This article examines the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew in the light of Ewe-Ghanaian conflict management model. Theoretically, the article employs a combination of the historical-critical and indigenous mother tongue biblical hermeneutical approaches to explore the implication of the petition for Ewe-Ghanaian Christian spirituality. The main theme of the petition in both Matthew and Luke’s renditions of the petition is forgiveness, which employs a divine-human and human–human formula, with the human–human serving as a form of collateral for the divine-human. Whereas Matthew’s petition carries an eschatological motif that of Luke is viewed in a non-eschatological sense. The article discusses the various theological and hermeneutical positions of the text and dialogically engages the world of the text with the Ewe-Ghanaian conflict resolution model with the view of finding points of continuity and discontinuity, if any. The article argues that divine-human and human–human forgiveness model, and the eschatological and non-eschatological interpretations suggested in both Matthew and Luke, respectively, does not resonate with Ewe-Ghanaian worldview, which perceives conflict from a demonological point of view. Any conflict resolution model that does not take the demonological dimension into consideration cannot be trusted to deliver justice in conflict situations. Thus, the task of the 21st century Ewe-Ghanaian church is to design an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) that resonates with the Ewe-Ghanaian life and thought pattern and is able to deliver justice.

Contribution: Matthew’s rendition of the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer from the perspective of Ewe-Ghanaian conflict resolution model is the focus of this article. The article forms part of the researcher’s contribution to the academic knowledge on the Lord’s Prayer and inspires the use of Mother Tongue Biblical hermeneutics in the development of theological materials for the Ewe-Ghanaian Christian communities in Ghana and Togo.

Keywords: the Lord’s Prayer; Ewe libation prayer; Ewe cosmology; Ewe demonology; Ewe-Ghanaian conflict resolution model; Alternative Dispute Resolution model.

Introduction

The fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer forms part of the second half of Matthew and Luke’s renditions. However, Luke differs from Matthew by replacing the phrase τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν in Matthew with τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν, which is said to be rendered as sins or debts in Aramaic. He then ended the second part of the petition with ἀφῆκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν as against ἀφήκας ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν in Luke instead of Matthew’s past perfect tense ἔδωκας ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν. The use of the present tense in both Matthew and Luke respectively, carries the aorist present form of the verb ἀφέως. Some scholars posit that the use of τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν in Matthew’s rendition as against τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν in Luke instead of Matthew’s past perfect tense ἔδωκας ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν, suggests that a ‘social debt’ was what the phrase really meant (Brown 2004:24; Keener 1999:139; Plummer 1896:297). In other words, forgiveness of sins is viewed in the light of debts and its cancellation. Thus, sin is forgiven in the same manner as the cancellation of debt, which cannot be redeemed (Mt 18:23–27), but the use of the aorist again
in Matthew suggests a one-time forgiveness implying that the petition is eschatological in essence, that is, forgiveness of debts or sins on the day of God’s judgement (Brown 1961:199).

Nonetheless, the petition in Matthew’s and Luke’s account is conditional for divine pardon for debts, which is predicated on human pardon for debts/sins (Allen 1907:59–60; Aune 2013:65; Luz 2007:322). In other words, the two Christian communities – Matthew’s and Luke’s – are made to understand that human–human forgiveness must always precede divine-human forgiveness. The parallels to both the divine-human and human–human forgiveness are evident in the Kaddish, Shemoneh Esreh, Jewish Wisdom and rabbinic literature, and deuterocanonical documents (Abraham 1917:140, 145–147; Allen 1907:60; Luz 2007:322). Thus, forgiveness in both eschatological and non-eschatological frames is divine and human with the human serving as sort of collateral for the divine.

This article followed three others that have interpreted the Lord’s Prayer from the perspectives of Ewe-Ghanaian eschatology, demonology and in the light of Ewe-Ghanaian predicament (Sakitey & Van Eck 2020; Van Eck & Sakitey 2019a, 2019b). However, this study seeks to examine the fifth petition in Matthean and Lucan accounts of the Lord’s Prayer within Ewe-Ghanaian conflict management frame. The article employed a combination of exegetical and indigenous mother tongue biblical hermeneutical approach to assess the implication of the phrase καὶ ἄϕες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα and τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν in the fifth petition of Matthew’s and Luke’s renditions of the Lord’s Prayer, respectively, for Ewe-Ghanaian Christian spirituality today. The exegetical approach was employed to explore what the text meant to its original recipients by means of historical and literary analytical tools (Fee & Strauss 2003:23–31; Porter & Clarke 2007:3–18). The indigenous mother tongue biblical approach involves the use of a constructive dialogue between biblical texts and their translations into various languages, such as Ewe taking cognisance of the Sitze im Leben [situation in life] that governs them, as well as their Wirkungsgeschichte [history of effect/influence] and current practical application (Ekem 2007:77; Kuwornu-Adjaottor 2012:11–15).

This approach overlaps with Loba-Mkole’s (2007) intercultural exegesis because both approaches aim at a dialogical reconstruction between the source culture and the receptor culture (Mahlangu & Grobbelaar 2016:99–102). The mother tongue approach to biblical interpretation, as Ekem argues, is likely to shape the future of Biblical Studies in Africa. The importance of dialogical exegesis to biblical studies in Africa, he asserts, involves:

- an examination of texts from a cross-cultural hermeneutical perspective, whereby the biblical and other world-views (e.g. African) are brought face to face with each other on the principle of reciprocal challenge (intercultural/cross-cultural hermeneutics)
- dialogue between the translated texts and their ‘origins’ with the view to ascertaining their points of convergence and divergence and their impact on the community of faith (inter-textual dialogue)
- bringing the insights of the preceding points to bear on the development of context-sensitive Bible study notes and commentaries (applied hermeneutics).

This article used hermeneutics in its narrow sense of elucidating the text’s meaning to the Ewe-Ghanaian context whilst exegesis is used to explore the world of the text. The exegetical and hermeneutical methods are applied in the article as follows:

- the introduction attempts a lexical inquiry into καὶ ἄϕες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα and τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν in Matthew’s and Luke’s accounts of the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, respectively
- this is followed by a historical interpretation and theologies of καὶ ἄϕες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα and τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν from the patristic era to the Reformation era
- an in-depth analysis of the existing Ewe translations in order to correct any discrepancies in translation
- comparison between the forgiveness model in the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer and conflict resolution model in Ewe cosmology
- use of interviews, Bible study sessions and Ewe cosmic prayer texts into the discussion with the express purpose of blending indigenous knowledge with the academic, thereby bridging the gap between academic and grassroots theology
- an assessment of the implication of the petition for Ewe-Ghanaian Christianity.

Interpretations and theologies

Allen (1907:59–60) and Aune (2013:65) have already indicated in the introductory part of this article that the caveat in the petition is indicative of divine pardon for debts/sins predicated on human pardon – a condition which the Kaddish, Amida, Jewish Wisdom and rabbinic literature and deuterocanonical documents have all alluded to (Abraham 1917:140–149; Oesterley 1925:153). The petition, therefore, seems to suggest a kind of ‘golden rule’ on forgiveness – forgive us because we also forgave … (Mt 6:12) and, forgive us because we also forgive … (Lk 11:4). Tertullian (Brown 2004:21–25, 249; Souter 1919:26; Stewart-Sykes 2004:47–48), Origen (Stewart-Sykes 2004:187–190; Woolsey & Ulyatt 1856:108), Cyprian (Stewart-Sykes 2004:81,82), Augustine (Kavanagh 1951:248, 249, 251, 252), Gregory (Graef 1954:13; Stylianopoulos 2003:2,6), all translate ὀφειλήματα (debts) and share its notion as sin. Luther (Lenker 1907:294–296) and Calvin (McNeill 1977:910; Morrison 1972:211) follow the same interpretation and in agreement with their predecessors that sin was what is implied in the use of ὀφειλήματα, and that it is forgiven on the basis of reciprocity. Situating the reciprocity of forgiveness within the context of the

References

http://www.hts.org.za
Reformation, Luther posits that it is the greatest indulgence letter that has ever been issued because it is free of charge. The stance of Clement of Alexandria and the Libertine Christian sect on forgiveness of sins are the same, that is, there is no need to ask for forgiveness of sins (Brown 2004:157–158; McNeill 1977:91–92). The difference between them, however, is that, whereas the Libertines premise their view on the notion that we have already been made perfect already, Clement’s view is based on his lack of knowledge, that is, ignorance is the reason why Christians ask for forgiveness of their sins. For them, once we know that we have already been made perfect, there is no need to pray for forgiveness of sins.

The word ὀφειλήματα, in Matthew’s rendition of the petition, is rendered vodadawo in the missionary translation and ὀφειλέταις in the 1990, 2006 and 2010 versions of the Ewe bible, instead of ὀφείλεις ὀφειλέταις. There are similarities in the translation of the second half of this petition between the 1931 and 2006 versions on one the hand, and 1990 and 2010 versions on the other hand. In the former, both render ἡς καὶ ἡμῶν ἀφήκαν τοῖς ὀφειλεῖς τῶν ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν as sighe alesi miawo há mietsa ke amesiwo daa vo fe mia yiti la ene, literally, in the same manner we also forgive those who ‘dau vo’ against us, whilst the latter render it as abe alesi miawo há mietsa ke amesiwo wo de miawo hã mietsa la ene, literally, in the same manner we have forgiven those who have done ‘vo’ against us. It is obvious that the 1990 and 2010 versions are consistent with the use of ὀφείλεις and ὀφειλέταις in its rendering of ὀφειλήματα and ὀφειλέταις, respectively. In the 1931 and 2006 versions, ὀφειλήματα is rendered vodadawo whilst vodadawo is used to render ὀφειλέταις. Thus, whereas the 1990 and 2010 choose to interpret ὀφειλήματα and ὀφειλέταις as ὀφείλεις and ὀφειλέταις, respectively, the missionary version and Agbeya La (The Living Word) employ the vodadawo/vodadawo and πραττειν/πραττειν formulae, respectively, to render ὀφειλήματα/ὀφειλέταις in Matthew and ἁμαρτίας/ὀφειλέταις. There are similar discrepancies associated with the use of ὀφειλήματα in Matthew and ἁμαρτίας in Luke with its attendant theological and liturgical issues.

Kαι ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν and divine pardon motif in Ewe cosmology

The Ewe concept of forgiveness, unlike its New Testament counterpart, is a complex one. In Ewe-Ghanaian traditional belief system, an offense committed against one’s neighbour also affects the lesser deities and not the Supreme deity as is popularly conceptualised in Ewe as something that is evil or literally bad. The term is actually derived from nu [thing] and υς [to fear]. Nu is something that causes one to fear. Evil, therefore, is the appropriate rendering for Nu. Vodada on the other hand, derived from vo [free/free space], and dada, duplication of da [to throw], is basically the throwing of one’s freedom away or throwing of an object into empty space thereby missing one’s target. The term falls within the semantic domain of dzidada and agedzedze and parallels the Akan and Ga versions of the petition. Thus, ὀφειλήματα in Matthew’s version should be rendered, fewo [debts] and not vodadawo (sins). The Ewe rendering of ὀφειλήματα as νυ ὀφειλέταις or νυ ὀφειλέταις may be as a result of liturgical expediency. This brings the number of versions of the fifth petition in particular and the Lord’s Prayer in general in Ewe-Ghanaian Christianity to three; Matthew, Luke and the liturgical version, with the liturgical rendition gaining popularity over the others. On the impact of the petition in the worship life of the Ewe-Ghanaian Christian, participants in another Bible study discussion with a youth group drive home the seriousness that need to be attached to the petition because it is similar to making a vow to God. It is, therefore, wise not to recite it at all than to do it and not be able to live by it. Thus, petitioning God to forgive one’s sins but practicing the opposite is tantamount to summoning oneself to God. The Ewe rendering of the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew should therefore, be, εἴῃ τοῖς μιαίᾳ ἕνω καὶ, ἐλαβε has miawo há miets ke mia fenilawo, [and forgive us our debts, because we also have forgiven our debtors] or εἴῃ τοῖς μιαίᾳ ἥν καὶ, ἐλαβε has miawo há miets ame siwwo nyfie le miets la tse ke we [and forgive our debts as we have forgiven those who are indebted to us]. Notes are however, necessary to highlight the discrepancies associated with the use of ὀφειλήματα in Matthew and ἁμαρτίας in Luke with its attendant theological and liturgical issues.

---


6.Dzidada or sedsedada is from se [law], dze [up/top] and dada [throwing]. It denotes the throwing of the law out of place or simply flouting traditional norm. Agedzedze from ag [fan palm] and dzedze (cracking), literally, cracking/breaking the fan palm. It carries the same meaning as dzidada.

7.The Alkan (Tw, Akuapem, Mfantew) versions of the Bible translate the fifth petition as na fa yen akan firi yen sereul yede firi won a wade yen akan. The phrases yen [our] akan [debts], and won a [those who] wade yen akan [they owe us]. It also translates nyadzi le and mei ni hene nyadzi le in Ga, suggesting that debt is what is implied in Matthew’s version of the petition.

8.Bible study discussion with EPG youth group, 19 February 2018.

9.Bible study discussion with EPG Presbybters, Lashibi, 24 January 2018. Some participants confess that they do not recite this part of the Lord’s Prayer because they would not like to commit themselves.

---

4 Whilst the sale of indulgence was motivated by fundraising to build St. Peter’s Basilica, God’s forgiveness was graciously and freely given to both the rich and poor without asking for anything in return, see Lenker (1907:295–296). Whilst aiming for the construction of St. Peter’s Basilica was the condition for the offering of indulgence, God’s indulgence in the fifth petition, according to Luther, ‘if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses’. See Matthew 6:14–15 and Lenker (1907:296).

(Meyer 1999:86). Whereas ἁμαρτία denotes failure, being in error or missing the mark, in English, nu is popularly conceptualised in Ewe as something that is evil or literally bad. The term is actually derived from nu [thing] and υς [to fear]. Nu is something that causes one to fear. Evil, therefore, is the appropriate rendering for Nu. Vodada on the other hand, derived from vo [free/free space], and dada, duplication of da [to throw], is basically the throwing of one’s freedom away or throwing of an object into empty space thereby missing one’s target. The term falls within the semantic domain of dzidada and agedzedze and parallels the Akan and Ga versions of the petition. Thus, ὀφειλήματα in Matthew’s version should be rendered, fewo [debts] and not vodadawo (sins). The Ewe rendering of ὀφειλήματα as νυ ὀφειλέταις or νυ ὀφειλέταις may be as a result of liturgical expediency. This brings the number of versions of the fifth petition in particular and the Lord’s Prayer in general in Ewe-Ghanaian Christianity to three; Matthew, Luke and the liturgical version, with the liturgical rendition gaining popularity over the others. On the impact of the petition in the worship life of the Ewe-Ghanaian Christian, participants in another Bible study discussion with a youth group drive home the seriousness that need to be attached to the petition because it is similar to making a vow to God. It is, therefore, wise not to recite it at all than to do it and not be able to live by it. Thus, petitioning God to forgive one’s sins but practicing the opposite is tantamount to summoning oneself to God. The Ewe rendering of the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew should therefore, be, εἴῃ τοῖς μιαίᾳ ἕνω καὶ, ἐλαβε has miawo há miets ke mia fenilawo, [and forgive us our debts, because we also have forgiven our debtors] or εἴῃ τοῖς μιαίᾳ ἥν καὶ, ἐλαβε has miawo há miets ame siwwo nyfie le miets la tse ke we [and forgive our debts as we have forgiven those who are indebted to us]. Notes are however, necessary to highlight the discrepancies associated with the use of ὀφειλήματα in Matthew and ἁμαρτίας in Luke with its attendant theological and liturgical issues.

Kαι ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν and divine pardon motif in Ewe cosmology

The Ewe concept of forgiveness, unlike its New Testament counterpart, is a complex one. In Ewe-Ghanaian traditional belief system, an offense committed against one’s neighbour also affects the lesser deities and not the Supreme deity as...
suggested in the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer. This idea stems from the belief that Maamega, the Supreme deity, dwells in a remote place and thus does not interfere in the affairs of humans. When an individual commits an offense against his or her neighbour, customs demand that an apology is expected to be rendered through a third party who is related to the offender. When this fails, he or she is summoned to the traditional court (Meyer 1999:68). On the one hand, if the offender is found guilty after adjudication, he or she is either made to apologise and pacify the gods and the offended. On the other hand, if the offender refuses to admit the offense, he or she is discharged pending further investigation into the matter. If the investigation confirms the wrongdoing but the offender still refuses to admit it, he or she is then left into the hands of the gods to deal with. The gods then appear to the offender thrice to convict him or her of the offense and if they still deny it, the gods may wipe out the life of the offender and his or her entire family. This is because in Ewe social system, the family is responsible for the actions and/or inactions of an individual. This approach to justice stems from the Ewe cosmic principle that the house of a thief is not burnt outright; it is destroyed gradually beginning from the roof. 

Another model of conflict resolution and prevention of provocative behaviours finds expression in Ewe libation prayer offered during an annual self-purification/cleansing ritual meal known as da ne man ko onu da, from da ne [stomach], ko ko [cleansing], and onu onu [meal]. The prayer reads:

E, amegbetewo mienne, mia davao, 
_eye amewo tso woada vo de mia tso._

Mielea ame de lama o, miawo mietsa nuwo kena.
Mielea ame de lama o lo, mi tabgibuwo, mi mamawo, 
_mielea ame de lama o, mia yutse se ma mie do na mi ya me._

Gake ne miawo mie dzee le wo dze, 
_eyi wobe yewo maa tso ke ki o la, fâle ele wogbo._

Njadja desiaje yake ava mia mi me, _de mia xe me._

Miaowo yee mia wo xado. Mixe mi na njadjaowo na mi.

Treatment of the libator, in petitioning the ancestors, acknowledges that they are humans and are susceptible to wrongdoing, that is, ‘amegetewo mienne [we are humans], _ma davao amewo tso: woada vo de mia tso._’ [we may sin against people and they may as well sin against us]. However, they pray for the assistance of the ancestors in forgiving their offenders [Ne wawawo davao de mia tso, mia deo gbe da nawo be mia kpeo mia tso be mia ts o ko], with the sole motivation that they [the offended] have been instructed by their forebears not to harbour any resentment against anyone [ni lea ame de dawo lo, mia tso guwawo, mia mamawo, mia lea ame de dawo o, mia yutse se ma mie do na mi ye me]. On the contrary, if they offend others and they refuse to let go, so be it, [gake ne miawo mi mie dzee le wo dze_ _eye wobe yewo maa tso ke ki o la, fâle ele wogbo]. The main purpose of the petition is to unite individuals and clans within a community employing a tried and tested traditional conflict resolution mechanism thereby forging social cohesion (Kobia 2016:1113). When clans come together once every year, the local court of the clan sits to arbitrate conflicts that have divided them. After the adjudication process is completed, water is poured in a calabash and the ‘herb of unity’ is dipped into it. Prayer is then offered, after which every member of the clan is invited to drink from the calabash and wash his or her face with the unity herb solution, starting with the elders. By drinking the water and washing the face, one is essentially saying that he or she has let go of every resentment against the other and a self-assurance that indeed the ‘stomach is clean’. After the ritual, a sumptuous meal is prepared and enjoyed together. In the event of any hypocritical disposition on the part of any individual, the person’s belly swells up resulting in his or her death. The worse form of punishment for refusing to partake in the ritual was ostracism. This ritual of drinking from the same cup symbolising unity and reconciliation amongst parties engaged in conflict is also known as tukpilodo in other Ewe communities. Thus, there is a sharp contrast drawn between the conflict resolution model in Ewe cosmology and the model prescribed in the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer and this has implication(s) for Ewe-Ghanaian Christian spirituality.

You are our stronghold.
Prevent all the temptations for us.
No temptation should lead us into sin.
When we go to the market, let us make good sales.
When we go to farm, let us have good harvest.
Then when we cross over to the other side of the Nile,[12] help us to come to you in peace.

In the given prayer, the libator, in petitioning the ancestors, acknowledges that they are humans and are susceptible to wrongdoing, that is, ‘amegetewo mienne [we are humans], _ma davao amewo tso: woada vo de mia tso._’ [we may sin against people and they may as well sin against us]. However, they pray for the assistance of the ancestors in forgiving their offenders [Ne wawawo davao de mia tso, mia deo gbe da nawo be mia kpeo mia tso be mia ts o ko], with the sole motivation that they [the offended] have been instructed by their forebears not to harbour any resentment against anyone [ni lea ame de dawo lo, mia tso guwawo, mia mamawo, mia lea ame de dawo o, mia yutse se ma mie do na mi ye me]. On the contrary, if they offend others and they refuse to let go, so be it, [gake ne miawo mi mie dzee le wo dze_ _eye wobe yewo maa tso ke ki o la, fâle ele wogbo]. The main purpose of the petition is to unite individuals and clans within a community employing a tried and tested traditional conflict resolution mechanism thereby forging social cohesion (Kobia 2016:1113). When clans come together once every year, the local court of the clan sits to arbitrate conflicts that have divided them. After the adjudication process is completed, water is poured in a calabash and the ‘herb of unity’ is dipped into it. Prayer is then offered, after which every member of the clan is invited to drink from the calabash and wash his or her face with the unity herb solution, starting with the elders. By drinking the water and washing the face, one is essentially saying that he or she has let go of every resentment against the other and a self-assurance that indeed the ‘stomach is clean’. After the ritual, a sumptuous meal is prepared and enjoyed together. In the event of any hypocritical disposition on the part of any individual, the person’s belly swells up resulting in his or her death. The worse form of punishment for refusing to partake in the ritual was ostracism. This ritual of drinking from the same cup symbolising unity and reconciliation amongst parties engaged in conflict is also known as tukpilodo in other Ewe communities. Thus, there is a sharp contrast drawn between the conflict resolution model in Ewe cosmology and the model prescribed in the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer and this has implication(s) for Ewe-Ghanaian Christian spirituality.

Καὶ ἄρες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφελήματα ἡμῶν
and conflict resolution in Ewe-Ghanaian Christianity
The fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer has been a model prayer for settling disputes in the Ewe-Ghanaian church and is often referred to whenever conflict situation arises. The difficulty with the petition as indicated here is that it discontinues with existing Ewe-Ghanaian dispute resolution model prior to the advent of Christianity. Colonialism has

12. The language of this prayer suggests that the Ewe people have lived along the Nile before, and that they were carried across the Nile for burial.
also contributed to the conflict resolution options with the introduction of the Court trial system, breaking the monopoly of the indigenous and Christian models. The adjudication of disputes in a Court of competent jurisdiction is common amongst the elite and middle-class Christian. Those at the lower stratum of society invariably resort to the indigenous court system where disputes are settled through traditional Chiefs, Elders, Heads of Families and Clans, and priests/priestesses who are in charge of local shrines. There is also the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), a contemporary dispute resolution mechanism stipulated in the National Constitution of the Republic of Ghana. All that an individual needs to do under the indigenous conflict resolution model is to summon a family member or neighbour to their Head of Clan or Family. The local court as already explained earlier sits after that water is poured in a calabash and the unity herb dipped into it. A libation prayer is then offered after which an invitation is thrown to every member of the family or clan to drink from the calabash. They all wash their faces with the herb solution as sign of forgiveness and reconciliation. The reconciliation process is then climaxed with a love feast where all parties recline at a table and eat from a common bowl. It is believed that any member of the family or clan who goes through the ritual hypocritically would have his or her belly swollen up leading to loss of life of the individual. The worse form of punishment for refusing to undergo the said ritual is ostracism. In the event of a stalemate, however, the Chief’s Palace becomes the last resort in resolving disagreements between two individuals, families/clans, and communities. Conflicts are also resolved by spiritual means where an individual is summoned to a shrine and the case arbitrated through divination. A case in point is copy of a summon notice served by a priest of a shrine over land arbitrated through divination. A case in point is copy where an individual is summoned to a shrine and the case arbitrated through divination. The content of the letter reads:

Sir,

Mr [name of plaintiff withheld] from [name of place withheld] has summoned the following people; [names of defendants withheld] to our fetish priest Mr [name of priest withheld] from [name of community withheld].

Charge: That these people are claiming his land from him. The land is a property to his father, and he [name of plaintiff withheld] is working on the land for years now. Mr. [name of plaintiff withheld] is also claiming that, his father’s property belongs to him, and he is working on the land for period of years now.

Therefore, [names of defendants withheld] have to appear before the fetish priest and explain their charges. A damage of Five Million Cedis (5,000,000.00) Old Ghana Cedis, will be charged when guilty. Bring your witnesses.13

Date of hearing: 29 September 2009 Tuesday.

Time: 8:00 am prompt.

The Schism that occurred amongst members of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana in 1991 is a typical example of an African church resorting to the Court trial system for settlement of internal disputes. The conflict that began as disagreement between members of the same family, spread like wildfire and ended up in splitting the church with its attendant acrimony and vilification (Ansre 1997:137–148; Atakro 2020:30–80). It all started with disagreement between members of the church and leadership over the legality or otherwise of the church’s Constitution used in electing leaders into office (Ansre 1997:132–138; Atakro 2020:12–29). The second stage of the conflict was when the very Constitution under contention was actually used to re-elect the head of the church into office for a third term, heightening tension between the newly elected leaders and disgruntled members of the church, calling on the leadership to step down (Ansre 1997:135; Atakro 2020:50–54).14 The tension had heightened to the extent that the disgruntled members began raising doctrinal, liturgical and financial administrative issues as additional justification for their call for the newly elected administration to step down (Ansre 1997:135, 137; Atakro 2020:51–52). Steps were taken by both parties and eminent persons to resolve the conflict amicably but ended in an impasse (Ansre 1997: 135–136; Atakro 2020:67–75). The disgruntled members then truncated the reconciliation process and rushed to a Court of competent jurisdiction for interpretation of the legality or otherwise of the church’s Constitution and the Court ruled in their favour (Ansre 1997:138; Atakro 2020:55). Excerpts of the ruling are as follows:

[7]that the 1979 Constitution was the only valid constitution documented within the Church; that the 1979 Constitution was never amended and that any purported amendment was without effect that the so-called 1980 Constitution was a forged document and must not be considered at all, that the nomination and election of the second defendant Rev. Dzobo for a third term was a nullity and without effect. (Ansre 1997:140; Atakro 2020:58)

The defendant then filed an application for stay of execution of the judgement but was thrown out. He then moved to Court of Appeal and there the judges unanimously ruled in favour of the defendant. Here is excerpt of the ruling:

I find that there was a long standing practice of Moderators and Synod Clerks serving more than two terms of office. The Rt. Rev. Dzobo was not the first Moderator to have been elected to a third term of office. Since the respondents failed to prove the case that at as January, 1988, the constitutional document of the 1979 was the valid and binding constitution of the E.P. Church, the trial judge ought to have dismissed their action. Accordingly, I will allow the appeal and dismiss plaintiff’s action. (Ansre 1997:142; Atakro 2020:67)

Although the legal battle have been settled by the ruling of the Appeal Court, it ended up creating a kind of constitutional and by extension leadership vacuum in the minds of many, especially the disgruntled members of the church. An attempt by the disgruntled members of the church to fill this vacuum caused them to appoint new leaders for the church whilst the

13 This summoned letter was written on 21 September 2009 by the secretary to the fetish priest of [name of shrine withheld] located at [name of village withheld], a village in the Northern part of the Volta Region of Ghana with the District Pastor of [name of church withheld] also a town located at the Northern sector of the Volta Region of Ghana in copy.

14 In the 1975 draft Constitution, one is said to be eligible for re-election as Moderator or Clerk of Synod two terms of 4 years each whereas in the 1980 revised version is undefined, that is, once the person is capable. Thus, in the 1980 Constitution, one could become a Moderator or Clerk of Synod for life (Ansre 1997:133).
The given incidents of conflict and its management in the Ewe-Ghanaian church make a clear case for the church’s inability to deal with its own internal bickering. It also betrays the lack of confidence in the Ewe-Ghanaian church’s internal conflict resolution mechanism. The church’s approach to resolving its own internal conflicts has not changed since the advent of Christianity on Eweland. The divine-human and human–human pardon formula taught by Jesus and practiced by the two communities of Matthew and Luke, is premised on the notion that one’s debt/sin can only be cancelled if he or she willingly cancelled the debts/sins of others. In other words, God holds our debts/sins against us and prefers punishment of both eschatological and non-eschatological consequences on us if we also hold the sins of others against them. Matthew’s community also develops yet another model for handling conflict situation amongst members of the community similar to what pertains in Ewe indigenous model. In this model, when conflict situation arises, it must first be handled between the two parties. A third party is involved if the two parties fail to resolve their disagreements. The intervention of a higher authority – the church – is sort after all avenues have been exhausted. And if that also fails, the offender is branded as an infidel and probably excommunicated from the community – an exclusive conflict resolution model, which is no longer relevant in the church today because of the proliferation of churches and the existence of other options available to the church in general and its members in particular in conflict situations (Mt 18:15–17). The gap between Matthew’s and Luke’s conflict resolution models on one the hand, and conflict resolution model in Ewe-Ghanaian Christianity on the other hand is a demonological gap. In other words, conflict in Ewe-Ghanaian popular Christianity is viewed through demonological lens, that is, from the perspective of spiritual warfare between good and evil. Conflict is therefore seen as a threat to the destiny of the individual, family and community at large (Van Eck & Sakitey 2019b:175, 182). Any conflict resolution model that does not take the demonological dimension into consideration may therefore not be successful and may end up dividing the church than uniting it. The task of the 21st century Ewe-Ghanaian church is to design a more robust, just and trustworthy ADR model that resonates with the life and thinking pattern of converts.

Concluding remarks

The exegetical discussion of the fifth petition in Matthew’s and Luke’s renditions of the Lord’s Prayer places the main theme of the petition, that is, forgiveness, in eschatological and non-eschatological frames, respectively. Thus, forgiveness, in both eschatological and non-eschatological sense, is divine-human and human–human, with the human–human serving as collateral for the divine-human. However, neither the eschatological nor the non-eschatological motifs embedded in both petitions continuous with Ewe-Ghanaian conflict resolution model, which is demonological in nature. In Ewe-Ghanaian traditional belief system, an offense committed against one’s neighbour affects the lesser deities and not the Supreme God. This notion stems from the belief that Mawunga, the Supreme God, dwells in a remote place and thus does not interfere in the affairs of humans. The involvement of the lesser deities in any conflict management situation calls for pacification rites to appease the gods in anticipation that they would always deliver justice in favour of the offended and punish the offender – a formula which is apparently lacking in both Matthew’s and Luke’s petitions. Thus, conflict in Ewe-Ghanaian popular Christianity is understood from a demonological point of view and is deemed to have an effect on the destinies of the parties involved. Any conflict resolution model that does not take into account the demonological dimension cannot be trusted to deliver justice and would therefore lead the aggrieved parties to explore more effective and efficient options to addressing the grievances. The task of the 21st century Ewe-Ghanaian church is to design its own ADR model, which must resonate with the life and thought pattern of its converts and can be trusted to deliver justice.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors’ contributions

D.S and E.V.K. contributed to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results and to the writing of the manuscript.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.
Data availability
The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

Disclaimer
The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of any affiliated agency of the authors.

References
Fee, G.D. & Strauss, D., 2003, How to read the bible for all its worth, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI.
Kavanagh, D.J. (transl.), 1951, Saint Augustine: Commentary on the Lord’s sermon on the Mount with seventeen related sermons, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, DC.
Sakitey, D. & Van Eck, E., 2020, ‘Τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον (Mat. 6:11; Lk.11:3): The lord’s prayer and an African predicament – The Ewe-Ghanaian context in focus’, HTS Teologiese/Theological Studies 76(4), a5981. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i4.5981
Souter, A. (transl.), 1919, Tertullian’s treatises concerning prayer, concerning baptism, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London.
Stylianopoulos, T.G. (transl.), 2003, Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Five homilies on The Lord’s Prayer, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, New York, NY.
Van Eck, E. & Sakitey, D., 2019b, ‘Ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου: Interpreting the Lord’s Prayer (Mt 6:10a) in the light of Ewe-Ghanaian eschatological vision’, HTS Teologiese/Theological Studies 75(3), a5207. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i3.5207