



Πάτερ ἡμῶν (Our Father) in Matthew 6:9: Reconstructing and negotiating a Christian identity in the 1st century CE

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To the question of why Matthew includes the phrase Πάτερ ἡμῶν (Our Father) in his version of the Lord's Prayer, scholars guided by different theories answer this question differently. Employing literary criticism ranging from form, source and tradition history to reader-audience response and socio-rhetorical interpretation, scholars contend that Matthew composed the concept Πάτερ ἡμῶν (Our Father) as a crucial segment of his version of the Lord's Prayer, either to present an opposition between Father who dwells in heaven and the Earth, which is humanity's dwelling place, or to evoke a community relationship to God in the context of welcoming God's rule, or to present the Lord's Prayer as God's gift for creating order, community and transformation in society. In view of this inconsistent conception of the function of Matthew's concept 'Our Father', the goal of this study is to employ semantic analysis and social identity theory (SIT) to analyse Matthew 6:9 to defend the argument that Matthew employed the concept Πάτερ ἡμῶν in the 1st century CE firstly to reconstruct the Christian identity of his community by identifying with the early Christian community and accommodating Jewish traditions and then to negotiate it by contesting the Roman Empire.

Contribution: The interdisciplinary contribution of the study in tandem with the expectations of *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* has been attained through the application of a collective SIT prism of identification, accommodation and contestation to read the social function of Matthew's concept Πάτερ ἡμῶν in reconstructing and negotiating the identity of his community in 1st century Roman society.

Keywords: identity; accommodation; identification; contestation; Lord's Prayer; Πάτερ ἡμῶν; Our Father; Roman empire; Jesus Movement; diaspora Judaism.

Introduction

Awareness of norms, values and practices that inform religious identity is crucial in enforcing people's freedom to contest hegemonic rule. This awareness was demonstrated by Germany peasants' clamour for freedom as a result of the challenges that Martin Luther, the reformist, posed against the 16th-century papacy's ecclesial hegemonic rule. Martin Luther's challenge against the papacy ultimately prompted church reformations that spread all over Europe and eventually to the rest of the world. Similarly, during the emergence of early Christian communities in the 1st century CE, authors of the New Testament had to engage their writings in order to lay down the norms and values that were important in grounding the identity of their audience. Laying down the norms and values to ground identity was important, bearing in mind that in the various 1st-century CE institutions such as the Roman Empire, Judaism and other religions had already determined norms and values to mark the identity of their citizens or adherents. Likewise, Matthew needed to write his gospel narrative in such a way that it guided his community to understand their identity in reference to the existing social economic and political institutions and religions in the vicinity. In antiquity, people's identity was expressed dyadically, that is, in relation to institutions, associations, cities, or even fictive families. According to Warren Carter, Matthew's gospel emerged from late 1st century religious conflicts between synagogues and the Matthean community. Carter noted that the conflict between these two groups was occasioned by their competition to claims on Israel's traditions and scriptures, whereby for the Matthean community, Jesus as God's Messiah and Son provided the definitive interpretations and teaching of Israel's tradition, while the synagogues attributed no such authority to Jesus (Carter 2011:287). This implies that this conflict was occasioned by intra-group competition for Israel's traditions as a

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basis for community identity. Given this conflict as a context from which the Gospel of Matthew emerged, it is important to consider the debates surrounding the semantic function of Matthew's phrase Πάτερ ἡμῶν in Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer before considering its contribution in reconstructing and negotiating the identity of the Matthean community. The main question to be addressed by this study is how does Matthew employ his phrase of Πάτερ ἡμῶν (Our Father) to reconstruct and negotiate the identity of his community? This study employs mainly a qualitative research methodology, in which document analysis as a research design is employed to analyse ethnographic data reflected in Matthew's gospel, 1st century BCE Roman calendrical inscriptions, the hypothetical Q Source and the Jewish Kaddish and Shimoneh Esreh prayers. Redaction criticism as well as social identity theory (SIT), to be outlined later, are applied to read these documents in reference to Πάτερ ἡμῶν in Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer. To this end, this article now turns to a brief scholarly review in order to provide the gap of knowledge and the attendant argument addressed in this study.

Scholarly perspectives regarding the phrase Πάτερ ἡμῶν

Guided by source criticism, Goulder (1963) views Matthew's phrase Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (Our Father who is in the heavens) as having originated from the same source that occasioned ὁ πατήρ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (your Father who is in the heavens) in Mark 11:25 and that this Matthean phrase is reflective of Jesus' Gethsemane cry, ἀββα ὁ πατήρ (Abba, Father) (Mk 14:36), and the early church usage (Gl 4:6; Rm 8:15). At this time, the church valued the use of Aramaic words for its original nature alongside Greek translation to portray its liturgy (Goulder 1963:38–39). Goulder suggests that Matthew sourced the phrase Πάτερ ἡμῶν from Aramaic, early Christian and Special 'M' material (Matthew's own additions). In his turn, Brown had noted that although the use of Πατήρ ('Father') for God was also known to pagans ('Father Zeus'), the contemporary Jewish prayers tended to use the Hebrew term *ab* and to accompany it by a possessive pronoun such as 'our' – thus, 'Our Father', *abinû* (Brown 1965:182; M'bwangi 2019:132–256). So that means that given the positions of Goulder and Brown, Matthew's use of Πάτερ ἡμῶν (Our Father) may have been occasioned by both Aramaic and early church liturgical contexts and Greco-Roman social contexts.

Van Tilborg (1972) constructs his argument by following Goulder while closely appealing (mainly) to form criticism and some aspects of tradition history and redaction criticism. After refuting Lohmaey's Parousia occasioned eschatological interpretation of Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer, Van Tilborg contends that the similarities in πατήρ (Father) and the difference caused by ἡμῶν (our) in Matthew 6:9 and Mark 14:36 indicates that although the prayer was unknown in Mark's congregation, it originated in a liturgical reflection of the Gethsemane story. Furthermore, Van Tilborg noted that

the coupling of Πάτερ with οὐρανοῖς is used to differentiate the heavenly and earthly Father. Because the word οὐρανοῖς (heaven) is mentioned twice in verses 9b and 10c in the context of a comparison between 'heaven' and 'earth', the concept Πάτερ ἡμῶν suggests 'an opposition between the Father, who dwells in heaven, and the earth, which is man's dwelling place' (Van Tilborg 1972:96). Furthermore, guided by form and redaction criticisms to explain the form of the Lord's Prayer, Van Tilborg regards the prayer as a 'Jewish-Christian prayer' that had endured its final transformation when it was assumed in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. With reference to Matthew, it may be assumed that the final redactor of the Gospel of Matthew is responsible for the formulae (Πάτερ) ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς: (v6:9b: Our Father who is in heaven) and the addition of ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς (v10c: just as in heaven and on earth) (Van Tilborg 1972:105). As already noted, Van Tilborg suggests that Matthew couples Πάτερ (Father) and οὐρανός (heaven) in order to allow the prayer to differentiate the heavenly and earthly Father, whereby a comparison made in verses 9b and 10c between heaven and earth suggests an opposition between the Father, who dwells in heaven, and the earth, which is man's dwelling place (M'bwangi 2019:224–228; Van Tilborg 1972:101). Does Van Tilborg's aspect of 'opposition' suggest that by the use of the phrase 'just as in heaven and on earth' (10c), Matthew had envisioned a perspective of God's transcendence conceivable by juxtapositioning Πάτερ ἡμῶν against pagan references to Zeus as 'Father'? During the composition of Matthew's Lord's Prayer, Zeus was popularly worshipped in the Roman Empire as one of the principal deities. If this was the case, and because people's choice to worship a particular deity constitutes a performative mark of identity, then did the drawing of the correlation between Matthew's conception of God as Father and Rome's conception of Zeus as 'Father' have anything to do with the self-understanding of Matthew's community?

Employing socio-rhetorical interpretation, Robbins (1995) agrees with Van Tilborg's proposal of Matthew sourcing some aspects of the Lord's Prayer from early Christian liturgical experience while emphasising its Jewish heritage. Consequently, Robbins (1995:132) claims that the relation of the phrase 'Our Father' in Matthew 6:9 with the direct address to God as Abba, the Aramaic word for Father, in Mark 14:36, Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6 as a prayer statement suggests that 'Father' rather than 'Our Father' was characteristic of Jesus' early followers and probably derived from Jesus himself. Supplementing Goulder's and Van Tilborg's suggestion of an Aramaic or Jewish origin of the Lord's Prayer, Robbins observes that this relationship with Jewish heritage in the Lord's Prayer does not indicate recitation of Hebrew Bible texts. Rather, the Prayer 'recontextualises' words from statements from contemporary Jewish literature and worship in a special context of the speech of Jesus. Robbins (1995:134) claims that this recontextualisation of words in Jewish culture, whose result is 'reconfiguration' of the thought and action the words evoked in other contexts, occurs throughout the Lord's Prayer. Robbins, in resonance with Van Tilborg's suggestion

of the prayer being reflective of the transcendence of God, suggests that Matthew's concept 'Our Father' indicates that the prayer, in its expanded version in its opening, evokes a community relationship to God ('Our') in the context of identifying 'God's exalted place in heaven' (Bradley & Roberts 1995:117–146; M'bwangi 2019:233–238; Robbins 1995:132).

Employing mainly reader-response criticism blended with J.L. Austin's speech act theory and Tom F. Driver's ritual theory, Carter (1995) joins the debate on the significance of Matthew's concept of 'Our Father'. Unlike Goulder, who suggests that Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer is reflective of previous Jewish or early church liturgical experiences, Carter (1995:515, 522) suggests that Matthew's phrase Πάτερ ἡμῶν in Matthew 6:9 performs a liturgical function of helping the community to recall previous liturgical experiences of order, community and transformation. However, Carter observes that the coupling of the phrase Πάτερ ἡμῶν with the two-fold mention of 'heaven' in verses 9 and 10 accomplishes a ritual function of maintaining social and cosmic order, whereby heaven is regarded as the model source for what is to happen on Earth. Carter's position resonates with the inference of God's transcendence suggested by Van Tilborg and Robbins. The 'Father' is meant to symbolically create order in terms of past, present and future perspectives (Carter 1995:522–524). However, Carter presents more of the notion of God's transcendence that relates to the identity of the Matthean community, a community with a dual residence; a heavenly and an earthly residence. Consequently, Carter (1995:526, 528) claims that the pronoun ἡμῶν (Our) in verse 9 performs the role of shaping the identity of the community by enhancing solidarity among those joining in their performance of the prayer, for instance, in the act of drawing participants together in the common act of addressing God as their Father. Furthermore, emphasising the dual aspect of the community's identity, Carter contends that the evoking of God's 'will to be done on earth as in heaven' in the Lord's Prayer envisions a gift of transformation effected not only on individuals but also on the society and the natural world. This transformation, according to Carter (1995:528–529), occurs in the context of exposing injustice in terms of 'sin' and 'temptations' and is accomplished through God's forgiveness and the community's obligation to reciprocal forgiveness.

To be noted from the above brief analysis of scholars' conceptions of Matthew's use of the concept Πάτερ ἡμῶν, two aspects of performative identity function of this concept can be inferred: on the one hand, taking advantage of literary criticism (form, redaction and reader-response), these scholars have explored the connection between Matthew's concept 'Our Father' with similar prayers found in Aramaic and early Christian traditions. On the other hand, the linguistic connection of the concept ('Our Father') with the contemplation of the transcendence of God has been noted. The connection noted by these scholars between the concept of 'Our Father' in Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer and the Aramaic and early Christian traditions in the context of evoking God's transcendence, as will be discussed in due

course, was crucial in shaping the identity of the Matthean community in the Roman society of the 1st century CE. What has not been explored by these scholars is the dynamic function of the phrase 'Our Father' in reconstructing and negotiating the identity formation of the community of Matthew in the Roman Empire, which could be attained by engaging both literary analysis and SITs that have the capacity to explore cultural, social, political and economic aspects of the discourse of the Matthean community in the 1st century CE social setting. This is the gap of knowledge regarding the function of Matthew's concept 'Our Father' in shaping the identity of the Matthean community that will be attended in this study to defend the argument that Matthew employed the concept Πάτερ ἡμῶν in the 1st century CE firstly to reconstruct the Christian identity of his community by identifying with early Christian community and accommodating diaspora Judaism and secondly to negotiate it by contesting the Roman Empire.

Negotiation and construction of identity in the Roman Empire

The concept of 'negotiation' is borrowed from Carter (2011) who defines it:

[N]ot as a face-to-face discussion between Christian leaders and imperial leaders, but [*it refers*] to making one's way or shaping an appropriate way of life and identity in the midst of the Roman Empire. (p. 287)

A reference to 'making one's way or shaping an appropriate way of life' points to relationships as a means of identity formation and sustenance. Thus, identity reconstruction and negotiation of the Matthean community is to be understood in terms of the relations between the Matthean community with cultures of either diaspora Judaism, other early Christian communities or Roman imperialism. How could identity reconstruction and negotiation be effected? Identity reconstruction and negotiation in the Roman Empire happened in three ways.

Firstly, it could happen through what Barclay (1996:98) refers to as 'accommodation', which means the loss of Jewish culture through the interaction between Judaism and Hellenistic traditions. Reference to loss of Jewish culture means 'accommodation' could also be used to explain the identity reconstruction in terms of the relationship of diaspora Judaism with emerging Christianity, because this process also involved the submerging of some of the values, practices and norms of diaspora Judaism with Christianity in the Roman Empire.

Secondly, 'identification' was another way by which identity reconstruction in the Roman Empire could be accomplished. The precondition for identification is the existence of two or more individuals who conceive themselves as members of a group (Faulkner 2005:3–4). Belonging to a group is driven by two factors, namely (1) a desire to maintain self-esteem and (2) to have their life guided by group norms. In some cases, identification, such as in ethnic groupings, presents rigid

boundaries of identity, unlike in such a case as belonging to a football club (Faulkner 2005:2–3; Kuecker 2016:70–71). In antiquity, identification with either other individuals or groups performed the crucial aspect of grounding identity. Malina and Neyrey (1996:154–164) have observed that in antiquity, narratives of collective identity, rather than an individual's choice, were guided by belonging to a fictive family, a city dwelling or political factions or coalitions, and these played a significant role in the formation of an individual's social identity. Consequently, identification with other early Christian communities was crucial to identity formation and maintenance of the community of Matthew (M'bwangi 2019:232–240).

Thirdly, contesting as means of negotiating identity in the Roman Empire refers to nonviolent resistance to the Roman Empire occasioned by Roman elite pressure that was characterised by tense interactions (Carter 2011:286–287). Hence, the Matthean community could borrow, for instance, the use of Roman titles, but for the purposes of contesting Roman imperial policies. Carter (2011:303), following Barclay, aptly notes that 'diaspora communities are typically sites of contested power, both internal contest over the power of tradition, and contest with the host community'. Carter's view that the 'diaspora communities are typically sites of contested power' explicitly supports the notion that exuding Rome's power through the Roman elites in most cases could result in contestation by the communities at the provincial and municipal levels that were seeking autonomous existence in the Roman Empire. This contestation was important in negotiating identity by preserving norms and values for a way of life and identity appropriate to the Matthean community in the midst of Roman social, economic and political strategies.

In what follows, the author will carry out a brief discourse analysis of Matthew's phrase of Πάτερ ἡμῶν in preparation for elaborating how he employs this concept to reconstruct and negotiate the Christian identity of the Matthean community in the late 1st-century Roman Empire.

A brief observation of the sentence flow of Matthew 6:9–10

The sentence flow is informed by the separate but related semantic analysis of Πατήρ (Father), ἡμῶν (Our) and their combination Πάτερ ἡμῶν (Our Father) as viewed from a brief observation of the sentence flow of Matthew 6:9–10.

Matthew 6:9–10: A sentence flow

V 9. οὖν

ὑμεῖς προσεύχεσθε ·	Orientation
Οὕτως	
Πάτερ	
ἡμῶν	Communal
ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς	Modeling

V.10	τὸ ὄνομά ἁγιασθήτω	
	σου·	
	ἡ βασιλεία ἐλθέτω	
	σου·	
	τὸ θέλημά γενηθήτω	
	σου, τῆς γῆς	
	ἐπὶ	
	ὡς	Comparative experience of God's kingdom and will
	οὐρανῶ	
	ἐν	

The noun Πατήρ: The progenitor, creator and sovereign ruler

Πάτερ is a noun vocative masculine singular of πατήρ, Father. In his online version of *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Friberg claims that πατήρ has a three-fold meaning: (1) literally meaning an immediate male ancestor (Mt 4:21); a more remote or racial ancestor, (*fore*)father, Progenitor (Mt 3:9); (2) as a title for God, it may mean the Creator and Sovereign ruler of all (Ja 1:17); the Father of Jesus Christ (Lk 2:49); the Father of Christians (Rm 1:7); and (3) figuratively, it may refer to spiritual fatherhood (1 Cor 4:15); a title of honour or respect (Ac 7:2); the first of a class of persons, *archetype, founder* (Rm 4:11); the devil as the first of the class of persons who partake of his nature as *archetype, model*, such as murderers, liars, etc. (Jn 8:44) (Friberg 2000). As an emphatic vocative (Wallace 2000:39), Πάτερ conveys the deep emotional significance of the title of God as Creator and Sovereign ruler of all. What did this description of God have to do with the audience of Matthew? The next section on ἡμῶν helps to explain the relationship between πατήρ and the audience of Matthew

The pronoun ἡμῶν

The word ἡμῶν is a personal genitive plural pronoun from ἐγώ, meaning 'our'. As a genitive of association (Wallace 2000:62), it describes the relations of Matthew's audience in connection to πατήρ, the sovereign ruler and progenitor of mankind. Consequently, ἡμῶν (Our) semantically plays the role of shaping the identity of the Matthean community on account of establishing a relationship of dependence on God (Carter 1995:526) to express the belonging of the Matthean community to God, the sovereign ruler. This relationship is further elaborated by the concept Πάτερ ἡμῶν (Our Father).

The sources for and origin of Πάτερ ἡμῶν

Although Matthew does not clearly describe what occasioned the phrase Πάτερ ἡμῶν (Our Father), Luke indicates that the Lord's Prayer was occasioned by the disciples' request to Jesus; 'Lord, teach us to pray, just like John taught his disciples' (Lk 11:1). Reference to John's disciples indicates the desire of Jesus' disciples to understand who they are in

comparison to John's disciples and who they may be to other communities around them. The commonality of Πάτερ in Matthew 6:9 and Luke 11:2 reveals the place of the so-called Q community (which provides the source for the common textual materials in Matthew and Luke) in Matthew's narrative. Similarly, the phrase αββα ὁ πατήρ (Abba, Father) in Mark 14:36, Galatians 4:6 and Romans 8:15 is reflective of early Christian communities, besides the audience of Matthew, although some of the members of Matthew's community could have originated from them. To emphasise Jesus' authority in his community, in 6:9a Matthew employs προσεύχεσθε (verb, imperative, present middle, 2nd person, plural, from προσεύχομαι, pray or speak to God), which is a command indicating a speaker addressing his subordinate (Mounce 1993:302–303; Wallace 2000:211). Consequently, Οὕτως οὖν προσεύχεσθε ὑμεῖς ('Pray, then, in this way', NAS) at the opening of Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer (6:9a) rhetorically serves the role of orientating Matthew's community to a prayer grounded in Jesus' authority. This orientation is motivated not by a request to pray like John's disciples but by a desire for a righteousness; a righteousness for which Matthew tells them they need to be rewarded by the Father (6:1) and without which they will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:20). Emphasising the role of Πάτερ ἡμῶν (Our Father) in underlining the relations of Matthew's audience with God, Robbins (1995) aptly observes that:

In the expanded version the opening evokes a community relationship to God ('our'), identifies God's exalted place in heaven, praises God's name as holy, welcomes God's rule, and submits willingly to God's will both for heaven and earth. (p. 132)

Robbins' usage of the phrases 'community relationship', 'welcomes God's rule' and 'submits to God's rule' are some of the indicators by which Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer envisions the reconstruction and negotiation of the identity of Matthew's community in reference to a plethora of religious practices, values and norms that survived in the Roman Empire. These practices, values and norms preserved a way of life and identity appropriate for the Matthean community in the Roman empire. How does Matthew use the phrase 'Our Father' to accomplish the task of reconstructing and negotiating the identity for his community?

Matthew 6:10 Πάτερ ἡμῶν: Reconstruction of Christian identity

It is important to think of the function of the Matthean Lord's Prayer as reconstructing rather than constructing the identity of the Matthean community. In other words, Matthew for some reason felt that the community had an identity that was inadequate and therefore needed to be negotiated through a process of reconstruction (M'bwangi 2022:106). Some of the crucial strategies undertaken by Matthew to reconstruct the identity of his community are redacting earlier literary sources, and accommodating Jewish traditions. This two-fold strategy of identity reconstruction points to a skillful way of crafting or designing the dynamics of identity, on the one hand, and on the other hand, identity

negotiation refers to a suitable or proper way of preserving identity.

Redacting earlier sources to identify with the Jesus Movement

In his redaction of the Q source, Matthew probably added the personal pronoun ἡμῶν (Mt 6:9), since the original Q source probably only had the vocative masculine singular Πάτερ that is retained in the shorter Lucan prayer invocation (Lk 11:2). With respect to the redactional activity of Matthew, two issues in the Lord's Prayer stand out. The first issue has to do with the shorter Lucan version. Both Luke and Matthew used the Q source independently and therefore redacted it from Q for their respective gospels. Both prayers begin by invoking God as Πάτερ (Rodgers & Rodgers 1998:135). The Lucan format of this prayer is witnessed by ancient manuscripts such as \mathfrak{B}^{75} κ B 1. 700 aur vg sy^s; Mcion^T Or (Aland et al. 2016), showing that it is the earliest form of the phrase. Secondly, Matthew's longer version of the prayer witnessed by κ^{*1b} D K L W Z Δ Θ 0170^{vid} $f^{(1)}$ ¹³ 33. 565. 579. 700. 892*. 1241. l 844. l 2211 m latt sy^{s-c-p} bo; Or^{pt} from the point of the text of the Greek New Testament includes a later version of the phrase whereby the prayer begins with a possessive case, Πάτερ ἡμῶν (Our Father). Because of the plural form of ἡμῶν (Our) in the address of God as Πατήρ (Father), Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer is characterised as a community prayer (Osborne 2010:227) that regards God as the metaphorical father of the community and by implication the members of the community as part of God's family. The literary function of ποιέω (6:1) is action or praxis-oriented. Thus the imperatival προσεύχεσθε (prostrate to pray) (6:9) signals the ritual characteristics of the Matthean Lord's Prayer. Nel (2017:120) noted that in Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer, rituals function in a complex manner, whereby existing rituals serve to reinforce some rituals, while other rituals reinterpret and even nullify other rituals. In this case, the role of rituals to reinforce or nullify some other rituals suggests that Matthew redacted earlier forms of prayers to reconstruct a Christian identity by first recontextualising these earlier pattern in tandem with other prayers emerging from the communities that constituted the Jesus Movement, then, reconfiguring the performative role of the prayer befitting his community's identity. The importance of this recontextualisation and configuration will be elaborated in due course.

Accommodating Jewish traditions

In respect to the relations between the Matthean community and diaspora Judaism, the Matthean Lord's Prayer accomplishes two important tasks of accommodating Diaspora Jewish religious traditions. Firstly, Matthew recontextualised earlier Jewish liturgical traditions. In addition to the invocation of the original, the Q prayer resonates with the Judean אבנו (Our Father) in the Kaddish (Parson 2003) and Shimoneh Esreh types of Jewish prayers (Parson 2003). These Jewish prayers were likely significant in the formation of Jewish identity among the Judeans in the diaspora. Consequently, not only did Matthew recontextualise

the Prayer by editing what he found in the Q tradition, as already noted, but he also reconfigured Jewish traditions of prayer so as to provide a belief system for his community when reconstructing a cultural identity as a family of God in similar terms as 1st-century Judean sectarian communities understood their identity. This reconstruction of a Christian identity by reconfiguration of earlier Jewish religious tradition indicates that either the Matthean community was a Judean sectarian group regarding itself as part of true Israel or, unfortunately, a deviant Judean group struggling with other Judean sectarian groups in contextualising traditional Judean religious sources to constitute a new community in the post-70 CE period (Overman 1990:5), or even worse still, a deviant Judean group within formative Judaism that sought to legitimate its religious identity. It is also, more unfortunately, commonly claimed that the Matthean community was a deviant Judean community seeking to establish a new symbolic universe without denying the way it was previously understood (Riches 2006:61, 64; Saldarini 1994:66–68) or as one form of middle Judaism with a distinct synagogue-derived identity (Talbert 2004:6). Underlying all these assumptions is a conception of the relations of the Matthean community with diaspora Judaism, a relationship that reveals how Matthew employs his gospel narrative to accommodate Jewish traditions in order to transform them to provide a criterion for constructing a Christian identity in the Roman Empire, thereby portraying his community as a 1st century CE quasi-Judean community, albeit their source of identity was not the Mosaic Torah *per se* but as interpreted by Jesus (M'bwangi 2019:236–237).

Contesting the Roman empire

The Matthean Lord's Prayer reflects Matthew's appropriation of Jesus' interpretation of earlier Jewish prayers to provide a cultic perspective. This cultic aspect is important in reconstructing the Christian identity of the Matthean community. Firstly, in its political function, the prayer mimics the *pater-patria* status of the Roman emperors. Porter (2011) cites a late 1st-century BCE calendrical inscription from the Roman province of Asia that honours Augustus in terms of Father Zeus and saviour of the universe. This was a tradition that prevailed in Roman Empire as a means to honour the divine status of subsequent Roman emperors, including Nero, who was described in Athens as 'good god Asclepius Caesar ... and Apollo in Athens' (Porter 2011:170–173). Thus, in the Roman empire, *pater-patria* was an ideological and political strategy that was applied by either the senate or individuals like Roman elites to honour the divine connection of the surviving emperor. It also provided an important aspect of delineating the identity of peoples by symbolically connecting them to the legacy of Caesar Augustus (M'bwangi 2022:107).

By imitating the Roman political use of the term *pater-patria*, the Matthean use of the phrase 'Our Father' in his version of the Lord's Prayer assumes a political function that ironically contests and symbolically inverts the political power of the Roman emperor by emphasising the political power of God

as taught by Jesus in the Prayer. The phrase Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (Our Father who is in the heavens) (Mt 6:9) is intended to shape the community's self-understanding or sense of identity by emphasising familial relations between the community and God. This identity-forming role of the phrase 'Our Father' in Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer is communicated in two ways. Firstly, from a ritual perspective, Matthew intends to preserve a two-fold communal memory. According to Baker, memory has two phases by which it reconstructs and maintains social identity; communicative and cultural phases. The communicative phase is characterised by face-to-face circulation of facts and information, while the cultural memory phase focuses on the past and is comprised of reusable texts, images and rituals (Baker 2011:14–16, 2016:110–112). By revising material from the Q source to recontextualise Jesus's interpretation of Jewish prayer, Matthew depicts the communicative characteristic not only of the concept 'Our Father' but of the whole of the Lord's Prayer, by which he intends to present its ritual nature to his immediate audience. Moreover, the act of composing the Lord's Prayer indicates that Matthew attempted to preserve the cultural memory of the prayer for future generations of Christians.

Secondly, by redacting the Q source through adding the pronoun ἡμῶν (Our) in Matthew 6:9, Matthew employs the Lord's Prayer to negotiate a Christian cultural identity of his community by recategorisation into superordinate identity that contested Roman empire. This contestation of the Roman empire through recategorisation is attained not only through communication and cultural memory but also through the depersonalising effect achieved in the recitation of the prayer by both Judean and gentile followers of Jesus. Thus, to reinforce group cohesion, the narrative of the Gospel of Matthew depicts Matthew, the implied author, as a prototypical in-group leader of the community. This recategorisation to the Matthean community ideologically negotiated the community's identity, firstly, by subordinating previous Judean ethnic identity to the superordinate category and, secondly, by maintaining this superordinate identity, in which case both Judean and gentile followers of Jesus belonged together, as expressed through the memory prompted by oral recitation of the Lord's Prayer. Thus, the recitation of the concept 'Our Father' in Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer contested the identity formation norms and values pegged on the *pater-patria* divine status of the Roman emperors and elites by emphasising a relationship with a transcendent God who first revealed himself to the Jews and now to the Matthean community.

Thirdly, Neyrey following Malina, comments on the political function of the Lord's Prayer in reference to the Roman patron-client strategy. He says that the phrase Πάτερ ἡμῶν (Our Father) in Matthew (6:9–15):

[F]ully acknowledges the basic patron-client relationship [between the Matthean community] and God. God-patron earthly clients render honor by acclaiming God as heavenly

father, whose name is most praiseworthy and whose power and sovereignty should be acknowledged (6:9–10). Once they have paid their dues of honor to the Patron, clients may ask for benefaction, such as food, deliverance from debt, and protection (6:11–13). (Malina & Neyrey 1998:110)

Malina and Neyrey's comment implies that the narrator of Matthew's Gospel employs the phrase Πάτερ ἡμῶν in the Matthean Lord's Prayer to contest the beneficence of the emperors and elite to render irrelevant the political power of Rome, which was secured through the client–patron strategy in the Matthean community. Thus, in v10, ὡς, an adverb of comparison (just as, as, 'in a similar manner') holds the action of 'God's kingdom' (βασιλεία σου) and 'God's will' (θέλημά σου) 'on Earth' (τῆς γῆς) in apposition to 'in heaven' (ἐνοὐρανῶ). Consequently (in the sentence flow), prepositions ἐπὶ (upon or on) and ἐν (in), modify 'the Earth' (τῆς γῆς) and 'heaven' (οὐρανῶ), respectively. Thus, regarding God as their father in heaven whose kingdom and will should come to Earth is to replace the role of the Roman Emperor and the elites with the invisible God, not only as the father of the Matthean community, but also a benefactor who wields superior power that grants the provision of all their earthly needs (Mt 6:11).

Conclusion

To answer the question of how Matthew employed his concept Πάτερ ἡμῶν (Our Father) in Matthew 6:9 to reconstruct and negotiate the identity of his community, it was important to briefly explore perspectives offered by earlier scholars on the function of Matthew's phrase Πάτερ ἡμῶν to expose the gap of knowledge to be addressed by this study. Consequently, the analysis of Matthew's phrase 'Our Father' in reference to the socio-economic and political significance of the concept of αββα ὁ πατήρ (Abba, Father), Judean אבא (Our Father) and Pater-Patria, in the Jesus Movement, diaspora Judaism and Roman Empire, respectively, defended the argument that Matthew employed the concept Πάτερ ἡμῶν in the 1st century CE firstly to reconstruct the Christian identity of his community by identifying with early Christian community and accommodating diaspora Judaism and secondly to negotiate it by contesting the Roman Empire.

Thus, reconstruction of existing Judean identity into a quasi-Judean-Christian identity was important for the survival of Matthew's community in 1st century society because it granted a hybrid identity that was crucial for the community's survival in a society that was not only ruled by the Roman Empire but also had several religious traditions that were tolerated by the Empire. The conclusion drawn from this study is that people's awareness of the norms, values and practices that inform the identity of their progenitors is crucial in enforcing the freedom of marginalised people to identify with their progenitors (ancestors, forerunners, predecessors). In turn, this identification and awareness has the potential to empower people who are marginalised to contest hegemonic rule.

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