



Righteousness, Ideology and the Kingdom of God in Matthew 6:10 - A reading of Identity Politics from Matthew's Lord's Prayer

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Abstract

A number of New Testament Scholars contend that Matthew's emphasis for God's Kingdom in the Lord's Prayer either implores God to establish His empire on earth, or stands as a catalyst for character formation, or even presents a more interactive perspective of God. In spite of observing Matthew's focus on God's work on earth, these scholars fail to see the connection between Matthew's concept of righteousness, his ideology and the phrase "your Kingdom come" (Matt 6:10, RSV). The aim of this article is to argue that Matthew rhetorically employs his concept of "your Kingdom come" to elaborate the ideological significance of righteousness in advancing identity politics.

Keywords: Kingdom of God, righteousness, ideology, identity politics, Matthew.

Introduction

Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer has had a notable impact in the society during the Church fathers and reformation periods. The beliefs and norms derived from this prayer have the potential of effecting social justice as well as a supplicant's inner healing. The observation of Matthew's Lord's Prayer as the heart of Christian life¹ points to the rhetorical function of the Prayer in shaping Christian character and decision making.

Consequently significant people have provided the content of church history and reformation theology, such as St. Augustine, Martin Luther and John Calvin recognized the distinctive contribution of the Lord's Prayer in supplying all kinds of needs for Christians, including pastoral counseling process² (Du Plessis 2016:1, 5-6). Thus, studying Matthew's Lord's Prayer is important because it provides a window through which one can understand not only the impact of Matthew's Gospel in New Testament scholarship, but also the vital role of the Christocentric beliefs system that has shaped Christian worship, and generally Christian life for ages. For instance, Apollonius of Tyana (14-70 CE) a contemporaneous of Jesus, Paul and Matthew, believed in God and was radical in his teaching just like Jesus and Paul. But, unlike Paul and Jesus, he taught that through mystical meditation, people could achieve union

¹ N. Koopman 'The Lord's Prayer – An agenda for Christian living', in *Journal of Reformend Theology* 1(2007) 4. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/156973107X182604>; Amanda Du Plessis, 'The Lord's Prayer as a paradigm for restorative justice in brokenness', In *die Skriflig* 50 n. 4 (2016) 1, a2089. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v50i4.2089>.

² Du Plessis, 'The Lord's Prayer as a paradigm for restorative justice in brokenness', 1, 5-6.



with the Supreme being. Matthew's community must have been exposed to a range of mystic meditations and prayers that were going on in the Roman Empire This provokes the main question to be answered in this article; why did Matthew in his narrative emphasize the coming of God's Kingdom and what did he intend to achieve by this claim? To answer this question, I will first briefly explore the work of three prominent Matthean scholars, namely Warren Carter, Charles Talbert and Craig Evans, who have contributed to the discussion of the Lord's Prayer before offering a reading of the identity politics found in Matthew's Lord's Prayer.

Brief Literature Recap

In a monograph published in 2000, Warren Carter attempted to show the connection between religious practices of the Matthean community in the socio-political environment of the late first-century CE. In his monograph, *Matthew and the Margins*, Carter underscores the rhetorical function of the Matthean Lord's Prayer in advancing a second act of justice. Carter understood almsgiving (6:2) to be the first act of justice. As an act of justice,³ Carter claims, the Lord's Prayer employs polemical language to contrast the disciples' lifestyle with the practice of righteousness in both synagogues and the Graeco-Roman world. By regarding the Matthean Lord's Prayer as a lifestyle forming tool, ironically, Carter insinuates that the Lord's Prayer has the propensity to describe the identity of a Matthean community. Furthermore, Carter argues that Matthew's focus on Jesus' call for "the Kingdom to come" (Matt 6:10) implores God, as a loving Father, to recreate the world by establishing his Empire on earth. He claims that the widespread refusal to accept God's sovereignty in the Roman Empire, motivated the Matthean community to evoke the Lord's Prayer, calling for God's Kingdom on Earth.⁴ Although viewed from the close connection that Carter establishes between the Roman Empire and the Lord's Prayer, the Matthean Lord's Prayer is depicted as a political tool, however; he does not observe Matthew's rhetorical use of the prayer to instigate embattled and humanistic perspectives of identity politics. This study attempts to stretch Carter's view of Matthew's Lord's Prayer by explaining the Prayer's perspective of identity politics.

Writing four years after Carter, in his monograph, 'Reading the Sermon on the Mount: A Character Formation and Decision Making in Matthew 5-7,' Charles Talbert refuted the claim that the Matthean Lord's prayer describes the split between Christians and Jews to affirm that the prayer rather reflects "the tensions between different forms of Judaism at the close of the first century CE Palestine."⁵ Not only does Talbert see a link between early Christianity and first-century Judaism from the vantage point of the Matthean Lord's Prayer, but he also notes the rhetorical function of the Sermon on the Mount in character formation for the purpose of elaborating the meaning of Matthew's concept of greater righteousness (Matt 5: 20).⁶ Like Carter, Talbert insinuates that Matthew's phrase "your Kingdom come" in the Matthean Lord's Prayer rhetorically provides a basis for the identity of the Matthean community. He regards the petition for God's Kingdom as a catalyst for character formation because it provides "norms for one's life of prayer,"⁷ on the one hand. On the other hand, Talbert links the Matthean Lord's Prayer with specific Jewish prayers such as witnessed in Psalms (8: 26), Isaiah (64: 8) and the Qaddish prayer which is said after the Sermon in the Synagogue. However, Carter also sees some difference between the Lord's Prayer and Jewish prayers in that the Matthean

³ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 161

⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁵ Charles Talbert. *Reading the Sermon on the Mount: Character Formation and Decision Making in Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academy, 2004), 5

⁶ C. Talbert, p. 102

⁷ C. Talbert, p. 119.



Lord's Prayer plays an eschatological role by emphasizing the "speedy coming" of the eschatological Kingdom.⁸

Eight years after Talbert, Craig Evans in his monograph, *Matthew: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*, identifies the author of Matthew's Gospel as a tax collector (Matt 9.9) who would invite people to listen to Jesus (Lk 5: 29-32). Evans claims that this tax collector wrote the narrative of the Gospel based on the sayings of Jesus with the intention of addressing a community that was mainly Jewish in composition and was transitioning away from Judaism after being forcefully removed from the synagogue during worship.⁹ At this point I need to point out two issues concerning the provenance of Matthew's Gospel. First, it is noteworthy that external evidence, such as that provided by the writings of Eusebius, Bishop of Antioch, testifies to the presence of the Gospel of Matthew in Antioch in the late first-century CE because in the prologue of his epistle to *Smyrnaeans* (1:1-2), Eusebius attributes divine origin to Jesus which shows some affinity with Matthew's birth narratives.¹⁰ Second, the tension in Antioch suggested by Evans may have been caused by the presence of Jews in Antioch who were attempting to convert people to Judaism or compel Christians to obey Jewish laws (Gal 2:11-13; Acts 14:24-15. 3).

Furthermore, Evans' observation that the great commission (Matt 28:19) depicts the audience of Matthew's Gospel as the "new people of God" is confirmed by the narratives' depiction of the audience of Jesus as a multi-ethnic crowd composed of people from Jerusalem, Galilee, Judea, and beyond Jordan (Matt 4: 25). Like Carter and Talbert, Evans regards the earlier Jewish prayers as having influenced the Matthean Lord's Prayer so much that he regards Matthew's Lord's Prayer looking like "Jesus' own adaptation of an ancient Qaddish Aramaic Jewish prayer."¹¹ In spite of observing this close affinity between Matthew's Lord's Prayer with Qaddish Prayer, Evans noted some differences between these prayers. While the Qaddish Prayer seems to present a distant view of God to the Jewish community because it refers to God in the third person singular, the Matthean Lord's Prayer presents a more interactive perspective of God with the Matthean community because it refers to God in the second person singular, and Matthew instructs the community "to speak directly to God as their Father."¹²

Additionally, Evans draws a perspective of the continuous arrival of the Kingdom of God from the Matthean Lord's Prayer. He claims that according to Mark (1: 15) the Kingdom of God had come in the person and ministry of Jesus, and the insistence of "your Kingdom come" in the Lord's Prayer is to urge the Matthean community- as was with the case of Jesus' disciples- to pray for the "Kingdom's arrival in its fullness."¹³

In short, from the research findings of Carter, Talbert and Evans, we gather that the author of Matthew's Gospel points to the establishment of God's righteous activities on earth as the focal point of the Lord's Prayer. Thus, demonstrating the meaning of exceeding righteousness (5.20) in the context of Jewish heritage of the Prayer on two fronts; in terms of its origin as well as its audience. Despite this revision of the Lucan Lord's Prayer and/or the Jewish Qaddish prayer to compose the Matthean Lord's Prayer, which itself shows Matthew's mind set, none of these scholars regard the Matthean Lord's Prayer as an ideological intervention.

⁸ C. Talbert, pp. 109,111,115-116.

⁹ Craig A. Evans *Matthew: New Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5-7.

¹⁰ Eusebius. "Church History." In *New Advent*. [http:// www.newadvent.org/fathers/ 2501. htm](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2501.htm). Accessed 11/05/2017

¹¹ C.A. Evans *Matthew*, 145.

¹²C.A. Evans, p.146.

¹³ C.A. Evans, p 147.



This leads to the question (already noted earlier); why did Matthew in his narrative emphasize the coming of God's Kingdom and what did he intend to achieve by this claim? What follows from this point is that I will attempt to extend the works of Carter, Talbert and Evans by examining Matthew's ideology in his version of the Lord's Prayer to support the argument that Matthew rhetorically employs his concept of "your Kingdom" to elaborate the ideological significance of righteousness in advancing identity politics for his community. This ideology was meant to empower the community of Matthew with critical and creative skills for participating in intra-group relations with Jewish communities in Antioch in the late first century CE.

Reading Identity Politics

It had already been observed in 1996 by Richard Martin, that in his Gospel narrative, Matthew employs an ideological approach in his narrative to construct what looks like Jewish hostility toward Christians in an attempt to legitimate the Matthean community as true covenant people.¹⁴ However, Martin does not depict the Lord's Prayer as an ideological intervention that uncovers aspects of identity politics among the Matthean community because his interpretation takes note of only one trajectory of relationship of the community of Matthew with Judaism but avoids the other two trajectories of relationships, namely, the Jesus Movement and the Graeco-Roman Empire. In order to illustrate the existence of identity politics in the Matthean Lord's Prayer, I will first engage an ideological texture, in order to explain the semantic relations and rhetorical function of the phrase "your Kingdom come" (Matt 6.10). Following this, I will apply two modes of identity politics-both the embattled and humanistic dialogues- as a dual model. By doing this, I will be able to infer more about intra-group relations between the Matthean community and first-century Jewish sectarian community from the vantage point of the Matthean Lord's Prayer. But, before I do this, I will first define two concepts that prominently feature in this paper. These two concepts are cultural identity and exceeding righteousness.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the definition of identity politics is derived from those stated by Tesh and Williams,¹⁵ Bernstein¹⁶, and Moon.¹⁷ Grounded in the definitions proposed by these scholars, I define identity politics as, *the evoking of traditional rhetoric by a disenfranchised community to reconstruct, legitimate and maintain a social, religious or cultural self-understanding of who they are in a given society.*

In addition, Matthew's concept of exceeding righteousness (5: 20) is to be understood as *the ethical demands by Jesus upon his disciples in compliance with his (Jesus') commands (Matt.6: 10-12) which fulfils not only the Mosaic Law (5: 17-18) but also the will of God (12: 50).*

Richard T. Martin "Ideology, Deviance, and Authority in the Gospel of Matthew: The Political functioning of Performative Writing." *Literature and Theology*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (March 1996) 27-28.

¹⁵ Sylvia N. Tesh, and Bruce A. Williams. "Identity Politics, Disinterested Politics, and Environmental Justice." *Polity* 28, no. 3 (Spring 1996) 285-305.

¹⁶Mary Bernstein. "Identity Politics," in *Annual Review of Sociology*. Vol. 31 (2005),47-74.

¹⁷ Dawne Moon "Who Am I and Who Are We? Conflicting Narratives of Collective Selfhood in Stigmatized Groups." *American Journal of Sociology* 117, no. 5 (March 2012)1336-1379.



Ideological Analysis

The ideological analysis I will use here is grounded in Vernon Robbins' ideological texture. Robbins defines ideology as "...an integrated system of beliefs, assumptions and values...which reflect the needs and interests of a group or class at a particular time"¹⁸ (Robbins 1996a, 193). In effect, Robbins suggests that ideology refers to a communication of a mind-set related to some kind of power, either of the text, audience or the author, which is communicated through the aspirations promoted by a given text. Thus, when a text acquires ideological status, it manifests its potency to rhetorically communicate a three-fold ideological perspective; ideology of the text itself, that of the author, or of the audience. At this point it is important to discuss how ideology is applied to legitimate and even reify the identity of the Matthean community.

There are three striking semantic relations of the Lord's Prayer within Matthew's narrative. First, Matthew's Lord's Prayer (Matt 6: 9-13) is occasioned by Jesus' warning to his disciples in 6: 1, "Beware not to practice your righteousness [δικαιοσύνη] before men in order to be seen by them." In Luke's shorter version, the Lord's Prayer is occasioned by the disciples' request, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Lk 11: 1). The prayer also appears in the Sermon on the Mount, along with acts of piety, such as alms-giving (Matt 6:2-4) and fasting (Matt 6:16-18), which are intended to exemplify what exceeding righteousness stands for (Matt 5: 20). Consequently, it is explicitly pointed out here that according to the author of Matthew's Gospel, the Matthean Lord's Prayer is one of the acts of piety that demonstrates what the Matthean Jesus underscores as the proper way to practise exceeding righteousness. The phrase "your Kingdom come" (6.10), is introduced by the references to God as, "our Father," while in the Gospel of Luke it appears simply as "Father" (Lk 11: 2). Second, the Matthean Lord's Prayer shows some affinity with the Qaddish Jewish prayer in which God is evoked in the third person singular, saying:

Magnified and sanctified be his great name in the world He created according to His will. May He establish His kingdom during your life and during your days, and during the life of all the house of Israel, speedily and in the near future. And say Amen (Jason Barr, <https://propheticheretic.wordpress.com>).¹⁹

Third, the Gospel narrative of Matthew is introduced by making a deliberate reference to the birth narratives of Jesus in the context of two people—Abraham and David—who are significantly connected to the covenant of Israel. The narrative introduces Jesus as "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt 1.1). The place of Jesus makes the covenant available to Christians but not to non-Christians because rejection of Jesus means standing out of the covenant, that is, in its new perspective of being fulfilled by Jesus (Matt 1:1). From these three observations, I deduce two conclusions regarding Matthew's ideological intentions in his Gospel narrative.

First, Matthew seems to have revised the Jewish Qaddish and Lucan versions of the prayer and re-contextualized them for his community's use as well as to defend his perspective of righteousness. Thus, viewed from the first-century background of the emergence of

¹⁸Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring The Texture of Texts* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996a), 193.

¹⁹ See John Parson "Reciting Kaddish: Sanctifying the Name of God." In *Hebrews 4 Christians*.http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Prayers/Daily_Prayers/Kaddish/kaddish.Html. Accessed 29/04/2017; Jason Barr, <https://propheticheretic.wordpress.com/2007/11/13/the-qaddish-and-the-lords-prayer>, Accessed 29/04/2017.



Christianity in the midst of Judaism, Matthew engages his concept of righteousness in the Matthean Lord's Prayer as an ideological intervention by granting his text the power to promote a particular Christocentric approach as opposed to one based on Mosaic Law and a centred perspective of righteousness. Second, because the Lord's prayer is intended to affect character formations, as already noted by Talbert,²⁰ Matthew's emphatic reference to God as "our Father" becomes an identity descriptor.²¹ This legitimates the identity of the Matthean community because the phrase explicitly points to the Matthean community as a family of God. Thus, at this point it is clear that Matthew advanced further ideological intervention to legitimate the identity of the Matthean community by re-contextualizing earlier prayers. This prompts the question; what kind of identity is Matthew attempting to legitimize, and how does he accomplish this? To answer this question, I turn to further ideological analysis. So, far, it can be said that Matthew has legitimized an "enscriptural identity"²² because the Matthean identity is derived from a scriptural point of view. But because Matthew deliberately introduces his narrative by mentioning key figures in Israel's covenant (Abraham and David), there is more to it than simply a scriptural identity. The identity of the Community is shaped by Matthew's perception of the role of Jesus in God's covenant with Israel and the new way of relating to the world derived from this role. Thus, the narrative emphasizes, right at its beginning, Jesus' symbolic sonship to David and Abraham.

Professor Charles Wanamaker's argument that the reconstruction of identity involves a resocialization process in which "one universe of discourse or set of shared or common social meanings is replaced by another,"²³ is instructive in discerning why Matthew revises some aspects of earlier Jewish prayers to compose his own version of the Lord's Prayer. Matthew does not only revise Jewish prayers; he also enhances Jewish perspectives of righteousness to secure his ideological aspirations. Taking note of how first-century Jewish literary traditions, expressed the rhetorical function of righteousness is important, particularly from the Qumran community. To this end, we note that the Psalms of Solomon (8: 11)²⁴ and 4 Ezra (7: 44, 48, 51)²⁵ collectively present an exclusionist function of righteousness. This literature from the Qumran community shows that righteousness is used to describe the identity of Jewish sectarian groups in the light of seeing outsiders as "lawless," "wicked" and "infidels." For instance, the Gentiles that comprise of the Graeco-Roman emperors, Roman elites and client Kings were categorized as unrighteous and lawless people. Thus, Overman claims that 4 Ezra, like 2 Baruch, are late first-century Jewish documents that viewed the Jewish law as "a means to affirm the righteous few and denounces the others."²⁶

Matthew presents a different perspective of righteousness that seems to enhance the Jewish sectarian perspective. Consequently, we see from Matthew's narrative that although Matthew demands of his community a practice of righteousness that greatly exceeds that of the scribes

²⁰ C. Talbert. *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 109-119.

²¹ Philip F. Esler *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 20.

²² Jeremy Punt "Paul, Hermeneutics and Character: Implications for Scripture and Identity." *Scriptura* 79 (2002) 122-123.

²³ Charles A. Wanamaker "Apocalyptic Discourse, Paraenesis and Identity Maintenance." *Neotestamentica* 36, no. 1/2 (2002),133.

²⁴ Gary Buchanan, *The Psalms of Solomon*. R.H. Charles (editor) Wesleyan Center On line (OrfordPress,1913)2:631-652:<http://wesley.nnu.edu/sermons-essaysbooks/non-canonical-literature/noncanonical-literature-ot-pseudepigrapha/the-psalms-of-solomon>. Accessed 11/05/2017.

²⁵ Peter Kirby 2 *Ezra* (4 Ezra). In Early Jewish Writings. <http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/2esdras.html>. Accessed on 29/04/2017.

²⁶ Andrew J. Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis*. (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1996),27-28.



and Pharisees (5.20), he seems to avoid the exclusionist perspective on two fronts; by encouraging his community to reach out to the Jewish community (Matt 10.5-8) as well as to all nations (Matt 28:19). He also encouraged his community to evoke the Kingdom of God in the context of forgiving even their enemies (Matt 6:12, 14-15).

Given the first-century Jewish sectarian literary background, exemplified by Psalm of Solomon, 4Ezra and 2Baruch, which were mainly apocalyptic in nature, it becomes apparent that Matthew revises earlier Jewish liturgical practices to empower his text not only to become a basis for describing cultural identity for his community, but also to stand as a bearer of his ideology. Cultural identity suits the Matthean community because the Lord's Prayer in its literary context describes group values and norms, and because such values and norms are partly derived from existing cultural and religious practices shared with Jewish sectarian communities. If cultural identity is viewed in Smelser' perspective, namely, as a reference to "a phenomenon borne out of the game of social control, social conflict and social change,"²⁷ then the Matthean community possesses a cultural identity because it was borne not out of conflict, but from a social change shared with first-century Jewish sectarian communities. The 66-73 CE Jewish revolt is largely held responsible for this social change.

New Testament scholars ²⁸ seem to agree that the 66-73 CE Jewish war against Rome which eventually led to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and its priesthood exacerbated the tension within first-century Jewish sectarian groups. As they attempted to engage with the Mosaic Law and an understanding of righteousness, they consolidated themselves in the aftermath of the revolt. To understand the kind of relations that existed between the Matthean and Jewish communities in the aftermath of the 66-73 CE Jewish revolt, I will engage two modes of identity politics derived from Dawn Moon's article, "Who Am I and Who Are We? Conflicting Narratives of Collective Selfhood in Stigmatized Groups." It is important here to note that Matthew composed his Gospel around 80-85 CE, that is, in the aftermath of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and its priesthood following the 66-73 CE Jewish revolt. Matthew composed his Gospel narrative at this time in order to consolidate his community in Antioch, just as Yohannan Ben Zakai is believed to have been attempting to consolidate Jewish communities at the Yavneh council in Syria, a first-century province in the Roman Empire.²⁹ From the vantage point of the Matthean Lord's Prayer and the embattled, humanistic dialogue mode of identity politics, it is possible to discover the type of relations that existed between the Matthean community and Jewish sectarian groups in Antioch.

Embattled and Humanistic Intra-Group Relations

Moon contends that an "embattled mode" of identity politics emerges when a stigmatized or marginalised group feels its identity is threatened by rhetoric from a dominant group and its collaborators. To protect their identity from such threats, the marginalized group must "reify their identity." Furthermore, Moon contends that an embattled community engages a kind of "us-them" rhetoric not only to vilify the oppressor, but also to eventually "foreclose

²⁷ Neil Smelser, "Culture: Coherent and Incoherent" in *Theory of Culture* (Berkeley: University of California, 1992),25.

²⁸ See N.T. Wright *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992),161; Leon Morris *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Leicester: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 8-11; Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis*,19-26; Warren. *Matthew and the Margins*, 140-143; Evans, *Matthew*, 4; David A. DeSilva *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press Academy, 2004), 265-266.

²⁹ Shaye J.D. Cohen "The Significance of Yavneh." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 55 (1984),31-34; Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 161-166.



negotiations” with the oppressors and their collaborators.³⁰ Viewed from its relations with first-century Jewish sectarian groups, the rhetorical function of the phrase “your Kingdom come” in the Matthean Lord’s Prayer, depicts the Matthean community’s involvement in an embattled mode of identity politics. How does Matthew’s narrative portray this position? Warren Carter gives some guidelines for analysing the discourse in Matthew’s Gospel. Carter argues that, “though the authorial audience remains the author’s constructs, it is in part an approximation of the actual audience addressed by the author,³¹ explicitly indicates that in the characterization of the scribes and Pharisees, the crowd, and the disciples of Jesus, Matthew’s narrative represents Jewish leadership, the Jewish crowd, and the Matthean community, respectively.

Moreover, as we have already seen, by referring to God as “our Father” and evoking his Kingdom to come (Matt 6: 10), the Matthean community legitimates their identity by claiming that they belong to God whose Kingdom they are invoking to come as they recite the Lord’s Prayer. The narrative has already indicated that the identity which is being legitimized has been reconstructed through the rite of baptism which demanded repentance (Matt 3: 1, 2, 11-13). In addition to this was the revising of earlier Jewish prayers in order to describe the identity of the community as family of God (6: 10). Furthermore, viewed from the immediate context of the Lord’s Prayer (5:3-7.28) the identity of the Matthean community is reified by their description in the beatitudes as a people who are “merciful,” “pure in heart,” “peacemakers” and show a readiness to “suffer for righteousness sake” (Matt 5: 7-11). Reference to reified nature of identity compels us to ask; did the Matthean community fear for the survival of their identity? Did they think that someone out there was threatening their self-understanding of who they were? If Matthew was writing in the aftermath of the 66-73 CE Jewish revolt against Rome, then he probably had the retainers in mind. The retainers are a Jewish aristocratic group that included Pharisees, Scribes and priests, a group which also collaborated with the Roman Empire to facilitate Roman imperial policies in Palestine and Syria.³² Thus, Matthew had enough reason to fear for the survival of his community, particularly because these retainers who belonged to the Jewish leadership which included Pharisee and teachers of the Law were associated with destruction of the second Jerusalem temple.³³

³⁰ As a response to the hegemonic power of the oppressor, the embattled mode of identity politics applies the self-categorization rhetoric of “between us and them,” not only to define and defend the boundaries of identity, but also to “create a sense of security” (Moon 2012, 1350) for a social identity. Additionally, this response has the *effect* that deliberately impedes positive relations between the oppressive regime and the disenfranchised community; because after defining and defending their social identity it creates fixed boundaries which eventually result in the foreclosing of negotiations between the two antagonistic groups. Another essential point is that to *maintain* group identity, adherents of the embattled mode of identity politics apply Manicheanism, which depicts a “fixed and eternal struggle between good and evil.” In this case dissenters are neither tolerated nor accommodated but are excommunicated. The adherents of the embattled mode will also engage in stereotyping rhetoric as vilification, describing dissenters as traitors, ignorant, falsely conscious, naïve, brain washed or the wannabes (Moon 2012, 1351). Besides casting out the dissenters from the group, it eventually strengthens internal group cohesion.

³¹ W. Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, p. 56.

³² Walter P. Zenner “Jewish Retainers a Power Brokers,” in *Jewish Quarterly Review* 81, no. 12 (July-October 1990), 127-149.

³³ Josephus, “Wars of the Jews (BJ 312-315)” in *LEXUNDRIA: A Digital Library of Classical Antiquity*. [http:// www.lexundria.com](http://www.lexundria.com); Suetonius, “The Lives of Caesars (Ves. 4)” in Huff, Phillip in *Whiston, William*. <http://lexundria.com/>.



It is important to remember that before breaking away from mainstream Judaism, the Matthean community had been worshipping in the synagogues and in the Jerusalem temple (Mat 10: 16-19; Jn 9: 22). Because Matthew could not trust the Jewish leadership in the aftermath of the 66-73 CE Jewish revolt, his narrative portrays the Matthean community as embattled by Jewish leadership. Compared to the depiction of the disciples who present the Matthean community, Glasson rightly observes that in Matthew's narrative there is "an increase of severity against the Pharisees, [but] a toning down of rebuke against the disciples."³⁴ Thus, the narrative vilifies the scribes and Pharisees, first by introducing the Matthean Lord's Prayer by denouncing the righteousness practiced by the scribes and Pharisees (5: 20; 6.1). Second, despite the invoking of the Kingdom of God to come, in Matthew's narrative, the scribes and Pharisees are characterized as hypocrites (6: 2), less righteous (5: 20), transgressors of God's commandments (Mat 15: 1-9), not worthy of exemplary leadership (Matt 23: 3), hypocrites because they shut the Kingdom of heaven against men while they themselves are not entering (Matt 23: 13) and are a brood of vipers condemned to hell (Matt 23: 32).

Therefore, in view of the embattled mode of identity politics, not only does the narrative depict *tense* relations between the Matthean community and the Jewish leadership in Antioch, but also presents rigid boundaries of identity between the Matthean community and the Jewish leadership. Even though these rigid boundaries of identity seem to secure the identity of the Matthean community, it unfortunately seems to close the door on negotiation between the Matthean community and Jewish leadership. Thus, Matthew's narrative presents the Matthean community as a counter-cultural community against Jewish leadership which in the narrative is characterised as a failed leadership not worthy of trust. Keener's suggestion that the phrase "your Kingdom come" (6:10) in Matthew's Lord's Prayer "more explicitly reminds [the Matthean community] that God...will restore the purpose for which he formed the world in the beginning,"³⁵ underscores the motive driving the Matthean community to look up to God rather than the Jewish leadership for any transformative change. Leon Morris' suggestion that in Matthew's Lord's Prayer "the Kingdom of God" refers to the "perfect accomplishment of what God wills...in the deed of those he has created"³⁶ insinuates that God's Kingdom in Matthew's Lord's Prayer entails the participation of the Matthean community in righteous deeds in the society.

What we shall see from this study is that while the embattled mode of identity politics helps us to explain *tense* and *suspicious* relations that probably existed between the Matthean community and the Jewish leadership on the one hand, and on the other, the humanistic dialogue mode helps to explain a more *compassionate* relation between the Matthean community and the populace of Jewish sectarian communities. According to Moon, the humanistic dialogue mode of identity politics is borne out of a group's desire to achieve social transformation grounded in the belief that social differences are accidental, and apparent dividers that can be dissolved through social interaction. Consequently, adherents of the humanistic dialogue mode are convinced that through a process of *education*, *active listening* to the other and helping each individual to *relate* to others, the self is empowered to affect social transformation.³⁷ How do we get access to the attitudes of the Matthean community regarding the populace of Jewish sectarian communities from this narrative?

Carter contends that in Matthew's narrative characters such as "the crowd," "Jewish leadership," and "Jesus," rhetorically function in the narrative to provide a model to the

³⁴ T. Francis Glasson "Anti-Pharisaism in St. Matthew." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 51, no. 4 (April 1961), 317.

³⁵ Craig S. Keener *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 220.

³⁶ Morris *The Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 145.

³⁷ D. Moon "Who Am I and Who Are We?", pp. 1356-1358.



Matthean community.³⁸ That means that Jesus' instructions to his disciples to undertake a mission πρὸς τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἴκου Ἰσραήλ (to the lost sheep of the house of Israel) (Matt 10: 6), in the context of *practicing* and *teaching* of Jesus' commands (Matt 5: 19-20) implies that the Matthean community engaged in a humanistic dialogue mode of identity politics, in which case interaction through dialogue played a significant role. Of course, during the emergence of early Christian communities in the first-century, dialogue played a significant role in facilitating interaction with other groups. For instance, Paul used dialogue with Jews, Epicurean, and Stoic philosophers in Athens (Acts 17: 16-34). The crucial concern here is the content of teaching; what is the content of teaching that Matthew's narrative presents which would have facilitated a social transformation?

Here it is noted that not only does the narrative depict compassionate relations between the Matthean community and Jewish populace in Antioch because of an emphasis on "listening" (Matt 10.14), but also because the narrative provides a paradigm of social services, namely; healing the sick, casting out demons, feeding the masses, and cleansing the lepers (Matt 10: 7-8). It also directly impacted social transformation on the society by greatly mitigating the chronic miseries due to moral decadency, epidemics, and other social miseries found in the late first-century city of Antioch.³⁹ Furthermore, the narrative provides a paradigm for social ethics education outlined in Matthew 5: 21-48. The social ethics paradigm outlined in 5: 21-48 was potent enough to allow social cohesion between the Matthean community and Jewish sectarian communities because it challenged conventional scales of justice by breaking the vicious cycle of evil in the society. In other words, Jesus' teaching on morality, outlined in 5: 21-48, addressed the root cause of evil in society by discouraging lust, revenge, and hatred, among others. Keener's⁴⁰ observations concerning the rhetorical function of Matthew 10.8 considers the disciples' mission as one replicating and extending the mission of Jesus' preaching of the coming of the Kingdom of God (Mk 1: 15). It insinuates that Matthew's phrase "your Kingdom come" (6: 10), demonstrates a participation of the Matthean community in extending God's Kingdom through acts of righteousness, which shows empathy for the Jewish populace in Antioch.

Conclusion

The article generates some new knowledge regarding use of the social identity theory when considering Biblical texts such as the Lord's Prayer. To the questions concerning why Matthew in his narrative emphasizes the coming of God's Kingdom and what he intends to achieve by this claim, it has been necessary to employ Dawn Moon's two-fold perspective of identity politics, namely, an embattled mode and a humanistic dialogue mode, first to construct ideological perspectives of Matthew's concept of 'your Kingdom Come' (Matt 6:10). Second, to read the embattled and humanistic nature of the relations of the community of Matthew with first century Judaism. Not only has this approach defended the argument that Matthew rhetorically employs his concept of "your Kingdom" to elaborate the ideological significance of righteousness in advancing identity politics for his community, but it has also demonstrated the contribution of an interdisciplinary interpretive approach that blends literary criticism with social sciences (ideology) to read the discourse of early Christians.

³⁸ W. Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, pp. 66-67

³⁹ Rodney Stark, "Antioch as the Social Situation for Matthew's Gospel" in *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches*, edited by Balch, David L. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 191-199.

⁴⁰ C.S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 316.



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