

An evaluation of *ikpu alu* in Igboland in the light of the Old Testament *Yom Kippur* in Leviticus 16

Ikenna L. Umeanolue

Abstract

Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) in Leviticus 16 is rich in typology with ikpu alu (expiatory sacrifice) in Igboland. Thus, this paper is an evaluation of ikpu alu in Igboland in the light of the Old Testament idea of atonement especially in the Jewish annual event of Yom Kippur in Leviticus 16. Alu is an act of misdeed that is totally abhorred by the Igbo community. It brings calamity upon the defaulter. For the offender to regain the favour of the spiritual beings, he/she must offer expiatory sacrifice called ikpu alu. The event of the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16, when the sins of the Israelites were washed away, and they became reconciled with God, gives much insight to the study of ikpu alu. After the sacrifice of ikpu alu and the event of the Day of Atonement, the offender and the community have a sense of newness and joy. Hence, the end result of the sacrifice of ikpu alu and the Day of Atonement is reconciliation towards God and neighbours. This ensures peace, love and growth of the community.

Introduction

The event of *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) in Chapter 16 of the Old Testament book of Leviticus is rich in typology with *ikpu alu* in Igbo traditional society. The Igbo word *ikpu alu* has the same meaning with the English word atonement. The biblical meaning of the word ‘atone’ is to cover, to expiate and to pay the

penalty for sins. Thus the Old Testament *Yom Kippur* is significant in this regard. This event was celebrated annually on the tenth day of the Jewish first month Tishrei (usually commencing in September). It was a day of rest as the Israelites were to do no work. It was a day of repentance and forgiveness (Goldman, 2000). On this Day of Atonement, the people confessed their sins. Sacrifices were made by the high priest and blood was shed so that the people's sins could be expiated. It was a significant celebration for the people of Israel since Yahweh gave it to them in order to atone for their sins.

In Igboland, people are very conscious of their relationships. Consequently, the idea of sin and atonement arose out of these relationships with the divine and hinges on the divinities (Anyanwu, 2004). As such, when moral standards, which have been set from time immemorial, are violated, it is said that sin is committed. Consequently, the notion of sin and atonement, more than any other phenomenon, occupies important part of morality in Igbo traditional life. This is so because a return to the former harmonious state is necessary and this can be attained through the expiatory sacrifice of *ikpu alu*.

Sin is an ever-present reality that enslaves the human race and corrupts God's created order. The Old Testament and Igbo peoples are aware of the reality and the universality of sin. Sin is that which is in opposition to God's benevolent purposes for his creature. It points to the fact of what *alu* and *ikpu alu* in Igboland mean. This research therefore aims to understand the Igbo concept of *ikpu alu* in the light of Old Testament *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) in Leviticus 16. The work specially examines the meaning of the Igbo expiatory sacrifice (*ikpu alu*) and explores the goals and values it holds. It also seeks to articulate the extent of its influence on modern Igbo Christians.

Igboland and the Igbo people

The Igbo, one of the largest cultural groups in Nigeria, occupy the South-eastern Nigeria between latitude 5 to 7 degrees north and longitude 6 to 8 degrees east (Uchendu, 1965). This means that the Igboland stretches across the river Niger from west of Agbor to the fringes of the Cross river and runs roughly from north of Nsukka highlands to some parts of the Atlantic Coast. According to Ogbalu cited by Anyanwu (2008), “The Igbo people are usually of average height, mostly dark in complexion, thickly built and with broad nose, curly black hair, and moderately thick lips” (p. 276). Anyanwu further opines that presently, the word Igbo is used in three senses to refer to the territory, *ala* Igbo, to refer to the speakers of the language, *ndi* Igbo and finally to refer to the language itself, *okwu* Igbo.

It is not certain from where, when and how the Igbo people came to occupy their present place of abode. However, according to different myths of origin gathered from many Igbo communities, the people believe that they were indigenous to the area they now occupy. The Igbo are single people in the sense that they speak a number of related dialects, occupy a continuous tract of territory and have many features of social structure and culture in common. Some Igbo scholars have on ethnographic and cultural grounds advanced the thesis of Jewish origin of the Igbo people. Aquiano and Basden cited in Afigbo (1981) earlier advanced the view that the Igbo were a branch of the Hebrew nation, or at least that their culture history could satisfactorily be explained in terms of Jewish impact. In his view the fact that the Igbo are deeply religious, they practise circumcision, sacrifice and mummification and have sentence structures commonly found in Hebrew constructions such that the investigator cannot

help being struck with the similitude between them and some of the ideas and practices of the Levitical Code. It is also argued that the words Uhuru (the name of a number of Igbo towns) and Igbo are corruptions of the word Hebrew.

Sin and atonement in Igboland

For the Igbo, like other African peoples, sin is a conviction that one has fallen short of the custom and tradition of his/her community. According to Idowu (1973), "Sin is that which produces evil as its consequence" (p. 103). In Igboland, the term *mmehie* translates sin. This consists essentially of going contrary to moral values set down from the beginning of times by the Supreme Being, the divinities and the ancestors. As such, sin in Igboland includes the following: *ohi* (theft), *igbu mmadu* (murder), *mmadu igbu onwe ya* (suicide) and *imeru ala* (breaking the taboos of the earth goddess). In addition, in Igboland, immoral acts such as adultery, falsehood, and fraud are regarded as sins. These vices are rejected and condemned as sins against the spirits and humanity.

The whole concept of sin among the Igbo hinges on their appreciation of their sacred traditions and customs. That is why it takes more of a religious dimension than a socio-cultural phenomenon. For the Igbo, the earth goddess (*ala*, *ana* or *ani*) tends to be closer to human beings than all other deities. She ranks second after the Supreme Being and is usually regarded as the queen of the underworld, the owner of men and custodian of public morality in conjunction with the ancestors (Arinze, 1970). The earth goddess is solely concerned with matters affecting the community and as the guardian of public morality, she prohibits antisocial behaviours. A break of the moral code is termed *alu* or

aru (abomination). The two concepts *alu* and *nso* are interwoven, and may be called taboo and abomination respectively.

Igbo concept of *alu* could also mean pollution. One who breaks any *nso ala* is said to have committed an abomination: *o meruru ala* (he/she has defiled the land). The Igbo word *alu* or *aru* (literally meaning abomination) gives the deeper meaning to sin. The Igbo concept of *ikpu alu* derives from this term *alu* or *aru*. Thus, sin in Igboland is a practical reality conceived to bring harmful consequences to the individual offender, and the innocent community to which the offender belongs. There is, therefore, the need for atonement.

In Igboland, atonement is conceived as the process of penitent rite, a rite of forgiveness, which culminates into a re-acceptance and a perfect communion with the spiritual beings. One, therefore, gains reconciliation through this process of traditional purification rite, expiatory sacrifice (*ikpu alu*). Often the idea of atonement in Igboland is based on the nature and disposition of the sacrifice. In the wake of sin, efforts are made to restore harmony between the members of the community, spirits and cosmic order. *Ikpu alu* (expiatory sacrifice) has a particular purpose. According to Arinze (1970), this is “designed to ward off danger hanging over the people, for any misfortune or grave danger is a sign of spiritual activity and therefore involves the propitiation of the spirit expiation of faults” (p. 67).

Ikpu alu in Igboland is known as sacrifice of expiation. It serves as a ransom to reconcile and redeem the sinner and offer him protection of the spiritual being. Confession is an essential process through which atonement is affected. Without confession, reconciliation is not possible. Therefore, the whole idea of atonement as carried out by expiation sacrifice is to cleanse the defiled person and the land/community. In this sacrifice, the

priest of *ala* plays a major role. Usually the priest offers the sacrifice to appease the earth goddess that has been angered. The Igbo in general conceive atonement for sin as the process by which man is restored to friendship with God, the divinities, the ancestors and the community.

Sin and atonement in the Old Testament

Sin is presented in the Old Testament as transgression of God's law (Deut 6:24-25), breaking of a covenant with God (Deut 29:19-21) and violation of the righteous nature of God (Lev 11:45). Simmons (2009) defines sin as, "Actions by which people rebel against God, miss his purpose for their life and surrender to the power of evil rather than to God" (p. 3). According to Ngana (2010), "Sin is that which is in opposition to God's benevolent purposes for his creature" (p. 52).

The Old Testament uses various Hebrew words, each of which has a profane use, to designate sin. McKenzie (2002) enumerated different important Hebrew words that describe the idea of sin. According to him, the Hebrew word which is commonly translated sin is *ḥeṭ'*, *ḥaṭṭa't*; literally like the Greek *hamartia* the word means 'to miss the mark'. This signifies not merely an intellectual error in judgment but a failure to attain a goal. Considering the basic meaning of 'to miss the mark', Pedersen (1959) observes that sin is a nonaction. Another Hebrew word, '*awon*', usually translated 'iniquity', means a deviation; here also the element of failure and distortion is seen. Iniquity means that reality has become what ought not to exist. In common use, iniquity signifies concretely 'guilt'. Guilt is conceived a burden too heavy for the sinner to carry (Gen. 4:13; Ps. 38:5; Is. 1:4). It designates the permanent damage that is done to a person by the sinful act. Yet another term *pasa'*, means

rebellion. It signifies more properly rebellion against a political superior (1 Kg. 12:19; 2 Kg. 8:20) and is applied to rebellion against Yahweh (Is. 1:2; Jer. 2:29; Am. 4:4; Hos. 7:13).

The Old Testament idea of sin can also be understood in the following words: *ra'* (evil), *to 'ebah* (abomination) and *'awel* (twisted). 'Disorder' seems more feeble a word to use as a summary of these words. Evil is that which lacks its proper form. Abomination is that which Yahweh finds intolerable. That which is 'twisted' is also that which lacks proper form and shape, that which is crippled and distorted. Analyzing the various Hebrew words that describe the concept of sin, Achtemeier (2005) says, "The most basic is a Hebrew word meaning 'revolt' or 'transgression' and indicating a deliberate act of defiance against God" (p. 955). This notion of sin as revolt against God is central in Old Testament thought. Sin is rebellion against God (Num. 14:9; Deut. 28:15). Sin is often called folly, and the sinner is a fool (Deut. 32:6; Jer. 4:22, 5:21; Is. 29:11; Pro. 1:7). These definitions bring out the consequences of sin thus: Sin brings barrier between God and man (Isa 59:2); it makes a society or a nation depraved, dishonouring for God (Prov. 5:21-22); it ruins people's relationship with one another (Gen. 4:7); it incurs guilt upon the sinner (Number 5:6); it brings death (Ex 18:20). These consequences of sin enable one to understand why the Day of Atonement and its significance to the Israelites: To restore relationship with Yahweh and restore harmony to a distorted community. The rite of atonement does this.

Atonement in the Old Testament is the means by which the guilt punishment chain produced by the violation of God's will is broken with God. Violation of the world order leads to punishment by divine powers. Only atonement could prevent or end such punishment. The Hebrew word with which the concept

of atonement is associated in the Old Testament can be translated variously as purge, cleanse, expiate, purify, wipe off or cover. The Old Testament viewed a number of offerings and sacrifices as atoning. Such sacrifices include the burnt offering, the fellowship or peace offering, the sin offering, the guilt or trespass offering.

The idea reflected in the Old Testament atonement shows that God is foremost in reconciliation. He provides the means of reparation. He is merciful and gracious. God's holiness has two natural and necessary consequences: His wrath toward everything that contradicts it and his love for everything that is good and serves its divinely intended purpose. In setting his love upon man in the state of sin, therefore, God deals with both the sin of man and his own wrath - wiping away the one and turning away the other. This involves what the Old Testament called 'atonement', a process of sin-bearing and reconciliation. It is by this process that God's wrath was turned away and the way opened for his love to re-establish eternal fellowship with humans.

The *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) in Leviticus 16

Sin alienates man from God and fellow human beings causing him/her ultimately to experience eternal death. Therefore, a fundamental human need is to be free, not only from external oppression, but also from the eternal burden of sin. This simple truth was typologically taught in Old Testament times especially through the annual celebration of the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) also called Sabbath of Sabbaths (Lev. 16:31). In the words of Bacchiocchi (2005), "This was the most solemn Holy Day of the religious calendar of the ancient Israel" (p. 1). For Castelot and Cody (2007), "*Yom Kippur* is one of the better known Jewish feasts" (p. 1281). It is a day when Jews express

remorse for their sins through prayer and fasting. Both Israelite and non-Israelite residents were to fast and desist from any form of work on this most solemn Sabbath or day of rest (Faley, 1995). This fast is the only one prescribed in the entire Torah.

The Day of Atonement is the holiest day of the Jewish year which ends Ten Days of Repentance beginning with *Rosh Hashanah* (the Jewish New Year festival) in the first month of Tishrei. Because of their great power and importance in Jewish life, *Rosh Hashanah*, the Ten Days of Repentance, and *Yom Kippur* are collectively known as the High Holidays or the High Holy Days (Dosick, 1998; Goldman, 2000). Even more compelling is the name by which they are designated in Hebrew, *Yamim Nora'im* meaning the Days of Awe. This name demonstrates the awesome task and the eventual joy that characterize *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* – the difficult and painful process of genuine self-evaluation, the honesty of humble repentance, personal growth, hoped-for forgiveness, and the ultimate satisfaction of receiving God's richest blessings.

The Day of Atonement was a gracious day each year when all the Israelites could experience a new beginning by being cleansed from their sins and restored to fellowship with their maker: On this day shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be cleansed before the Lord (Lev. 16:13). Goldman (2000) says, "*Yom Kippur* is very much about the power of repentance. In the imagery of the *Yom Kippur* prayers, God weighs our deeds, looks at our remorse and our resolve, and, with mercy, determines our faith for the next year" (p. 118). Greenberg cited by Bacchiocchi (2009) explains that:

Yom Kippur goes beyond the elimination of sin to the renewal of the individual. Habit and conditioning often combine with the

structure of individual life to keep the person torn between evil and ethic, between apathy and ideal, between inertia and desire for improvement. Against these powerful forces which proclaim that humans cannot change, Yom Kippur teaches that there is capacity for renewal and unification of life. (p. 2).

Fairchild (2009), making reference to the Day of Atonement has this to say:

Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement is the most solemn and important holy day of Jewish calendar. In the Old Testament the Day of Atonement was the day the High Priest made an atoning sacrifice for the sin of the people. This act of atonement brought reconciliation between the people and God. After the blood sacrifice was offered to the Lord, a goat was released into the wilderness to symbolically carry away the sins of the people. The scape goat was never to return. (p. 1).

The promise of moral cleansing and renewal in the Day of Atonement embodies the hopes and aspirations common to the Jews and then the Christians. An understanding of how the cleansing and renewal was accomplished typologically in Old Testament through the rituals of Day of Atonement enables a better appreciation of its antitypical fulfillment accomplished through Christ's atoning death in the New Testament.

Significance of the Day of Atonement to the Hebrews

As noted earlier, *Yom Kippur* or Day of Atonement is the most solemn and important holy day in the Jewish calendar. Its importance lies in its significance to the Hebrew people. Bacchiocchi (2009) articulates this fact as follows:

The Day of Atonement represented for the Jew the climax of ten days of intense self-examination and repentance. They were known as ‘Days of Awe’ or ‘Days of Repentance’. These holy days were strictly a time for people to make a thorough assessment of their lives. It was a time to verify if the sins which had been confessed and atoned for during the previous year, had also been forsaken. If not, God provided a last opportunity to confess and forsake any lingering sin. (p. 15).

From the above, it is observed that the Day of Atonement was a time for the Hebrew to take stocks, to look back into their lives, feel sorry for their sins and make amendments. There is always resolution not to go back to the old self. Again the consciousness of sin was deepened on the Day of Atonement as indicated by the fact that this is the only fast day prescribed in the Mosaic Law: Again it shall be a statute to you forever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourself and shall do not work either the native or stranger (Lev. 16:29, cf 23:27, 29; Num 29:19).

Fairchild (2009) makes the above point clearer by saying that “*Yom Kippur* was a day of repentance when Jews express remorse for their sins through prayer and fasting” (p. 1).

According to Harrison (1980), the book of Leviticus teaches that atonement for sin must be by substitution. The sinner must bring an offering which he has acquired at some cost as a substitute for his own life. The formal identification with it is followed by the presentation of the offering to God and a declaration by the priest that atonement has been made. Leviticus 16 thus makes it evident that no person can be his own saviour or mediator. A priest is needed.

The place of traditional Igbo priest and Hebrew priest in both rituals

Sacrifice is an act of public worship offered in the name of a community or part of it. According to Obielosi (2017), sacrifice goes with some sense of oblation to a deity and it involves the subject offering the sacrifice, the object offered and the deity to whom it is offered. It is through a special person, the priest, that the community or individual fulfills this great obligation. Arinze (2008) noted that “man has always felt the need for a special mediator between himself and the object of his worship” (p. 119). Priesthood is a religious institution for mediation between man and the spirit world. Therefore, in *ikpu alu* in Igboland and Old Testament Day of Atonement, a priest plays major role of mediation.

The Igbo traditional priest has a major part in the ritual of *ikpu alu*. He is the official servant of a determined spirit who offers sacrifice to the spirit. Arinze (2008) supported this view-when he said that, “A priest is a priest of one spirit, for example Udo” (p. 122). In traditional Igboland the chief priest intercedes on behalf of the culprit or the offender or the community. He asks God to temper justice with mercy. He pleads that angered God may leave the offender and give him/her another chance. He

finally asks God to continue to shower his favours upon the person and be eager to listen to his prayers when the person or the community comes into his presence.

According to Fuller (1996), the priest offers prayer and sacrifice for himself and the entire community. In Leviticus 16, on the Day of Atonement, Aaron, the priest, offers sin sacrifice for himself and for the entire Israelites. This very act makes him clean and his sacrifice would be accepted by God. On the other hand, the priest of Igboland never offers expiatory sacrifice of *ikpu alu* unless he keeps himself pure from sinful acts. This act of keeping himself clean is a daily struggle. He avoids visiting abominable places and telling lies since they defile him. At the ceremony of *ikpu alu*, as he prays with the cola nut, he acknowledges his sinfulness and that of the offender.

The priest stands as a mediator between the people and God. Metuh (1999) sees a priest as a mediator "a go-between, one who mediates between God and man" (p. 204). In the context of Leviticus 16 Aaron the priest plays the role of a go-between in man's relationships with the spiritual world. Aaron the priest intercedes for the people before God. In Igbo traditional society, the priest intercedes for the culprit with such incantations as: *Biko, Ala, mere ya ebele. Biko atala ya ahuhu make ihe o mere* (Please, earth deity, have mercy upon him/her. Please do not punish him for what he has/she done).

In both cases, sacrifice remains central as an act of public worship offered to a divinity in the name of the community or the individual. The community or the individual cannot fulfill this obligation directly but through a special person, the priest, as man has always felt the need for a special mediator between himself and the object of worship.

The idea of ‘Scapegoatism’ in the two religious rituals

There is the idea of ‘Scapegoatism’ in the two religious rituals. On the Day of Atonement, according to Leviticus 16:8, Aaron is to cast lots upon two goats which on the part of the congregation are to serve for sin offering (Lev. 16:5): One lot for Yahweh and the other lot for Azazel. Leviticus 16:10 says, “But the goat, on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be set alive before Yahweh, to make atonement for him, to send him away for Azazel into the wilderness. The goat for Azazel bears the sin of the community. The sin is transferred on the goat through the laying of hands and confession made by the culprit. It is believed that after this the animal takes the place of the sinner and his/her sins. This goat is driven into the wilderness. It is believed to carry away eternally the guilt of the offender and the consequences thereof on the said individual and his/her community.

During the process of *ikpu alu* in Igboland, such as one for murder and suicide, the traditional Igbo priest asks the offender to lay hands on the head of the animal and make confession of all he or she has done. After this, the priest drags the animal round the culprit’s compound; hence the verb *ikpu* meaning ‘to drag’. When it has to do with the community’s sin, the animal is led into a dense forest carrying the sins of the people. This animal is not killed.

***Ikpu alu* and *Yom Kippur* as spiritual liberation for the individual and the community**

Committing an abomination or a sin carries its consequences. In the Old Testament it is a barrier between God and the sinner either as individual or as community. In the same way an *alu* (abomination) brings a barrier between the culprit and the ancestors, deity and Supreme Being. There are other

consequences which affect the individual and the community. Man invariably becomes a slave to sin (Rom 6:16). Guilt is another natural consequence when a person sins. Often guilt is in the Old Testament a burden or weight that could destroy a person from within (Ps 32:3-4), or a debt that must be paid (Lev.5:1-6:7). Spiritually, the person and the community feel a sense of burden or weight of the offence committed. The individual is ostracized from the community. He or she is and carries his life activity alone. Nobody would want to associate with such an individual for fear of sharing in the same punishment. Again the individual feels that the supreme powers have abandoned him. Actually, the principal ingredient in the biblical concept of guilt appears to be the dimension of responsibility.

According to Dosick (1995), many special prayers are interspersed throughout the celebration of *Yom Kippur* service to embellish and deepen the worship. During the *amidah* (silent meditation) that is repeated aloud later in the service, two confessionals are recited – one short and one lengthy. These confessionals are a litany of human foibles and failings, and give the worshipper the opportunity to acknowledge a wide array of mistakes and transgressions. Interestingly, the confessional is written in the plural: “We have transgressed ...”, reflecting Judaism’s notion of communal responsibility for conduct and human behavior. The theory is that even if one did not commit the particular transgression, “all Israel (the Jewish people) is responsible,

Hence, when the sacrifice of *Yom Kippur* or *ikpu alu* is carried out on behalf of the individual, the individual feels relieved of his guilt. He once again feels free to communicate with God and the entire community. The individual is spiritually liberated from the chains of sin. The community experiences the

same. The community which feared the consequences of incurring the anger of God welcomes the individual. Thus, it is observed that after *alu* has been said to be removed the community eats together. The individual often feels like a newborn baby (Ngana, 2008). This is actually spiritual liberation both for the individual and the community.

***Ikpu alu* and *Yom Kippur* as reconciliation in Judeo-Christian religion**

The concept of atonement developed in Israel because of the understanding that all people were guilty before God and one another. Thus, a system of rituals and sacrifice was designed to purify the people involved. The system was designed to establish reconciliation between the guilty party and the party offended. The same experience can be observed in the ritual of *ikpu alu* where the offender is reconciled with the offended. In the New Testament, Paul makes frequent use of this idea:

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is specially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners, so now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God. (Rom 5:6-11).

In another place Paul made a clearer point of this view when he said:

This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. (Col 2:21-22).

Like the *ikpu alu* for the Igbo *Yom Kippur* for the Jews, the death of Jesus brought reconciliation between God and humanity and subsequently between individual sinners/community in Christianity and God. Reconciliation is the end-point of these rituals.

For Arazu (1994), “Reconciliation is not a mere doctrine. It is an accomplished fact. Jesus fought the battle and won. Man under sin was under the dominion of Satan, the prince of this world” (p. 175). Christ is the sacrifice because his blood cleanses humans from all sin. Therefore, reconciliation with God from whom humanity was alienated by sin, was accomplished through the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ which was prefigured in the Old Testament and especially in Levitical sacrifices. So is the *ikpu alu* in Igboland. In the Jewish and Igbo reconciliation rituals, the priest is the mediator while the animal is the vicarious victim of reconciliation. In the Christ-event, Christ is both the priest and victim of the reconciliation sacrifice. Jesus, the high priest offered his own blood in sacrifice for sins. Hence, through his death the guilt of sins was paid for and humans became reconciled with

God. Humans still benefit from the fruits of Christ's death for reconciliation.

In the Catholic Church, for instance, this reconciliation of God with sinners in Christ is continuously experienced through his ministers (the priests) in the sacrament of penance or reconciliation. McManus (2005) holds that this "Sacrament of reconciliation is to be called a sacrament of healing" (p. 41). This is so because sin is an offence against God; it inflicts a wound not only on the sinner, but also on his or her neighbour, and indeed on the whole church, thus the sinner needs healing.

In Christian religion, before one is reconciled with God or the neighbour, one must be aware that one has sinned against God or his neighbour. There must be confession of ones guilt towards the offended before forgiveness takes place. The offender must be resolute that he/she will not repeat that particular act that broke his/her relationship either with God or with his neighbour. The same issue is observed in *ikpu alu* in Igboland where the chief priest urges the culprit to make confession of his sins. He/she vows that he/she would never repeat that particular sinful act. *Yom Kippur* for the Israelites remains a day for repentance from past misdeeds and the promise to Yahweh to keep his ordinances, Hence, *Ikpu Alu* and *Yom Kippur* are considered as reconciliation, as equally found religion in Christian religion.

Conclusion

Ikpu alu is a traditional religious practice that is still prevalent in Igboland. The practice helps an adherent to Igbo traditional religion to atone for his/her evil deeds. The *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) in Leviticus 16 remains for the Jews a day set apart by Yahweh for their sins. The end is forgiveness and reconciliation. In the New Testament, Christ atoned for the sins of humanity and reconciled it to God. This practice of *ikpu alu* in

Igboland still challenges many Christians. Simple observation indicates that an Igbo Christian believes that anyone who violates the norms of the land (*Omenana*) will never be at rest, for the land always pursues him until the ritual of *ikpu alu* is performed. This practice should help Christians to see the necessity of confessing one's sins, the effect of guilt and the need for reconciliation. It should also enable them to better understand the Christian doctrine of reconciliation. This is important since the majority of the Igbo are now Christians. Incorporating Christian process of reconciliation into the Igbo ritual of *ikpu alu* or vice versa will go a long way in socializing an Igbo into being an authentic Igbo who is a Christian and not cut off from his Igbo roots.

References

- Afigbo, A. (1981). *Ropes of sand: Studies in Igbo history and culture*. Nsukka: University Press.
- Anyanwu, H.O. (2008). Sin, reconciliation and development in Igboland. In M.I. Okwueze (Ed.). *Religion and societal development: Contemporary Nigerian perspective* (pp. 275-286). Isolo: Merit.
- Arazu, R. (1994). *Covenant broken and reconciliation: Sin in salvation history*. Enugu: Liz.
- Arinze, F. (1970). *Sacrifice in Igbo religion*. Ibadan: University Press.
- Arinze, F. A. (2008). *Sacrifice in Igbo traditional religion*. Onitsha: St. Stephen's.
- Bacchiocchi, S. (2012). Retrieved March 18, 2019 from <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/booksfestivals-2/4.html>.

- Dosick, W. (1998). *Living Judaism: the complete guide to jewish belief, tradition, and practice*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Fairchild, M. (2002). Day of Atonement. Retrieved March 18, 2012 from http://Christianity.about.com/od/biblefeastsand_holidays/P/dayofatonement.htm.
- Faley, R. J. (1995). Leviticus. In R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer and R. E. Murphy (Eds.). *The new Jerome biblical commentary* (pp. 61 -79). London: Burns and Oates.
- Fuller, L. (1996). *The Pentateuch: Foundations of God's message to the world*. Plateau: ACTS.
- Goldman, A. L. (2000). *Being jewish: The spiritual and cultural practice of Judaism today*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Harrison, R. K. (1980). Leviticus. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary*. London: Interv-Versity.
- Idowu, E. B. (1973). *African traditional religion: A definition*. London: SCM.
- McKenzie, J.L. (2002). *Dictionary of the Bible*. Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation.
- McManus, V. (2005). *The healing power of the sacraments*. Bangalore: St. Pauls.
- Metuh, E. (1999). *God and man in African religion*. Enugu: Snaaps.
- Ngana, U. A, (2010). *Ikpu Alu in Nri and Old Testament Day of Atonement (Lev 16)*. Master of Arts Thesis, NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka.
- Obielosi, D.C. (2017). The lamb of God who takes away the sin of John 1,29 and sacrifice of atonement in the African traditional religion (An exegetico theological reflection). Faculty of Arts Lecture Series, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Uchendu, V, C. (1965). *The Igbo of southeastern Nigeria*. New York: Rine Hart-Winton.

Ikenna L. Umeanolue is a senior lecturer in the Department of Religion and Human Relations, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.