

# Salvation in Matthew 5:17–20 and its Implications in the Church in Antioch and St James Kajire Anglican Parish, Kenya

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## Abstract

This article was prompted by my fervour to find out how modern and ancient cultures influence Christian conception and the practice of salvation. To address this issue, I decided to do a comparative study of salvation in modern time, with first century practice of the same. On the one hand, I focused on exploring salvation as reflected in the Gospel of Matthew 5.17–20, because most scholars believe that this Gospel addresses a multi-cultural community composed of Gentiles and Judeans. On the other hand, to observe modern practices of salvation, I interviewed a focus group through a questionnaire and telephone calls in 2011 and 2019, respectively, to briefly explore the case of St James Anglican Parish at Kajire Village in Taita-Taveta County, Kenya. The overall goal of the article is to explore how, in pursuit of practising their salvation, the community of Matthew in Antioch had to contest the Roman Empire, accommodate Diaspora Judaism, and identify with the emerging Jesus Movement. Consequently, employing literary analysis and what I call “social identity political theory” (SIPT), I have argued that a culturally conditioned practice of salvation is prone to the promotion of group dominance. To address this problem, Matthew advances an inclusive view of salvation that entails the construction of a superordinate Christian identity, which has the potential to support a Christocentric perspective of salvation.

**Keywords:** culture; salvation; righteousness; identity; Matthew; Church in Antioch; St James Kajire Anglican Parish



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## Introduction

The influence of culture on the expression of Christianity is a long-term issue that Christianity has faced in the modern time as well as during its emergence in the first Century CE. For instance, in his article “Greco Roman and Jewish Contributions to the Growth of Christianity” (2013), Emeke Ekeke discusses how both Greeks and Jewish culture contributed to Christianity in terms of the language of its writings, and the growth of Christianity, respectively (Ekeke 2013, 24). Similarly, the matter of cultural influence on modern Christianity has continued to surface in subsequent generations to date. In his article “Current Theologies” (1984), Justin Ukpong explores the emergence of three branches of African contextual theologies in the mid-twentieth century, namely African Inculturation Theology, African Black Theology, and Liberation Theology (Ukpong 1984, 501). Because these theologies attempted to give African cultural expression to Christian faith, they eventually espouse a Christian theology shaped by African cultural identity. Consequently, the church through the ages has been exposed to the question of cultural perception and the practice of salvation; both in its capacity of receiving the apostolic traditions and modern theological conception and practices. The goal of the article is to explore the role of culture in shaping a Christian conception of salvation by exploring two case studies; one from the community of Matthew in Antioch, and the other from a modern African community at Kajire Village, Taita-Taveta County, Kenya. Employing qualitative research method, literary redaction and SIPT (that will be elaborated on in due course), the article defends the argument that a cultural conception of salvation is prone to group dominance. The solution to this problem lies in constructing a superordinate Christian identity which has the potential to support a Christocentric perspective of salvation. This argument provides a basis for this article to make a contribution to knowledge, as will be explained in the conclusion. To proceed from here, we shall first briefly explore Matthew’s conception of salvation as presented by a sample of three scholars in order for us to set out the research problem, question and methodological perspectives for this study.

## A Brief Scholarly Review

The main problem to be addressed in this article is prompted by the debate on either the exclusion or inclusion of Gentiles and Judeans in Matthew’s view of salvation. Levine suggests that Matthew espouses an inclusive view of salvation that embraces both Judeans and Gentiles on equal footing (Levine 1956, 3). To the contrary, Meier (1975, 205–206) and Gullotta (2014, 328) contend that Matthew’s rhetoric promotes an exclusive view of salvation that primarily embraces Judeans while excluding Gentiles till a later date. Levine, Meier, and Gullotta tentatively bring us to the main question to be answered in this article: How does the cultural difference between Gentiles and Judeans feature in Matthew’s concept of salvation? There are notable methodological deficiencies among these three scholars that necessitate a methodological preference for this study, which blends literary and social sciences. The choice of Matthew 5:17–20 here is based on the notion that this passage presents Jesus’ sayings on the Mosaic Law, an issue which is at the heart of the positions proposed by Levine, Meier and Gullotta.

Although I will be briefly defining key concepts for this study as I develop the article, it is crucial to briefly outline the methodological perspectives here.

## Methodological Perspectives

This study mainly employs a qualitative research method derived from literary approaches used in the semantic analysis of the biblical text, together with social identity political theory (SIPT) that blends four concepts, namely “superordinate identity, identification, accommodation and contestation” (M'bwangi 2019, 47–48).<sup>1</sup> Additionally, two research studies (briefly conducted in 2011 and 2019 at Kajire Village) collectively inform this study. While the intention of the first research (conducted in 2011) briefly reflects the perception of cultural practices of integration between members from two different tribes in the wider Kajire Village community, the recent case study (conducted in 2019) was to find out the conception of the practice of salvation by representatives of St James Kajire Anglican Parish. Furthermore, a focus group research design of 17 and 4 people for the 2011 and 2019 cases, was applied respectively. The data collection technique applied is that of interviews, whereby a questionnaire and telephone interviews were used in 2011 and 2019 as data collection tools. Literary criticism and SIPT collectively provided tools for data analysis. As far as ethical issues are concerned, in both cases the participants freely volunteered to give information because first they were all informed of the need, nature and importance of the interview in supporting the publication of articles for public reading. Second, and as a result without any coercion, the participants voluntarily participated in the interviews and granted permission for their information to be used in the two articles borne out of this research; the first article (2011) was published by the *HTS Theological Studies* journal<sup>2</sup> and the manuscript for this article, which was submitted to the *Studiae Historiae Ecclesiae* journal for this article. To this end, we turn to the semantic analysis of Matthew 5:17–20.

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- 1 The social political identity theory (SIPT) derived most of its content and arguments from Ann Faulkner (2005), Aaron Kuecker (2016), and Philip Esler (2003; 2016). In order to address the negative effects of vilification and stereotyping that tend to perpetuate inter-group hostility and antagonism, categorisation into a *superordinate category* is necessary. A superordinate category refers to the redrawing of group boundaries in order to bring into one group members of an in-group and out-group, without collapsing their distinctiveness, but in a manner that acknowledges their commonality (Baker 2011, 107–108). *Identification* refers to the notion of human beings' preference to belong to a group because they conceive it to rightfully express a self-conception of who they are. The precondition for identification is the existence of two or more individuals who conceive themselves as members of a group (Faulkner 2005, 3–5). Belonging to a group is driven by two factors, namely: 1) a desire to maintain self-esteem; and 2) to have their life guided by group norms. In some cases, identification, such as in ethnic groupings, presents rigid boundaries of identity, unlike in such a case as belonging to a football club (Faulkner 2005, 2–3; Kuecker 2016, 70–71).
  2. See M'bwangi 2011, “A Case of Tribal Defilement in a Kenyan Rural Village: A Narratological and Socio-rhetorical Function of the Motifs of ‘Hearing and Understanding’ and ‘Contrast’ in Matthew 15:10–11 *vis-à-vis* Leviticus 11:1–4.” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 67 (3): Art. #427, 8 pages. doi:10.4102/hts.v67i3.427.

## Semantic Analysis of Matthew 5:17–20

In this article, our investigation of the meaning of Matthew's salvation is limited to Matthew's significance of righteousness.<sup>3</sup> In order to grasp the connection of salvation to righteousness in Matthew's rhetoric in this passage, the semantic analysis is divided into three thematic components, namely: fulfilment of the Mosaic Law; performative perspectives of the sayings of Jesus on the Mosaic Law; and greater righteousness. These three portions respectively constitute the opening, middle and closing of Matthew's rhetoric in this passage.

### Matthew 5:17: Jesus' Fulfilment of the Mosaic Law

Verse 17, which marks the opening of Matthew's narrative in this passage and points to the abiding character of the Mosaic Law from the point of view of Jesus' sayings, is primarily made up of eight verbs in the subjunctive mood. These subjunctive verbs are also accompanied by several negative particles, posing as adverbs, that can be classified as emphatic negations or prohibitions (Wallace 2000, 463). Matthew rhetorically employs these subjunctives and negative particles not to express the tenets of Mosaic Law *per se*, but to emphasise the interpretative authority of Jesus on the Mosaic Law in Matthew's church. For instance, at the opening of verse 17, μή (no) modifies νομίζω (think) to translate the phrase “do not think”; and οὐκ (not) modifies καταλύω (break, destroy) to translate the phrase “not to destroy.” Hence, verse 17 can be translated as: “Do not think that I came to destroy the law and the prophets; I came to destroy not but to fulfil [it].” Thus, verse 17 clearly focuses on Jesus's fulfilment of the Mosaic Law. The significance of this “fulfilment” is elaborated on in the rest of the passage.

### Matthew 15:18–19: Performative Perspective of the Sayings of Jesus

Verse 18 and 19 constitute the middle of Matthew's narrative. In verse 18, a combination of other negative particles, οὐ and μή, modifies ἰῶτα (iota) and κεραία

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3 The Greek word σωτηρία (“soteria”) translated “salvation” bears Roman imperial, Jewish as well as Christian meanings (Josephus, AJ 2:331; Verbrugge 2000, 549–550; BDAG 2001, 985). In his rhetoric, Matthew does not directly use the term “salvation” as Paul does (Rom 1:18; 10:9). Instead, Matthew depicts a view of salvation informed by Jesus' teachings and actions. Given the first century social context, one aspect of Matthew's view of salvation was derived from Jesus' power to deliver his followers from natural danger (Matt 8:23–27), spiritual perils (Matt 8:28–34) and hunger (Matt 14:13–21; 5:29–39), on the one hand. On the other hand, Matthew's concept of salvation resonates with the eschatological perspective of salvation that entails the obligation to follow Jesus in order to be incorporated into his outreach mission (Matt 4:19). Similarly, the practice of a righteousness that greatly exceeds that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Mosaic Law (Matt 5:20), reflects Matthew's meaning of salvation. Behind the concepts of deliverance, and Jesus' command “follow me and greater righteousness,” lies the significance of Matthew's perspective of salvation which is grounded in Jesus' sayings. Therefore, according to Matthew, there are two sides to the idea of salvation; as the accomplishment of Jesus, on one hand, and on the other hand, there is a view of salvation that entails the obligation of the followers of Jesus. This article is concerned with the latter aspect, that is, the conception and practices of salvation as obligation of the church (the adherents of Jesus's teaching) for the purpose of accomplishing greater righteousness.

(letter) to translate the phrase to “not an iota” (smallest) or “not one of the letters” in order to emphasise the whole coverage of Jesus’ interpretative authority on the Mosaic Law. Consequently, Matthew 5:19 elaborates the eschatological significance of πληρόω (fulfil/accomplish: Matt 5:17) as entailing the honouring of the status of one’s identity (being pronounced “great”: μέγας) on account of practising and teaching others to do the instructions of Jesus regarding the Mosaic Law. Doing the opposite, of course, entails the loss of an honourable identity (being pronounced smallest: ἐλάχιστος) in “the kingdom of heaven.” Guelich argues that Matthew (5:19) employs διδάσκω (teach) and ποιέω (practise) to heighten the contrast between breaking or annulling the Mosaic Law and doing or not doing. Although Guelich reads verse 19 in the context of the progression of Matthew’s thinking in verse 20, he wrongly concludes that verse 19 differs from Matthew 23:2–3 because he thinks that while the latter attempts to distinguish the action of the scribes and Pharisees from their teachings, the former concerns the difference between the breaking of the Mosaic Law and abiding by the Law (Guelich 1982, 150). Contrary to Guelich, and viewed in the context of verses Matthew 19, 20, and 23:2–3, I argue that in verse 19, Matthew emphasises the speech performance of the sayings of Jesus on the Mosaic Law by employing διδάσκω (teach) and ποιέω (practise) to emphasise the endurance of the Torah from Jesus’ point of view of fulfilment; in contrast to a lack of such endurance of the Torah presented in the traditions of the teachers of the Mosaic Law and the Pharisees that contradict the spirit of the Torah. Moreover, the text shapes the readers’ understanding by stressing the importance of practising the sayings of Jesus on Mosaic Law; and teaching others to do the same as a way of receiving recognition in βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (the kingdom of heaven). The main thrust of verses 18 and 19 is to insist on the performance of Jesus’ significance in fulfilment of the Mosaic Law through practising and teaching others to do the same concerning Jesus’ instructions.

### **Matthew 15.20: Greater Righteousness**

Verse 20 marks the closing of Matthew 5:17–20 by presenting the climax of Matthew’s progressive thinking in this passage. The adverbs μὴ (not, not) that modify περισσεύω (bound, surpass) and the combination of οὐ and μὴ modify εισέρχομαι in verse 20. Another repetitive pattern is noted in the form of conjunctions. For instance, the conjunction γὰρ (therefore, thus) appears in verses 17 and 20 to perform an explanatory function. Similarly, the phrase “λέγω ὑμῖν” (“I say to you”) is employed in verse 20, and like the use of διδάσκω (teach) and ποιέω (practise) in verse 18, Matthew uses this phrase to emphasise the speech performance of the sayings of Jesus. Furthermore, the noun βασιλεία (Kingdom), which also appears in verse 19 to emphasise teaching Jesus’ sayings on the Mosaic Law to others, is employed in verse 20 by Matthew to emphasise the result of practising and teaching righteousness that bound above (surpass) that of the teachers of the Mosaic Law and the Pharisees; such practising of Jesus’ instructions and teaching others to do the same, grants entrance into the Kingdom of heaven.

It is noteworthy that verse 20 is probably Matthew’s redaction of Mark 9:47. In his redaction of a Markan source (Mark 9:47), Matthew shifts the metaphor’s focus from

the problematic plucking of the eye to the quest for righteousness that bounds above (surpasses) that of the teachers of the Mosaic Law and the Pharisees as a condition for entering the Kingdom of heaven. How did Matthew expect this kind of righteousness to be attained? Verse 20 does not rhetorically function as a summary of Matthew 5:17–20, as Guelich (1982, 157) suggests. Rather, I prefer the view of Evan and Zachariah that because the conjunction γὰρ (therefore) introduces the verse and references the previous statements, it reflects on Jesus' Messianic authority (Evans and Zachariah 2012, 119). Jesus' messianic authority is embedded in his demand for his followers to teach (διδάσκω) and practise (ποιέω) Jesus' sayings about the fulfilment of the Mosaic Law's demands. In this context, the reference to ἐντολή (commands) in Matthew 5.19 refers to Jesus' declaration in Matthew 5.17. By “teaching” and “practising” Jesus' commands, his followers will be practising a righteousness which greatly abounds/surpasses that of the teachers of the Mosaic Law and the Pharisees. But what is the content of this righteousness? The content of righteousness that Jesus demands in Matthew 5:20 is found partly in securing social justice (Matt 5:21–48), giving alms and praying in a hidden (not public) place (Matt 6:1–8). In short, Matthew 5:17–20 describes Matthew's view of salvation based on the reason that, since Jesus has fulfilled all demands of the Mosaic Law, the followers of Jesus (to use modern terminology, “those who are borne-again”) in response are instructed to reflect the meaning of their salvation in light of greater righteousness. This is to say, although salvation was accomplished by Jesus, the followers of Jesus are invested with the responsibility of reflecting greater righteousness first by practising and then teaching others to practise the instructions (commands) of Jesus. By practising and teaching others the instructions of Jesus, the followers of Jesus will eventually be accomplishing the criteria for entrance into the Kingdom of heaven. This perspective of salvation, which is reflected in practising greater righteousness than that of the Pharisees and teachers of the Mosaic Law, was important in shaping the Christian identity of the Matthean community in Antioch, because it points to norms and values that constitute the distinctiveness of Matthew's church in Antioch.

Identity formation is a relational enterprise. Wanamaker, following Wilson, contends that in pursuit of constructing a social identity, one socially constructed and maintained world is rejected in favour of another (Wanamaker 1987, 4). From Wanamaker's position, it is evident that the process of acquiring an identity may involve an insider *vis-à-vis* outsider response (M'bwangi 2019, 184). So, which groups interacted with Matthew's community during the composition of Matthew's Gospel and what kind of challenges did they pose to Matthew's church that compelled Matthew to conceptualise a view of salvation pegged on practising and teaching greater righteousness? I will briefly explore the social setting of the Matthean community to answer this question.

### Antioch: The Social Setting of Matthew's Community

Following the evidence within Matthew's Gospel that includes Jesus' genealogy, the missionary focus on Jews and Gentiles (Esler 2003, 54–55; 63–65) and external

evidence from writers such as Ignatius “In New Advent: Church Fathers” (*Smyr* 1.1–2), the provenance of Matthew’s Gospel can be identified as Antioch. Given this internal and external evidence, I propose that Matthew composed his Gospel around 80–85 CE in order to constitute a church that was mostly made up of Diaspora Jews and a minority of Gentiles. Josephus, a first century CE Jewish historian, suggests that Antioch had a sizable Jewish population that enjoyed some imperial privileges (Josephus, “Antiquities of the Jews” (AJ 12:119); “Wars of the Jews (BJ 7:43). Rodney Stark, in his description of the socially deplorable condition of Antioch, paints a picture of a city experiencing social chaos because of its overcrowded population, with concomitant health hazards that would have caused despair and danger to a city in desperate need of revitalisation (Stark 1991, 191–200). Furthermore, a brief observation of the role of Roman Law, Torah, and sayings of Jesus on the fulfilment of the Mosaic Law in identity formation in the Roman Empire, Diaspora Judaism, and the Jesus Movement, respectively, is crucial in briefly espousing the social environment of Matthew’s church in Antioch.

### **Roman Law and Identity Formation**

Roman Law, operating in the context of an emperor cult, provided the basis of identity formation for Roman citizens and lifted the power associated with the image of the emperor above all citizens and subjects. Nilsson, following Hartland, claims that the Roman imperial cult “lacked all genuine religious content ... [and the cult’s] meaning lay far more in state and social realms, where it served both to express loyalty to the rule of Rome and emperor and satisfy the ambitions of leading families” (Nilsson 1948, 178; 1961, 385). Nilsson reiterates the centrality that Rome had in matters of identity in the Empire, for instance, *lex Irnitana* Municipal Law for swearing in magistrates, marked elite cultural identity by demanding the magistrate being sworn into office to express allegiance to a chain of emperors (Ando 2008, 95). Here is a close connection between the religious and cultural aspects of identity. This article embraces the view of culture that refers to “a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioral conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behavior and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour” (Spencer-Oatey 2012, 2).<sup>4</sup> By virtue of being identified with this Roman tradition of oath-taking, not only does the

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4 Because this definition of culture entails adherence to beliefs, policies, and behavioural conventions, culture plays a role of informing identity. The view I prefer in this article for identity is that which refers to the question of who we are, as informed by norms, values and traditions that motivate the way we live and express how we understand ourselves, our relationship to God, our community, and others (Van der Watt 2006, vi–vii; Kok 2011, 2; Nicklas and Schlögel 2012, 2). To be noted is that while “culture” outlines group values, “identity” points to the role of these group values in shaping people’s understanding of who they are. Given this relationship of “identity” and “culture” this paper explores how members of Matthew’s church in Antioch and people at Kajire Village in Kenya engage group values (culture) to express who they are (identity) in the context of belonging to the community of Jesus. This we shall achieve by employing SIPT to explain intra-group and inter-group relations of the community of Matthew with emerging early Christian communities (the Jesus Movement), Diaspora Judaism and the Roman Empire in Antioch.

swearing in reconstruct the elite social status, but also the connection to this entrusts some social power to the elite by granting them the power to arbitrate socio-economic and political issues of the local communities on behalf of Rome.

### **Torah and Diaspora Judean Identity Formation**

While the Roman Municipal Law of swearing in magistrates procured an elite identity and power to arbitrate Rome, the Torah rhetorically procured Judean identity in the diaspora. Even before the destruction of the second Jerusalem temple, Josephus tells us that Judeans felt that they needed to advocate for the maintenance of the source of their cultural identity. Noting the appeal of the Jews to Rome for the purposes of maintaining Judean Religious Laws while in diaspora, Josephus says:

But now, when Agrippa and Herod were in Ionia, a great multitude of Jews, who dwelt in their cities, came to them, and laying hold of the opportunity and the liberty now given them, laid before them the injuries which they suffered, while they were not permitted to use their own laws, but were compelled to prosecute their law-suits, by the ill usage of the judges, upon their holy days, and were deprived of the money they used to lay up at Jerusalem, and were forced into the army, and upon such other offices as obliged them to spend their sacred money; from which burdens they always used to be freed by the Romans, who had still permitted them to live according to their own laws. (Josephus, AJ 16:27–28)

Josephus reveals some concerns of the Judeans in the diaspora regarding their ethnic cultural identity in the pre-70 CE period. In this case, Judeans are noted by Josephus as requesting Agrippa I (41–44 CE), King of Judah, to petition for their grievances in Rome concerning the application of Judean Law instead of that of the Romans to prosecute cases for Judeans in the diaspora. The importance of Judean Law over Roman Law for the Diaspora Judeans is based on their belief that the former does justice to the distinctiveness of their cultural Judean identity.

Pre-73 Judean violent response to Rome's imperial policies earned an equal or even greater violent response from Rome, culminating in the destruction of the second Jerusalem temple during the 66–73 Jewish revolt against Rome. The post-73 Judeans in the diaspora would likely have chosen a non-violent response to Rome in order to control what Scott (1990, 37) calls "natural impulses to rage, insult, anger and violence that such feelings prompt." James Scott suggests that when a subordinate group is violently treated by a dominating group, they employ a non-violent response not only to suppress their anger and bitterness, but also to foster coexistence with the dominating group (Scott 1990, 36–37). Consequently, the interpretation of Judean first-century apocalyptic literature by Judeans contributed to the maintenance of Judean cultural identity in the diaspora, in the context of expressing non-violent resistance against Rome's domination. Although Baruch (85, 3) (see Charles n.d.) regards the Torah as



Yahweh's decrees,<sup>5</sup> Baruch represents the Torah as a political narrative for waging a divine war against Rome. Not only does the concept "Yahweh" or "the Mighty One" represent the superiority of the God of the Diaspora Judeans over Jupiter, but politically it stands as a force superior to Roman imperial rule that inverts the Emperor's political power. The laments in 4 Ezra 10:21–23, that "our sanctuary which has been destroyed ... [to the effect that] Levites have gone into captivity" and "our young men have been enslaved,"<sup>6</sup> resonate with Josephus' (BJ 7:96) comment that "Now Titus Caesar ... removed, and exhibited magnificent shows in all those cities of Syria through which he went, and made use of the captive Jews as public instances of the destruction of that nation." Josephus, like 4 Ezra, recounts Titus's subjugation of Judeans in 70 CE, when vessels of the second Jerusalem temple were confiscated, and Judeans were taken into captivity by Rome.

Thus, although 4 Ezra most likely recalls the political domination of the Judeans by Rome during the Flavian dynasty, it is most certainly political rhetoric of resistance against the Flavian emperors. Consequently, the description of Charles (n.d. "Early Jewish Writings, Wesley Center Online," [2 Baruch 5, 1]) of the sacking of the Jerusalem sanctuary by Titus as "your enemies will come to this place and pollute Your sanctuary" fits well with Scott's "hidden transcript" as a non-violent response by a minority group against a dominant political rule. While Diaspora Judeans referred to the Torah to negotiate their cultural identity by contesting Rome's dominance, the Jesus Movement (early Christian communities) employed the sayings of Jesus to negotiate for their identity. The term "negotiation" is used here "not to mean formal face-to-face discussions between Christian leaders and imperial leaders, but to refer to making one's way or shaping an appropriate way of life and identity in the midst of the Roman Empire" (Carter 2011, 287).

### **Identity Formation in the Jesus Movement**

The term "Jesus Movement" refers to the "various phenomena of Jesus-followers in the land of Israel ... the Jerusalem primitive church and the churches of Judea mentioned by Paul—and to the messianic groups in Israel in the period after the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE" (Stegemann and Stegemann 1999, 1). This view of the Jesus Movement is instructive in explaining the inter-group relations of the community of Matthew in Antioch. In his letters, particularly in Romans 13:1–7 and 2 Corinthians 8, not only did Paul want to address the relations between Jewish and Gentile Christians, but he also wanted to produce a set of cultural norms, beliefs and values in order to empower his community to resist the Roman Empire and Diaspora Judaism. In Romans 4, Paul argues that Gentiles could become heirs of Abraham, the father of Jewish people, by trusting God as Abraham did. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul resisted the Judaizing Christianity that sought to make the Galatian Gentile Christians into law-abiding

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5. See Charles (n.d.) "Early Jewish Writings, Wesley Center Online," 2nd Baruch 85. <https://www.yahwehswordarchives.org/books-of-baruch/2nd-book-baruch-085.htm>.

6. See 2 Ezra [http://www.pseudepigrapha.com/apocrypha\\_ot/2esdr.htm](http://www.pseudepigrapha.com/apocrypha_ot/2esdr.htm).

Christians. Porter's analysis of Romans 13:1–7 provides helpful insights regarding the role of Paul's letter to the Romans in the construction, maintenance and purpose of the narrative.<sup>7</sup> Porter's analysis of Romans 13:1–7 presents the political aspects of the Jesus Movement as represented by Paul's thoughts in his letter to the Romans. Porter aptly observes that Romans 13:1–7 concerns two issues, namely; 1) taking the Roman authorities into account; and 2) imploring the Christians in the Roman Empire to recognise the Lordship of Jesus Christ in a manner that does not necessarily result in unqualified obedience to Rome (Porter 2011, 186). By implication, the political nature of Paul's rhetoric is based on the notion that Jesus' Lordship replaces the authority of the Roman emperor. In other words, Paul's letter to the Romans indicates that Paul employs his rhetoric to displace the political authority of the emperor with that of Jesus, the Son of God (Rom 1:3).

Besides the challenges posed by Roman imperial policies, the Jesus Movement in Antioch faced inter-cultural conflict prompted by demands for Gentile Christians to approach salvation through Judean legalistic cultural values of circumcision and food abstinence. This problem features in Acts 15:1–2; 22–29 and Galatians 2.11–14. In order to provide a solution to this intra-group conflict in Antioch, a first response is provided by the Pharisees by insisting that "Gentiles must be circumcised" and ascribe to the Mosaic Law (Acts 15:1, 5). But, bearing in mind that the Pharisees' proposal would make it more burdensome for Gentile believers, James suggested for Gentile believers not to be subjected to circumcision but to "abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood" (Acts 15:20). This is the solution which Paul and Barnabas carried back to Antioch from Jerusalem and read before the congregation in Antioch (Acts 15:29–30).<sup>8</sup> For the reason of being one-sided, the Jerusalem council's solution could not enforce group cohesion in Antioch. If the events reflected in Acts 15 and Galatians 2:11–14 took place around

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7 Porter (2011, 171–173) claims that Paul's letter to the Romans is reflective of two narratives: 1) the narrative of the emperor cult, emphasising the divinity of the emperors; and 2) a narrative constructed by Paul regarding Jesus as the Son of God. Before he juxtaposes these two narratives to show that the narrative in Romans is employed by Paul to replace the claims of divinity associated with the Roman emperor cult, Porter outlines calendric inscriptions erected in Asia by Paulus Fabius Maximus, governor of Asia in 10/9 BCE. These calendric inscriptions venerate the Roman emperors as god, son of god, creator, lord, and so forth, beginning from Julius Caesar to the time of Nero. Porter (2011, 173) concludes that because these calendric inscriptions were widely spread in Asia and in places Paul had travelled during his three missionary journeys, it follows that "Paul was familiar with the wide-spread use of the terms that divinised the Caesar when he wrote his letter to the Romans." Comparing Paul's narrative in Romans with the emperor cult narrative represented in the calendric inscriptions, Porter concludes that Paul was "styling himself as the new erector of a new inscription to the true Lord Jesus Christ" (Porter 2011, 174).

8 In other words, in mid-first century, the prevailing conflict in Antioch prompted by Judean demand on the Gentiles to comply with the Torah (Gal 2:11–14), led the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15) to attempt proselytising Gentile believers in order for them to access salvation. Unfortunately, this solution pitted Judeans against the Gentiles. Winter aptly observes that Acts 15 indicates that "Gentile Christians were under pressure to embrace an ethnic Jewish [Judean] identity as proselytes. This manipulation came not from without but from within the Christian community" (Winter 2015, 227).

50 CE, it seems that when Matthew wrote his Gospel narrative around 80–85 CE, this inter-cultural conflict in the Jesus Movement had probably survived for 35 years in Antioch.

Briefly described above, are the dynamics of identity construction in the Roman Empire, Diaspora Judaism and the Jesus Movement in the first century CE that collectively provided the social setting of the emergence of the church of Matthew. Given this social context in the Roman Empire, how did Matthew intend to construct the identity of his community? Would he peg himself on Judean or Christian religious heritage to envision the identity for his church?

### Salvation and Identity Formation in Matthew's Church

Given the first century social setting in the Roman Empire, Matthew's concept of righteousness plays a significant role not only in constructing the identity of the community of his church, but also elaborating his meaning of salvation, which is embedded in his concern for greater righteousness. What do we mean by the term "Matthew's Church?" Although in his article, "The Mixed State of the Church in Matthew's Gospel," Charles Smith (1963, 149–150) refers to Matthew 13 and 22 to discuss the nature of the church in Matthew's Gospel, I prefer Matthew's views of the church derived from his concept of ἐκκλησία (ecclesia) which is rhetorically located in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17–20. Matthew portrays the church (ἐκκλησία) as a collection of believers in Jesus Christ marked by his presence (Matt 18:20) and having the apostolic traditions as its doctrinal foundation (Matt 16:18). The place of Jesus' presence in this definition of the church resonates with Matthew's value of the rhetorical function of Jesus' sayings on the Mosaic Law in Matthew 5:17–20, in shaping the identity of the followers of Jesus in Antioch.

### Accommodating Diaspora Judaism

What is the content that Matthew had in mind when he referred to Jesus' metaphorical saying regarding "teaching" and "practising" in Matthew 5:19b? Knowing the content of Jesus' sayings is important, because Matthew 5:19 is more of a metaphorical principle, just like righteousness in Matthew 5:20. The content of the teaching envisioned in Matthew 5:19b is outlined in Matthew 5:21–48 and resonates with McIver's (2012, 129–132) suggestion that this passage (Matt 5:21–48) illustrates Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:19 in the context of Matthean special material.<sup>9</sup> As a result, it seems that Matthew employs Jesus' sayings in Matthew 5:19b in the context of Matthew

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9 For instance: "You have heard it said that ... but I say to you." According to McIver, this presents a new element that "radicalises and transforms the Law." An example of this radicalisation is: "do not murder." In Matthew, this has the new elements: "do not be angry" (Matt 5:21–22); "do not commit adultery"; "do not lust." Another example is (Matt 27–28) "an eye for an eye"; a reference to vengeance, which corresponds to the new element "do not retaliate." McIver concludes that underlying this kind of interpretation of the Mosaic Law "is the command that righteousness of the disciples must exceed that of the Scribes and the Pharisees" (McIver 2012, 131).

5:21–48 to accommodate a setting of local Jewish legal system in a local court as acknowledged by Josephus (AJ 4:214). Consequently, the role of Judean Law noted by Josephus (AJ 16:27–28) in petitioning for the grievance of the Judeans in the diaspora has been subordinated to Jesus' instructions to practices of greater righteousness (Matt 5:20) that has the efficacy to secure social justice for all races (Matt 5:22–48).

Besides subordinating Judean Law, Matthew's accommodation of Judean traditions subordinates Judean leadership in the diaspora. Luz suggests that by embracing righteousness that greatly surpassed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 5:20), Matthew defines himself over against the leaders of Judaism (Luz 2007, 222). Luz attributes the model of an in-group prototype leadership to Matthew that encouraged a sense of shared identity. The in-group model represents a shared or common identity because, as Baker (2011, 12–13) contends, in superordinate identity, an in-group model of a leader stands as a "representation of a person that embodies the identity of the group." In his Gospel, Matthew—as the implied author—acquires this prototypical status which is based on the narrative's presentation of Judeans (Matt 10:6) and Gentiles (Matt 12:21; 25:32; 28:19) that constitute Matthew's audience. This prototypical role ought to have depicted Matthew to his audience as the embodiment of both Judean cultural values and Christian religious values.

Thus, Matthew's accommodation of Judean traditions shows that Matthew valued a view of salvation that embraced a dual cultural identity that embraced Gentiles and Judeans within a Christian identity. As part of the superordinate characteristics of the identity of the Matthean community, Christian identity constituted a superior identity, while the cultural identity of the Judeans, and by implication that of the Gentiles, represents subordinate identities. This superordinate identity, grounded on the significance of Matthew's concept of greater righteousness, is what Meier and Gullotta failed to note, as a result of which they misinterpreted Matthew's Gospel narrative as embodying a view of salvation that excludes the Gentiles.

### **Contesting the Roman Empire**

Not only were Jesus' sayings on the Mosaic Law expected to address socio-economic and political issues, but they were also expected to shape the way the members of Matthew's community thought about who they were and how they ought to relate among themselves, in particular, and with the society in which they lived, at large. These two verbs—*ποιέω* (practise) and *διδάσκω* (teach)—collectively reveal the ethical principle of Jesus' sayings on the Mosaic Law. This is to say that *ποιέω* and *διδάσκω* underscore the normative function of Matthew 5:17–19 in terms of regulating peoples' behaviour and attitudes through regular practising and teaching of Jesus' meaning of fulfilment of the Mosaic Law as the accomplishing of greater righteousness (Matt 5:20). Norms perform a crucial role in identity formation. Esler (2016, 165) defines "norm" as "regularities in attitudes and behaviours that characterise a social group and differentiate it from other social groups." Norms point to the identity formation of a group in relation to other groups. Hence, the securing of social justice outlined in Matthew 5:21–48

rhetorically accommodates Jewish and contests Roman imperial legal traditions in order to elaborate the significance of Jesus' saying on the fulfilment of the Mosaic Law.<sup>10</sup> Given the rhetorical elaborative function of Matthew 5:21–48, in effect Matthew's insistence for practising Jesus instructions on greater righteousness and teaching others to do the same (Matt 5:19), subverts the significance of swearing allegiance to the chain of emperors required of the Roman elites by *Lex Irnitana* 26. Why would Matthew see the Roman elites as problematic in Antioch? Carter (2011, 294–295) comments that “the hierarchical and exploitative imperial structure marked by alliances between Roman officials and Antiochene elites ... continued at the expense of non-elites whose production, skills and labor serviced the elite's way of life.” This indicates that despite their beneficent role in uplifting the economic status of the local communities, in Antioch the elites had become an economic burden to the local communities. Consequently, Matthew's emphasis on pragmatic (Matt 5:19b) and social involvement (Matt 5:21–48), viewed in the context of almsgiving (Matt 6:2–3), elaborates the meaning of Matthew's concept of righteousness in Matthew 5:20, while at the same time contests the Roman beneficences to economically make both the elite and members of the local community become mutual benefactors of the alms.

### Identifying with the Jesus Movement

In this section, an analysis of Jesus' sayings on the Mosaic Law is guided by the principle of identification. It is noteworthy to reiterate that the twofold goal of identification in social identity formation is: 1) to maintain positive self-esteem; and 2) to obtain a measure of security through reliance on and endurance of group norms (Kuecker 2016, 70–71). By his redaction of the earlier sources and in employing his Gospel narrative to complement the subject matter of the Jesus Movement, Matthew

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10 What is the content of Jesus' teaching that Matthew had in mind in 5:19? The content of Jesus' sayings is important because Matthew 5:19 is more of a metaphorical principle, just like righteousness in 5:20. The teaching envisioned in Matthew 5:19 is outlined in 5:21–48 and resonates with McIver's (2012, 129–132) suggestion that this passage (Matt 5:21–48) illustrates Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:19 in the context of Matthean special material. For instance, “You have heard it said that ... but I say to you.” According to McIver, this presents a new element that “radicalises and transforms the Law.” An example of this radicalisation is “do not murder.” In Matthew, this has the new elements: “do not be angry” (Matt 5:21–22); “do not commit adultery”; “do not lust.” Another example is (Matt 27–28) “an eye for an eye”; a reference to vengeance, which corresponds to the new element, “do not retaliate.” McIver concludes that underlying this kind of interpretation of the Mosaic Law “is the command that righteousness of the disciples must exceed that of the Scribes and the Pharisees” (McIver 2012, 132). As a result, it seems that Matthew employs Jesus' sayings in Matthew 5:21–48 to accommodate a setting of local Jewish legal system in a local court (Josephus, AJ 4:214). In addition, Matthew was attempting to contest the Roman imperial legal dimensions in “earthly courts [that] could not judge such offenses as displaying of anger,” save for defamatory words (Keener 2009, 182) in the Roman Empire to argue that in light of the righteousness demanded of the Matthean community (Matt 5:20), even thinking “angry” thoughts, something much less serious than murder, was worthy of serious punishment in view of God's kingdom. Similarly, by making the practising and teaching of Jesus' teaching the basis for the identity of the members of Matthew's church, in effect Matthew 5:19 contests the credibility of the Roman Municipal Law, *Lex Irnitana* 26, as grounds for shaping identity, particularly that of the Roman elites.

attempted to identify members of his church with the earlier communities of the Jesus Movement. Consequently, Matthew 5:18 seems to be Matthew's redaction of Mark 13:30–31. Mark articulated the saying of Jesus, declaring: "30 Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away (NRSV)." Mark's purpose in focusing on this saying of Jesus was probably to reflect on the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and the persecution that followed. His motivation was likely to encourage the followers of Jesus to remain firmly focused on maintaining cooperation among themselves in their post-70 CE missions. However, Matthew redacts this saying by inserting it between Jesus' saying on fulfilling the Mosaic Law (Matt 5:17) and the affirmation of its longevity (Matt 5:19). It is evident that Matthew borrowed and accommodated Jesus' sayings from Mark. In his version of the Markan redacted saying, Matthew combines the two verses from Mark (13:30–31); deleting "generations" and adding "the Law," among others, to emphasise Jesus' focus on the Law instead of destruction of the temple, as in Mark. This redaction provides evidence for Matthew's borrowing. Matthew maintains a textual meaning of the sayings of Jesus, which is far removed from Mark but is much closer to that of Luke (21:32–33). Luke's redacted version of Mark reads: "32 Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." Luke's sayings about Jesus, like that of Matthew 5:18, emphasise the endurance of the Mosaic Law. Neither Luke nor Mark gives details like Matthew, who expounds thoroughly on the sayings of Jesus on the Mosaic Law.

The significance of Matthew's redaction of earlier sources in Matthew 5:17–19 is debatable. Guelich suggests this redaction marks the continuity of Judaic tenets in Matthew's community because Matthew 5:19 "reflects the monistic nuance of a strict Jewish-Christian community who may well have shaped the tradition of 5:17, 18 and added 5:19 as a commentary" (Guelich 1982, 152). Davies and Allison claim that Matthew 5:18 is redacted from Jesus' tradition "to give it a traditional form familiar to him" (Davies and Allison 1988, 489), and point to Matthew's critical use of earlier sources to address a new situation. Viljoen (2011, 385–401) takes a middle-ground between Guelich (1982) and Davies and Allison (1988), first by arguing that Matthew presented the sayings of Jesus on the Mosaic Law as a "foundational statement about the continuing validity of the Torah," and second by proposing that the purpose of these statements is to encourage his community to engage in qualitative acts of righteousness in obedience to Jesus' instructions that surpass the qualitative works of their opponents (Viljoen 2011, 385–401). What evades Guelich, Davies and Allison, and Viljoen, is the observation already made, namely that in Matthew 5:17–20, Matthew borrows from Jewish traditions on the Mosaic Law in order to demarcate the boundaries of his community's identity, saying that only a certain type of obedience is acceptable in the community and the kind of practice by the scribes, Pharisees, and their supporters is inadequate and defective (Matt 5:20). By engaging in the redaction of earlier sources, such as the Gospel of Mark, Matthew was participating in a form of identity politics facilitated by borrowing from earlier traditions of the Jesus Movement in order to

accommodate Jesus' sayings on the Mosaic Law. This kind of accommodation enabled Matthew and his community to maintain positive self-esteem, bearing in mind the possibility of being flogged and scourged by Synagogue leadership (Matt 10:17), on the one hand. On the other hand, by identifying with the Jesus Movement, it enabled the church of Matthew to obtain a measure of security through their reliance on and endurance of group norms embraced by the larger Jesus Movement that focused on the significance of the interpretative authority of Jesus the Messiah and his instructions that emphasised greater righteousness. Consequently, identification with the Jesus Movement meant that the significance of salvation, reflected by acts of greater righteousness (Matt 5:20; 21–48), was in harmony with the practice and conception of salvation in the larger Jesus Movement.

At this point it is important to define Matthew's concept of greater righteousness, which is also a debatable issue. Przybylski claims that righteousness is not primarily a Christian theological concept, but a Jewish religious one used by Matthew provisionally to provide a point of contact between contemporary Jewish religious understanding and the teaching of Jesus (Przybylski 1981, 123). Riches believes that it refers to "a tradition of forensic, restorative eschatology" because it grounds "the hopes and the restoration of the people of Israel" in Isainic prophetic narratives (Riches 2000, 197). Yet, still, Talbert regards Matthew's greater righteousness functioning ethically as a catalyst for the formation of the character and decision making for the community of Matthew (Talbert 2004, 29). Briefly explored in this the study, is my own view of Matthew's meaning of greater righteousness and its importance in describing Matthew's view of salvation in the context of shaping the Christian identity of the members of Matthew's church in Antioch. Consequently, from this study's point of view, Matthew's concept of righteousness refers to practising a lifestyle shaped by Jesus' sayings on the fulfilment of the Judean Law, which functions in a social context to elaborate Matthew's perspective of Christocentric salvation. Thus, Matthew rhetorically employs Jesus' sayings on the Mosaic Law 5:17–20 to derive the meaning of his righteousness in the social context of identity formation in order to expound his meaning of salvation. Given the inter-cultural conflict in the Jesus Movement reflected in Acts 15:1–5; 22–29 and Galatians 2:11–14, Matthew is compelled to rhetorically employ Matthew 5:17–20 to identify the Jesus Movement to construct a superordinate Christian identity, on the one hand; and on the other hand, to secure the socio-economic significance of his concept of righteousness, it was crucial to accommodate certain aspects of Diaspora Judaism and contest identity formation in the Roman Empire. This approach provides normative responses that empowered members of Matthew's church to overcome total assimilation into the Roman and Judean cultures. If, at this point, we have managed to reconstruct Matthew's meaning of salvation for his church in the first century city of Antioch, how does this help us, in our time, to understand the influence of culture in the conception and practice of salvation in the church in our time? To this end, we turn our attention to St James Kajire Anglican Parish, Kenya.

## St James Kajire Anglican Parish

The intention of using the case study of St James Kajire Anglican Parish, Taita-Taveta County, is to briefly demonstrate the influence of cultural practices and perceptions on the Christian concept of salvation. In this section I intend to answer this question: How do members of St James Kajire Anglican Parish construe the influence of cultural practices of the larger Kajire community on the practice of salvation? I will briefly highlight the background before I discuss the relationships between Wasanye and Saghalla people in Kajire Village, to provide a basis for explaining the influence of culture on the conception and practice of salvation.

### A Brief Background

Kajire Village is located in Taita-Taveta County, Kenya. During the interview in 2011, Kajire Village (located in the eastern part of Saghalla Hills, Taita-Taveta County) had a population of about 2 300 people. There are two main tribes that live in this village: the Saghalla and Wasanye that make 90% and 10% of the population, respectively. In both of these tribes we have a majority of Christians, and very few Muslims, and a countable number of African religious traditionalist believers. The research utilised a focus group of 17 people randomly sampled from the villagers (6 from Wasanye and 11 from Saghalla). I gathered from this survey that while Wasanye relocated from Garbit to Kajire Village in the early 1940s, the Saghalla community had settled at Kajire long before the arrival of the first missionaries in Saghalla in the early 1840s (M'bwangi 2011, 1). In respect to the Taita-Taveta County, the Saghalla people in Kajire constitute one ethnic group of a larger Saghalla community with other sub-groups located in Talio, Teri, Kishamba, Kizumanzi, Kirumbi and Dambi, to collectively make the larger Saghalla community, a sub-tribe of the Taita tribe in Taita-Taveta County. The three main tribal groups that constitute the Taita-Taveta community are the Taita, Taveta and Wasanye. This would be the case in traditional villages, but in urban towns like Voi, Maungu and Mwatate, the population is of multi-ethnic composition, embracing members from other ethnic groups from Kenya.

### Relationships between Saghalla and Wasanye

Although the local churches in Kajire Village had not even attempted to design a clear-cut solution to reconcile the two tribes—for instance by addressing the taboo and stigmatisation leveraged against Wasanye by Saghalla community—around the 1960s, Kajire Village traditional elders (led by Solomon Mashanga Mwavuo) attempted to address the anomaly through a two-fold traditional ritual cleansing process known as *kuwora* and *mtero*.<sup>11</sup> The goal of this ritual cleansing ceremony is to seal a covenant

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11. This ritual cleansing was administered by a medicine man using undigested food from the large intestine of a sheep, which was then sprinkled on the “unclean” Wasanye people. Then the sheep was roasted and when it was ready for eating, blood drawn through incision of the two elders from the two camps, that is, from Solomon Mashanga Mwavuo (representing Saghalla people) and an elder representing Wasanye, was smeared over the roast sheep. The sheep was divided into smaller numerous pieces enough for all the people to each eat at least a piece of it (M'bwangi 2011, 1–2).



that assures acceptance and peaceful co-existence in Kajire of the two tribes: Wasanye and Saghalla people. In the first research I conducted in 2011, I noted that even after this cleansing ceremony had been performed:

Intermarriage between these two tribes could not be allowed by the Wataita [Saghalla] (although the Wasanye were willing to intermarry with Wataita [Saghalla]) until after a cleansing ceremony. Sarcastically, it was said that only Wasanye women were expected by the [Saghalla people] to be married to Wataita [Saghalla] men and not the other way round. (M'bwangi 2011, 2)

The Solomon Mwavuo-led solution seemed to be effective, though unfortunately it was one-sided because it favoured the Saghalla people against the Wasanye. During this research (M'bwangi 2011) I had noted that for intermarriage to take place, Saghalla people demanded the ladies (from Wasanye people) to be ritually cleansed again. Although this kind of cultural-ritual-cleansing created the possibility for intermarriage between these two tribes, from the 1940s to the 1990s, only two such intermarriages between these two tribes had taken place. The Wasanye whom I interviewed in 2011 complained that although the current generation of Saghalla young men from Kajire Village were willing and wanted to marry ladies from the Wasanye tribe, parents of these Saghalla young men adamantly discouraged them from doing so, fearing to bring into their homestead one who is defiled (M'bwangi 2011, 2).

As will be noted from my recent follow up research conducted in late 2019, the social segregation and cultural discrimination of Wasanye by the Saghalla community, have negatively affected the practice of the Christian view of Salvation at Kajire Village. The Reverend Joyce Mdawana, the vicar of St James Anglican Parish, tells us that currently St James Kajire Parish has 95 active members. The idea of interviewing four members of this parish is to get a glimpse from these participants of how far culture has influenced the conception and practice of salvation among Christians in Kajire. This case study opens the door for further research in future concerning the practice of Christian faith in Kenya. My role in this article is to lay the foundation for future research of this kind.

In my recent visit to Kajire Village I observed that in spite of the Solomon Mashangaleled reconciliation, integration between Saghalla and Wasanye had only been achieved partially. The main impediment to a lasting reconciliation, as will be noted, is that a dominant group (Saghalla community) still appeals to former cultural traditions as a basis of their identity, while restricting the minority group (Wasanye) from doing the same, and this results in asymmetric power relations. In my recent telephone interviews, Patrick Dengo Mnjau, a member of St James Kajire Anglican Parish, regarding the current treatment of the Wasanye by the Saghalla people, responded that "Wasanye are still segregated by the Saghalla community in Kajire Village. For instance, members of the Saghalla people oppose the election of Wasanye in the village leadership due to the stigmatisation and belief on taboo leveraged against them by the Saghalla community" (Interview Mnjau July 18, 2019). Mnjau's remark reveals the ineptitude of the conception and practice of salvation by a majority of people that ought to effect

harmonious relationships between Wasanye and Saghalla people in Kajire Village. This ineptitude has continued to deny the Wasanye people political power in the community. However, Ruth Makeo, a member of St James Anglican Kajire Parish, indicates that in reference to church leadership, as opposed to village communal leadership, there is the hope of reclaiming Wasanye's voice in the village. Ruth noted that:

Although a couple of years ago Wasanye were not elected as members of the parish council in the local Anglican church, but lately, those who have confessed Jesus as their Lord, were accepted and elected to the parish council and also inter-marriage between the Saghalla and Wasanye has been on an increasing rather than decreasing scale. (Interview Makeo July 18, 2019)

Although Mnjau would not agree with Ruth's observations on this issue of intermarriage,<sup>12</sup> we can postulate from Ruth's observations that the practice of salvation by members of St James Parish reveals the potential of Christian values in fostering social equity and justice. Consequently, St James Parish reveals the potential of the church in motivating the Kajire community to enforce acceptance of the Wasanye by the Saghalla people and the reconciliation of these two groups.

Contrary to the belief and taboo that regards Wasanye as an unclean and cursed community, Ephrahim Marigho, a member of St James Kajire Parish, argued that "members of Kajire community ought to recognise Wasanye's as a special blessing to Kajire because in the past the Wasanye people employed their hunting skills to protect the community from wild animals and provide game meat to the community" (Interview Marigho July 18, 2019). The cultural misconception of the Saghalla people that Wasanye are a cursed people is outrightly contested by Marigho. The attribute of blessing of Wasanye to Kajire people, construed by Marigho, reveals the myopic cultural perception of the Saghalla people who wrongfully leverage a social taboo against Wasanye on account of cultural difference.

Recently (11 October 2019), through a phone interview, Rev. Joyce Mdawana, responding to the question concerning the impact of the restriction of intermarriage by Saghalla people to the Wasanye in reference to her understanding of salvation, said:

It seems that Saghalla people have created their own cultural boundary on salvation because they stigmatise Wasanye, this is a failure to realise that earthly experiences of salvation entail a responsibility upon Christians to exercise brethren love that embraces all people without stigmatising them. Probably the Saghalla community, by restricting

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12. Mnjau noted that "recently no intermarriage has been taking place between Wasanye and Saghalla community because the Saghalla community still stereotypes Wasanye as lazy, non-developmental and cursed" (Interview Mnjau August 18, 2019). Mnjau's narrative reveals that not only are the Saghalla cultural values responsible for dominating Wasanye, by producing asymmetric relations of power that pit the Saghalla people against the Wasanye, but these cultural values are also responsible for sustaining these relations of power—even though the majority of the members of Kajire community claim to be Christians.

intermarriage with Wasanye, are trying to protect some of their *ngasu* [hereditary cultural secrets] from being accessed by Wasanye community. (Interview Mdawana October 11, 2019)

From Mdawana, we can see some kind of social antagonism at Kajire Village occasioned by people's preference for either faith (in Christ) or traditional Saghalla cultural values as a basis for negotiating identity. The antagonism we see here between Christian faith and hereditary cultural values probably helps us to understand how negatively cultural practices can influence people's conception and practice of salvation. The conception of salvation by some members of the Saghalla community, noted by Mdawana, is reminiscent of Meier's and Gullotta's conception of Matthew's exclusive view of salvation that embraces Judeans on account of tenets of Mosaic Law, but excludes the Gentiles till a later date.

Mnjau, responding to the same question posed to Mdawana, claimed that:

Although some people in the village still regard Wasanye as a defiled and cursed community, as a born-again Christian, I hold a different perspective on them. I believe that once you accept Jesus, you are born-again, delivered from all curses and placed under God's grace. (Interview Mnjau October 11, 2019)

Mnjau, in agreement with Mdawana, envisions the efficacy of a Christocentric perspective of salvation in procuring the acceptance of Wasanye and Saghalla people on equal footing on account of a common identity made available by faith in Jesus Christ.

From the above observations we can see how the cultural values of a majority group can be used to agitate for the dominance of a majority group over a minority, with the result of producing and sustaining asymmetric relations of power. This means that some cultural values associated with the practice and conception of salvation, if not properly checked, can easily occasion social segregation in the church by enforcing an exclusive perspective of salvation.

## A Comparative Look: Antioch and St James Kajire Anglican Parish

A comparative study of Antioch and St James Kajire Anglican Parish indicates that a culturally conditioned view of salvation could easily occasion rigid boundaries of identity, a recipe for intra-group conflicts in the church. However, a Christocentric superordinate identity bears the potential for enforcing harmonious co-existence of the many different cultural groups in the church.

### **Rigid Boundaries of Identity**

When cultural values and norms are the only preferably platform for grounding people's conception of identity in a multi-ethnic, multi-racial context, they tend to promote rigid boundaries of identity that have the potency for igniting conflict in the society. This is

the case we have witnessed with the function of the *Lex Irnitana*, Mosaic Law (as provided by Josephus) and Saghalla traditional cultural views in promoting a Roman elite cultural identity, Diaspora Judean identity, and Saghalla identity in Kajire, respectively. Conflict becomes inevitable because the resultant antagonism is occasioned by cultural differences.

### **A Partial Solution**

A view of salvation that is conditioned by cultural values can only provide a partial solution to a conflict born out of inter-cultural differences. Consequently, the attempt by the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:1–5; 22–29; Gal 2:1–14) to compel Gentiles in Antioch to access salvation via Judean legalistic-cultural requirements, could only provide a partial solution. Similarly, although some Christians in Kajire Village (as witnessed by the research conducted 2011) could accept intermarriage between Wasanye and the Saghalla people after traditional ceremonial cleansing (of the Wasanye lady), restrictions on intermarriage between Wasanye and Saghalla people are still observed by some Christians (as witnessed by Makeo, Mnjau and Mdawana). Had Christians embraced a view of salvation that transcends cultural influence, these intermarriage restrictions would not be surviving today at Kajire Village.

### **Superordinate Identity**

The conception and practice of a culturally conditioned salvation will most likely result in the dominance of a minority by a majority group. This is what most likely happened when the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:1–5; 22–29; Gal 2:11–14) compelled Gentiles to access salvation through Judean legalistic requirements. A similar case was observed in Kajire Village when Christians supported or refused to criticise the demand by Saghalla parents (whose sons wanted to marry ladies from the Wasanye), for Wasanye ladies (brides) to undergo a traditional Saghalla ritual cleansing rite as a condition for acceptance in marriage with the Saghalla men. A lasting solution to this kind of dominance is found in appealing to a Christocentric perspective of salvation, which bears the capacity to construct a superordinate identity that embraces positive aspects of cultural identity. This approach calls for the contestation of negative traditional cultural practices, the accommodation of some aspects of positive traditional cultural norms and values, and the identification with Christocentric values and norms. This has been the response of Matthew towards the Roman Empire, Diaspora Judaism and the Jesus Movement, respectively. This response in effect reflects Matthew's conception of salvation as a social praxis that elaborates the meaning of greater righteousness (Matt 5:20). A similar approach, which is yet to be developed, is echoed by Mnjau and Mdawana for suggesting that Wasanye ought to be embraced on equal footing with the Saghalla people at Kajire Village on account of their common Christian identity and the significance of the Lordship of Jesus in the church.

## Conclusion

In order to address the main question concerning how the cultural differences between Gentiles and Judeans feature in Matthew's concept of salvation, this study has had to focus on the meaning of salvation as reflected in the significance of Matthew's concept of greater righteousness grounded in Jesus' sayings on the Mosaic Law (5:17–20). A theoretical approach that blends literary criticism to read Matthew 5:17–20 with SIPT has facilitated a critical analysis of group relationships between the members of the church of Matthew in Antioch with the early Jesus Movement, Diaspora Judaism and the Roman Empire. These relations of Matthew's church in Antioch provide the platform to employ SIPT to explore the relations of Wasanye and Saghalla people in Kajire Village. Consequently, the relations of Matthew's church in Antioch and its discursive application in St James Kajire Anglican Parish in Kenya, have defended the argument that a culturally conditioned practice of salvation is prone to the promotion of group dominance. To address this problem, Matthew advances an inclusive view of salvation that entails the construction of a superordinate Christian identity, which has the potential to support a Christocentric perspective of salvation. By employing the sociological concept of identification, contestation and accommodation, the article contributes to the gap of knowledge in Matthean scholarship that explains the multivalent nature of the identity of the community of Matthew, on the one hand. On the other hand, these sociological concepts collectively present the impact of social science in effecting a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of Christian religion, particularly by explaining the importance of embracing a heterogeneous nature of the church to address inter-culturally motivated group conflicts in the church. The study supports the conclusion that righteousness, that is, practising a life-style shaped by Jesus' instructions, and Christian identity, which is a conception of who we are in light of Jesus' teaching, are two sides of the same coin; necessarily linked together to expound the meaning of a Christocentric perspective of salvation.

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