



# Πάτερ, ημων ο εν τοις ουρανοις (Mt 6:9a): Reading the Lord's Prayer with insight from Ewe cosmology



## Authors:


Daniel Sakitey<sup>1</sup>   
Ernest van Eck<sup>1</sup> 

## Affiliations:

<sup>1</sup>Department of New Testament and Related Literature, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

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### Project Leader:

Ernest van Eck 

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## Corresponding author:

Daniel Sakitey,  
dksakitey@gmail.com

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This article seeks to interpret the phrase Πάτερ, ημων ο εν τοις ουρανοις in the invocation of the Lord's Prayer in the light of Ewe-Ghanaian cosmology. The article employs a combination of the historical-critical and indigenous mother tongue biblical hermeneutical approaches to explore the implication of the invocation for Ewe-Ghanaian Christian spirituality today. The article firstly discusses the various theological and hermeneutical positions of the invocation in dialogue with Ewe-Ghanaian concept of God and the plurality of his dwelling place. The article argues that Matthew's use of ουρανοις to suggest a plurality in God's dwelling place resonates with Ewe cosmology, where it is believed that there are seven states of existence and that Mawugā, the Supreme Being, dwells in the first – the absolute state. Thus God exists in 'seven heavens' in Ewe cosmology, with the highest heaven being the eternal state of abode. On the other hand, the 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. This hermeneutical position, the article observes, was responsible for the theological tensions that characterised the encounter between missionary Christianity and Ewe indigenous religion in the middle of the 19th century. However, the introduction of social services as evangelisation strategy, the legacy of the 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 employs indigenous religious and cultural categories in theologising.

**Contribution:** Matthew's rendition of the invocation of the Lord's Prayer in the context of Ewe-Ghanaian cosmology is the focus of this article. The article forms part of the researcher's contribution to the academic knowledge on the Lord's Prayer and inspires the use of mother tongue biblical hermeneutics in the development of theological materials for the Ewe-Ghanaian Christian communities in Ghana and Togo.

**Keywords:** The Lord's Prayer; Ewe cosmology; fatherhood of God; God's dwelling place; exclusive and inclusive interpretations; Ewe-Ghanaian spirituality.

## Introduction

The Lord's Prayer opens with Πάτερ in both Matthew and Luke, with Matthew continuing with ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν 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 nonliturgical structure (Luz 2007:309, 313). Matthew's use of οὐρανοῦς in the invocation and third petition is interesting. Whereas the term is pluralised in the invocation (οὐρανοῖς), it is singular in the third petition (οὐρανῶ). This raises the theological question about the dwelling place of God: is he in οὐρανοῦς or οὐρανῶ? But this may also suggest that the two can be used interchangeably. This discrepancy may have accounted for Luke's omission of the term in his version. It is presumed that the opening address of the prayer, Πάτερ, is common in Jewish literatures and also prevalent in many Greco-Roman literatures in addressing their gods (Brown 2004:8; Luz 2007:314).<sup>1</sup> 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'

1. According to Brown (2004:8, 9), 'both humans and immortals often call Zeus father. Polyphemos calls the god Poseidon father'. Jupiter and Mars are also invoked as fathers in Latin literature.

**Note:** Special Collection: Africa Platform for NT Scholars, sub-edited by Ernest van Eck (University of Pretoria).

(Luz 2007:315; Pennington 2007:218). Pennington's work affirms that of Luz, but he argues that the idea of the Fatherhood of God to Jews is one of exclusivity (Pennington 2007:220). They saw themselves as the only begotten of God although he is the creator and ruler of the entire cosmos (Pennington 2007:223). This notion finds expression in many Jewish literature (Pennington 2007:217–222). A typical example is found in the Full Kaddish (*Kaddish shalayim*), 'may the prayers and supplications of all Israel be accepted by their Father who is in heaven...' (Scherman 1991:43–45). It is therefore plausible to come to the conclusion that Matthew's community identifies with the attributes of God as expressed in the Jewish notion of God. The Greco-Roman background of the invocation, as Brown (2004:10) puts it, 'provided [the] conceptual basis for the gentile Christian understanding of God as father in the Lord's Prayer'. In his interpretation of the term within the context of an imagined legally regulated Greco-Roman social structure, Brown (2004:4, 5) noted that although the *paterfamilias* is both austere and tender, it failed to provide the needed social protection for the vulnerable in the society (Brown 2004:6).<sup>2</sup> Comparing *paterfamilias* to Πάτερ, ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, the Greco-Roman Christians – slave and freed – view the Father in heaven as one of 'benevolence rather than self-aggrandizement' (Brown 2004:6). Thus, a Greco-Roman Christian reading of Πάτερ, ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς would be, 'our Father', the one who is in the heavens, not *paterfamilias*. The use of the possessive pronoun ἡμῶν emphasised the relationship between God and the gentile Christian through Jesus Christ, an indication of 'a fundamental understanding of the sociality of existence' (Brown 2004:10).<sup>3</sup> The symbiotic relationship that exists between humans and other creatures cannot be extended to God. When it comes to humans' relationship with God, the former absolutely depends on the latter. The philosophical view during the time of the prayer perceives God as the first cause of all existence, as Scott describes it, 'Father of the world of nature and of our own rational being' (Scott 1951:84). The invocation concludes with the phrase ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (the one in the heavens). The locative voice of the phrase places God, from Brown's Greco-Roman viewpoint, within a monotheistic frame. It also raises the question about the abode of God, that is, he transcends the entire cosmos and is 'willing and able to assist the orant in his quest for a hearing' (Brown 2004:13; Luz 2007:316; Nolland 2005:288–289).

2. It must be noted that, as Brown (2004:6, 7) indicates, the nomenclature *paterfamilias* is generic and it is the designation for both father of the smaller household and the Emperor who was viewed as father of the state – the larger family. Its imperial, political and absolute nature must have accounted for its failure to live up to its intent and purpose.

3. Brown (2004:11) argues against the hermeneutical stance that the possessive pronoun 'our' is referring to Christians from a theological perspective, stating that, firstly, it is against the tenet of Judaism and Christianity which affirms that 'all humanity derives from God and thus can claim God as Father.' He cites the following Bible passages to buttress his point: Deuteronomy 32:6, Malachi 2:10, Acts 17: 28–29, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Ephesians 4:6. Secondly, it undermines God's divine attribute of perfect justice and the doctrine of monotheism. Thirdly, unlike Luke's version of the prayer and the *Didache*, it is unclear whether Matthew's version of the prayer was addressed to disciples or everyone. The argument is raised in the work of Ong (2012–2013:112) where the point is made that it is only when Πάτερ translates 'householder of the earth' that it validates the inclusive interpretation of the word. Considering Matthew's version of the prayer from its sociolinguistic setting, however, its audience is unquestionably followers of Christ. See Ong (2012–2013:113). Also, the disciples ought not to be interpreted with the possessive pronoun ἡμῶν from an exclusive point of view, because they may be conscious of the Jewish theological view of God as God of the Jews.

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 Sakitey & Van Eck 2020, 2021; Van Eck & Sakitey 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 *Mia To/Mia Fofa* and οὐρανοῖς 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 *Fofogā* (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 Πάτερ, 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 Yeye La* (1990), *Agbenya La* (2006) and *Biblia* (2010) – one finds some similarities and differences. The *Biblia* (1931) and *Agbenya La* translate Πάτερ, ημων ο εν τοις ουρανοις as *mía Fofu*, *si le dzifo* while *Biblia* (2010) and *Nubabla Yeye La* (1999) render it as *mía Tɔ si le dzifowo*. The majority of Ewe Christians understand Πάτερ to be *mía Fofu* and not *mía Tɔ*. Also in his Gethsemane prayer, for instance, Jesus used Πάτερ μου, which is rendered in all three Ewe translations as *Fofonye* (my Father) instead of *Tɔnyɛ* or *Tatanyɛ*.<sup>4</sup> The only reason that can be attributed for the use of *Tɔ* and *Fofu* interchangeably in these translations is orthography.<sup>5</sup> The question of orthography has arisen due to the three different dialects in which the Ewe language finds expression – *Anlo*, *Tongu* and *Ewedome*.<sup>6</sup> The use of *Fofu* in translation carries two meanings, father and senior brother, depending on the part of Ewe one hails from – Ghana, Togo or Benin. Similar to *Tɔ* is *Tate*, which is used by Ewes living along the Volta Lake – the *Tongu* people. A *Tongu* rendering of Πάτερ μου would be *míw Tate*, as compared to *mía Tɔ* 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 Πάτερ 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).<sup>7</sup>

4. See *Ewe nyadigbale* (Ewe concordance).

5. The following liturgical books show the variations in translation: *Liturgi alo doqo na subsubu* (2016:102), *Nyananyi Hame Hadzigbale sue* (2002:282), *Liturgi*.

6. Interview with Rev. Fred Amevenku (2017).

7. See also John 1:11, Deuteronomy 33:9, Matthew 8:22, John 8:44, Isaiah 1:3–4, John 8:34, 1 Kings 2:30, 1 Corinthians 6:20. Origen's proof-text approach on the invocation is different from Gregory's philosophical approach which is based on the concept of fatherhood. The ethical relationship that is supposed to exist between a father and son is that 'if a man knows how to approach the Divine qualities, he will not dare to call himself a child of God unless he finds these [qualities] in himself'. See Steward-Sykes (2004:159–165) and Graef (1954:10).

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 Πάτερ, 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.<sup>8</sup>

## 'Εν τοις ουρανοις and the plurality of God's dwelling place

Regarding the translation of ουρανοις, 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 Évangélique Presbytérienne Du Togo. The Akan and Ga translations *sor* or *soro* and *ηwei*, respectively, are in the singular instead of plural. In the other Ewe translations (*Biblia* 1931, 2010; *Nubabla Yeye La* 1990), *dzifowo* is used because of its equivalence to the Greek ουρανοις. The word is derived from *dzi* (height) and *fo* (literally, belly) and denotes the belly of the heights.<sup>9</sup> 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 *Ewedome* people as *dzingɔ*, from *dzi* (height), and *ηγɔ* (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 ουρανοις 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

8. Scott (1951:84) alludes to Brown's view as the prevailing philosophical view during the time of the Lord's Prayer.

9. Interview with Rev. Fred Amevenku (2017).

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  $\sigma\ \epsilon\ \nu\ \tau\omicron\iota\varsigma\ \omicron\upsilon\ \rho\alpha\ \nu\omicron\iota\varsigma$  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 *Nubabla Yeye La* (1999) – that the invocation of the Lord's Prayer – Πάτερ ημών  $\sigma\ \epsilon\ \nu\ \tau\omicron\iota\varsigma\ \omicron\upsilon\ \rho\alpha\ \nu\omicron\iota\varsigma$  – should be literally translated *Miatɔ si le dzifowo* (literally, Our father who is in the belly of the skies).

## Πάτερ, ημών $\sigma\ \epsilon\ \nu\ \tau\omicron\iota\varsigma\ \omicron\upsilon\ \rho\alpha\ \nu\omicron\iota\varsigma$ in Ewe cosmology

In Ewe-Ghanaian cosmology, the whole of the universe is believed to be an embodiment of the Supreme Being (*Mawugã*). *Mawugã*, it is believed, emanated from the absolute or celestial state of being through the various levels of existence to the embodied state.<sup>10</sup> From this state, he created all living things (*Nugbegbeawo* or *nugbagbeawo* in Ewe),<sup>11</sup> including human beings, and dwells in them. God is therefore known at the absolute state as *Sogbe-Lisa*, from *So* (Father), *Gbe* (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 *Se*,<sup>12</sup> with the dualistic pair *Sodza* (female) and *Sogbla* (male), with *Sɔwlui* as a third pair (Spieth 1906:458–462).<sup>13</sup> Thus, the pantheon of deities<sup>14</sup> called *Trɔwo* 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'<sup>15</sup> (Awoonor 2006:377). In this cosmic understanding, the whole of creation, in both physical and metaphysical forms, is inextricably linked to the Supreme Being. *Hamugbetɔ*, now pronounced *Amegbetɔ*, from *Ha* (the male counterpart of the divine duality in its blissful state) and *Gbe* (the female),<sup>16</sup> 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 Aɔetɔ*, because they are the only creatures who have been given the power of speech.

Situating the invocation of the Lord's Prayer, Πάτερ, ημών  $\sigma\ \epsilon\ \nu\ \tau\omicron\iota\varsigma\ \omicron\upsilon\ \rho\alpha\ \nu\omicron\iota\varsigma$ , 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-Ghanaian 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 furniture. 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, ημών, may be rendered *mía Tɔ*, *mía Fofo*, or *míɔ Tate*. The second half of the invocation,  $\epsilon\ \nu\ \tau\omicron\iota\varsigma\ \omicron\upsilon\ \rho\alpha\ \nu\omicron\iota\varsigma$ , should read *si le dzifowo* to reflect Matthew's theology.

10. In an interview with Dr Kumordzi on 28 September 2015, 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 *Gbe*, with *So* being the father and *Gbe* 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 *Sa*. 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*, *Vodu-Da* or *Da-Kriso* and *Sovi-Agbeku*, 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 *Trɔwo* (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 their 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 *Nu* (thing or things) and *gbe* (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 Dzobo (2008). Gbolonyo (2009) has also done extensive work on the idea of a cosmic trinity in Ewe ontology.

14. Wicker and Opoku (eds. 2007:26) have categorised the Ewe primordial divinities into five: *Torhonor*, which is the divinity of thunder and rain, and is responsible for the fertility of plants, beasts and humanity; *Torkorsu*, 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; *Efa*, the divinity of wisdom, science and divination and the patron of clairvoyants and diviners as well as the spokesman for all the other divinities; 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 Datey 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 Datey Kumordzi 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 *TeGbe*.

## 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<sup>17</sup> 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'.<sup>18</sup>

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 indigenes, which sometimes led to looting of the missionaries' properties (Wiegräbe 1936:18). Worshippers 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

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.

(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 οὐρανοῖς 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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Both authors contributed equally to this work.

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