

Jesus and nostalgia: A nostalgia construction of 'ho theos tōn paterōn – ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων' for facing an identity crisis (Mt 22:32)

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Several theologians unanimously accorded well with the notion that the writer of the Gospel of Matthew was a pastoral theologian. Nevertheless, the pastoral dimension of Matthew 22:32 has not been subjected to much scrutiny. In the text, Jesus celebrated the tradition of calling the God as the 'God of the Fathers'. The tradition revealed that Jesus adapted the pastoral approach, which is termed as nostalgia in psychology. In empirical psychology researches, utilising nostalgia provides many positive benefits for people who have psychological problems, including an identity crisis. By using a psychological text to sharpen the understanding of the biblical text, this research showed the nostalgic construction in the tradition as a pastoral approach to the readers who were in a situation of a major crisis.

Contribution: By using the nostalgia as a psychological text, this article attempts to explore the pastoral dimension of Matthew 22:32, which seems absent in the study of Matthew 22:32.

Keywords: the Gospel of Matthew; the God of the Fathers; identity crisis; psychology; nostalgia.

Introduction

In 2001, in memory of William G. Thompson, S.J.,¹ Harrington showed Thompson's dissatisfaction with the interpretation of the Gospel of Matthew. Harrington stated that Thompson was obsessed with imposing the notion that the writer of Matthew was a pastoral theologian (Harrington 2001:62). The pastoral nuance coincides perfectly with the crisis that faced the readers of the first gospel (henceforth Matthean Community). This article, thus, attempts to explore the pastoral dimension of Matthew 22:32. Through this study, the authors want to show that the notion of ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων/*ho theos tōn paterōn* (the God of the Fathers) in Matthew 22:32 contains the construction of nostalgia as a pastoral approach. Besides looking into the future (*eskhatos*), Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (henceforth Jesus) applied the past (the nostalgia). The past has enormous power in facing crisis in life.

However, the notions of *ho theos tōn paterōn* and nostalgia have not been explored thoroughly in the study of the Gospel of Matthew, especially in Matthew 22:32. Referring to Matthew 22:32, this study drew on the recent research by Surbakti (2019). The term 'nostalgia' was not literally written in Surbakti's article, but it definitely had a clear notion of nostalgia. Meanwhile, the recent theoretical and empirical studies on nostalgia in psychology research are employed to evaluate whether what Jesus did in Matthew 22:32 was the construction of nostalgia. The authors utilised the results from past studies by Sedikides, Wildschut and other researchers, who did the same study on nostalgia, which was used to evaluate the therapeutic effect of nostalgia. The subjects of their research were also very diverse, from age, gender, jobs and cultural backgrounds. The research was conducted not only in Europe but also in America and Asia. In this way, we could capture part of the nature and pattern of human being throughout history. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore the understanding of the pastoral behind *ho theos tōn paterōn* in Matthew 22:32. Finally, by using a psychological text to sharpen the understanding of the biblical text, Thompson's obsession that 'the author of Matthew was a pastoral theologian' can be further strengthened.

1. His colleagues called him Bill Thompson. Until his death (1996), Thompson taught at the Institute of Pastoral Studies at Loyola University in the United States of America. Thompson himself is a pastoral theologian, who has done several biblical studies on the Gospel of Matthew.

Nostalgia: A psychological text

In medical science, the root word of nostalgia can be traced back to 1000 years ago, which, firstly, was a medical term in a dissertation on nostalgia circa 1688 by Johannes Hofer (cf. Routledge et al. 2013; Sedikides & Wildschut 2018). Since then, nostalgia had been considered as a disease or some kind of cerebral disease (Routledge et al. 2013:808). In the 19th century, the medical world's view of nostalgia began to change. Nostalgia is now no longer seen as a disease of the brain (Routledge et al. 2013:808).

Although nostalgia is no longer considered a brain disease, which is closer defined as a disease related to nervous dysfunction or depression, nostalgia was still regarded as something abnormal. In collaboration with several other researchers, Sedikides and Wildschut have conducted much research on nostalgia. They conducted many empirical studies to prove that nostalgia is not a neurological disease. According to them, nostalgia is an essential source of mental health. Their studies concluded that nostalgia is very useful for people who are facing a crisis.

Positive effects of nostalgia

The first step that Sedikides and Wildschut took when starting empirical research on nostalgia was formulating a definition of nostalgia from *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998) and defined it as 'a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past'. The participants of the research, who were in the age range of 20–80 years, were asked to write the narratives of nostalgia comprising 1000–1500 words. The study, conducted in 2006, contains a number of analyses on the narratives of nostalgia. There are four conclusions, two of which are given as follows: firstly, the most common objects of nostalgia were people, followed by momentous life events, and, fourthly, nostalgia narratives expressed more positive affect than negative affect (Routledge et al. 2013:809).

The study continued with parallel research that was carried out with different subjects, that is, undergraduate students. The students were asked to write narratives related to nostalgia and also their feelings regarding their experience. The study concluded that (Routledge et al. 2013):

[T]he most common objects of nostalgia were other people and momentous life events ... According to these ratings, participants experienced significantly more positive than negative affect. (p. 809)

The nostalgia frequency commonly also occurred more often when people were experiencing loneliness or having negative emotions (Routledge et al. 2013:811). In another research, nostalgia was unveiled to have a more powerful effect when individuals felt a threat to their existence (Juhl et al. 2010:313).

Inferring from the participants' nostalgia of past experiences, there are two types of nostalgia, that is, personal nostalgia and historical nostalgia (Marchegiani & Phau 2013:24). Personal nostalgia is a person's memories of past experiences that he or

she had about the people he or she met. Meanwhile, historical nostalgia is a person's indirect past experience, which might not be experienced directly by the participants of the research, but the participants understood the narratives and presented their interpretation for the narratives. An indirect experience is often a form of shared historical narratives, which are transferred from, known and reinterpreted by a subject of research. Several empirical results of studies on the effects of nostalgia are provided in the following points:

1. One hundred ninety-three factory workers (121 women, 53 men and 19 people of unknown gender) in Dongguan City, China. The effect: Nostalgia was utilised as a coping strategy for lonely people to satisfy their needs for social support (Zhou et al. 2008:1026–1028).
2. Eighty-one undergraduate students at the Faculty of Psychology, North Dakota State University, USA. The effect: Nostalgia has a more powerful effect in the case of individuals who feel a threat to their existence (Juhl et al. 2010:313).
3. Thirty-five undergraduate students (20 women and 15 men) at the University of Southampton, UK. The effect: Nostalgia reduced the level of stress in people who had a low meaning of life (Routledge et al. 2011:646–647).
4. A total of 664 volunteers were recruited online through the popular Dutch radio and television programme (345 women and 319 men, aged 14–67 years) in the Netherlands. The effect: Nostalgia caused a more heightened sense of optimism, especially for people who listened to nostalgic songs. Nostalgia also incited a feeling of optimism through intermediary self-esteem (Cheung et al. 2013:1488–1489).
5. Four hundred forty-eight people aged 18–75 years (247 women and 198 men). Participants were undergraduate students and workers in two different workplaces in the United States of America. The effect: The emergence of nostalgia that was deliberately evoked affected the participants' social relations, self-esteem and sense of optimism (Cheung, Sedikides & Wildschut 2016:284).
6. Two hundred eighty undergraduate students aged 19–26 years in Hong Kong. The effect: Nostalgia highlighted differences in life satisfaction from the past, present and future times. In the experimental group, life satisfaction in the past was lower than life satisfaction in the present and the future (Ye, Ng & Lam 2018:1752–1758).

Thus, it can be concluded that nostalgia can become an *inner resource* needed by humans when facing a crisis. The main objects of nostalgia in the study are the memories of people and life events that are also related to a particular person. Nostalgia can be personal or historical in nature. Thus, we conclude these as the nature and pattern of human being throughout history.

Identity crisis faced by the Matthean community

Many scholars have concluded that the Matthean community was in Antioch in Syria (hereinafter referred to as Antioch) (Davies & Allison 1988; Shin 2019; Sim 1998). It is true that

scholars keep other possibilities as well, but most scholars believe that Antioch is where the Gospel was written (cf. Sim 2001). Matthean community was also a sect in Judaism (Overman 1990; Sim 1998, 2001). The characteristic of a sect is not only a minority characterised by opposition to the norms accepted by the parent body, but also it claims in a more or less exclusive way what the parent body claims to be (Blenkinsopp 1981).

The gospel itself was written around 85 CE. In 70 CE, the Jewish war broke out, which was the apex of Roman's anger over a number of rebellions waged by different groups within Judaism. As a result, there was a systematic massacre of the Jews; the temple of God was destroyed again; the City of Jerusalem was also destroyed again. Senior called this event a *holocaust* (Senior 1996:8). As Jews, the majority of members of the Matthean community also felt the effects of the *holocaust*.

The era itself is often referred to as the Formative Judaism (FJ) era. It refers to the reorganisation and consolidation of Judaism in the period following the First Jewish War. It was the era of the process of social construction and self-definition in Jewish communities (Viljoen 2012, 2016). It can also be concluded as the era of the identity set up in Judaism (Senior 1996:9). A significant consequence of the self-definition or the identity set up was to expel those who did not conform to a number of values that were principle to the life of the FJ (Viljoen 2012, 2016). All groups or sects within Judaism were no longer as free as before; those deemed deviant were forced to leave the synagogue (cf. Senior 1996:9).

The reality as a sect and its characteristics had made this community meet with powerful opposition of the parent body. This indication could be seen in the emergence of the 12th benediction in Tefillah in Jamnia around 85 CE called *Birkat ha-Minim*² (cf. Bosch 1991:58; Davies & Allison 1988:136–138; Hagner 1993:lxviii; Senior 1996:9; Viljoen 2012:263, 2016:4). Another 12th benediction quote in Tefillah is, 'If any hesitated to read that prayer or to say "Amen" to it, they were liable to expulsion from the synagogue' (Senior 1996:9).

The *Birkath* developed over a period of time, whilst synagogues at different locations and times increasingly did not tolerate the presence of other deviant groups and Christians, including the Matthean Community (Saldarini 1994). It seems that in later years the 'blessing' was even specifically aimed at Christians (Brown 1997:4). In such a situation, identifying differences in the identity between Judaism and Christianity has become increasingly apparent. A community such as the Matthean community was considered as deviant and increasingly under relentless pressure.

2.'For apostates let there be no hope. The dominion of arrogance do thou speedily root out in our days. And let the Nazareans and the Minim perish in a moment. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living. And let them not be written with the righteous'.

Apart from its connection with the parent body of the FJ and Roman Empire, this community also connected to other version of non-Judaism Christianity in Antioch. Matthean community was law-observant (LO), whilst the other version was law-free (LF) (Sim 1998). Based on Matthew 5:17–19, Viljoen concluded that the antinomians directed to people within the community whose behaviour was incompatible with Christian discipleship, not to other branches of Christianity (Viljoen 2012). But if we analyse from the perspective of Antioch Church's history, the wider picture could be seen.

Antioch Church had its origin in the circle of the Hellenists who were amongst the first converts to the Christian movement in Jerusalem (Sim 1998). The LF mission seemed to have a new impetus when Barnabas and Paul settled in Antioch. Based on Galatians 2:11–12 and Acts 15:1–2, it seemed that the Jerusalem Church under James had a strong desire to keep Christianity in Antioch under its control. After the general council was established in Jerusalem around 50 CE (Ac 15), Paul and Barnabas separated, and both left Antioch (Ac 15:36–41). Finally, the colour of the Antioch church eventually changed to be LO (Sim 1998:100–107).

Although already left Antioch, Paul's polemics with the Jerusalem Church did not end (Sim 1998:101). The problem in Galatians was a continuation of the conflict in Antioch (cf. Dunn 1993; Watson 1986). Brinsmead (1982) stated:

[I]n the second century, the Galatians opponents were identified by both orthodoxy and the Marcionites as radical Jewish-Christians from Jerusalem ... along with Martin Luther, most Protestant writers have identified Paul's opponents as Jewish-Christians fanatics from Jerusalem. (pp. 9–10)

The LO group turned out to have a powerful influence in early Christianity. Paul's amazement at how quickly the Galatians turned away from his teachings (cf. Gl 1:6–7) shows how powerful the LO missionary movement was to LF in Galatians. They wanted Christianity, at least in Antioch and later in Galatians, to remain under the control of the Jerusalem Church.

The Jewish War in 70 CE made the authority of the Jerusalem Church to weaken further. This made the Jerusalem Church's ability to control the Christian movement to weaken and eventually cease altogether. It was in Antioch that Paul's version of Christianity (LF) had been reinvigorated. The successors of Paul made the Antioch church as a prime target. Therefore, Paul's version of Christianity was dominating Antioch and became a major threat to the LO (Sim 1998:211). This situation created an added pressure for the Matthean community.

It can be concluded that at the time this gospel was written,³ Matthean community was in the midst of the three enormous power bases that place them under considerable pressure, which came from the FJ, the Roman power (*Holocaust*) and

3.It is about three to four decades after the departure of Paul from Antioch.

the LF mission. Thus, it can be concluded that this community was experiencing a great identity crisis, which was very reasonable.

As mentioned earlier, the nostalgia frequency occurred more often when people felt a threat to their existence (Juhl et al. 2010:31), and people were in crisis such as experiencing loneliness or having negative emotions (Routledge et al. 2013:811). The idea of an identity crisis was seen in Senior Statement, ‘... Matthew, therefore, attempted to define Christian identity over against the reform of Jamnia’ (Senior 1996). The portrayal of the identity crisis of the Matthean community was presented very well by Bosch with several questions that were most likely to arise in the minds of the people⁴ (Bosch 1991:58).

The ancestors are still alive

The discussion in this section is drawn from the previous research on the meaning of *ho theos tōn paterōn* use in Matthew 22:32 by Surbakti (2019). Surbakti proposed the term *Theos Patros* to analyse many variants used to address God. Alt did not use the term, but it is derived from the phrase which was initially introduced by Alt through his paper entitled ‘The God of the Fathers’ (Alt 1989). Vriezen, one of the students of Alt, mentioned the term ‘the God of the Ancestor’ (Vriezen 1963:119), and ‘the God of the Fathers’ (Vriezen 1963:26).

Alt’s paper was a translation of an article published in 1929 entitled *Der Gott der Väter* (Alt 1989). Alt stated, ‘This is the tradition of the God of Abraham, the Fear of Isaac, and the Mighty One of Jacob, or in short, of the God of the Fathers’ (Alt 1989:10). Thus, the term ‘the God of the Fathers’ is a simplification of many variants of the mention of the God of Israel associated with the ancestor or the name of the forefather of Israel. In Matthew 22:32, the term appears in one of its variants, namely ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob’. In the Old Testament, the variant appears in Exodus 3:6, 15, 16; 4:5.

Exodus 3 itself is the theophany event when God chose Moses to lead his people out of Egypt so that the use of this variant certainly reminds the Matthean community of God’s care for them. In the theophany, *ho theos tōn paterōn* is used to assert God’s identity to Moses (cf. Durham 1987:31–32). However, in relation to the polemical narrative between the Jewish leaders and Jesus, which is so prominent in this Gospel, of course there is another message to be presented.

In Matthew 22:32, *ho theos tōn paterōn* appears in a polemical dialogue between Jesus and some Sadducees about the resurrection of the dead. Jesus said:

[A]nd as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’

4. ‘What should the identity of the Matthean Community be in the coming years? Can it continue as a moment with Judaism? What attitude should it adopt toward the Law? Can it give up on viewing Jesus as more than just a prophet? and Can it give up on a mission to fellow Jews?’

After *ho theos tōn paterōn*, Jesus said, ‘He is not God of the dead, but of the living’. Thus, what is the motive for this mention in the context of identity crisis? Why, after using this model of addressing God, Jesus stated that the God of Israel is the God of the living? Didn’t Abraham, Isaac and Jacob die? If Jesus implied that the forefathers were alive, then what kind of life is meant by him? In his research, Surbakti has expressed his rejection of some commentators who concluded that the life in question is totally the life to come. It means to live in the present (Surbakti 2019:6). A rhetoric of fighting of leadership as the rhetorical nature of the first gospel could help us to better understand the motive behind the usage of *ho theos tōn paterōn*.

By showing a number of polemical narratives, the author of Matthew sought specifically to delegitimise the traditional, established leadership of the Jewish community and thus to legitimise his own group and authority (Saldarini 2001; Surbakti 2017). In Matthew 22:32, the fighting is presented in the form of a polemical narrative between Jesus and the Sadducees. Therefore, the motive behind the polemic in Matthew 22:32 is also the notion of delegitimising. The absence of role models but hypocrisy is a portrait of the leaders who deserved to be delegitimised.

We begin this discussion by alluding to the *echo* of the Hellenistic Mediterranean morality, ‘The virtuous person is truly alive; an evil person is really dead’. The morality is behind the phrase ‘he died while living’ in I Timothy 5:6 (Collins 2002:138). The tradition of passing wisdom in Mediterranean society had shown that people who have good traits and who can be good models during their life would still live on even after the person pass away. On the other hand, people could have died even though they were still alive if they show a bad way of life during their lifetime. The idea seems quite popular in that time. Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE – 50 CE) also used the idea.⁵ When Jesus interacted with several Sadducees, as a part of Jewish leaders, the idea of this wisdom also appeared in *ho theos tōn paterōn*.

When linked with the tradition of Hellenistic Mediterranean’s wisdom, Jesus deemed the forefathers of Israel to be alive even though they had been deceased. There has been an accepted point of view because the way of addressing God by *ho theos tōn paterōn* spoke not merely of God but also of the ancestors whose names were mentioned (cf. Morris 1992:561). The way of addressing God is also associated with the reality of the relationship between God and the forefathers of Israel during their lifetime. Therefore, the key aspect of the ancestors’ immortality is their relationship with God whilst they are living. Although Israel’s ancestors have been physically deceased, the memory of how they related to God

5. ‘Therefore, be taking myself for instruction to a wise woman, whose name is Consideration, I was released from my difficulty, for she taught me that some persons who are living are dead, and that some who are dead are still [a]live: she pronounced that the wicked, even if they arrive at the latest period of old age, are only dead, inasmuch as they are deprived of life according to virtue; but that the good, even if they are separated from all union with the body, live forever, inasmuch as they have received an immortal portion’ (Flight and Finding 55). ‘Therefore, O all-wise man, good and virtue mean life, and evil and wickedness mean death’ (Flight and Finding 58).

and spent their lives when they were still alive persists. The same conclusion was also stated by Philo that *ho theos tōn paterōn* related to the imperishable virtues of the Israel's forefathers (Davies & Allison 1997:232; Downing 1982). That is what we understood of immortality. On the other hand, the Jewish leaders portrayed in Matthew have been regarded as deceased even though they were still alive.

In a more specific conclusion, besides talking about the identity of God of Israel, the motive for applying *ho theos tōn paterōn* in this text was also to emphasise that the exemplary actions and behaviours inherited by the Israelites' ancestors made them alive even when Jesus mentioned that they were deceased. The memory of the Israelites' ancestors had kept them alive and continued to guide the lives of their descendants, who are now still alive in this world.

'Ho theos tōn paterōn' as a pastoral approach

As what has been presented earlier, the main object of nostalgia is the people, or more specifically, the memory of individual people, and subsequently, the memory of certain events that are commonly related to people (Routledge et al. 2013:809). As a pastoral theologian, the writer of the Gospel used this approach through Matthew 22:32. Matthew provided a narrative in which Jesus was also using this approach in order to remember a number of Israel's forefathers of whom the Jews were so proud. The dignified forefathers did not only leave behind and set an exemplary life, but also their presence was alive and present in the community, which was in the midst of facing the crisis.

Therefore, the forefathers did not only recreate the romantic effect of the past, which is closely related to the development and even affirmance of their identity, but also sparked the memories of the forefathers' attitude to exemplary life and behaviour. The motive behind these memories was to encourage their descendants to emulate how these ancestors relate with God. The relationship would always be used as a reference to evaluate their descendants' piety (Vriezen 1963:119). Alt's opinion, as quoted by Hyatt, was in line with Vriezen's opinion, in which the tradition of this model of *deification* was passed down from generation to generation and imitated by his children and grandchildren in the future (Hyatt 1955:130). In this way, the ancestors will of course become historical nostalgia for their descendants.

Therefore, by mentioning the name of their ancestors when addressing God, the descendants of Israel were being invited to reminisce the feeling of nostalgia in order to be reminded of the religiosity quality of people who were intimately related to God. Thus, the nostalgia was the motive of Jesus in Matthew 22:32. By remembering the ancestors, it was hoped that they would become a model or patron to follow, which in turn would guide the people of this community in facing identity crisis.

In the beginning of the culmination of the plot of the polemical narratives in Matthew 23, Jesus emphasises the weakness of leaders in the Judaism, namely, 'to teach but not to do (*poieo*)' (Mt 23:3). Out of the 65 occurrences in the entire Gospel of Matthew, the word *poieo* occurs 25 times⁶ in the text unit, which can be concluded as a unit that describes the discipleship process of Jesus, in chapters 5–10. The six chapters in this unit can be divided into three main parts, namely, chapters 5–7, 8–9 and 10 (Davies & Allison 1988).

As 'to do' is one of the ways 'to know',⁷ it is unsurprising that Jesus in the gospel emphasised the importance of doing God's will through the word *poieo*. The first two passages represent what Jesus taught by words and deeds, respectively (Davies & Allison 1991; Hagner 1993). The discipleship of Jesus did not stop at a number of words and deeds but had to be followed by a number of concrete actions. Therefore, in the third passage (Mt 10), Jesus sent the disciples so that they also carried out the teachings they had received, the teachings they received by both words and works. Chapter 10 seemed to be the final stage of the process of Jesus' discipleship (cf. Davies & Allison 1991:5). In the process of discipleship, doing what is taught or commanded is the climax of Jesus' demand to his disciples.

For Jesus, doing God's will was the best way to face many crises in life, including identity crisis. By doing God's will every disciples will know who they are and who God is, so that is why at the end of the sermon on the mount, Jesus said that everyone who hears his words and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock (Mt 7:24–27). Besides historical nostalgia, by doing his words, they will also have the personal nostalgia regarding God, so that is why by doing Jesus' words faithfully, they will know who is God that always be with them. That is 'nostalgia as an *inner resource*' means. The ancestors have exemplified it, and Jesus reminds it by *ho theos tōn paterōn* in Matthew 22:32.

Conclusion

It has been found that the main objects of nostalgia are people and events that are related to people. Jesus saw this uniqueness and used the ancestor of Israel in Matthew 22:32 as objects of historical nostalgia. Remembering their ancestors was not only associated with how they related to God but also making them a patron to their religiosity. By utilising nostalgia research in the field of psychology, we show that through *ho theos tōn paterōn*, Matthew used a nostalgic approach to the community that faced a severe identity crisis. Based on the positive effect of nostalgia as presented earlier, it is hoped that the Matthean community would experience the same effect, so that the main theme of the gospel – God with us – is also affirmed by the therapeutic effects of nostalgia. In this way, Thompson's obsession that 'the author of Matthew was a pastoral theologian' has been strengthened.

6. Matthew 5:19, 32, 36, 46, 47*2; 6:1, 2*2, 3*2; 7:12*2, 17*2, 18*2, 19, 21, 22, 24, 26; 8:9*2; 9:28. (* = appearing twice in the same verse.)

7. According to Aristotle, there are three ways to know, namely, *theoria*, *praxis* and *poiesis* (cf. Groome 1980:153).

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