**Introduction**

The Lord’s Prayer opens with Πάτερ, ημών ο εν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, with Matthew continuing with ημῶν ο εν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. Although it is uncertain why the second part of the invocation is missing in Luke’s rendition, scholars attribute it to what appears to be its non-liturgical structure (Luz 2007:309, 313). Matthew’s use of οὐρανοῖς, in the third petition, is common in Jewish literatures and also prevalent in many Greco-Roman literatures in addressing their gods (Brown 2004:8; Luz 2007:314). However, it was employed by Jesus to mean more than just a surrogate for the divine name (eds. Brown, Fitzmyer & Murphy 1990:645). What Πάτερ means to Matthew’s community is not different from what it means to Jesus, who often personalises the fatherhood of God. It is also not different from what it means to the Jewish community in which Jesus lived and worked (Luz 2007:315–316). The term in the Judaism of Jesus’ day, carries the idea of ‘creator and begetter, the preserver, the highest ruler of the world’.
This article is the fifth in the series of articles published on ‘Matthew’s version of the Lord’s Prayer in Ewe-Ghanaian context’ (see Sakitie & Van Eck 2020, 2021; Van Eck & Sakitie 2019a, 2019b). It seeks to explore the concept of God in the phrase Πάτερ, ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς as found in the Matthean rendition of the Lord’s Prayer in the light of Ewe-Ghanaian cosmology. The article employed a combination of the exegetical and indigenous mother tongue biblical hermeneutical approaches to assess the implication of the invocation for Ewe-Ghanaian Christian spirituality today. The exegetical approach was employed to explore what the text meant to its original recipients by means of historical and literary analytical tools (Fee & Strauss 2003:23–31; Porter & Clarke 2007:3–18). The indigenous mother tongue biblical approach involves the use of a constructive dialogue between biblical texts and their translations into various languages, such as Ewe taking cognisance of the Sitze im Leben (situation in life) that governs them as well as their Wirkungsgeschichte (history of effect or influence) and current practical application (Ekem 2007:77; Kuwornu-Adjaottor 2012:11–15).

This approach overlaps with Loba-Mkole’s (2007) intercultural exegesis, because both approaches aim at a dialogical reconstruction between the source culture and the receptor culture (Mahlangu & Grobbelaar 2016:99–102). The mother tongue approach to biblical interpretation, as Ekem argues, is likely to shape the future of biblical studies in Africa. The article used hermeneutics in its narrow sense of elucidating the text’s meaning to the Ewe-Ghanaian context and exegesis to explore the world of the text. The exegetical and hermeneutical methods are applied in the article as follows:

1. A lexical inquiry into Πάτερ, ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς in Matthew’s account of the invocation of the Lord’s Prayer.
2. A historical interpretation and theologies from the patristic era to the Reformation era.
3. An in-depth analysis of the existing Ewe translations in comparison with the source language.
4. Comparison between Matthew’s invocation and Ewe cosmic notion of God and his place of abode.
5. Use of interviews, Bible study sessions, and Ewe cosmic prayer texts into the discussion with the expressed purpose of blending indigenous knowledge with the academic, thereby bridging the gap between academic and grassroots theology.
6. Assessment of the implication of the invocation for Ewe-Ghanaian spirituality today.

**Interpretations and theologies of Πάτερ, ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς**

Interviews conducted on the invocation of the Lord’s Prayer reveal participants’ general knowledge of the prayer regardless of their sex, age, level of education, position in church, occupation and religious affiliation. Participants are, however, divided on the translation of the invocation from the source language (Greek) to receptor language (Ewe). Those who pray Πάτερ in the invocation as Μία Τσά/Mia Fofo and οὐρανοί, as dzifowo demonstrate their knowledge of the plurality of the dwelling place of God in Matthew’s version.
For those who rendered the dwelling place of God in the singular, thus, *dzifo*, did so from a liturgical point of view, that is, how it has been recited at liturgical gatherings since missionary era (1847 till date). Other views that have been expressed on the interpretation of the dwelling place of God included his omnipotence, omniscience and his power to control the cosmos. On the fatherhood of God, there are those who are of the view that if an earthly father is referred to as *fofo* (father), then the heavenly Father must be *Fofogd* (Great Father). Juxtaposing participants’ views on the meaning of the invocation, one may conclude that addressing God as Father is a sign of respect for him. They also acknowledged the inclusiveness in addressing God as *Hàtrap*, that is, he is the Father of all people – Jews, Christians and non-Christians. Adoption into the family of God was also cited as justification for addressing him as Father.

Comparing the data from the field with the existing Ewe translations – *Biblia* (1931), *Nubabla Yege La* (1990), *Agbenya La* (2006) and *Biblia* (2010) – one finds some similarities and differences. The *Biblia* (1931) and *Agbenya La* translate *Hàtrap*, *ημων ο εν τοις ουρανοις* as *mía Fofo*, *sí le dzifo* while *Biblia* (2010) and *Nubabla Yege La* (1999) render it as *mía Tó* *sí le dzifowo*. The majority of Ewe Christians understand *Hàtrap* to be *mía Fofo* and not *mía Tó*. Also in his Gethsemane prayer, for instance, Jesus used *Hàtrap mion*, which is rendered in all three Ewe translations as *Fofomye* (my Father) instead of *Tónye* or *Tàtanye*. The only reason that can be attributed for the use of *Tó* and *Fofo* interchangeably in these translations is orthography. The question of orthography has arisen due to the three different dialects in which the Ewe language finds expression – Togum, Tongu and Ewedome. The use of *Fofo* in translation carries two meanings, father and senior brother, depending on the part of Ewe one hails from – Ghana, Togo or Benin. Similar to *Tó* is *Tate*, which is used by Ewes living along the Volta Lake – the Tongu people. A *Tongu* rendering of *Hàtrap mion* would be *mía Tó*, as compared to *mía Tó* in the existing translations in standardised Ewe. Unlike the Ewe, the Akan has no deferring rendition. The Akan name for father is *Egya* or *Agya*, and that is what is used to render *Hàtrap* in *Fante* and *Asante* or *Akuapem* translations of the Lord’s Prayer.

The hermeneutical position of participants on the right of becoming a child of God agrees with Cyprian, Origen, Gregory of Nissa, Augustine and even Clement’s exclusive interpretation of God’s moral attribute shared by those in high moral standing (Brown 2004:152, 154; Graef 1954:10; Kavanagh 1951:242–243; Steward-Sykes 2004:70–73; Stylianopoulos 2003:2; eds. Woolsey & Ulyat 1856:107). Luther and Calvin, although favouring the exclusivity of the first part of the invocation, also support its universality (Lenker 1907:252, 255; ed. McNeil 1977:900–901; Morrison 1972:206). The position of Luther, for instance, may be understood within the context of the ecclesiastical tension between the Reformers and the existing religious structures – the Roman Catholic Church. It was extremely difficult for Luther, for instance, to accept that the papacy could address God as Father. Scholars such as Brown (1961:188), Brown (2004:6–10), Ong (2012–2013:13) are in favour of the inclusive interpretation of the first part of the invocation. Their knowledge of interpretations of the Lord’s Prayer through the epochs of Christianity, coupled with their particular religious setting, is what informed their hermeneutical positions. Brown (2004:11), for instance, asserts that the inclusive interpretation of *Hàtrap*, *ημων* is consistent with the tenets of Judaism and Christianity, because the two religions affirm God as the source of all human existence, his perfect justice, and the doctrine of monotheism.

'Ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς and the plurality of God’s dwelling place

Regarding the translation of *οὐρανοῖς*, only the *Agbenya la* renders it *dzifo*. This agrees with the views of majority of Ewe-Ghanaian Christians, and it is used in the Ewe liturgies of the Protestant churches in Ghana and Togo, especially the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana and Église Evangélique Presbytérienne Du Togo. The Akan and Ga translations *sor* or *soro* and *nymi*, respectively, are in the singular instead of plural. In the other Ewe translations (*Biblia* 1931, 2010; *Nubabla Yege La* 1990), *dzifo* is used because of its equivalence to the Greek *οὐρανοῖς*. The word is derived from *dzi* (height) and *fo* (literally, belly) and denotes the belly of the heights. Thus, *dzifo* is conceptualised as the inner heights or belly of the sky and conceives God as a Being whose dwelling place is in the inner part or belly of the sky. This idea of the dwelling place of the Holy One is also expressed by the *Evwedom* people as *dzingo*, from *dzi* (height), and *nhy* (ahead or beyond) (see Meyer 1999:55; Spieth 1906:48). This notion depicts Old Testament imagery of the heavenly tabernacle where God is believed to dwell in the holiest place. This hermeneutical position, and those expressed by interviewees on their interpretation of the second part of the invocation, raises the issue of whether or not the heaven(s) is really God’s dwelling place. Origen is claimed to have said ‘the heaven contains him not; no bodily form includes him; he is not in space; everything corporeal is also perishable, divisible’ (Steward-Sykes 2004:162; eds. Woolsey & Ulyat 1856:107). He concludes that only a metaphorical interpretation of *οὐρανοῖς* can make any sense. Calvin’s understanding of God’s dwelling place suggests God’s transcendence, superintendence and Divine Providence over the entire cosmos. In other words, ‘all things are subject to His command, the world and all that is in it are in the
palm of His hand, His influence is spread on all sides, everything is ordered by His Providence’ (Morrison 1972:206). This hermeneutical view about God’s dwelling place has not changed over the years, as it continues to appear in the works of 21st century scholars (Brown 2004:13; Nolland 2005:288–289). But, as the locative voice of the phrase Πάτερ ἡμῶν ο εν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς suggests, God is located in a place known as the heavens. This article therefore agrees with the two existing Ewe translations – Biblia (1931, 2010) and Nuablala Yeve La (1999) – that the invocation of the Lord’s Prayer – Πάτερ ἡμῶν ο εν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς – should be literally translated Miari si le dzifowo (literally, Our father who is in the belly of the skies).

Πάτερ, ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς in Ewe cosmology

In Ewe-Ghanian cosmology, the whole of the universe is believed to be an embodiment of the Supreme Being (Mawugü). Mawugü, it is believed, emanated from the absolute or celestial state of being through the various levels of existence to the embodied state.10 From this state, he created all living things (Nugbegbeawo or nugbagbeawo in Ewe),11 including human beings, and dwells in them. God is therefore known at the absolute state as Sogbe-Lisa, from So (Father), Ghe (Mother), Lisa, from Li (being) and Sa (immortal or eternal). The third deity surrounding the duality Sogbe Lisa in the celestial realm of existence is called Chi – the awakener and consciousness behind Sogbe Lisa. In other Ewe traditions, the Supreme Being is called Sa,12 with the dualistic pair Sodzà (female) and Sogbià (male), with Sodiwa as a third pair (Spieht 1906:458–462).13 Thus, the pantheon of deities13 called Trwo and Voduwo and every living creature are manifestations of Sogbe-Lisa at various stages of existence. Sogbe Lisa is ‘the source which has emanated to become the manifold universe, that upon which you lean and do not fall; Zioni – the Eternal Support’15 (Awoonor 2006:377). In this cosmic understanding, the whole of creation, in both physical and metaphysical forms, is inextricably linked to the Supreme Being, Hamugbets, now pronounced Amenget, from Ha (the male counterpart of the divine duality in its blissful state) and Ghe (the female),16 is the embodiment of the male and female pairs of the Supreme Being, and the totality of creation. Humanity is also named and called Homo Sefe, the embodiment of all the laws of creation; they are also known to be Homo Lodo, because they embody all the mysteries there are, or Homo Adets, because they are the only creatures who have been given the power of speech.

Situating the invocation of the Lord’s Prayer, Πάτερ, ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, within Ewe cosmology, the heavens where God is believed to dwell are conceptualised as the absolute state of existence. In Ewe cosmology, there are seven levels or states of existence, and the Supreme Being dwells in the first and second levels or states. If the Ewe-Ghanian notion of the seven states of existence is anything to go by, then Matthew’s use of the plurality of God’s dwelling place in his rendition of the Lord’s Prayer is justified. Thus, the Supreme Being exists in ‘seven heavens’ in Ewe cosmology, with the highest heaven being the absolute state of existence. The seventh level or state of existence is the dwelling place of humans and are complete images of the divine duality in its absolute state and the totality of creation and the only creature with the power of speech. The idea of heaven has, throughout the history of biblical interpretation, been fluid and ambiguous. The fluidity and ambiguity of its rendering in Pennington’s (2007) work, for instance, is evident in its singular and plural uses in both Matthew and other New Testament and related literature (Pennington 2007:39–65, 100–135). It appears that the word has evolved from its plural use in the creation narrative to its singular use in the Septuagint and in other New Testament and related literature, and in some cases it has gone back to its plural use. These inconsistencies in the rendering of the word may have arisen as a result of the writers’ context. The multiple heavens theory propounded in the work of Pennington and other NT scholars does really apply in Ewe cosmology. The levels or states theory as described in this article is the manifestation or emanation of the Supreme Being from the invisible state of existence to the visible state and not to be understood from the perspective of heavenly architecture and fuse. Thus, when it comes to the relationship between God and humans, it is without any shred of doubt that he is not only father but also mother and the one who awakens the consciousness of humans. The first half of the invocation of Matthew’s version of the Lord’s Prayer, Πάτερ, ἡμῶν, may be rendered mía Ts, mía Fòfo, or mía Tate. The second half of the invocation, ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, should read si le dzifowo to reflect Matthew’s theology.

10. In an interview with Dr Kumordzi on 28th September 2012, he mentioned that Sogbe Lisa manifests the self at seven different levels. At the first and second levels, which is called the absolute state, he exists as So and Ghe, with So being the father and Ghe being the mother, and Chi as the awakener and consciousness behind Sogbe. And because they exist in an immortal and eternal state, they are called So. So the eternal immortal God in Ewe is called Sogbe Lisa. At the third level of existence, Sogbe Lisa exists as primordial sound (Hu). At the fourth level of existence, Sogbe Lisa manifests the self in a cosmic trinity of Sovi-Agbade, Sovi-Da, Vodua Da or Da-Kriso and Sovi-Apleku, who are creators of life with the responsibilities to preserve, create and destroy life, respectively. See also Awoonor (2006). At the fifth level of existence, Sogbe Lisa is called Xebieso, the god of light and sound (thunder), who is believed to control about 256 deities known in Ewe as Trwo (lesser gods), who are the embodiment of the law and order of the cosmos. Voduwo are the gods who exist at the sixth level of the divine manifestation. In the final level of existence, Sogbe Lisa manifests the self in its visible form – sun, moon and galaxy of stars, plants, animals, humans, the earth, rocks, mountains, rivers and the ocean, with humans as the epitome of all creation.
11. Nugbegbeawo, now pronounced as Nugbagbeawo, from Nuu (thing or things) and ghe (sound or voice), meaning all things that are the embodiment of sound.
12. The whole of existence is an ordered law system.
13. See also Wicker and Opoku (eds. 2007), and Ozobo (2008). Gboloanyo (2009) has also done extensive work on the idea of a cosmic trinity in Ewe ontology.
14. Wicker and Opoku (eds. 2007:2007) have categorised the Ewe primordial divisions into five: Torhonor, which is the divinity of thunder and rain, and is responsible for the fertility of plants, beasts and humanity; Torlarsu, the divinity of water bodies – oceans, seas, lagoons and rivers; Ablor, the divinity of the earth and patron of farmers and animal husbandry; Ade, the divinity of fortune and patron of hunters and warriors; Efu, the divinity of wisdom, science and divination and the patron of clairvoyants and diviners as well as the spokesman for all the other deities; and Egu, the divinity and errant patron of smiths and technologists. Egu is also responsible for the welfare of hunters and warriors, as well as all those whose profession involves the use of metals. Dr Kumordzi, however, disputes this cosmic hierarchy.
15. Dr Daty Kumordzi, in one of the interviews he granted, confirmed Awoonor’s position. The late Awoonor, who met his untimely death during Al-Shabab Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi on 21 September 2013, acknowledged Dr Daty Kumordzi well as the one who supplied him with information on chapter 26 of his book, The African Predicament: Collected Essays. See Awoonor (2006:376–386).
16. Another designation for the male pair of the Supreme Being is SoHa while the female is TeGbê.
Πάτερ, ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς: Implications for Ewe-Ghanaian spirituality today

There are points of convergence and divergence between Matthew’s theology on the fatherhood of God and his dwelling place in the invocation of the Lord’s Prayer and Ewe cosmology. Whereas they ostensibly affirm the plurality\(^\text{17}\) of his place of abode, they are divided over who has the right to address him as father. The church fathers did not depart from the exclusive theological positions as far as the relationship between God and humans is concerned. Clement of Alexandria and Luther, for instance, make a moral argument to justify their exclusive interpretation. For them, only those with high moral standard qualify to address God as father. Modern scholarship, however, favours an all-inclusive interpretation of the invocation. Thus, God is not only the Creator of the universe but also father of all humanity, and ‘in him we live and move and have our being … for we are indeed his offspring’.\(^\text{18}\)

The exclusive hermeneutical stance during the patristic and Reformation eras found expression in Christianity’s encounter with the Ewe-Ghanaian indigenous religion at the middle of the 19th century. The strategy of planting Christianity on the African soil by first of all uprooting, tearing down, destroying and overthrowing the indigenous religion and its associated practices created conflict between the host and guest religions. There were countless hostilities between the missionaries and the indigenous, which sometimes led to looting of the missionaries’ properties (Wiegräbe 1936:18). Worshipers of the indigenous religion at the time perceived the missionaries as white men whose presence was characterised by conflict, war and enslavement, hence their resolve not to receive them warmly. They held the missionaries responsible for any misfortune such as drought within the communities (Wiegräbe 1936:17). The hostile environment in which the missionaries found themselves compelled them to own guns for self-protection (Wiegräbe 1936:11). The introduction of social services such as education was vehemently resisted by the indigenes. Parents always discouraged their children from attending school, threatening them to sell them into slavery should they express interest in education. They sometimes walked to the schools with canes to force them out of the classroom (Wiegräbe 1936:20–21). The missionaries also had their own misconceptions towards the indigenous religion and its practices. They demonised almost everything about the indigenous religion, calling it all manner of names, such as fetish, pagan, heathen, savage, primitive and so on. (Atakro 2021:26).

The liturgy of the mission church was strictly foreign; drumming and dancing were forbidden in church because they were perceived as barbaric and demonic (Atakro 2021:9). This arrogant posture of the missionaries, coupled with their negative attitude towards the indigenous culture, was a setback to doing missionary work in the land. This prompts the question whether the missionaries came to preach the gospel or to rule the indigenous people (Atakro 2021:12).

The *diakonic* programmes introduced by the missionaries, translation of the Bible into Ewe and use of a contextualised liturgy after their departure probably contributed to a large extent in dealing with the perception the indigenous had towards the Christian religion (Atakro 2021:1; Ekem 2011:139–140; Wiegräbe 1968:42–44). Christianity on Eweland today is no longer seen as a foreign religion but a development partner. These traditionalists who were vehemently opposed to the planting of Christianity on their soil became contributors to the success of missionary work (Wiegräbe 1936:43). Lands were freely given, and the missionaries were offered protection at mission stations, which hitherto was not the case (Wiegräbe 1936:20, 43). Ewe popular spirituality today is essentially a transposition of the indigenous religious thoughts and categories, with strong emphasis on demonology (Van Eck & Sakitey 2019a, 2019b). Generally, worship has become more transactional, and God exists to provide solutions to the predicaments of his worshippers (Sakitey & Van Eck 2020). The majority of Ewe-Ghanaian Christians would prefer spiritual means and/or litigation in resolving conflict, because it is viewed as the surest way in justice delivery (Sakitey & Van Eck 2021).

Conclusion

Reading Matthew’s rendition of the invocation with insight from Ewe cosmology, one may come to the conclusion that the Fatherhood of God transcends all religions. This inclusive interpretation of the fatherhood of God in Ewe cosmology is discontinuous with the exclusive interpretation in the works of the church fathers such as Cyprian, Origen, Gregory of Nissa, Augustine and Clement of Alexandria. On the question of the plurality of God’s dwelling place, the Ewe cosmic notion of seven levels or states of existence is consistent with Matthew’s *οὐρανοὺς* motif. Consequently, the initial religious tensions that characterised the planting of Christianity on Eweland may be attributed to the wrong perception that Western Christianity had towards Ewe indigenous religion. The missionaries’ attitude of uprooting, tearing down, destroying and overthrowing away every practice of the host religion before planting their faith in its place was clear indication of a misconception of the mission field to which they came to graze. However, the introduction of social services as evangelisation strategy, the legacy of Ewe Bible and liturgy and the handing over of the Ewe church to the indigenous coworkers may have contributed to a large extent in ensuring religious tolerance among followers of the two religions. Today, Ewe-Ghanaian popular Christianity has shifted from its apologetic stance to a more liberal stance, and it employs indigenous religious and cultural categories in theologising.

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\(^{17}\)Actually, the multiple heavens theory in Pennington (2007) and other NT scholars does not apply in Ewe cosmology. The levels or states theory as described in this article must be understood as the manifestation or emanation of the Supreme Being from the invisible state of existence to the visible state. Sufficient information has been provided at the footnote above for clarification.

\(^{18}\)Acts 17:28.
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