

# The Influence of Akan Traditional Religious Conceptions on the Reception of Hamartiology of First John by a Selection of Charismatic Preachers of Ghana<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The general Christian tradition in Ghana has historically attracted local and cultural views to itself that have enriched its universal nature and strengthened it to address different doctrines in different cultural and religious contexts. This has, however, led to misconceptions in the interpretation of some Christian doctrines such as the doctrine of sin in 1 John. This study employs a tailored method for reception analysis to analyse the reception of 1 John's hamartiology by a selection of Ghanaian charismatic preachers. It discovers that both for better and for worse, Akan Traditional Religious (ATR) concepts of sin influence the reception of the hamartiology of 1 John by charismatic preachers in Ghana. This finding is in itself not surprising. However, the precise manner and extent to which the influences flow have immense implications for the communication of the Gospel in Ghana. The reception-analytical method developed from the philosophical framework of reception theory enables the study to establish that ATR concepts create a horizon of expectations for Akan charismatic preachers in Ghana that influence their reception of the doctrine of sin in 1 John. From the comparison between the doctrine of sin in 1 John and the horizon of expectations of charismatic preachers in Ghana, it is apparent that to a large extent they have succeeded in contextualising the Christian message. In the process, however, traditional Akan cosmology, both for better and for worse, influences their reception of the doctrine of sin in 1 John.

## Keywords

Reception; Akan traditional religion; horizon of expectations; uses and gratification; Charismatic; hamartiology; 1 John.

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## 1. Introduction

Christian tradition in Ghana has attracted to itself local and cultural views that have enriched its universal nature and strengthened it to address different doctrines of the Bible. This enrichment serves as the undercurrents for the current stream of historically younger Pentecostal independent or charismatic churches. Vicariously, they possess intrinsic characteristics that are the product of cultural influences. This has sometimes led to their failure to adequately analyse, understand, and express some Christian doctrines such as the doctrine of sin.

Charismatic churches in Ghana may be classified as part of the neo-Pentecostal movement or the 'third wave' of the Pentecostal Christian tradition. This began with the 'first wave', which is Pentecostalism, and moved to the 'second wave' by the evangelical charismatic movement. A distinctive feature of charismatic churches in Ghana is that they keenly appropriate electronic media to become accessible (Meyer 2004:466). Live church services are beamed nationally and across the world through radio, television, and online platforms. For example, during the 'Greater Works Conference' of the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) in 2018, the five-day conference was beamed on Facebook live and on myjoyonline platforms. Daily devotional messages are also posted on WhatsApp platforms. Charismatic churches are accordingly extremely influential in the national consciousness. Music is often given a prominent role in their liturgy. Hackett (1998:263) puts forth that music is one of the most important means by which charismatic churches in Ghana have constructed their identity. Many commercial gospel music performers are deeply rooted in charismatic churches and their music ministries have become part of the charismatic church 'brand' (Carl 2015:48). For example, gospel-music singer Gifty Osei was married to Prophet Prince Elisha Osei, a charismatic preacher, and Head Pastor of Blessed Generation Chapel International in Tema. Prophet Elisha Osei embodies the gifts of healing, teaching, and deliverance. The music videos of Florence Obinim, wife of Bishop Daniel Obinim of God's Way International Ministries occupy much of the airtime of the church's television channel, OB TV (Carl 2015:48).

Charismatic churches in Ghana have thus become very influential. They own universities and pre-tertiary schools. International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) owns Central University (CU), a prominent private tertiary institution in Ghana with a student population of over six thousand. The General Overseer of ICGC, Dr Mensah Otabil, is the chancellor of CU. Another prominent charismatic church in Ghana is the Christian Action Faith Church (CAFC). The

church owns Dominion University College (DUC) and the leader of CAFC, Archbishop Duncan-Williams, is the chancellor. Charismatic churches in Ghana attract many people from all walks of life to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Many prominent politicians in Ghana fellowship in these churches. The immediate past president of Ghana, Mr John Mahama, is, for example, a member of the Assemblies of God Church. Thus, any phenomenon responsible for their hermeneutics has wide-ranging implications for the Gospel—the direction of the church and inevitably also world Christianity.

There are reasons to believe that charismatic churches in Ghana are influenced by traditional concepts. Akrong (2011:32) points out how their soteriological assumptions, as well as social context, underlie their hermeneutical appropriations of Christian doctrines. This is unsurprising as the social context makes traditional notions prominent and important for social identity in Ghana. This, however, opens the potential for syncretistic influences. For example, as in traditional religion, charismatic Christians tend to acknowledge that beliefs and practices inform every facet of human life. The prominent role that the concept of the good life plays as part of its soteriology is for instance critical in this assessment (Quayesi-Amakye 2017:112). In many of these churches, just as it is in ATR, the realisation of the good life features prominently as the goal of salvation (Quayesi-Amakye 2017:116). Adherents, therefore, deploy the spiritual resources of Christianity to overcome the problems impeding their realisation of the good life. In the process of these interactions, it appears that some charismatic preachers have become susceptible to influences from Akan traditional religion. Another example is that, just as in traditional religion, many charismatic preachers and their followers perceive that setbacks are caused by evil spirits (Akrong 2011:31).

In broadly general terms, the main problem investigated in this study is to establish the precise way such parallels influence the reception of particular biblical doctrines. In specific terms, the investigation restricted itself to the hamartiology of 1 John, given the richness and comprehensive nature of the doctrine in the letter. Thus, the question posed is to what degree, for better or for worse, do ATR concepts of sin influence the reception of the hamartiology of 1 John by charismatic preachers of Ghana? The hypothesis of the study is that the reception of the hamartiology of 1 John by Ghanaian charismatic preachers has been adversely affected by beliefs and practices of Akan traditional, religious, and cultural conceptions. This is argued using reception analysis. The choice of reception theory for this study is based on the presupposition that

it enables the analysis of the link between the original hearers and future readers of 1 John. Despite its rich content on sin, there are no published studies in relation to the reception of the doctrine of sin in 1 John by Ghanaian charismatic preachers. This makes this study important not just for shedding light on the hermeneutical processes of influential preachers of contemporary Christianity, but also for establishing the exact contours of the biblical doctrine itself. The study then combines insights from hermeneutics, biblical theology, reception analysis, and contemporary Christian praxes. In some respects, then, this study takes up the challenge by Bediako to African scholars that they should seek to contextualise Christian theology in the current settings.

In the remaining sections of this article, we summarise the key features of the methodology employed, set out the exegesis on the doctrine of sin in 1 John, summarise the findings of the empirical investigation and provide some reflections on their implications.

## 2. Summary of Reception Theory

Reception theory as a literary method basically describes how the reader creates meaning (Klint 2000:88). Reception refers to the response a text provokes from the reader at different periods and places (Jauss 1982:27). It considers the effect of the reader's tradition and prejudices on the interpretation process. Different readers may understand a text differently (Lv and Ning 2013:114). Jauss and Iser were the leading proponents of reception theory, who developed it in two different directions. Critics who employed reception theory in biblical studies drew heavily on Iser's text-centred method that gave much attention to the dialogue between the implied reader and the text. Jauss, on the other hand, focused on the varying historical reception of literary works (Klint 2000:89). Iser put forward the view that meaning is developed in the process of reading. He points out that meaning is not the outcome of a single aspect of text or reader (Lv and Ning 2013). It is through his/her proactive investigation in the reception process that meaning emerges (Lv and Ning 2013:114–115). The point of convergence of the views of Iser and Jauss was their agreement that the reader's role was more important than the relation between author and text in the process of literary activity (Lv and Ning 2013:115). Two reception-analytical methods employed in this study are horizon of expectations and uses and gratifications.

## **2.1. Horizon of expectations**

'Horizon of expectations' is the fulcrum of Jauss's interpretative theory. Gadamer (2004) affirms this concept by arguing that every experience has its own horizon of expectations. Experience is obtained from 'anticipation or preconception to fulfilment or disappointment of anticipation' (Jauss 2005:203-4; Parris 2009:149). Knowledge within the horizon of disappointed expectations constitutes some things that can be experienced and open a new horizon. Jauss saw the theory on the horizon of expectations as a hermeneutical foundation, and therefore developed a hermeneutical process for analysing a text that had three stages: understanding, interpretation, and application (Srouji-Shrajrawi 2013:6). This process is useful for revealing the role played by the reader's prejudices and previous knowledge of the subject matter. Experience and expectation constitute an important conceptual pair such that 'no expectation exists without experience and no experience exists without expectation' (Parris 2009:150). The fusion of the horizons may, however, give the erroneous impression that the reader is a passive participant. Jauss, therefore, used the term 'mediation' of horizons.

## **2.2. Uses and gratifications**

'Uses and gratifications' is employed in communications theory to study the specific needs that attract and hold an audience to the kinds of media and the types of content that satisfy their social and psychological needs (Ruggiero 2000:3). It is a 'need seeking' theory of communications that points out the media's most important role as fulfilling the needs and motivations of the audience (Mehrad and Tajer 2016:2). In textual analysis, uses and gratifications take the interpreter's motivations for reading a text as its vantage point for understanding the exposure and impact of the text (Ballard 2011). It is an important concept that this study integrates under reception theory. Certain individual needs do interact with personal values and the cultural environment to produce perceived problems and perceived solutions that constitute different motives for gratification behaviour in the use of texts. The gratifications sought by the reader and preacher form the central concept in the theory and place the focus on the interpreter instead of the message, by asking 'what people do with the text' rather than 'what texts do to people.'

Two major pitfalls of reception theory as a literary study method may be relevant at this juncture. The first hinges on the inability of readers to agree on a single, non-contradictory interpretation of a text and indicate that the meaning of a text is significantly affected by several factors at the point at which it is read. The second is that the reception of texts without the original cultural context can be 'hair-

raising ahistorical' (Eagleton 2003:77). There is a degree of truth in the claim that texts have no fixed meanings, especially as different interpreters may arrive at different understandings of the text. Yet, the claim cannot be that when the writer wrote the text, he/she did not have a meaning in mind. He/she did, otherwise writing would be a meaningless activity. The reader must, therefore, be conscious of the degree of the influence of his/her own biases and traditions as he/she reads the text and takes the author's own context into consideration in the interpretation. It is this which underpins the use of the theory for the analysis.

### **2.3. Method of reception analysis**

The following procedure for reception analysis was followed in this study. Interview questions were grouped under various themes and their rationale explained. The themes were: the influence of cultural background of charismatic preachers on their understanding of the doctrine of sin in 1 John; the perceived meaning of the epistle's concept of God as light, and sin as darkness; how ATR conceptions and sometimes vocabularies of sin influence charismatic preachers' understanding of the intersections of hamartiology of 1 John with the imagery of Christians as God's family; remedies for sin; sin as lawlessness and the role of the devil; and the central message and gratifications of sin. We also analysed sermons and books of these preachers. The account of the various responses was analysed and compared with an exegetical analysis of the doctrine sin in 1 John. In the process differences and reasons for such differences were teased out. The differences include highlights of how Akan conceptions were reflected in the answers. A general summary of the findings and reflections on their implications was then set out.

In applying the reception analysis for this study, we probed with the question: why do charismatic preachers read texts on the doctrine of sin in 1 John, and what do they use them for? The basic idea behind this approach is that the preaching needs of charismatic preachers influence what texts they select to preach on the doctrine of sin, how they use these texts, and what gratifications these texts give them. Akan traditional religious conceptions interact with the personal values of charismatic preachers to produce perceived needs. These perceived needs constitute their motive for gratification in interpreting and preaching on the text. The gratifications may be derived from many antecedent variables such as text structure, social circumstances, psychological needs, values, and traditional conceptual beliefs that relate to the gratification pattern. The task is to identify some of these variables and the extent and way they shape the interpretation and application of a text. This was obtained from interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions.

The thirty selected charismatic preachers were given a list of possible uses and gratifications and asked whether they constituted the motives behind their reading of the doctrine of sin in 1 John. They were asked which book of the Bible they preferred for studying the doctrine of sin; whether sinful behaviours attract their attention; how often they observe sinful behaviours; why they observe these sinful behaviours; how important these observations are to them and for their sermons; how often do they preach on sin; and what impact they make by preaching on sin. This study also examines the motives for reading or avoiding the doctrine of sin in 1 John as well as the gratifications rebuked or enhanced by this reading.

### 3. Summary of Exegetical Analysis of Hamartiology of 1 John

In addition to examining the key hamartiological terms, important passages such as 1:5–2:2, 11, 12, 29; 4:10, 20; 5:16–18 were examined in their putative socio-historical, cultural and religious contexts. John wrote the epistle to correct the doctrine of the false teachers. Some were influenced by proto-Gnosticism and others by Docetism who seemed to focus on ethics. These teachers held erroneous views about Christ. They regarded themselves as being superior and without sin. They also claimed better, and greater knowledge of God, yet did not know him or keep his commands. The secessionists argued that they were sinless and did not need purification from sin. They claimed continuous fellowship with God while they lived in the darkness of sin (1:8, 10). To this assertion, John responded, *ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν, ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν* (we have come to know him, if we keep his commands; 2:3). These false teachers claimed fellowship with God and that they walked in the light. They denied the influence of sin in their lives yet lived in a manner sharply in contrast to these claims. John refuted the Docetists' denial of Jesus's humanity with texts such as 2:1. He emphasises that *Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν* (Jesus Christ), *παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα* (we have as an advocate with the Father), and *δικαίον* (the righteous[one]). This is the same Christ who has saving power and dwelt in the flesh. John refers to Jesus thus: *αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν* (he is the atoning sacrifice for sins; 2:2). He rejects the claims of those who deny that Jesus came in the flesh affirming that *πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστιν* (every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; 4:2).

John used the diatribe and third-class conditional sentence *ἐὰν εἴπωμεν* (if we say) to express what we consider a disagreement with assertions of the false teachers (1:8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9). For instance, the

heretics were influenced by Greek philosophy from Plato to believe that fellowship is based on knowledge. John responded to this in 1:6 (Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ σκότει περιπατῶμεν). The false doctrine of antinomianism was that a Christian can live as he/she pleases, for his/her relationship to God does not depend on the law. John exposes this false view, asserting that walking in the darkness of sin is a hindrance to fellowship with God. Further, if a person rejects the deity of Jesus Christ and salvation by grace, he/she is not saved and walks in darkness. John points out that ἐὰν δὲ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ περιπατῶμεν ὡς αὐτός ἐστιν ἐν τῷ φωτὶ, κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' ἀλλήλων (if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another; 1:7). First John 1:6 underlines the depraved quality of antinomian Gnostic doctrine, whereas 1:7 reflects John's apostolic teaching. He contrasts the implications of adhering to Gnostic doctrine with the implications of conforming to the teaching of Christ Jesus. In 1:6, 'walking in darkness' is by implication not experiencing fellowship with God or not living in his presence, or not living according to his standard of holiness.

The condition for walking in God's light and fellowship is not the condition of sinless perfection. It is fellowship with God attained because of the atonement (ἰλασμός) for sins (2:2). The individual has a personal responsibility to confess his/her sins and be cleansed so as not to hinder his/her fellowship with God and with one another. The attainment of righteousness in Gnostic doctrine was the reason for John's thoughts and writings to his 'little children'. He denounced the falsehood of the Gnostics by putting forward that acting outside God's commands is lawlessness. He points out: Πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν καὶ τὴν ἀνομίαν ποιεῖ, καὶ ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία (Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness; 3:4). He thus affirmed that Gnostics were sinners. Sin destroys knowledge of God (3:6, 8).

The inference from the foregoing is that texts on hamartiology were a response to the socio-religious doctrine of proto-Gnosticism infiltrating the Johannine community. Whereas there may have been other issues plaguing the fellowship, this was probably one of the largest sources of doctrinal disputation at the time John wrote his epistle. Antinomian Gnostics maintained that Christians were free by grace from the moral law. This was based on their concept of the soul and body being morally independent of each other; that is, the sinful gratifications of the body had no bearing on the spirit. John applies the concept of light and darkness to explain moral issues. The antithesis of light and darkness was key in Gnostic doctrine. The remedy for sin according to 1 John is that the Christian must confess his/her sin to be forgiven and cleansed from all unrighteousness. To



'confess' is 'to say the same thing' as God (Glasscock 2009:220). Put together, it is clear that the hamartiology of 1 John was significantly a response to the situation in which socio-cultural circumstances were resulting in adaptations of Christian doctrine by elements of the Johannine community. This provides a foundation for testing how it is received in a roughly similar context in which ATR conceptions vie for influencing the hamartiology of charismatic preachers.

## 4. Summary of Findings of Empirical Study

### 4.1. Akan cosmological influences on charismatic preachers' reception of hamartiology of 1 John

We discovered that the concept of sin espoused by some charismatic preachers betrays their horizon of *bònè* (sin) in Akan conceptions. The claim that sinful spirits can be cast out of a person as an evil spirit is an Akan conception that has become ingrained in the horizon of expectations of the preachers. This concept is, however, absent from 1 John. The concept of sin in 1 John is that sin is a human failure and not ascribed to external spirits. The life of charismatic Christians proceeds in the form of salvation from sin, and spiritual enemies such as the devil, evil spirits, and witchcraft. These spiritual enemies constitute entities that deprive people of their well-being. We must point out, however, that charismatic preachers' view of sin from demonic powers and the devil may also come from other biblical texts. For example, Zechariah 3:1–7 describes a vision in which an angel shows Zechariah a scene of Joshua the high priest dressed in filthy rags, representing the sins of Judah. He was before God, and Satan was standing as the prosecutor. God rebukes Satan and orders that Joshua is given clean clothes, which represent God's forgiveness of Judah's sins. For charismatic Christians, salvation from sin becomes a stepping-stone to being empowered by the Holy Spirit to overcome these spiritual enemies. The reality is that no one—children or adults—can claim a past sinless condition.

The study also found that the charismatic preachers primarily talk of salvation in terms of the forgiveness of sin, atonement, and reconciliation with God, yet in praxis, salvation permeates their material horizons. Their gratifications include financial breakthroughs, need for marriages, and resolution of marriage problems, childbirth for couples, jobs, drunkenness, housing needs, and bad dreams. The concern for human welfare forms the axiological basis of their use of the hamartiology of 1 John and takes its strong and unreflective desire from Akan traditional conceptions. Like Akan tradition, charismatic preachers believe in the doctrine

of universal causality. They explain human moral actions with causal references to supernatural beings such as evil spirits. This situates well with Akan belief that misfortunes and tragedies are caused by evil spirits. This concept is antithetical to the conceptions in 1 John. Ἀμαρτίας (sin), ἀδικίας (unrighteousness) and ἀνομία (guilt, lawlessness) depict the failures of a human person and cannot be attributed to external spirits. They are not spirits in themselves. However, it must be admitted that the devil plays a role in the sinful acts a person commits (1 John 3:8–10). The Akan is thus predisposed to better understand the assertion that ‘Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil’ (3:8). It also makes him/her prone to exaggerate the understanding of the doctrine of sin in 1 John.

#### **4.2. Notions of sin among the charismatic preachers**

The Akan concept of *bòné* (sin) also regards sin only as an act. A child who has not been observed engaging in any sinful act has not sinned. The implication of this concept by some charismatic preachers asserts that a Christian possesses sinless perfection until evil spirits cause him/her to sin. It must be pointed out that this reception is inappropriate in light of the hamartiology of 1 John. This concept signifies a fundamental change in meaning from that of the first epistle. It unmistakably shows that the preoccupation of charismatic preachers’ moral thought is their gratification for material possessions.

The metaphorical statement: ‘God is light’ is a penetrating description of God’s nature. It portrays God’s righteous functions and includes his holiness, intellectual and moral enlightenment. God’s nature as light illuminates and purifies those who come to him just as physical light reveals and purifies. Charismatic preachers describe darkness, not as the absence of holiness and righteous functions, but rather the presence of witchcraft and evil spirits that influence an individual to commit sin resulting in misfortunes and serial sinful misbehaviours that require intense prayer to avert. This is similar to Akan thought of *mmusuyi* (deliverance from evil) in the sense that they both use darkness in a negative sense. Also, in the reception of sin by the charismatic preacher, sin is conceived as darkness that affects various areas of the sinner’s life. This interpretation has connotations of Akan thought. Darkness in Akan tradition denotes evil motives, clandestine activities, and secrets that people refuse to disclose to one another.

The study also found that the charismatic preachers’ understanding of sin as lawlessness interfaces with Akan conceptions of sin. They describe sin as *mmrato* (law-breaking) that attracts God’s punishment. This is similar to the manner in which individuals in

Akan traditional settings are punished for disobeying regulations. The preachers claim that God punishes those who disobey his word. This concept is understood because in Akan tradition acts must be for the well-being of the community and must be sanctioned by spiritual agencies. Infractions are regarded as *mnrato* (law-breaking). The response that sin must be punished is reassuring. However, the severity of punishment causes fear and anxiety, as in Akan traditional communities.

#### **4.3. The charismatic preachers' reception of remedies for sin in 1 John**

The primary objective of the remedy for sin in 1 John is different from Akan conceptions. In 1 John forgiveness and cleansing from sin benefits the Christian in a manner that improves his/her fellowship with God the Father and fellow-Christians. The blood of Jesus cleanses all kinds of sin (1:7). Cleansing in this context is not just a one-time act for salvation but involves continuous cleansing throughout the Christian journey for continuous fellowship with God. This is unlike Akan conceptions, whose remedy for sin is to restore spiritual relationship with God and ultimately material benefits and physical well-being. While the means of remedy for the doctrine of sin in 1 John is the blood of Jesus that cleanses past and continual sins, the remedy for sin in Akan thought includes the blood of an animal. There was no evidence to show that any charismatic preacher had assimilated this ATR thought in their teaching. Their emphasis on the power in the blood of Jesus was quite pronounced and indeed chimes with that of 1 John.

#### **4.4. Gratifications and the reception of the doctrine of sin in 1 John**

One of the key attractions of Akan cosmological influences in the theology of the charismatic preachers is its underlying link between human well-being and sin. The pervasiveness of references to evil spirits in the charismatic preachers' account of hamartiology is more closely aligned to their thoughts regarding Akan cosmology. This may result in an exaggerated emphasis on spirits in their theology. These gratifications are derived from antecedent variables such as social Akan circumstances, psychological needs, values, and traditional conceptual beliefs that relate to the gratification pattern used by these preachers.

## 5. Reflections and Implications of the Findings

This study set out to investigate to what degree, for better or for worse, ATR conceptions of sin influence the reception of the hamartiology of 1 John by a sub-section of charismatic preachers in Ghana. It was discovered that the perception of the doctrine of sin in 1 John by the charismatic preachers is influenced by their soteriological goals, which are the realisation of salvation as well as healing, prosperity, and success. These soteriological goals are influenced by Akan traditional conceptions of salvation from sin and spiritual enemies such as the devil, evil spirits, and witchcraft. The following are some reflections of charismatic preachers' reception of the doctrine of sin in 1 John and their implications:

- In the attempt by charismatic preachers to interpret the doctrine of sin in 1 John they are unwitting captives of the notion of *bònè* (sin) in Akan conceptions. We discovered that it is difficult for them to arrive at the horizon of the hamartiology of 1 John by disregarding Akan conceptions. Akan concept of *bònè* (sin), *akyiwáde* (taboo) and *mmusuo* (evil) moved with them as they continue to live. They claim sinful spirits influence individuals to commit acts of sin and can be cast out of the person. The implication is that the charismatic preachers tended to dismiss the inner character flaws of human nature that include pride, hatred, and dishonesty (cf. 1 John 2:16; John 8:44).
- The charismatic preachers regarded sin as being caused by witchcraft and demons with the intended goal of denying them benefits such as good health, good marriages, profitable jobs, businesses, and prosperity. This interpretation has its positive and negative elements. The devil and his demons are described by John as the source of sinful behaviour (3:8). This cosmological emphasis raises awareness of the role demonic forces and evil spirits play in sin. This interpretation, however, results in some not taking responsibility for their sinful, fleshly gratifications. When they get themselves involved in sexual scandals, for instance, they describe the ladies involved as witches sent from the devil to tempt them to fall into sin. The devil, however, is not the only source of sinful behaviour in the epistle. While he is the originator of sin, he is not the immediate cause. Sin has selfish manifestations such as self-will, self-centredness, and self-assertion. The world is also a source of sin. Thus, there is a need for balance in how the charismatic preachers appropriate the cosmological speculations of ATR in their reception of biblical hamartiology.

- The shared mental framework within which charismatic preachers in Akan culture interpret the first epistle's doctrine of sin includes their knowledge of Akan expectations of some sins as forbidden because their resultant effects include curses. Also, these sins are to be exorcised through deliverance. This portrays the Akan concept of *akyiwáde* (taboos) and *mmusuo* (evil) which are regarded as abominations. This is a wrongful interpretation and antithetical to the doctrine of sin in 1 John. Ἄμαρτιας (sin), ἀδικίας (unrighteousness) and ἀνομία (guilt, lawlessness) depict human failures other than evil spirits.
- The concept of spiritual direction has become ingrained in the conceptual framework of charismatic preachers. They give spiritual directions for their congregants to overcome enemies. While the idea of counselling is perhaps universal, the particular practices of the selected charismatic preachers exhibit elements of the influence of the Akan traditional religious practice of *sumsum akwankyere* (spiritual direction or divination). It includes the diagnosis of hidden problems, predictions of future events, and prescription of solutions. This is comparable to traditional religious practices in Akan, where fetish priests offer solutions to problems in the form of directions from the spirit world for the protection and prosperity of clients. Often, a motivation behind the adoption of this practice is the gratification of material welfare and good health.
- As noted earlier, in the reception of sin by the charismatic preacher, sin is perceived as darkness that affects various areas of the sinner's life. This undergirds the tendency to believe in the influence of the evil eye and the fear that sharing good plans could lead to their supernatural abortion before manifestation. The charismatic preachers thus tend to encourage their congregants to keep personal plans secret, since agents of the devil could abort them. While this might feed a tendency to mistrust and fuel paranoia, it also catalyses constant prayer life.

## 5. Conclusion

The charismatic preachers studied have to a large extent succeeded in contextualising the Christian message resulting in the rapid growth of their churches. In the process, however, traditional conceptions such as Akan cosmology have, for better and for worse, influenced their reception and the presentation of the doctrine of sin in 1 John. We have demonstrated how the cultural and traditional contextual situation of Akan charismatic preachers in Ghana influences their

reception of a text. This means that the horizon of expectations of charismatic preachers of the doctrine of sin in 1 John will differ from other preachers with different expectations. Differences in interpretations can be minimised if the charismatic preacher becomes conscious of the danger of syncretism and confers with original manuscripts or avails himself/herself of sound theological education, especially in hermeneutics, to help him/her reduce these dangers.

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