

A Procedure for Analysis of Contemporary Reception of Biblical Texts in Ghana: A Methodological Consideration

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Abstract

This essay hypothesizes that the contemporary reception of biblical concepts by Ghanaian charismatic preachers is influenced by beliefs and practices of traditional, religious, and cultural conceptions. This hypothesis is investigated by the analysis of the socio-historical context of the preacher's community obtained through qualitative analysis of existing data and interviews. A procedure is then outlined to demonstrate and determine the varying degrees of emphasis of traditional conceptual influences of these interpretations. This is done to highlight areas of positive influence and mitigate areas of negative influence to draw interpretation as close as possible to the biblical meaning in the original manuscripts. This essay employs the methodological tools of reception analysis to design this procedure. Reception theory places the focus unswervingly on the reader as the

origin of interpretation, whose experiences and thought patterns play an important role in creating meaning. In the procedure outlined for reception analysis, various responses and other forms of data are analyzed qualitatively to identify the influences of traditional conceptions on a text in the Bible by the reader or interpreter. This is compared with the socio-cultural context and exegesis of the biblical texts to outline the similarities and differences. The implications are examined to bring interpretation as close to biblical concepts as possible.

1. Introduction

It is a scholarly thought in theological traditions that the goal of interpretation is to recover the author's original intentions (Parris 2009, 1). This is supposed to ground

Conspectus

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the meaning of a text and give it stability in every interpreted situation. Almost every interpreter claims to be doing this, and yet they arrive at very different conclusions regarding what they thought the biblical authors had intended (2009, 2). Nel (2015, 1) observes that the varying conclusions are because the underlying feature of different biblical interpreters is the distinctive manner they read and interpret the Bible. That is, different Christian traditions fashion out distinctive ways of reading and interpreting the Bible. Lategan (2009, 13) affirms that the reading and interpretation of biblical texts primes to “sense-making with existential consequences,” resulting in diverse interpretations and Christian theologies that underlie the different denominations.

Some examples of this assertion are Catholic hermeneutics, Reformed theology, and Charismatic hermeneutics. Nel (2015, 1) and Olson (1999, 133) describe the Catholic viewpoint of hermeneutics in terms of two main perspectives. The first is that words mentioned in Scripture as spoken by God and his prophets and apostles are both historically and objectively true. However, texts in Scripture that proceed from persons who are not prophets or apostles are open to error and not necessarily objectively true, though historically true. The second perspective is that in matters of faith and morals the Bible should not be explained against the “sense held by the church, or against the unanimous consent of the Fathers.” That is, the interpretation of Scripture should not be without the direction and governance of ecclesial authority and the dogmatic tradition of the church (Lategan 2009, 27).

In Reformed theology, on the other hand, the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture is the only unchallengeable authority for doctrine or life, either for the individual believer or the corporate church (Bahnsen 1993, 1; Kaiser and Silva 1994). Horton (2011, 116) explains this to mean that “human

speculation, imagination, tradition (including the church), or reasoning (including ‘science’) cannot have the aptitude or right to repudiate, replace, correct, or supplement what God has revealed about himself, his works, or his will.”

Regarding Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal (charismatic) hermeneutics, the scholarly thought is that it emphasizes three rudiments: (a) the interrelationship between the Holy Spirit and the believing community as the One animating Scriptures, (b) the Holy Spirit empowers the believing community with the purpose that members be equipped for ministry and (c) the believing community witnesses in culturally appropriate ways (Nel 2015, 3; Archer 1996, 63–81; Rance 2009, 1–25). The use of the literary device of reception theory is applied to design a procedure for reception analysis of biblical texts.

2. The Influence of Socio-Religious Currents on the Reception of Biblical Texts

In a previous study, I discovered that the tradition and culture of neo-Pentecostal or charismatic interpreters in Ghana influenced their reception of biblical texts. This has resulted in a situation where some writers have expressed concerns about biblical interpretive practices by some charismatic preachers in Ghana (Nel 2015, 3; Archer 1996, 63–81; Rance 2009, 1–25). Biblical interpretation, Aryeh (2016, 140) maintains, is a critical enterprise in biblical studies and is the essential element that nurtures the Christian church. In Ghana, however, this is often influenced by traditional conceptions and the priorities of the interpreter. Charismatic preachers in Ghana do not consciously interpret the Bible to agree necessarily with ecclesiological council decisions or dogmatic philosophies, but rather respond to the existential needs of their audiences. In the process, for better and for

worse, doses of traditional concepts influence their reception of biblical texts. Ossom-Batsa (2007), Amevenku (2014, 4), and Kuwornu-Adjaottor (2012, 2) agree that biblical interpretation and translation in Ghana have significant problems that call for academic engagement.

Some scholars outside Ghana such as Walter Hollenweger (1997), Matthew Clark (1997), and Gordon Anderson (1990) have also expressed some uneasiness with the present state of charismatic hermeneutics in Ghana. Literalism underpins the biblical hermeneutics of these charismatic preachers (Larbi 2017, 32). Their interpretation of the following passages of Scripture helps to underscore this point (Omenyo and Arthur 2013, 52–3):

From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.
(Matt 11:12 NRSV)

To charismatic preachers in Ghana, this verse implies the exertion of physical force as essential for the receipt of answers to prayers. Prayer sessions are often boisterous and very physical. They include intense clapping of hands, stamping of feet, shouting and pacing within a wide radius. This is influenced by traditional prayer and dance forms that are often boisterous and physical. The verse is also understood to suggest that God's material riches abound for his children, and the conquest of enemies to appropriate these riches is essential. The soteriological goals of charismatic preachers in Ghana include salvation from spiritual enemies such as the devil, evil spirits, and witchcraft to realize well-being. Underlying these goals are the soteriological goals of traditional conceptions such as those of Akan tradition, which are the realization of healing, prosperity, and success. While they are alerted to sin and the absence of material well-being, which is thought to occur due to the presence of spiritual enemies, this predisposes them to take sin and the devil seriously and rely on God for their well-being. Intense prayer

against these enemies is regarded as a means of religious interaction to achieve these goals.

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it can judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
(Heb 4:12 NRSV)

This text, to some charismatic preachers in Ghana, means that the word of God serves as a literal, physical weapon against the enemy. Witches and wizards are often cut into pieces using the word of God in prayer. It is very common to see a physical pointing of the bible in the direction of a perceived enemy, be it human or spiritual, during prayer and deliverance sessions at charismatic church services to neutralize the enemy's power. This has been influenced by the traditional belief in symbols in Ghana. For example, the Akan, like many other traditions in Ghana, acknowledge that spirits work in the human world through material objects such as land animals, birds, and fish. These land animals, birds, and fish are termed *totems*. Also, apart from the gods, there is the belief in the power of *asuman* (plural; *suman*, singular—fetish) or what is commonly referred to as *aduro* (medicine). *Asuman* are numerous classes of objects such as amulets, charms, and talismans. *Suman* is thought of as a lower order of spirit beings, which operate through some objects against human and spiritual enemies. In the conception of charismatic preachers in Ghana, Jesus is observed as the Savior who can protect Christians against all spiritual enemies and makes real the universal sovereign power of God. Just as in traditional religion, where various objects such as *asuman* (fetish) and very physical dance forms are used to exorcise evil spirits, the charismatic preacher applies such forms in the context of biblical interpretation and practice by pointing the Bible and applying anointing oil against perceived enemies. While the physical pointing of the Bible may not affect enemies, this attitude predisposes

charismatic preachers in Ghana to rely on and use the Bible as often as possible.

When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. When the officials of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female slaves, female donkeys, and camels. (Gen 12:14–16 NRSV)

The interpretation of this text is skewed towards wealth transfer. It is assumed that this text points to children of the Creator God who owns the whole world, and that the wealth of the unbeliever is the Christian's for the taking. Non-Christians do not deserve God's special favor as far as material wealth is concerned. Charismatic preachers in Ghana have an intense penchant for prosperity—a fact that also extends to their audiences. This is derived from antecedent variables such as social Akan circumstances, psychological needs, values, and traditional conceptual beliefs that relate to the gratification pattern prevalent in the context. Akan cosmological thought is deeply concerned with well-being.

Again, in a previous study on the reception of the doctrine of sin in 1 John by a selection of charismatic preachers in Ghana, I discovered that, while charismatic preachers in Ghana are unwitting captives of the traditional concept of sin, these conceptions better predispose them to the interpretation of some biblical concepts (Adjei-Brown and Asumang 2020, 86–88). For example, they claim the devil, witchcraft, and demons influence individuals to commit acts of sin with the intended goal of denying them benefits such as good health, good marriages, profitable jobs, businesses, and prosperity; and that they can be cast out. In this interpretation, sin is regarded only as an act. The implication is that the preachers dismiss the inner

character flaws of human nature that include pride, hatred, and dishonesty. This reading has been influenced by Akan cosmological conceptions of well-being which is hampered by evil spirits that cause persons to commit *bone* (sin), *akyiwáde*, and *mmusuo* (taboos).

While the devil and his demons are described by John as the source of sinful behavior, and while everyone who sins is a child of the devil (3:8), he is not the only source of sin. The world and flesh are also sources of sin. The goal of the devil is to alienate human beings from God by causing them to sin. He does this to enslave and deny them God's freedom (John 8:32). The interpretation of the devil as influencing individuals to sin enables charismatic preachers, positively, to be predisposed to him as a source of sin and drives them to heavily rely on God for solutions through prayer. The above interpretations have been influenced by traditional Ghanaian conceptions. Bediako (1990, 8–9) points out that the understanding of Jesus Christ as “Supreme over every spiritual rule” arises from the Ghanaian's keen awareness of forces and powers at work in the society which threaten life, prosperity, and harmony.

The thesis of this article is that the approach of wholesale censure of such interpreters is unsatisfactory, because the critics themselves do not employ sophisticated methods for analyzing how the interpretations are done. I, therefore, propose that the following principles, philosophical underpinnings, and procedures for reception analysis of how the Ghanaian charismatic preacher interpret various texts of the Bible would be more fruitful. These will be especially helpful to identify the key factors that contribute to wrong interpretation of specific texts and to provide correction.

3. Definition of Reception Theory

Reception theory as a literary method came into prominence in the 60s and 70s and describes how the reader creates meaning (Klint 2000, 88). Reception refers to the response a text provokes from the reader or the perception and presentation of an author at different periods and places (Jauss 2005, 27). It takes into account the effect of the reader's tradition and prejudices on interpretation. Different readers may understand a text differently (Lv and Ning 2013, 114). Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser were the leading proponents of reception theory. They developed it in two different directions. Critics who employed reception theory in biblical studies drew heavily on Iser's text-centered 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 focused on the dialogue between the text and the reader and put forward the view that meaning is developed in the process of reading. He pointed out that meaning is not the outcome of a single aspect of text or reader. It is through the reader's proactive investigation in the reception process that the meaning of a text is understood (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 (115).

3.1 *Different Angles of Studying the Reception of a Text*

There are several ways in which the reception of a text may be approached and the factors influencing it analyzed. Knight (2010, 138) explains that these include the hermeneutic processes taking place within history, tradition, and prejudices. History influences and has been part of hermeneutics. The

history of influence (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) tells how a literary work has been interpreted over time and shapes contemporary efforts to derive meaning from a historical text (Knight 2010). Nicholls (2008, 15) outlines the following benefits: (a) it gives the reader an experience of historical distance, (b) helps the reader to introduce the text into the present, (c) gives rise to searching questions, and (d) brings together scholarly and confessional works. In this way, the operative meaning of a text does not depend on the circumstances of the author and original readers alone, but co-depends on the historical circumstance of the reader, such as the charismatic preacher in Ghana (Gadamer 2004, 296).

Besides the influence of history, the hermeneutic process could also be approached through the traditional circumstance of the reader. Plested (2001, 1) defines tradition as a set of beliefs or behavior with origins in the past that is passed down within a group or society with symbolic meaning or special significance to that group. Tradition is part of the human tendency to depend on others, and entails the process of handing down custom and thought processes from generation to generation (Murphy and Visnovsky 2006). Handing down is normally done naturally through both self- and unself-consciousness. That is, through self-awareness and the quality of not being self-conscious. Tradition is part of every interpreter, and they must, therefore, understand the past by taking cognizance of tradition exerted upon them. Tradition may exert negative as well as positive influences on interpreters. Readers must not secure themselves against the tradition that comes out of the text, but rather deny themselves everything that could block their understanding of the subject matter. Prejudices constitute tradition. Tradition is evaluated by prejudices. It is a constitutive part of human existence that is neither negative nor positive. Prejudices are not inherited in the manner that some diseases are inherited. They are

formed by upbringing and social factors and can be modified. Prejudices can sometimes be negative, such as racist attitudes. The hermeneutical concept of prejudice is pre-judgment. This is the process of understanding that functions in the thinking of an interpreter at the pre-conceptual level. Understanding calls upon pre-judgments that readers possess before their act of interpretation.

The passage of time creates problems for the interpretation of texts. Due to these challenges Gadamer (2004, 269) proposed the disclosure of the fore-structure for understanding. He argued that interpretation is based on three things readers already possess: a fore-having or something they have in advance, a fore-sight or something they grasped in advance, and a fore-conception. Interpretation is not a process without presupposition. It involves what already stands there or the undiscussed assumptions of the interpreter. The initial meaning comes about because the interpreter reads a text with some precise expectations, and this leads to understanding.

The fore-structure or fore-projection that interpreters bring to the text includes their preunderstandings, presuppositions, and aim and purpose for interpretation (Tate 2008, 219). This fore-projection is continuously revised in terms of what constantly emerges as interpreters dig deep into the process of meaning, understanding, and interpretation (Gadamer 2004, 270). Readers interpret within their social location or matrix context, including their ideological, literary, religious, and cultural conceptions. Through these they acquire their values, think, make judgments, and understand (Tate 2008, 220). All texts are made important by the readers' effort to make meaning of the language.

Fore-structure or prejudice is derived from an interpreter's tradition. This is the shared mode of interpretation of the community to which they belong. In the process of interpretation of a text, interpreters place a text within a context, approach it from a perspective, and conceive it in a clearly

defined way. Prejudice, therefore, has a three-fold character: (a) it is shaped by prior tradition, (b) it defines who a group of people are, and (c) it has anticipatory nature that projects possibilities for understanding (Parris 2009, 3).

Gadamer (2004, 273) argues that understanding is fully realized when fore-meanings are not arbitrary but examined for their legitimacy by the interpreter. It is, therefore, important to assess whether the effects of fore-meanings are positive or not, rather than denying their influence. Interpreters must resign themselves to their fore-structure, if they are unable to find meaning. This involves neither neutrality to the content of the text nor the deleting of the interpreter's prejudices. It is essential that interpreters become conscious of their prejudices, for this gives the interpretative problem its real thrust. Prejudice is part of a positive or negative value, and does not necessarily mean false judgment.

During the period of the Enlightenment, tradition as a philosophical thought for interpretation was marginalized by scholarship (Parris 2009, 2). Philosophers considered that "error in thought, prejudices, and irrational ideas" are unexamined and not worth considering as a basis for interpretation. A tradition was regarded as an unreliable source of knowledge, for traditions lacked methodical justification. However, Gadamer (2004, 270) argues that denying the power of tradition is a setback in literary understanding. Tradition constitutes a person's understanding and interpretative acts performed in their historical horizon. For instance, the cultural ideas of God, human beings, and sin in Akan societies in Ghana constitute traditional prejudices that influence understanding and interpretation of biblical texts by charismatic preachers.

While it is true that distortions and false prejudices may be handed down through tradition, indeed, truth is also handed down through tradition. For example, moral behavior is not always based on reason but

rather applied through tradition. Parris (2009, 8), therefore, concludes that it requires reason to dialogue with tradition. The challenge, however, is how interpreters, who are detached from the history of the text, reinstate a living relationship between themselves and tradition(s) (11).

4. Philosophical Underpinnings of Reception Theory

Several philosophical underpinnings undergird the principles of reception theory. Chief among them is the Hegelian dialectic, Gadamer's hermeneutic circle, and Jauss's theses. The Hegelian dialectic puts forward the concept that human thought develops in a way characterized by what is called the dialectic triad: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. An idea or theory may first be called a thesis. Such a thesis will have weak spots and therefore produce opposition. The opposing idea is called antithesis, since it is directed against the thesis. A struggle then results between the thesis and antithesis until a solution is reached that recognizes their respective values and preserves their merits to avoid the limitations they both carry. The solution obtained is the third step and is called synthesis (Parris 2009, 14). Hegel named this synthesis sublation, which then becomes the first step of another dialectic triad. The Hegelian dialectical formula is, therefore: Concept A (thesis) versus Concept B (antithesis) equals Concept C (synthesis).

Hegel argues that the past must be internalized through this dialectical process that brings two antithetical ideas together to yield a synthesis of the two contradictions (Parris 2009). Inwood (1992, 81) explains that this method involves three steps: (a) one or more concepts are taken as fixed, sharply defined, and distinct from each other; this is the stage of understanding, (b) one or more contradictions emerge when a reflection is performed on the concepts; this is the stage of dialectics, and (c) this

results in a new higher category that embraces the earlier concepts and resolves the contradictions in them; this is the stage of positive reason. For Hegel, meaning shifts and comes to imply preservation of all elements of truth which assert themselves within the contradictions, and elevate the elements to a truth that incorporates and unites everything true (Parris 2009, 15). Hegel's dialectic is reflexive and has integrating power that overcomes problems inherent in the hermeneutics of reconstructing the original meaning of the text.

Gadamer (2004, 282) utilized Hegel's synthesis and developed the concept of the hermeneutic circle that employs an outward and returning concept or movement. In the outward movement, interpreters see themselves in a foreign concept, but find a place to be at home. During the returning movement their horizons expand, transfigure, and shift in the process of understanding. Parris (2009, 15) named the hermeneutic circle as differentiation and assimilation. During assimilation the foreign preconceptions are negated, restricted, or expanded. Every person's understanding is restricted in this hermeneutical circle. Gadamer (2004) fused horizons by constructing a provisional understanding of a text before reading. In his view, prejudices are always brought forth in an encounter with a text, resulting in tension between the past and present of the text.

Understanding occurs when an interpreter experiences a fusion of these two horizons that involves the raising to a higher horizon that encompasses both horizons. This process continually occurs in any tradition (Parris 2009, 16). Hegel and Gadamer thus explain that every interpretation is a negotiation. The negotiation between the thesis and antithesis recognizes their respective values and tries to preserve their merits while avoiding the limitations in both. The limitation of the dialectic method of interpretation is that it confines to a situation where only one thesis is offered to start

with; it is not easily applied to situations where different theses are used from the beginning independently (von Popper 2004, 3).

Another challenge derived from Hegelian dialectic is that a thesis and antithesis are by synthesis reduced to components that are negated or preserved and elevated to a higher level (von Popper 2004). However, an idea though negated or refuted, may be worthy of preservation. The preservation of a negated idea may be necessary to help underline the truthfulness of its replacement. In reception analysis, it is important to identify the idea being negated by a particular interpretation to appreciate that interpretation better. For example, if a preacher forcefully preaches that sin is caused by demonic forces, this preacher may be making that forceful declaration because within their context there exist persons who deny that demons have any role to play in sin. So, the forceful preaching is occasioned by an attempt to negate what they believe was wrong teaching. Reception analysis thus asks whether ideas are being negated in the way a particular truth is being received.

To establish the extent, for better or worse, of the influence of these traditional and cultural conceptions, it is important to identify some other philosophical frameworks relevant to the analysis of data. These are the horizon of expectations, Jauss's third and fourth thesis, the influence of language, and the concept of play.

4.1 Horizon of expectations

It is appropriate to point out that every interpreter changes horizons during the process of reception. Charismatic preachers in Ghana have cultural persuasions that give rise to prejudices. Their prejudices include traditional conceptions of various doctrines such as sin and salvation gained unconsciously and formed within their respective cultures. Cultural

tradition is the fundamental basis of a person's prejudice. Charismatic preachers' understanding of biblical texts is formed through the mutual influence of cultural conceptions and biblical doctrines. Their prejudices constitute their horizon of expectations. They are, however, capable of seeing things beyond their horizon, and this opens the avenue for fusion and change of horizons.

Change of horizons, in the words of Jauss and Benzinger (2008, 14–18), occurs when texts that teach biblical doctrines go through the negation of familiar perspectives or the opening up of new ones. This means the prejudices of charismatic preachers are schemes of recognition or causes for misunderstanding when they encounter doctrines of the Bible. The preacher's misunderstanding, however, is neither wrong nor incorrect, since they can read the texts under the restriction of their cultural conceptual prejudices. Rather, it causes them to experience provocation, negation, or push from texts. Without this provocation, charismatic preachers will not learn what they do not know concerning the Bible. Without it, they will not ask questions, which are essential for learning to occur. Traditional conceptions possess a homogenizing ability on Bible texts. That is, bringing traditional conceptions into direct contact with comparable biblical doctrines breaks barriers of understanding and allows for a greater fusion of concepts. This results in less aesthetic distance between these texts and charismatic preachers. Verma (2013, 263) points out that this results in the negativity of traditional concepts becoming self-evident, and acquires a horizon of future aesthetic experience. The negativity of traditional concepts is where they invite criticism and pessimism after their contact with texts of the Bible. They do not exude hope and enthusiasm.

4.2 Jauss's third and fourth thesis

The argument is established that different historical and cultural contexts create challenges for the interpretation of ancient texts. Consequently, a reader's response to these challenges must be to use interpretative methods that take into consideration their traditional and cultural conceptions. Jauss's seven theses form one of the philosophical underpinnings to reception theory. His third and fourth theses are relevant in this respect:

Thesis 3: The artistic character of a work can be determined by the influence or effect of a text on its audience. The change in horizons that the text brings about through the negation of the familiar or opening up of new perspectives is a result of the aesthetic distance between the text and its audience, which can be objectified through the audience's reactions and the critics' judgments (Jauss and Benzinger 2008, 14–18). A work closely aligned with the audience's horizon of expectations produces no horizontal change, and this is classified as "culinary art" (Parris 2009, 134). For instance, if the hamartiology of 1 John is closely aligned with the horizon of expectations of the charismatic preacher in Ghana, it will produce no horizontal change in understanding (Adjei-Brown 2020, 55–56). Parris (2009) puts forward that readers are not influenced if they do not experience provocation, negation, or push from the literary work. Without this provocation, readers will be unable to learn what they do not know, and learn to ask questions as individuals, communities, and traditions. A literary work could be kept safe from culinary art by a special effort to read it against its familiar experience to catch its naturally creative character. A concept may be classified as anticipatory and serve archaeological modes. For anticipatory purposes, a concept negates existing norms and prejudices, and in the archaeological function, it mediates values and norms from the past with different spheres of life within its horizon by permitting rediscovery (Verma 2013). In its anticipatory role, a concept speaks to its readers to

correct and change their prior wishes, and achieve an archaeological role when required to remember what is handed down from the beginning (Parris 2009, 138).

Thesis 4: The reconstruction of the original horizon of expectations allows us to compare past and present understanding and forces us to become aware of the text's history of the reception which mediates the two horizons (Jauss and Benzinger 2008, 18–23). This thesis could be applied by reconstructing past the horizon of expectations of a concept to enable readers to discover the original questions the text answered and find out how the original readers or hearers understood the text (18). The reconstruction of a past horizon is always encapsulated in the present horizon of the reader; therefore, any reconstructed question is not exactly like the original question the text answered (Parris 2009, 139). However, it enables an interpreter to pose questions that the text answers to discover how a reader understands it. Meaning, to an "equal degree," comes from both the original horizon of the concept and any other interpreter's horizon. This fusion of horizons enables the interpreter to ask a question that draws the text "back out of its seclusion" to "say something" to the contemporary reader.

4.3 Influence of Language

Concerning language, Mahadi and Jafari (2012, 230) suggest that it is an important human possession required for communicating and the transfer of experiences. It is the key in the investigation of the aesthetic experience of the interpreter, since each word triggers a denoted idea and image. Understanding occurs in the medium of language. For instance, the Akan and English languages ensure acceptance of meaning and the ability to vocalize thoughts when speaking or thinking. Language consists of words and cultural symbols. The Akan language in Ghana cannot subsist except in the context of cultural conceptions. Akan religious conceptions

are embedded in the Akan language, and, for example, the words it uses for sin and salvation give a clear indication about their conception. One psychological tool possessed by charismatic preachers, apart from English, is their native language such as Akan. Akan is spoken in homes and communities. English is spoken in schools and some churches. Charismatic preachers generally speak and may also think in English during their study and the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. However, speaking Akan in their daily interactions whilst often thinking and speaking in English could affect the process of their conceptions of doctrines and concepts in the Bible.

4.4 *Concept of Play*

Lv and Ning (2013, 114–115) put forward that individuals cannot be excluded from the influence of prior reading experience and knowledge. All hermeneutic processes take place within history and affect understanding and application (Knight 2010, 138). Gadamer (2004, 68) sets out the theory that a person's understanding is closely linked to the universality of language. He explains that every dialogue has the capacity for "inner infinity," which is a means to reason and understanding. A questioning mind makes certain that language fills gaps towards a shared understanding and opens human capacity for continuous dialogue with others in a fusion of horizons. He went further to indicate that anxiety, intention, hesitancy, and attitude come into effect when language is used. This he called "play" in hermeneutics, and he suggests it is a dynamic process of buoyancy and fulfilment of each player's understanding. In the concept of play, each reader juggles the competing conceptions, both theirs and the author's, in their mind before arriving at an understanding. It is reasonable to assume that the idea of "play" exists in

the thought and motivation of the charismatic preacher in Ghana to make sense of the language of texts concerning doctrines and concepts in the Bible as an essential factor for understanding. The processing of the information from the text in interplay with the preacher's *a priori* conception constitutes the play. It is the interaction of their conception with the bare data from the text which then forms a language game in the mind of the preacher.

4.5 *Semiosis*

At this point we must mention the method of signs in semiosis for reception analysis. This method of reception analysis concerns signs that are studied as part of "sign systems," or a group of signs that function together as codes to construct realistic meaning. The "code is a complex of signs circulating in a society" (D'Alleva 2005, 32). The production and interpretation of signs depend on codes, and the meaning of a sign depends on the code in which it is situated. Codes provide the context in which signs are meaningful, and therefore interpreting a text semiotically involves relating it to the relevant code. Chandler (2014) defines a code as a set of practices familiar to users of the medium operating within a broad cultural framework. Codes are learned and carried with people.

The semiotic theory of communication greatly influences literary criticism. A text, utterance, and image that constitute a message are sent by a speaker or sender and received by a reader, listener, or viewer (D'Alleva 2005, 33). This message is transferred through a medium and understood if it is referred to as the shared context of the sender and receiver. It must be transmitted in a code that the receiver understands. For example, a reader cannot interpret a statue of a mother with a child as the Virgin Mary and Christ unless they know about Christianity (34). Berger (2004) explains that the reception and interpretation of a text are dependent on prior

knowledge of other possibilities that are known, and previously learned codes. The meaning of a sign depends on the code that frames it, and therefore, interpretation of a text requires prior knowledge of its relevant code. People's perceptions and worldviews are influenced by codes around them. Cultures are codification systems that play essential roles in the lives of people. Codes are often learned, and are specific to a person's social class, geographic location, and ethnic group (Berger 2004, 29). They inform an individual what to do in different situations, and what things mean. They are used to define groups, for example, Ghanaian character or charismatic behavior.

One of the linchpins of Ghanaian charismatic doctrine is the objectification of ideas. The charismatic culture depends largely on the doctrine that an idea must be tangibly observed, otherwise that idea lacks a potent existence. In other words, unless the thing or its effects are seen, heard, or felt, that thing may not be as potent or relevant to Christian existence as it may claim to be. There is no point in believing in the idea of salvation, for example, if a person cannot see its effects in their tangible existence. Charismatic Christians in Ghana, therefore, tend to objectify before they signify. In other words, the idea comes to their mind first and is then linked to something tangible that is thought to encode that idea. This sign is then decoded by the preacher. The apostle John created the texts on sin in the Gospel of John, for instance, by selecting and combining signs concerning codes he is familiar with. These codes include what he learned under the feet of Jesus. A code may undergo revision and transformation in the process of reading, and the code used by the producer of a text may not be the code used by the interpreter.

4.6 *Uses and Gratification*

Uses and gratifications are used in communications to study the gratifications 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 an important concept that is applied under reception theory. Certain individual needs interact with personal values and cultural environments to produce perceived problems and perceived solutions that constitute different motives for gratification behavior in the use of media. The gratifications sought by the audience form the central concept in the theory, which places focus on the audience instead of the message by asking, "what people do with media," rather than, "what media do to people." 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).

In applying this theory in reception analysis, the question is asked, for example, why do charismatic preachers read texts on sin in 1 John, and what do they use them for? The basic idea in this approach is that charismatic preachers know text content, and which texts they can use to meet their preaching needs. Their preaching has to influence what texts they select to preach on the doctrine of sin, how they use these texts, and what gratifications these texts give them. The doctrine of sin in 1 John provides material to charismatic preachers in Ghana when preaching about this topic.

Traditional religious conceptions interact with the personal values of charismatic preachers in Ghana to produce perceived views of what the doctrine of sin is in 1 John. These perceived views constitute their motive for the gratification of the doctrine of sin in 1 John. These gratifications sought

by charismatic preachers in Ghana 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(s) used by these preachers. This may be obtained from interviews and surveys and focus on (1) the role of exposure of gratification to the text, (2) the link between gratification and the interpretive frames through which the preachers understand text content on sin, and (3) the link between gratifications and the text content.

5. Application of Reception Theory to Reception Analysis

There are two broad applications of reception theory to reception analysis, namely, (a) establishing the reception history of a biblical concept or text, and (b) establishing the contemporary reception of a biblical concept or text. For each there are key procedures to follow, namely, (a) exegete the text taking the author's as well as the intended audience's contexts into consideration, (b) define the socio-cultural and religious context of the study population in both cases, (c) collect data on how the text has been interpreted by that population, (d) compare and contrast the interpretation in (a) with that in (c), and (e) analyze, decode, and explain the reasons why the text has been received by the study population.

5.1 Procedure for Reception Analysis

It is very important that various responses and other forms of data are analyzed to identify the influences of traditional conceptions on a text in the Bible by the reader or interpreter. This must then be compared with the socio-cultural context and exegesis of the biblical text(s). The following is my personal outline for the procedure for reception analysis of biblical

texts by charismatic preachers in Ghana. This recommended procedure is obtained from my field work:

- Data should be obtained through interviews and other forms and constituted into various groups and themes. These themes should include the influence of the cultural background of reader, preacher, or interpreter on their understanding of the text(s).
- This must include the perceived meaning of the biblical concept and how traditional conceptions influence the reader/preacher's understanding of the text(s).
- Before analysis, the interpreter must identify the rationale behind the grouped questions, what it was hoped would be obtained from answers based on the theory and method of reception analysis, and how that would help establish the hypothesis.
- After the rationale, the account of the various answers should be analyzed.
- During the analysis, the reader's responses should be compared with the exegesis of the biblical doctrine. In the process, differences and reasons for such differences must be teased out.
- Analysis of differences should include highlights of how traditional conceptions reflect in answers.
- A general summary of the findings and reflections on their implications must then be set out.

5.2 Pitfalls of Reception Theory

Two major pitfalls of reception theory as a literary study method may be relevant at this juncture. The first hinges on the fact that the inability of readers to agree on a single, non-contradictory interpretation of a text indicates that the meaning of a text is significantly affected by several

factors at the point at which it is read, and that meaning is produced through the interaction of the text and reader. 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, they did not have a meaning in mind. They did, otherwise writing would be a meaningless activity. Whereas it is extremely difficult to fully capture the authorial meaning in its entirety, it is nevertheless possible for a reader to come to a meaning that is as near and approximate as possible to the authorial meaning. This becomes easier to do if the reader is conscious of the degree of the influence of their own biases, traditions, and context(s) as they read the text and take the author’s context into consideration in the interpretation. Thus, the reception analytical tool developed and applied to this study takes into consideration the design of a reception theory interpretative method that is conscious of the extent of influence of the charismatic preacher’s biases and the authorial context of biblical texts. This affirms the evangelical proposition that Scripture, in particular, has originally-intended authorial meanings.

The second drawback is that the Bible is a cross-cultural book that needs to be carefully interpreted. Scripture comes through forms of mixtures of ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Roman, and other cultures. The charismatic preacher in a Ghanaian traditional society is, on the other hand, immersed in a culture different from these. The relevance of the cultural context of a text is based on the conviction that an interpreter finds meaning from the original readers. Texts, however, have fixed or isolated meanings outside their contexts. The meaning and relevance of a text are significantly affected by several factors when it is read. These factors include tradition, prejudice,

and the horizon of expectation of the interpreter. Biblical texts carry their inherent meaning. This enables a study to compare the interpretation of texts of the Bible with that by contemporary Ghanaian charismatic preachers.

The Bible has a cultural context; individual books of the Bible have their cultural context(s); the reader does as well. Certain experiences and values are common to human beings. For example, the values of humility, tolerance, goodness, and kindness may evoke the same experiences in all cultures. In this article, I have proposed that an effort be made to compare cultures, values, and experiences between the context of biblical texts and societal culture to mitigate the inability to identify the full extent of the original cultural context.

6. Conclusion

Reception theory is a literary method that explains how a reader creates meaning, and is an appropriate method for biblical interpretation. The theory sheds light directly on the reader’s beliefs, expectations, experiences, thoughts, and fantasies which play a role in creating meaning. This is what Hans-Georg Gadamer explained when he provided the philosophical hermeneutical framework for reception theory and its significance for biblical studies. This framework was subsequently fleshed out by Hans Robert Jauss. It also argues that language has a determination on hermeneutics and consists of words and cultural symbols. The procedure for reception analysis summarizes that data should be obtained through interviews with Ghanaian charismatic preachers and other forms, and then constituted into various groups and themes. These are to be analyzed and compared with the exegesis of the biblical doctrine. In the process, differences and reasons for such differences must be teased out. Analysis of differences should include

highlights of how traditional conceptions reflect in answers. A general summary of the findings and reflections and the implications must then be set out.

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