeated

God's children have won the victory.

The study proceeds to explore three key benefits of Christ's atonement based on Offei's song. They are: everlasting life, healing and deliverance, and protection.

EVERLASTING LIFE

Ghanaian Pentecostal theologian, Larbi (2001:11) has asserted that Akan traditional sacrifices are made "to make amends with the gods or the ancestors, in order to remove the danger-radiating pollution which would ordinarily destroy the personhood of the individual with its consequential effect on the community as a whole." Similarly, the Old Testament animal sacrifices only dealt with ceremonial impurity. Clearly, neither the Akan sacrificial system nor that of ancient Israel purifies the conscience and sets the sinner free. It is Jesus's blood that (in addition to dealing with ceremonial impurity) purifies the conscience, liberates the conscience from "dead works" (Heb. 9:14). The Christ-event provides the means by which sin is forgiven and the sinner reconciled with God. Paul speaks of "the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood" (Rom.

3:24-25). He also says "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them" (2 Cor. 5:19 NIV). He again states that Christ was made sin for humanity in order that, in him, humans become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21; see also 1 Pet. 2:24).

The New Testament considers sinner as being held captive, a situation which requires the payment of a ransom to free them. This ransom was paid by Christ through the shedding of his blood on the cross (see Mark 10:45; 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 1 Pet. 1:18; Tit. 2:14; Rom. 3:24; Rom. 8:21; Heb. 2:15; Gal. 3:13). Therefore, those who express faith in the atoning work of Christ are forgiven, justified, reconciled to God and adopted into God's family. Offei captures this whole point in her statement "Because of the power of his blood, we've received forgiveness of sins, everlasting life, [spiritual and physical] healing and salvation; the blood, the precious blood which was shed at Calvary."

HEALING AND DELIVERANCE

The Akan worldview considers everything that happens physically as having spiritual antecedent. Therefore, people usually seek spiritual solutions to most of their life challenges. When someone falls sick in a traditional Akan society, the family would usually consider consulting a traditional medicine man rather than taking the person to the hospital, the reason being that the traditional medicine man has solution to both the physical and spiritual dimensions of the health challenge. The main agents responsible for life problems include *akaberekerefoɔ* and *adutofoɔ* (charmners, enchanters and sorcerers) and *abayifoɔ* (witches and wizards). For the Akan, these spiritual entities must be dealt with in order to attain healing. Coming from this background, Akan Christians expect the Christian religion to provide their health needs. They expect to have health benefits from the Christ-event. This fact is highlighted by President Essamuah in the following *Abibindwom* (Akan/African sacred music):

Great Healer, come and touch me. Heal my ailments that my strength may be renewed for your service. Lord, I am deeply troubled, deeply troubled by spiritual sicknesses, anxieties and worries. I have been to many places for healing, but none has been of help. Come, Lord, release me from these spiritual ailments and troubles; that I may enjoy the health, strength and vitality needed to serve you.

Essamuah describes the sicknesses/ailments as spiritual because of the Akan belief that sicknesses/ailments are caused by spiritual forces. These forces may also bring misfortunes such as untimely death, accidents, economic hardship, barrenness, marital problems among others. Drawing on the expectations of Akan Christians with regards to health issues, Offei states that the blood of Jesus brings healing to believers. Biblical support for this assertion may be obtained from Isaiah's fourth song (52:13-53:12, especially 53:5) which says the stripes of the Servant of the Lord (identified in the New Testament as Jesus Christ) offers healing (physical and spiritual). More so, the New Testament gives accounts of Jesus healing people suffering from diseases such as dumbness (Mark 9:17), deafness and dumbness (Mark 9:25), convulsions (Mark 1:26; 9:20; Luke 9:39), blindness and deafness (Matt. 12:22), and lameness (Acts 8:7), and so on.

Since sicknesses may be caused by spiritual forces, it is important for the sick to receive deliverance as well. Healing and deliverance go together. Asamoah-Gyadu (2005: 165) defines "healing and deliverance" collectively as the use of spiritual weapons "to provide release for demon-possessed, demon-oppressed, broken, disturbed and troubled persons, in order that victims may be restored to 'proper functioning order'" so that "they may enjoy God's fullness of life understood to be available in Christ." Jesus therefore is to be seen as the Ultimate Healer and Deliverer. In the present COVID-19 global crisis the health benefits associated with the *Afɔdepreko* of Christ should serve as a relief to Christians and increase their faith in Jesus as the only one who can help the world to find a lasting solution to the problem.

PROTECTION FROM EVIL FORCES

In Akan cosmology, humans are almost always in battle with evil forces. The biblical antecedent to this view may be obtained from Ephesians 6:12 which makes it clear that there is a battle between believers and some spiritual entities. Akan Christians consider themselves vulnerable in this battle without the help of Christ. According to Offei, Jesus' blood is a mighty weapon by which the devil is defeated and victory won by God's children:

It is our mighty weapon

The devil is defeated

God's children have won the victory.

Against the backdrop of the foregoing discussions, many Akan believers use the blood of Jesus as a "powerful weapon" to conquer the devil and life challenges such as fear, sickness, barrenness and so on. A Ghanaian Charismatic pastor, Duncan-Williams (2012: blurb) has declared that the blood of Jesus is "efficacious", "redeeming", "sanctifying", "cleansing", "justifying", "prevailing", "overcoming", and "triumphant." In the light of this, many Christians make such declarations as "I cover myself and my family with the blood of Jesus", "I sanctify this food with the blood of Jesus", "I soak my properties in the blood of Jesus" with the belief that their lives will be secure by such pronouncements. Aside the passive use of Jesus' blood, Christians use the blood actively in such declarations as "I rebuke you with the blood of Jesus" as a way of suppressing evil spirits or "I cancel it by the blood of Jesus" as a means of reversing evil plans against them. The protection that Jesus offers his people is underscored by the following assertion by Kuma (2011:9): "You [Jesus] stand at the mouth of the big gun while your body absorbs the bullets aimed at your followers." This spiritual bullet proof is only enjoyed by those who abide in Christ. It is therefore important for Christians to maintain excellent relationship with Christ.

CONCLUSION

The study has attempted to develop an Akan *Afɔdepreko* Christology based on biblical teachings, ideas from Akan traditional worldview, and Offei's theology expressed in her song, *mogya*. The thematic area explored are: the ineffectiveness of the Old Testament sacrificial system; the superiority of Christ's priesthood and the superiority and finality of Christ's sacrifice. Three key benefits of Christ's *afɔdepreko* for humanity—namely, everlasting life, healing and deliverance, and protection—were also espoused. A key conclusion from the study is that Jesus' sacrifice is enough to secure the redemption of repentant sinners; therefore, in the post-resurrection era all traditional sacrifices intended for atonement must be stopped. The theology developed in this paper is significant for the following reasons. First, the interaction with Offei's song serves as a foundation for developing oral theology which the Akan community, being an oral one, needs for Church growth. In other words, it contributes to the scholarly discussions on the development of African Christian theology of biblical themes. Second, the contextualization of the Christian doctrine of atonement for the Akan community

has the potential of enhancing the Akan understanding of the Christian faith and hence remove the foreignness that sometimes characterize the Christian religion. To this end, the study deepens the value of the blood of Jesus Christ in the light of Akan cultural beliefs and hence has the potential of discouraging Akan Christians from making sacrifices to any other being than God. Finally, the study has the potential of fostering an improved divine-human, human-human and human-environment relations.

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