

Καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν ... the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:12, Lk 11:4) and dispute resolution in the African church: The Ewe-Ghanaian context and perspective

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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 ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν, which is said to be rendered as sins or debts in Aramaic. He then ended the second part of the petition with ἀφίομεν παντὶ ὀφείλοντι ἡμῖν (Scott 1951:25). The use of the present tense καὶ γὰρ αὐτοὶ ἀφίομεν παντὶ ὀφείλοντι ἡμῖν in Luke instead of Matthew's past perfect tense ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν in the second half of the petition makes his idea of forgiveness an ongoing process instead of Matthew's one-time forgiveness. The word ἄφες in the first half of the petition in both Matthew and Luke is aorist imperative of the verb ἀφήμι [to give up, to cancel, to remit, to pardon]. The word ἀφήκαμεν in the second half of Matthew's petition ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν carries the aorist present form of the verb ἀφήμι. Some scholars posit that the use of τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν μὴ μολύμεθα in Matthew's rendition as against τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν [our sins] in Lukan's account 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

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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 accounts is conditional petition 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*, *Shemôneh 'Esreh*, Jewish Wisdom and rabbinic literature, and deuterocanonical documents (Abraham 1917:140, 145–147; Allen 1907:60; Luz 2007:322).¹ 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 ἄφεσις 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)

1. Proverbs 24:17–18, Ecclesiasticus XXVIII. 3–5, *Test. Gad.* vi. 1.

- dialogue between the translated texts and their 'originals' 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 ἄφεσις 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 ἄφεσις 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),² Origen (Stewart-Sykes 2004:187–190; Woolsey & Ulyat 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)³ 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

2. The following examples of Scriptural passages were used by Tertullian to buttress his point: Hebrew 4:15; Matthew 6:12; Ezekiel 18:32; Matthew 18:21, 22, 27, 30; Luke 6:37, 12:58, 59.

3. For further explanation on this petition, see Hay (1892:255–256).

Reformation, Luther posits that it is the greatest indulgence letter that has ever been issued because it is free of charge.⁴ 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 1977:91–912). The difference between them, however, is that, whereas the Libertines premise their view on the notion that we have 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 *nuwo* in the 1990, 2006 and 2010 versions of the Ewe bible, instead of *fewo/fenyinyiwo*. 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 ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν as *sigbe alesi miawo hã mietsɔna kea amesiwo daa vo de mia nyiti la ene*, literally, in the same manner we also forgive those who 'daa vo' against us, whilst the latter render it as *abe alesi miawo hã mietsɔe ke amesiwo wo vo de mia nyiti 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 *nuwo* and *νωλωwo* in its rendering of ὀφειλήματα and ὀφειλέταις, respectively. In the 1931 and 2006 versions, ὀφειλήματα is rendered *nuwo* whilst *vodalawo* is used to render ὀφειλέταις. Thus, whereas the 1990 and 2010 choose to interpret ὀφειλήματα and ὀφειλέταις as *nuwo* and *νωλωwo*, respectively, the missionary version and *Agbenya La* (The Living Word) employ the *vodadawo/vodadawo* and *nuwo/vodadawo* formulae, respectively, to render ὀφειλήματα/ὀφειλέταις in Matthew and ἀμαρτίας/ὀφείλονται in Luke. Again, the missionary and 2006 translators make use of Luke's continuous tense of forgiveness instead of Matthew's aorist tense. Liturgically, however, the Ewe mission church uses a blend of the 1931 and 2006 renditions in the recitation of the petitions in question.

The use of *nuwo* to translate ὀφειλήματα and ὀφειλέταις in the 1990 and 2010 versions and *vodadawo/vodadawo* and *nuwo/vodada* in the missionary (1931) and *Agbenya La* (2006) versions of the Ewe Bible, respectively, is worth exploring. On the difference between the two terms – *nuwo* and *vodada* – participants in a Bible study discussion suggest that both terms denote sin but the former denotes sin that is committed knowingly whilst the latter is sin that is committed unknowingly. Meyer's (1999:85–111) investigation into Ewe concept of evil reveals that translating sin as *nuwo* is inappropriate because the two are conceptualised differently

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 almsgiving 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 ἀμαρτία denotes failure, being in error or missing the mark, in English, *nuwo* is popularly conceptualised in Ewe as something that is evil or literally bad.⁵ The term is actually derived from *nu* [thing] and *vo* [to fear]. *Nuwo* is something that causes one to fear. Evil, therefore, is the appropriate rendering for *Nuwo*. *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 *agɔdzedze*⁶ and parallels the *Akan* and *Ga* versions of the petition.⁷ Thus, ὀφειλήματα in Matthew's version should be rendered, *fewo* [debts] and not *vodadawo* (sins). The Ewe rendering of ὀφειλήματα as *νωwo* or *nuwo* 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.⁸ Thus, petitioning God to forgive one's sins but practicing the opposite is tantamount to summoning oneself to God.⁹ The Ewe rendering of the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew should therefore, be, *eye tsɔ miafe fewo ke mi, elabena miawo hã mietsɔe ke mia fenyilawo*, [and forgive us our debts, because we also have forgiven our debtors] or *eye tsɔ miafe fewo ke mi abe alesi miawo ha mietsɔ ame siwo nyife le miasi la to ke woe* [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 ἀμαρτίας in Luke with its attendant theological and liturgical issues.

Καὶ 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

5. In an interview with Rev. Fred Amevenku (13 September 2017), *nuwo* is the generic name for sin whilst *vodada* is an example of *nuwo*.

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

7. The *Akan* (*Twi*, *Akuapem*, *Mfantse*) versions of the Bible translate the fifth petition as *na fa yen aka firi yen senea yede firi won a wode yen aka*. The phrases *yen* [our] *aka* [debts], and *won a* [those who] *wode yen aka* [they owe us]. It also translates *nyɔdzi le* and *mei ni hiewo nyɔdzi le* in *Ga*, suggesting that debt is what is implied in Matthew's version of the petition.

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

9. Bible study discussion with EPCG Presbyters, 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.

suggested in the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer. This idea stems from the belief that *Mawuga*, 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.¹⁰

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 *domekɔklɔ nuɖuɖu*, from *dome* [stomach], *kɔklɔ* [cleansing], and *nuɖuɖu* [meal]. The prayer reads:

E, amegbetɔwo míenye, mía davo,
eye amewo tse woada vo ɖe mía ɲu.
Ne woawo davo ɖe mía ɲua,
mie doa gbe ɖa nawo be mia kpeɖe mía ɲu be mía tɔɔ kewo.
Míelea ame ɖe dome o, mía wo mietsɔ nuwɔwo kena.
Míelea ame ɖe dome o lo, mía tɔgbuiwo, mía mamawo,
mielea ame ɖe dome o, mía ɲutɔ se ma mie ɖo na mí ye ma.
Gake ne mía wo mie dzee le wo dzi,
eye wobe yewo maa tɔɔ ke mí o la, fãã ele wogbo.
Nuɖiaɖia ɖesiaɖe yike ava mía mɔ me, ɖe mía xe mɔ ne.
Miawoe nye mía wo wodo. Mixe mɔ na nuɖiaɖiawo na mí.
Nuɖiaɖia aɖeke ne gava afo vo mí o.
Ne mí yi asigbe la, asi nenyɔ, ne mí yi agble la agble nenyɔ.
Ekema gbeke gbe mía tɔsogbe aɖo ɖe,
mia kpe ɖe mianju ne mía ɖo mia gbɔ le ɲutifafa me.¹¹

[Yes, we are humans, we may offend people,
Others may also offend us.
If they do offend us,
we prayer that you help us to forgive them.
We don't 'keep a person in our 'stomach',
we forgive sins.
We don't keep a person in our stomach at all,
our fathers, our mothers,
we don't keep a person in our stomach,
that was the instruction you gave us.
But if we offend them and they would not forgive us,
so be it, it is up to them.
Every temptation that would come our way,
prevent them from coming.]

10. Bible study discussion with church elders at EPCG, Lashibi, 24 January 2018.

11. Interview with H.K. Gbotsyo (Rev), 24 September 2015.

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, '*amegbetɔwo míenye* [we are humans], *mía davo amewo tse woada vo ɖe mía ɲu*' [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 woawo davo ɖe mía ɲua, mie doa gbe ɖa nawo be mia kpeɖe mía ɲu be mía tɔɔ kewo*], with the sole motivation that they [the offended] have been instructed by their forebearers not to harbour any resentment against anyone [*míelea ame ɖe dome o lo, mía tɔgbuiwo, mía mamawo, mielea ame ɖe dome o, mía ɲutɔ se ma mie ɖo na mí ye ma*]. On the contrary, if they offend others and they refuse to let go, so be it, [*gake ne mía wo mie dzee le wo dzi eye wobe yewo maa tɔɔ ke mí o la, fãã 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 and 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 *nukpidodo* 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 ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα 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 litigation. 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

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.

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:

[T]hat 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

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).

elected officers were still in office. The appointment of new leaders to forcibly take over the administration of the church from the elected officers resulted in a split (Ansre 1997: 141–143; Atakro 2020:75–78). The ripple effects – acrimony and trading of insults, betrayal of relationships, loss of lives and property, loss of faith in the church and its leadership, migration of a section of the membership to other Christian denominations and probably other faiths (Ansre 1997:147; Atakro 2020:78–80). All this happened within the space of 3 years (1988–1991), following the re-election of the head of church in question in 1988 and subsequent resumption of office in January 1989. The Court trial process which was intended to settle a dispute amongst members of the same faith community ended up dividing them with pockets of lawsuits pending over ownership of church property till date.

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 is 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 *Mawuga*, 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.

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Authors' contributions

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