

Gashute, AS 2025, Review of *Identity Formation and the Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Narrative Reading*, Tekalign Duguma Negewo, *African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 246-248

Review

Negewo, Tekalign Duguma, *Identity Formation and the Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Narrative Reading*. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2023. ISBN 9783161617881, ix, 222 pp.

Reviewed by Abyot S. Gashute¹

Identify Formation and the Gospel of Matthew is a revision of Tekalign Duguma Negewo's doctoral dissertation. It consists of eight systematically organised chapters that present research gaps and questions, study methodology, thesis, supporting arguments, and key findings. The final chapter offers a summary of Negewo's argument and relevant recommendations for Matthean scholarship. The book also contains an exhaustive bibliography and an index of references, authors, and subjects.

Negewo's book focuses on the purpose of the gospel of Matthew. He contends that the primary purpose of the gospel's composition was to form the identity of an ideal reader's community in relation to embracing non-Judeans as part of the community of believers who share the messianic blessings. According to him, the ideal reader's community refers to 'the first century group of people who read, grasped, and accepted the ideology propagated by the gospel of Matthew as it was intended by the implied author in the narrative' (1). He further clarifies that this ideal reader's group is 'a new group of people as the reconstituted Israel' (1). Additionally, Negewo assumes the ideal reader's community to be 'a reflection of the existing community' (1). Though he also supposes that these are 'imagined/proposed communities (1). He argues that the gospel's characterisation and presentation of non-Judeans, both positively and negatively, represent the author's narrative strategy for shaping the identity of the ideal reader's community, rather than reflecting an actual

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historical tension between Judeans and non-Judeans. After narrating the history of research and describing his methodology in chapters 1 and 2, Negewo dedicates five chapters (chs. 3–7) to demonstrating his argument that the author's inclusion of non-Judean characters functions to shape the identity of the ideal reader's community.

In chapter 1, by reviewing and assessing previous research on Matthew, Negewo identifies the lack of sufficient study 'to determine the role of the text in constructing the ideal identity of the society to which the gospel was addressed' (38). In chapter 2, he describes his methodology as a socio-narrative reading of the gospels. This methodology employs 'an integrated approach that links socio-scientific criticism and narrative criticism through myth-making and social identity formation theories' (38). In subsequent chapters, Negewo applies the methodology introduced in chapter 2.

In chapter 3, Negewo discusses the negatively stereotyped non-Judean individuals in the Matthean narrative, such as 'the stereotypically negative depiction of non-Judeans in Jesus' teaching' (71), including the Gadarenes (Matt 8:28–34), Pilate (Matt 27:1–26; 27:62–66), and the Roman soldiers (Matt 27:27–28:15). Negewo argues that the author uses these negatively portrayed non-Judeans as a strategy 'to construct the identity of the ideal reader's community' (88). In chapter 4, he discusses 'how the author used the positively characterised non-Judeans to form the identity of the ideal reader's community' (88). Here, Negewo primarily examines the identity-forming role of the inclusion of four non-Judeans in Matthew's genealogy: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah. In chapters 5, 6, and 7, he explores the identity-forming function of the inclusion of stories of other non-Judean representatives in the Gospel narrative: the journey of the Magi (Matt 2:1–12), the healing of the centurion's servant (Matt 8:5–13), and the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter (Matt 15:21–28). In Chapter 8, Negewo summarises his key findings and offers recommendations for further Matthean studies, specifically addressing 'other aspects of identity formation, namely the role of Judean figures in the Matthean narrative in forming the identity of the ideal reader's community' (194).

Negewo emphasises that the inclusion of non-Judean characters in the Gospel narrative does not reflect a historical conflict and tension between Judeans

and non-Judeans. Rather, it serves to shape the identity of the ideal reader's community, which consists of both Judeans and non-Judeans. However, this raises further questions regarding whether historical tensions between Judeans and non-Judeans might, in fact, have prompted the author of Matthew to include these figures—both positively and negatively—in order to promote the vision of an ideal community of God's people comprised of both groups. By emphasising the inclusion of non-Judean characters in the Gospel narrative as the implied author's literary strategy to shape the identity of the ideal reader's community, Negewo overlooks the historical tension that existed between Judeans and non-Judeans. Broadhead arrives at a similar conclusion and observes: 'Like most Matthean scholars, [Negewo] fails to account for the dramatic tensions and contradictions that flow through the larger narrative. As with most scholars, his concern to diminish this tension and to credit it to some literary and theological design of a singular author is built upon presumptions brought to the text.'² Even so, I believe Negewo has made a significant scholarly contribution to Matthean studies. I particularly recommend this book to scholars and students of Matthean studies and New Testament studies more broadly.

²Edwin K. Broadhead, 2005, Review of "Identity Formation and the Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Narrative Reading," *Review of Biblical Literature* 02, p. 3.