

**The Widow's Offering and Jesus' Response (Mark 12:41-44):
A Comparative Study to Giving
from a Samoan Ecclesiastical Perspective.**

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Abstract

This thesis studies Mk 12:41-44. It focuses on the widow's offering and Jesus' response to it which implies two main line of interpretation. On the one hand, Jesus' response can be understood as praise despite the fact that the poor widow's giving was much less than the others. On the other hand, the paper also discusses that Jesus' response can be interpreted to be a lament. From that interpretation, the widow is considered poor because of the practices enforced on her by the scribes and also her obligation to give to the temple.

This biblical understanding is then compared to the Congregational Christian Church Samoa's (CCCS) perspective on giving.

The purpose is to highlight and to enlighten CCCS parishioners of the importance of giving from both the Samoan and the biblical point of view. The thesis also aims to encourage CCCS leadership including Church minsters to reconsider some of CCCS's practices regarding giving and the public announcing of the offerings. These practices have driven some CCCS members to hardship, despair and even shame.

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List of Abbreviations

Biblical References

Mt	The Gospel According to Matthew
Mk	The Gospel According to Mark
Lk	The Gospel According to Luke
Jn	The Gospel According to John
1 Ti	The First Letter of Paul to Timothy
Jas	The Letter to James

Bible Versions

NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (1989) ¹
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Others

CCCS	Congregational Christian Church Samoa
IVP	Inter-Varsity Press
SAT	Samoan Tala (Dollar)

¹ All biblical references contained in this paper are from the *NRSV* of the Holy Bible, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989).

Introduction

Giving to the CCCS Church in Samoa generally has become a controversial issue because the young church-goers are starting to express their grievous feelings about giving to the Church. It is controversial because giving to the Church has been blamed as one of the causes for people's financial hardship. For example, some people say they have to borrow to meet their Church obligations. Others have pointed out the perceived misuse of their hard earned donations by some Ministers to maintain their splendid life styles. Also, announcing these donations publicly has become an issue of grave concern for many, as it is considered to be shameful to those who give less.

However, there are church-goers who defend giving to the Church. They point out that giving is not only part of their culture but it is their way to express thanksgiving to God through CCCS for God's love to them. That grace and love of God is evident when He gives His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins and to give us salvation and eternal life, when Jesus rises triumphantly from the grave.

These two opinions regarding giving to the Church nowadays have encouraged me to seek a biblical interpretation in order to offer some resolutions for those who are in doubt about giving to the Church. Thus is the interest of this paper in the story of the widow's offering and Jesus' response in Mark 12:41-44.

It is the contention of this paper that after comparing and contrasting the widow's offering and Jesus' response to various practices involving giving and public announcement in the CCCS, it will result in giving suggestions that hopefully will enlighten the Church and its leaders, to reconsider aspects of its practices that are causing people to question giving to the Church.

This thesis consists of three chapters. Chapter one discusses Samoa's cultural practices involving giving and exchanging of gifts. These include wedding, funeral and other special occasions where giving and exchange of gifts, together with the public announcement of those gifts do take place. This chapter also discusses ecclesiastical giving practices within the Sinamoga CCCS parish, the Sub District and also the District to which the Sinamoga parish is affiliated to.

Chapter Two consists of the exegetical study of Mark 12:41-44. The discussion includes some relevant historical background of Palestine in the First Century CE. The focus is on the Temple, and the offering practices that has been in operation at the time of Jesus' ministry. Furthermore, this section contains a word study of key terms that are related to the issue of giving and public announcement. Scholarly views pertaining to the issues mentioned are also surveyed.

Chapter Three is a comparative study of what has been discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Two. This comparison involves analyzing the similarities and differences between giving and public announcement in Mark 12:41-44, to that of the same practices in the CCCS.

The Conclusion will sum up the findings of the whole thesis. It also provides some suggestions to/for CCCS leadership and parishioners in order to reconsider their understanding of giving and public announcement.

Chapter One

Giving – From CCCS's Ecclesiastical Perspective

Introduction

The general Samoan perception regarding cultural and ecclesiastical giving is that the two are inseparable and in a sense they complement each other. Thus is why I am including the Samoan cultural influence on gift giving and announcements of such gifts. There are various reasons why Samoans give the way they do, but I draw upon Marcel Mauss' view about giving. Mauss distinguishes three obligations why people give.² Firstly, 'giving' is the necessary initial step for the creation and maintenance of social relationships. Secondly, it concerns 'receiving.' To refuse to receive means rejecting that social bond. Thirdly, is 'reciprocating' in order to demonstrate one's own kindness, honor and wealth.³

In my opinion, these three aspects are very much evident in the Samoan Cultural practice of giving, especially in traditional occasions where exchanges of gifts are observed. It forms social bonds and continued relationships not only amongst families, but also communities.⁴ Furthermore, there is a unique aspect in the Samoan culture of giving which is the public announcement of gifts received. It is an act of appreciation and acknowledgement of what has been given. Moreover, the relationship of culture and church is obvious that whenever a service⁵ is carried out, there is sure to be a cultural exchange of gifts to follow. In that regard, the cultural

² Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. by W. D. Halls (Abingdon: Routledge Publishers, 1990), 31.

³ To the contrary, see Alain Testart, *Uncertainties of the Obligation to Reciprocate – A critique of Mauss* in 'Marcel Mauss – A Centenary Tribute, (eds. Wendy James and N. J. Allen, 1998), 98. This third point is criticized by Testart who found this appalling since giving or gifting money to a beggar on the street has very little chance of being repaid.

⁴ Agafili Laau Tuitolovaa, *Personal Interview*, 7 August, 2010.

⁵ Tuitolovaa, *Personal Interview*. Any Samoan cultural occasion opens with a prayer service. These include occasions like weddings, funerals and dedication of a new church. Likewise a service is also performed to open a meeting, a birthday party and graduation. A gathering in a special occasion is meaningless to Samoans when a prayer service is not carried out first.

aspect in this chapter includes a few examples to show the multitude of what is involved when Samoan cultural occasions take place.

In terms of giving to and in the CCCS, this paper concentrates only within my local *Sinamoga* CCCS parish, the Sub District of *Faleata* East (*Pulega Faleata Sasa'e*) and the District of *Faleata* (*Matagaluega Faleata*). It is my contention that the giving practices in my local parish, sub district and district reflect an overall picture of the CCCS. This is to highlight giving and public acknowledgment of it, in CCCS context. My presupposition is that, it represents an overall picture within CCCS.

1. Giving in the Samoan Culture (*Fa'a-Samoa*).

The common feature of the *fa'a-Samoa* in every village is that they have traditional ceremonies like, funeral rites, customary weddings, title bestowments, dedications of a new houses and others. Samoans share common values and ideas, sorrows and pains so that in the event that these ceremonies do happen, they come together as one people to assist in any way they can. This is where the exchanging of gifts, goods and pleasantries take place. Those with lineage ties in a village or district are expected to contribute since they are all known to be related. This bonding is meant to alleviate the pain of a particular family, if for example, someone has passed away. It can also be a sharing in the celebration of a marriage, the birth of a child, the thrill in the completion of a new traditional tattoo or the completion of a new house.

It is through these exchanges that make giving a part of the Samoan Culture long before the arrival of Christianity.⁶ Giving has also played a major role in the pre-Christian religious offerings of the people. Samoa had many gods whom they offered prayers to for guidance, for

⁶ The arrival of the LMS missionaries in 1830 is widely accepted as when Christianity arrived to Samoa.

food and for protection against their enemies.⁷ The gods were attributed thanksgiving and offering for any success such as fruits of the land, a good fishing trip or winning a war against tribal opposition. Samoans believed that any blessing they received was from their deities. Thus, acknowledgement to the gods was always performed through feast celebrations, which normally included the *ava* ceremony.⁸ In accepting the *ava* cup, the bearer would pour down some juice while chanting thanksgiving words to his/her god.

An important aspect of giving is in the sense of *tautua* (serve/service). This aspect defines the responsibilities of individuals to each other in a society, especially within the hierarchical setup of families. The *matai* (chief) is at the top of the setup and as a representative of the family, he sits in the village council of chiefs where decisions are discussed and laws are passed.

Other members of society are divided into distinct groups such as *aualuma* (unmarried women of the village) and *aumaga* or *taulele'a* (untitled men). Both these groups are responsible in serving the chiefs. The *aumaga* in particular, serves the house of chiefs and usually in the case where gifts are presented and exchanged. The important task of the *aumaga* is to publicly announce them in due recognition of the receiver, but more importantly the giver. *Tautua* is a very important part of *fa'asamoa* where responsibilities are carried out diligently and in recognition of good service to the *matai* is acknowledged. In due time, after a lengthy and honest service by such a person, he/she is bestowed also with a *matai* title as a reward of his hard earned service.

⁷ Elia Taase, *The Congregational Christian Church in Samoa: The Origin and Development of an Indigenous Church, 1830-1961*, (Michigan: A Bell and Howel Company, 1998), 56-60. Samoans had many gods that were classified in the individual, family, villages, and district levels.

⁸ A Samoan traditional ceremony where the drinking of *ava* is performed. It is performed before any formalities like welcoming guests, village meetings, honoring and thanksgiving to the gods.

Tautua also can be explained in the Samoan household environment especially in the *aiga potopoto* (extended family) extension of the immediate family.⁹ The extended family is headed by a *matai* who has the final say in family discussions. Each member has his/her own responsibilities to the family and part of their *tautua* is through serving the *matai*.

Within the immediate family, each member also has a responsibility to one another. The brother refers to the sister as *feagaiga* (covenant) and a big part of his *tautua* is the protection of his sister, in addition to his service to his parents and the family *matai*. The sister on the other hand is responsible for normal house duties, which involve cooking, washing and keeping the house clean. A big part of her *tautua* is the weaving of fine mats for family occasion.

These reciprocated responsibilities are what make the *fa'a-Samoa* unique. They form a bond that moulds the family and the village together. The people take them seriously and any shortcoming can bring disgrace not only on the individual but the family. The welfare of the family depends on everyone playing his/her role.

To capture the essence of giving and public acknowledgment of it from the cultural perspective, it is necessary to briefly discuss some of these traditional ceremonies.

1.1 Funeral

In the event of a funeral, the whole extended family gathers at the house of the *matai* bringing with them various goods that they can contribute to the *sii alofa*.¹⁰ It is simply a way of showing the grieving family that the whole extended family shares their pain and their loss. *Sii alofa* is carried out in different ways depending on how far or close the relationship is.

⁹ The immediate family consists of just the parents and the children within a house. However, the rendering of *tautua* is to the *matai* and the extended family.

¹⁰ Tuitolovaa, *Personal Interview*. '*sii alofa*' refers to the goods gathered by the relatives of the family to take to the grieving family.

The most important aspect of the *sii alofa* is the Samoan fine mat (*ie toga*).¹¹ The best in terms of quality and the biggest ones are selected. Goods are also needed to help with the *lauava*,¹² such as a sizable sow, a bull or cow, boxes of herrings and corned beef are also contributed.¹³ Money is also collected to be given as assistance in financing other parts of the funeral.

A *tulafale*¹⁴ (orator) who is well versed in the oratory language is also selected as the family speaker in presenting their contribution to the grieving family. After all has been presented, the recipient family is also obligated to make a return gesture and gifts. A Samoan saying: '*O le faaaloalo i le faaaloalo*' (pleasantries is returned through pleasantries),¹⁵ is the core aspect of exchanging gifts in the Samoan Culture.¹⁶ It is the due recognition and respect that each family has for each other. Failure to maintain this traditional social bonding and understanding can have serious repercussions and can often lead to unhealed division within the family hierarchy.¹⁷

All contributions from various members of the family are then used as gifts for the people who attend the funeral, based on their social status. These gifts are presented in the form

¹¹ R. W. Allardice, *A Simplified Dictionary of the Modern Samoa*, (Auckland: Polynesian Press, 1989), 56. *Ie toga* is a finely cloth of bleached pandanus fibres bordered with red feathers. These are usually named according to their size and quality or for the purpose for which they are given.

¹² Allardice, *A Simplified Dictionary of the Modern Samoa*, 82. *Lauava* is the term given to a funeral feast in which all the cultural formalities of giving gifts to distinguished guests are done.

¹³ Apart from taro and banana plantations, families also have farm animals such as pigs and chicken. A few also have cow farms. For families that don't have these, the average cost of a sow for such varies between \$800.00 and \$1000.00. A cow would be valued at over \$1000.00.

¹⁴ Tuitolovaa, *Personal Interview*. A *tulafale* is an orator chief as opposed to high chief. He is referred to mainly as the talking chief that publicly expresses the thoughts of the high chief in a Samoan cultural occasion. He serves the high chief with perseverance and dignity and in due time can become his successor.

¹⁵ Allardice, *A Simplified Dictionary of the Modern Samoa*, 49. *Faaaloalo* can also mean respect or to pay respect to.

¹⁶ Tuitolovaa, *Personal Interview*.

¹⁷ Tuitolovaa, *Personal Interview*. In some occasions, the *sii alofa* family does not want anything in return for what has been given. The *tulafale* then has to be brave and cunning enough to find the right words in his oratory speech to make sure that this is the case. The grieving side's *tulafale* will then fight hard to make sure that what has been given is to be reciprocated.

of a Samoan traditional *sua*¹⁸ (meal). In the event that a *sua* is presented, it is the untitled man's service (*tautua*) to publicly announce it. He needs to be loud to let everyone know what has been given.

The *sua* presented can vary in quantity depending on the status of the recipient. Those who receive the best are usually the paramount chiefs of a village and Church Ministers (*faiifeau*). The number of *sua* presented depends on the status of those attending, and can run into the hundreds for big events. In monetary terms, these *sua* can have a total monetary value, exceeding thousands of *Tala* (dollars), depending on the status of the deceased in the family, village, district and the Church. It is a lot of money, but, an obligation that the family is committed to, to ensure the family pride is upheld, with the assistance of *sii alofa* from the extended family.

Family pride is also an important factor, which contributes to this excessive spending on these traditional ceremonies. It ensures that the family's name is not tarnished by a lack of preparations. It is unfortunate that personal praise and glory from others are outcomes that determine the success or failure of these traditional ceremonies. But, the end result for the family concerned is usually more debt and hardship, after these occasions. However, these external motives should not diminish the importance of these traditional occasions, and the bond within extended families, when such occasions occur.

¹⁸ Pupualii Senio Pupualii, *Personal Interview*, Matautu uta, 3 July 2010. Pupualii explained that *sua* (meal) consists of fine mats, food items and in most cases money donation. *Faleula o Samoa*, Keepers of the Language, Traditions, Wisdom and *Tofamanino* of the Samoans. Compact Disc Programme, produced by TV Samoa, 2008. *Faleula o Samoa* has disputed certain parts of *sua* such as the *pasese* (money) and the *faaoso* (additional goods) as later inclusions. They insist that they were never part of the *sua* from the beginning.

1.2 Wedding

In a Samoan wedding, both the bride and groom's family have particular things to prepare. The groom's family supplies the *oloa*,¹⁹ which are goods used for *sua* that are to be presented to honorary guests. The fine mats on the other hand are contributed by the bride's family for the same purpose. The cost for the wedding feast is also to be provided by the bride's family.²⁰ Again, the whole extended family is involved.

The cultural aspect of presenting gifts (*sua presentations*) is performed after the blessing of the couple in church. This process follows the same process as in funerals. Again, it is culturally acceptable to publicly announce what has been given, as a show of respect and of appreciation.

These exchanges of gifts and their acknowledgments are common in public ceremonies as discussed before. These occasions also highlight the commitment of the extended families to pool together their resources to help each other and to share the burden of such occasions. Unfortunately, these occasions have become a burden for some people, as they try to meet their cultural obligations to each others.

1.3 Others

Even with private occasions such as the birth of a new baby, a celebration of a birthday or someone who has just achieved a milestone in life, cultural protocols are observed. On such occasions, the family *matai* invites the Church Minister over for a thanksgiving service. Afterwards, the Minister is presented with a *sua*.

¹⁹ Pupualii, *Personal Interview*. Pupualii says that *oloa* are in the form of foodstuff such as sows, cows, cartons of mackerel, kegs of salted beef, boxes of chicken along with crops such as sacks of taro, bananas, and yams. This style has slowly changed and has been turned into monetary value. The weddings costs nowadays are estimated and the total costs split equally between the two families.

²⁰ Pupualii, *Personal Interview*. This practice is how a true Samoan wedding is done. Recent changes, has meant that the cost is shared equally between the two families.

However, this gift is always announced out loud, as other ceremonies. This can be done by someone of the family, as a service both to the *matai* and to the Minister, who is honored with the highest accolade within the village, and as the congregation's *feagaiga* (covenant) with God.

1.4 The Church Minister

The divine-oriented status of the Church Minister (*faiifeau*) earns him high respect not only in the village, but in any Samoan occasion. When the Church Minister is called upon by a parish to be their minister, the initial step taken is through *osiga o le feagaiga* (establishing the covenant). Theologically, it is a three way covenant between, the parishioners, the minister, and God. Thus, the cultural value of *feagaiga* is hereby accorded to the minister. That is the parishioners serve the ministers every need and accord him honor and protection.

According to Malutafa Faalili, the pre-Christian tradition of giving to deities for protection and blessings has now shifted to the minister as God's representative.²¹ Samoans give gifts to the minister because they believe he is the means of God's blessings to families.²² This is especially true of family elders who would rather save any money he/she receives, to be given to the minister. This is done out of great respect and the belief in the minister's blessings. The elderly refer to their many years as evident of God's blessings on their service to the minister and the church. Thus they feel obligated to perform this as part of their faith in God.

This high respect for the minister is also reflected in oratory language. Such titles as '*ao o faalupega*' (head of all honorific titles) and '*fa'afeagaiga tau i le lagi*', (the heavenly covenant) are meant to emphasize the most honorable respect for the minister. In addition, there are

²¹ Malutafa Faalili, "Religion and Ideology: A Congregationalist's Perspective on Giving to the Church in Samoa." Unpublished Paper presented for the Sociology of Religion Course MN430, Pacific Theological College, Suva, Fiji, 31 October 2008, 6.

²² John Garret, *To Live Among the Stars*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1982), 124. Garret iterates that "the pastors took the place of the priests and the prophets of Ancient Samoa religion as mediators with the unseen world."

Samoan proverbial sayings that reflect this respect. Sayings such as *'lou faatuga paulia ma lou fa'afaletuluia'* refers literally to the isolation and separation of the minister from his family and being left to live in a leaked house, in the name of God.²³ I find these sayings really irrelevant and contradictory these days, because the minister now has the best and the biggest house with all modern amenities in the village. However, these sayings do reflect the high respect Samoans have for the Church Minister. In any gathering, they are given the most and best of all goods being distributed.

2. Church Giving and Announcement

Two Samoan sayings that epitomize the relationship between Samoan culture and Christianity are: *'É vaavaalua le aganuu ma le talalelei'* (The gospel and the culture go hand in hand); and *'E faakerisiano e le talalelei le aganuu, ae polapuipui le aganuu i le talalelei'* (the Gospel christianizes the culture, and the culture protects the Gospel). Tuitolovaa emphasizes that it is this relationship that has been embedded in the hearts of Samoans for centuries since the arrival of Christianity.²⁴

However, this relationship becomes a problem when one has an undue influence on the other, especially when it involves the economic welfare of people. I have discussed the economic influence or burden that culture has on families and individuals. Ironically, church giving has been viewed with the same mindset.

The people have been taught and made to believe that blessings from God are acquired not just through believing and faith, but through works and actions. That the more you give to the Church means more blessings for you and your family. I am neither denying the truthfulness

²³ The sayings were true in the early days of Christianity when the church ministers had to live in leaked huts but were committed to spread the Good News. However, the parishioners saw to it in those days that the minister is well taken care of.

²⁴ Tuitolovaa, *Personal Interview*.

of this claim, nor the ability of those who are able and afford to do so. However, the influence of such a claim has forced the average income earners within the congregation, to meet that demand. That is, to give even when they cannot afford it. An examination of this practice of Church giving within my own *Sinamoga* parish is warranted to verify this point.

2.1 Sinamoga CCCS Parish.

I have decided to use my own parish at Sinamoga as an example of the different giving practices that are also presumed done by other parishes in the CCCS context. Sinamoga parish is part of the *Pulega a Faleata i Sasae* (Faleata East Sub District),²⁵ which in turn belongs to the *Matagaluega a Faleata* (Faleata District)²⁶. The Sinamoga parish hierarchy has the Church Minister and his wife as ‘spiritual parents’, followed by the lay preachers, deacons, and then the rest of the congregation including youths and children. The church also has a Women’s Fellowship, Sunday school, youth group and church choir. All these Church sectors have respective offices such as president, leader, secretary and treasurer.

The makeup of the church has a certain unofficial class of people based on their economic backgrounds. The parish is made up of 32 families in which about 20 percent would be ranked amongst those with reasonable financial backings. The bottom 10 percent are those with very little means to fulfill church obligations. The majority are in the average income level whose income is really stressed every week to feed the family and to give what is convenient to the church.

All these groups serve the *Sinamoga* parish in terms of providing for the Minister and his family, church developments and activities as well as meeting Sub District and District

²⁵ *The Constitution of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa*, (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 2006), 6.

²⁶ *Constitution of the CCCS*, 9. *Faleata i Sasae* (Faleata East sub district) consists of 9 parishes. *Faleata i Sisifo* (Faleata West sub district) has 8 parishes. Together the 17 parishes form *Matagaluega Faleata* (Faleata District). Throughout Samoa and overseas, these Districts make up the Congregational Christian Church Samoa.

requirements. Each family within the church congregation is represented by a deacon, as a leader of that family (the same role the *matai* plays for the family within the village structure). In most cases, every village *matai* in the parish are bestowed the responsibility of being deacon in the Church. Becoming a deacon means his/her name will be recorded separately from the family and he is thus responsible for all obligations the church requires.

Whenever something needs to be done for the parish, it is the deacon's responsibility to ensure that his/her family contributes to that event either financially or otherwise.²⁷ As with traditional ceremonies where extended families help and contribute, families in the church setting are also required to meet the deacon's obligations to the church. Therefore, almost all of what is required to be done whether at parish level, the sub-District, or the District, even to the Mother Church (CCCS) level, requires giving.

In the CCCS set up, there are four main forms of offering known as *taulaga* (offering) that are collected annually. These offerings allow the CCCS to carry out its services, like mission works overseas, scholarships,²⁸ wages for its employees, administration, finance church schools²⁹ and so forth. There is a *Taulaga o Nu'u Ese* (offering for Overseas Mission), *taulaga Au leoleo* (offering for Watchers' Prayer Union), *Taulaga Au Taumafai* (offering for Christian Endeavour) and the main *Taulaga Samoa* (offering for CCCS Development). All these offerings are given to the Mother Church to meet its various responsibilities.

For the *Sinamoga* parish, people can donate to these offerings any Sunday, which are publicly announced and acknowledged at the end of the service. Those with reasonable means of

²⁷ People also contribute foodstuff, labor, or personal tools.

²⁸ These are for selected employees to continue their education overseas for Master and Doctorate studies, for church development in their respective fields – teachers, information technology, counseling, environmental issues.

²⁹ CCCS operates six colleges, one theological college, a school of Fine Art and various support offices – main office, bookshop, printing, counseling service, youth services, Christian education services, that support CCCS parishes in Samoa and overseas.

income can give up to \$10,000.00SAT. Other internal offerings for the *Sinamoga* parish developments include the *alofa o le faifeau* (donation for the minister), which is carried out every Sunday. The majority of what parishioner's give goes to the minister and in return, he usually renders due acknowledgement and impart blessings for the people. The working fund of the church, called *atina'e*, is also offered every Sunday. This is set at \$20.00SAT per deacon. This fund helps pay the bills for water, electricity and insurance for church assets.³⁰ Other sectors such as the Youth, Choir, Sunday school and Women's fellowship also have fund raisings of their own. These are either given to the main parish to assist when required or for each sector's own development. If you belong to all these different groups, then you are expected to oblige and contribute when required. That is because these groups set monthly fundraisings for its own development and monies collected are either tabled in financial reports or are announced to each group.

A particular feature of the *Sinamoga* parish that is of interest to this paper is the number of widows in the congregation. There are eight of them and are all deaconesses. From what I have noticed, they are some of the givers that consistently offer the most to the *Sinamoga* parish in terms of giving. They are also very dedicated to the church and strong supporters of the women's fellowship group. This group has the strongest financial capability of all *Sinamoga* parish groups because they also have an offering to fund their activities every Sunday. All female members of the church and the usual Sunday guests donate to this offering.

I was privileged to interview some of them on why they give the way they do. Their main response was that they felt blessed by God for not only the many years of their lives but God's

³⁰ Sinamoga CCCS parish assets include the Church building, the Hall, the Church Minister's residence and all internal components such as furnitures.

blessings have also given them successful families. An 82 year old of who has been a widow for 32 years went as far as to say:

My eight children have all been successful because of the blessings from God. I have prayed for God's blessings on my family and the only way I know to thank God is through taking care of his servant and my offering to the church. I believe the more I give, the more God will bless me and my children and I can die happy knowing that God has been good to me. [my translation]³¹

However, these widows' children who meet their mothers' church obligations as well as giving to the church themselves, have mixed feelings. Some points out that the church nowadays seems to put more priority on money and material things and less emphasis on the spiritual upkeep of the people. Others feel that they are finding it really hard to keep up with these church obligations, based on the level of their personal income. They say that the cost of living is so high that taking care of families and giving to the church has really stretched their limited resources. Unfortunately, some of them have had to loan money to make ends meet. In the past seven years, four widows have passed away and their children do not come to church anymore. This, I believe, is a worrying sign for the parish as it shows the children were only complying to fulfill the wishes of their mothers but their hearts were far from the Church.

2.2 Faleata East Sub District (*Pulega*) and District (*Matagaluega*)

The *Faleata* District and Sub District also have *felaugaina*,³² which requires families to give goods, fine mats and money to the guest preacher. Cultural protocols as discussed above³³ are observed in this respect. Another annual requirement is *faamati*,³⁴ which is held around

³¹ Neva Wong Tung, *Personal Interview*, Moamoa, Samoa. 14 August, 2010. Others such as Lasela Feite *Personal Interview*, Sinamoga, Samoa. 16 August, 2010; and Sina Pauga, *Personal Interview*, 21 August, 2010: share the same view.

³² *Felaugaina* is when preachers (lay preachers or church ministers) within the *Faleata* subdistrict and district preach at other churches within the area. This is done in the *Faleata* area about four times a year. It is a practice which is also observed throughout the other Districts of the CCCS.

³³ As in Samoan cultural occasions where giving of gifts are observed, all pleasantries in the form of *sua* presentation and all formalities are given for the guest speaker.

³⁴ *Faamati* is a term given to the Elder Deacon's annual inspection of all parishes within his District (*Matagaluega*). The original purpose of this compulsory inspection was to ensure that each parish was well

March of every year. This is mainly done by the Women's Fellowship and it requires each parish to fulfill the Elder Deacon's³⁵ expressed requirement for every parish. They include items such as mats, kitchen utensils, washing machines, electrical ovens, minister's, and wife's, clothing amongst other goods as required from time to time. On top of these things, there is a main item to be done for the Church Minister.

In 2010, the main item for the Faleata District's *Faamati* was a brand new car³⁶ for all Ministers, with an average value of \$60,000.00SAT. Overall, seventeen new vehicles were gifted to each parish Minister. This was all funded by the generous donations of the parishioners, while other parishes had to take out bank loans to buy the vehicle.³⁷ Elsewhere in the *Faleata* Sub District, there are congregations, which have just completed or are in the process of building a new church, a new hall and even a new house for their church Minister. These are costly undertakings that require borrowings from financial institutions. To repay these loans and still to provide for the Minister's welfare and other church obligations requires giving and contributions from parish members.

2.3 Folafofaga – Public Announcements of Giving

For the *Sinamoga* parish, the donations and offerings of parishioners mentioned above are recorded by a select committee before the start of the service. They setup tables in front of the church to record the donations of people before they enter the church. Although they do not

equipped to meet the need of the parish when catering for guests and visitors. It was also to ensure that the minister and his family's needs were cared for.

³⁵ The elder deacon is a District position that is responsible for overseeing the material welfare of parishes and their ministers. He has the final say on what the main items to be prepared by each parish for the *faamati* each year.

³⁶ This is an extreme case of giving that this paper is trying to find a biblical answer to. In fact it became a national topic of forum discussions and letters to the editor both in Samoa and overseas criticizing the enormity of such gifts to the poor parishioners.

³⁷ It must be pointed out that this was an extreme requirement for a *faamati*, and it is not a normal practice in other Districts. But it has set a dangerous precedent that will surely be followed by others in the future.

force people to give, the location of their table at the front entrance of the Church can be a daunting sight to the parishioners coming to worship. I can affirm that this setup is similar all throughout the *Faleata* District. Indeed, people still give to meet their church obligations. An influential part of it is because all these offerings are publicly announced at the end of the service. Names are read out one by one with the amount given. Moreover, the committee constantly reminds the congregation of main CCCS annual offerings every Sunday. According to the secretary³⁸ of the *Sinamoga* parish, it is disrespectful not to read out the generous giving of the parishioners. It is also a way to publicly acknowledge for the sake of transparency and accountability. He further adds that people like hearing their donations read out. I think it is a very fair reflection on why offerings are announced but I don't agree that all people like hearing their offerings being read out especially those who gave little as compared to the ones who gave a big amount. For example, a interview with some members of the *Sinamoga* parish support this view.³⁹ However, the responsibility rests with the giver, as he/she should give what is affordable.

2.4 Responsibility

Samoans do have a duty of responsibility to one another and to those in leadership positions such as *matai*. These social responsibilities oblige a person to contribute and to give in order to perform those responsibilities. I believe that this responsibility must also be observed on the individual level. That is, a person needs to decide responsibly before giving. There must be

³⁸ Tuiloma Faitasi Gae, *Personal Interview*, Alafua, Samoa, 4 July 2010.

³⁹ Junior Fiaui, *Personal Interview*, Sinamoga, Samoa, 5 August 2010. Junior Pauga said that he feels embarrassed when his name is read out because he gives little to the minister and church. But that's all he can afford because his pay is really stretched every week to take care of his family. Iese Eneli, *Personal Interview*, Sinamoga, Samoa, 12 August, 2010. Iese said when he does not have enough money, he would rather stay home than hear his name read out with a small amount.

a balance between giving to meet that responsibility (whether to the *matai*, to the extended family or to the church), and the welfare of one's family.

Many decisions that are made in church are made by the congregations themselves. These decisions not only contribute to the development of the church, but often also contribute to the hardships that the individual families face. For those in leadership roles such as Ministers, careful consideration must be given to the parishioner's welfare and social status as well as their spiritual well-being. A decision to build a new church, a new building and perhaps a new car for the Minister must be weighed up against the ability of the people to repay through their contributions. Responsibility then must be the undertaking of not only those in leadership positions, but of the people themselves. The leaders should appreciate what people can afford based on their status and the people should evaluate carefully their financial obligations so that the welfare of their families and children do not suffer as a consequence. A letter to the newspaper points to this saying;

...our people need to understand the bible spiritually not traditionally because that's where the church has blindfolded their faith. They use the culture as an excuse so the onus is on the parishioner to give responsibly. Of course we need to give what we have to the poor, church, or *Faifeau*, it must be done in spirit of a free giving as Paul told the Corinthians "You should each give then, as you have decided, not with regrets or out of a sense of duty, for God loves the one who gives gladly (2 Corinthian:7-8)."⁴⁰

Another writer puts the hardships of the people on themselves and the poor decisions they make.

If people are blaming the church for losing their homes or being poor, then they must be really lost souls. Find God again and you shall see, this culture of giving is not to be blamed at all on the church and its Ministers - but your own selves. Give what you can afford and don't worry about what the earthlings will say - only God can judge you. If the *faifeau* or deacon doesn't agree, then he is not a man of God that he was taught to be and why should you worry? I have a mortgage to pay and I only give what I can afford to my *faifeau* come pay Sundays - some Sundays I miss giving because I know my children won't have lunch money for the week - and

⁴⁰ Palepua Manu Aoete, "Understanding the Bible Spiritually not traditionally," *Samoa Observer*, 21 July 2010, 4.

only God knows - so why should I worry about the finance committee not mentioning my alofa on that Sunday.⁴¹

The two views are clear that the responsibility rests on the individual and the decision they make. The blame for hardships experienced should not only be with the church and those in leadership positions, but one has to reevaluate his/her own responsibilities.

3. Summary

The Samoan cultural use of giving is a way of life. Giving occurred within the family circle and was used for offerings to gods before Christianity. It is carried out as part of the *tautua* not only for one another, but service to the family. This is clear in the cultural occasions mentioned that respect of the *matai* as leader of the family is very important. This spirit of giving that has always been part of the Samoan culture elevates the church to an esteem position. The position of service to the *matai* and the offering to the gods is now been transferred to the parish Minister and the Church. However, this is justified in the Samoan reference of *feagaiga* where the needs and protection of the Minister is the responsibility of the parishioner. Ultimately, it makes the parishioners feel obligated to give to the Minister and the church as the source of God's blessings. The use of announcements has somehow changed the focus of acknowledgement to a way of enticing people to give more. It is used in Samoan cultural exchange for acknowledgement and recognition of what has been given. It is a token of appreciation of what has been given on the part of the receiver. However, the true nature of public announcement of church giving has become problematic in the sense that it has pressured people into giving more than they can afford. This is why the biblical story of the Widow's

⁴¹ Ane L, Letter to the Editor, *Samoa Observer online*. Cited 17 August 2010.
http://samoaoobserver.ws/index.php?view=article&id=24733%3Ablame-yourselfes&option=com_content&Itemid=61

offering is to be consulted for a biblical approach in order to provide some directions regarding giving in the CCCS.

Chapter Two

Exegetical Study of Mark 12:41-44

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the exegetical study of Mark 12:41-44, which is widely referred to as ‘The Widow’s Offering.’⁴² It contains historical information, which I feel are relevant to further clarify the text and also to support the argument this paper has set out. These include information about the Jerusalem Temple, the dual taxation practices for religious and political purposes and the people’s social environment at the time of Jesus’ ministry. Secondly, this section includes some a word study of some key terms that further assist in understanding the text. Part of this exegetical work surveys Luke’s parallel account (Lk. 21:1-4) where necessary, to determine any differences and similarities, that might shed some light into this exegesis. The chapter also highlights some scholars’ viewpoints on the widow’s offering and the motives of Jesus’ response.

1. Historical Background Information

This section provides background information of first century CE, during the time of Jesus’ active ministry in Jerusalem. It aims to analyze information about the Temple institution and its importance to the Jewish people. It also provides information about every Jew’s obligation to the Temple through the tithe system and his/her obligation to Rome, via taxation.

⁴² William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1975), 505; Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of the Mark’s Story of Jesus*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 320: Myers calls it “The Last Mite”. James R. Edwards, *Gospel according to Mark*, Pillar NT Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 378: Edwards refers to it as “A Widow’s Two Cents Worth,” in which he provides what he calls an ‘acid contrast’ of the religious pretence of the scribes (38-40) and the humble faith of the widow (41-44).

This background information discusses Jewish people's social environment, which includes living under these dual taxation practices, and how they contributed to their everyday well-being.

1.1 Temple Institution

The Temple itself was important to Jewish religious life and was also seen as the physical presence of *Yahweh* amongst his people. It was also a “place of prayer and of teaching for the first Christians.”⁴³ That emphasis changed significantly when the Temple became the central economic and political institution in the country and the centre of local collaboration with Rome. It had the defining features of ancient domination systems: “*rule by a few, economic exploitation, and religious legitimation.*”⁴⁴

The Temple was perceived to be the dwelling place of God, the mediator of forgiveness through sacrifices, the centre of devotion, and the destination of the pilgrimage.⁴⁵ All contributions from each Jew went to the Temple and were given as his/her religious obligations. Simply stated, these were given in the name of their religion. No matter whether a Jew was poor or not, he/she was required to faithfully contribute thereby making the Temple a treasury of great wealth.

From 6 CE, Rome exercises their control in Judea, via the Temple authorities – the wealthy high priest and priests. The Temple became a centre for the collection of tithes,

⁴³ Geir Otto Holmas, “My house shall be a house of prayer: Regarding the Temple as a Place of Prayer in Acts within the Context of Luke’s Apocalyptic Objective” *Journal for the Study of New Testament*, 27.4, (2005), 400.

⁴⁴ Marcus J Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week: A Day-By-Day Account of Jesus’s Final Week in Jerusalem* (New York: Harper, 2006) 15–16, (italic emphases are those of Borg and Crossan) argue that this was a two-layered domination system: “the local domination system centred in the Temple was subsumed under the imperial domination system that was Roman rule.”

⁴⁵ R. S. Sugirtharajah, “The Widows Mite Revalued” *The Expository Times*, 103 (1990): 42–43. Sugirtharajah adds that the Temple symbolized divine presence and the link between God and his people.

redistribution and payments of taxes⁴⁶ to Rome. The Temple treasury stored all this wealth from Jewish pilgrims. By the time of Jesus, high priests were appointed by Rome from wealthy or preferred families only, in what Josephus called, the “buying of the high priestly families.”⁴⁷ The Temple in this sense symbolized oppression and their collaboration with Rome.

Josephus also recorded one Jesus, son of Ananias, who warned against Temple corruption for seven years, before the Temple was destroyed by the Romans (70 CE).⁴⁸ From these examples, John Elliott is correct in his assertion of the Temple as the “centre of political and religious control, [which] is both the scene and object for conflicts – arrests and imprisonment, criticism of the Temple leadership, lynching and murder.”⁴⁹

1.2 Taxation

Taxation is the imposition of compulsory levies on people by the governments, to finance government expenditures.⁵⁰ For agrarian societies in Palestine, which included many Jewish people, the benefit for paying taxes was minimal if any, but the sole purpose for collecting these taxes was to benefit the elite.⁵¹ The authorities used most of these collections for their own benefits and only a small portion was redistributed back to the people. Gerhard E. Lenski has

⁴⁶ Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 113. This role of the priests was like walking the fine line of adhering to the Romans rule and at the same time, trying to be sensitive to the people's needs and perceptions. Failure to pay taxes was tantamount to rebellion.

⁴⁷ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, Books XX, *General Index to Volumes I-X*, 20.113-117, ed., G. P. Goold, transl., Louis H. Feldman, (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1965), 20.213, 112-115.

⁴⁸ Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, Books IV-VII, 7.438, ed., G. P. Goold, transl., J. Thackeray, (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1928), 7.301-309, 462-467.

⁴⁹ John H. Elliott, “Temple versus Household in Luke-Acts: A Contrast in Social Institutions,” in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed., Jerome H. Neyrey, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 211-240.

⁵⁰ K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 110.

⁵¹ Richard A. Horsley, “Introduction: Jesus, Paul, and the ‘Art of Resistance’: Leaves from the Notebook of James C. Scott,” *Semeia Studies: Hidden Transcripts and the Art of Resistance, Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul*, ed., Richard A. Horsley, (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 1: points out that all civilisations have been based on the domination and exploitation of the vast majority of people by an elite ruling class.

argued that the top five percent of any agrarian society might control fifty-sixty five percent of their territory's goods and services via taxations and tributes.⁵²

Beside these taxation and tributes, Jews also paid their obligatory tithes to support the Temple and its authorities. This tithe was equivalent to one quarter or even one half of all land produce.⁵³ They also had to meet other commitments like animals and agricultural products for offerings and sacrifices as well as paying a head tax of one half shekel per year.

These obligations put lots of Jewish people under immense pressure. Perhaps, they would also have viewed the Temple as the root of their problem of having to meet these religious and political obligations, while they struggled to survive. Still, they faithfully and silently performed their responsibility and their duty to the Temple, as did the widow in our text.

2. Exegesis of Mark 12:41-44

This story is about giving and Jesus appears to favor the poor widow's offering of a penny, as compared to the rich people's large donation (Mk 12:41-42). Jesus' assertion seems to defy logic and the temple priests would disagree with it. However, when he explains his reasoning (Mk 12:44), his argument becomes valid. At this point, one gets the impression that giving and donating to the temple treasury was not the real emphasis, but the motive and the reason for giving. That is, giving becomes a personal affair.

This exegesis attempts to the rationale behind Jesus' words when he made his assertion. Is Jesus praising the poor widow for giving all that she had, thus setting a good example of discipleship, or is he lamenting over the circumstances that contributed to this widow's condition of being poor while surrounded by the rich? This exegesis tries to address this question.

⁵² Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, 2nd Edition, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 228.

⁵³ Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine in the time of Jesus*, 114.

2.1 [Verse 41] *Kai; kaqivsa" katevnanti tou' gazofulakivou ejqewvrei pw'" oJ o[clo" bavlei calko;n eij" to; gazofulavkion. kai; polloi; plouvsioi e[ballon pollav;*⁵⁴

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums.

The immediate context of the story is within the Jerusalem temple at the Court of Women, where the temple treasury is located.⁵⁵ The temple played a significant part in the religious, social and political aspects of the Jewish people during Jesus' ministry. It was the centre of Jewish worship, yet, it was also the centre of Jerusalem's collaboration with Rome's domination. Even worse, the temple had become the centre of commerce and exchange where making a profit was a priority. Furthermore, it discriminates against the marginalized people, like the poor widow in the story. Jesus was indeed correct when he said that the temple should be a house of prayer not a den of robbers (Mk. 11:17). For Jesus, the temple is a place of devotion to God, which also implies a connection with God's presence.⁵⁶

The temple treasury (*gazofulakivou*) is located at the Court of Women, which is the easternmost court in the temple. The porch is around the court, and within it against the wall, are thirteen chests where charitable contributions are placed. These thirteen chests are narrow at the mouth and wide at the bottom, shaped like trumpets. Each treasure chests was specifically marked: nine were for the receipt of what was legally due by worshippers, and the other four for strictly voluntary gifts.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ The Greek New Testament (*United Bible Society UBS4*), All citations of the Greek Text are from this version. Pradis Bible Program, ver.5.17.004, The Zondervan Corporation, 2002-2004.

⁵⁵ Joel B Green, Scott McKnight, eds, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 815.

⁵⁶ Green, Scott, eds, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 816.

⁵⁷ Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple and its Ministry and Services at the time of Jesus Christ*, (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2000), 22.

This procedure for offering even distinguishes the poor from the rich judging by where they place their donations.⁵⁸ Only the rich can donate voluntary gifts because they can afford them. That is, they can afford to show off their wealth by donating voluntary gifts, whereas, the poor widow could only pay what was due for worshipping in the temple. Even worshipping in the temple has a price. Vincent Taylor further explains this process at the temple treasury:

The treasury is where donors had to declare the amount of their gift and the purpose for which it was intended, to the priest in charge, everything being visible and audible to the onlooker through the open door.⁵⁹

This is the setting of Jesus' observation of the crowd as they make their offering after he sits down opposite⁶⁰ the treasury.

Sitting (*kaqivsa*)⁶¹ is a common action of Jesus in the gospels. For example, he sits when he is about to teach a lesson. Mathew 5:1-2 records that "when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak and taught them saying." Mark 9:35 says: "and He sat down, called the twelve and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.'" Luke 5:3 records Jesus getting into Simon's boat: "Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat."

It is obvious from these evidences that Jesus' sitting position normally precedes a lesson to be taught. However, Mark records that Jesus does not sit down and start teaching straight away but he watches (*ejqewvrei*), as the crowd puts money into the treasury. Instead of teaching as alluded to above, he engages in some sort of observation. The use of the *ejqewvrei* here has a

⁵⁸ Edersheim, *The Temple*, 22; Hendriksen, *Exposition of Mark*, 506. Hendriksen adds that the receptacles were marked with Hebrew Alphabet letters so that people would know for what distinctive purpose the money would be used. i.e. temple tribute, for sacrifices, incense, wood.

⁵⁹ Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St Mark*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 496.

⁶⁰ Myers, *Strong Man*, 321. According to Myers, the Greek *katevanti* (facing) is a stage position proleptic of judgment, for Jesus will shortly "face" the temple mount in order to predict its demise (Mk 13:3).

⁶¹ This term can also refer to a seat in a future realm as in Mt. 19:28; 20:23; Mk. 10:40.

sense of “taking in” as opposed to just a mere glance.⁶² Myers agrees when he says that in “this scene Jesus carefully scrutinizes.”⁶³ Jesus is also silent as he seems to be absorbing what he is witnessing and probably contemplating his next move.

In Jesus’ observation of the crowd (*o[̣clo*”),⁶⁴ he notices rich people (*plouvsioi*) putting in large sums. The presence of the rich here is not surprising for two reasons. Firstly, they are part of the rich class that makes up society in Jesus time. Secondly, the treasury was a place where they needed to be, to either pay their dues and offerings or to deposit some of their wealth.⁶⁵

It is evident in all four gospels that wherever Jesus goes, the crowd increases in numbers (Mt. 13:2, 14:14; Jn. 6:5). The crowd had been following Jesus from the start of his ministry (Mt. 5:1, 8:1; Mk. 5:24) and are amazed and fascinated at his teachings (Mt. 7:28; Mk. 9:15). More importantly, the crowd consists of different kinds of people with all sorts of problems and illnesses. There are the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others (Mt. 15:30; Jn. 5:2-18). There are also women,⁶⁶ children (Jn. 6:9), tax collectors (Lk. 19:2-10) and Jewish religious leaders.⁶⁷ The feeding of the five thousand records the crowd makeup as inclusive of about five thousand men, not counting women and children (Mt. 14: 21; Lk. 9:141). Jesus has compassion for the crowd.⁶⁸ Jesus’ compassion now seems to fill his thoughts as he observes the crowd placing their offerings in the treasury chests.

The references mentioned above affirm the makeup of the crowd. There are different kinds of people of social, religious, and political standing in the crowd that follow Jesus.

⁶² C .S. Mann, *Mark*, Vol.27, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. William F. Albright and David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1986), 495.

⁶³ Myers, *Strong Man*, 321.

⁶⁴ R.T France describes the crowd as containing other sorts of poor and oppressed people but Jesus singled out the poor widow as an object lesson. R.T France, “The Gospel of Mark” in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC)*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 493.

⁶⁵ Green, McKnight, eds, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 816.

⁶⁶ (Mt. 9:18, 20; Mk. 5:25)

⁶⁷ (Mt. 9:3, 12:38, 15:1, 21:15; Mk. 2:6, 16; Lk. 5:21, 6:7; Jn. 7:20, 8:3)

⁶⁸ (Mt. 9:36, 14:14, 15:32; Mk. 6:34, 8:2)

Interestingly, Mark here in verse 41 makes a specific mention of the rich (*plouvsioi*) and their extensive offerings in Jesus' observation.⁶⁹ The rich in the gospels always seems to be at the end of Jesus' negative teachings and sentiments. For example, Mathew 19:23 says: "I tell you the truth; it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." Furthermore, Mathew 19:24 reads: "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Luke 6:24 records Jesus saying: "But woe to the rich, for you have already received comfort." Jesus also teaches in Luke 12:15, saying: "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Jesus also teaches parables that refer to the rich, such as 'the parable of the rich fool' (Lk. 12:13-21), 'the parable of the dishonest manager' (Lk. 16:1-9), and 'the rich man and Lazarus' (Lk. 19:31). Jesus is also confronted by a rich person who wants to know how to inherit eternal life (Mt. 19:16-22; Mk. 10:17-22; Lk. 18:18-25). After hearing what Jesus said about his request, the rich person went away grieving, for he had many possessions. In what may seem to be a twist of Jesus' negative image and teachings about the rich, he notices here that they contributed large amounts of money to the treasury. The mention of many rich people (*polloi; plouvsioi e[ballon polla*) is hardly necessary, but Mann rightly suggests that it gives added point to the poor widow.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Jesus sees not the amount of the giving that matters most but the heart of the giver.

2.2 [Verse 42] *kai; ejlqou'sa miva chvra ptwch; e[balen lepta; duvo, o{ ejstin kodravnth*".

⁶⁹ Myers, *Strong Man*, 321. Myers refers to what Jesus is witnessing in the makeup of the crowd as his class consciousness (cf. 10:21) through the use of extreme positions in his description of what happens next.

⁷⁰ Mann, *Mark*, 495.

A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.

Amongst the crowd contributing to the treasury, Jesus notices a poor widow (*chvra ptwch*) putting in two copper coins (*lepta; duvo*) which are worth a penny (*kodravnth*). The description of the woman points to a person who has been disadvantaged twice. That is, she is not only a widow (*chvra*), meaning her husband has passed away, leaving her with no one to provide for her needs, but she is also poor (*ptwco*).

It is not surprising that the word *ptwco* is used here as a qualifying adjective to further illustrate the status of the widow as being a poor widow. A poor person refers to someone of few resources, culturally oppressed, despised and miserable.⁷¹ It carries with it the sense of the experience of oppression and helplessness and as Malina puts it “the inability to maintain inherited status”.⁷² The poor is part of a marginalized group that Jesus is always identified with as those he cares for and prioritizes in his teachings. He also seemed to specifically refer to the Good News as being brought for the poor (Mt. 11:5b; Lk. 4:18, 7:22). He insists in his teachings that wealth should be given or shared with the poor (Mt. 19:21; Lk. 10:21, 18:22, 19:8).⁷³

The reference to the widow as being poor may be attributed to Jesus’ own assumption, based on his observation of the widow donating only a penny to the Temple treasury. A widow (*chvra*) especially one without a male heir can lead one to a life of poverty and hardships. This is

⁷¹ Green and McKnight, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 706.

⁷² Bruce Malina, *The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 205.

⁷³ However, Jesus appears to neglect the poor while being anointed by a woman (Mt. 26:6-13; Mk. 14:13-9; Jn. 12:1-8). When one of his disciples suggests that the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor, Jesus replies that “you will always have the poor, but you do not always have me” (Jn. 12:8, c.f. Mk. 14:7; Mt. 26:11). This is one incident where Jesus appears to neglect the need of the poor. Nevertheless, this is not the case, as Jesus in this story is pointing out the fact that he is indeed about to leave his disciples through his death, resurrection and accession to his Father.

because she no longer affords to inherit any land nor properties. Widows with little means of support are socially powerless and without honor in a society that emphasized status and honor.⁷⁴

Widows are one of the most vulnerable groups of people in a society. They can be taken advantage of when there is no family to support them. The family household provides an individual with “identity, support, protection, status, wealth and honour.”⁷⁵ Therefore, belonging and holding a place within a family household creates one’s identity and status through which, one is classified within the community. Widows therefore, have no status within a society.

The families work the land “where kingship and loyalty are primary values.”⁷⁶ However, this traditional way of life changes during foreign occupation. A peasant family, for example, survives under duress and are constantly being subjected to stress and crises.⁷⁷ Roman imperial rule while maintaining the Jewish Temple-state constitute two official layers of rulers over the people, “demanding their produce.”⁷⁸ They are required to provide tributes to Rome and they also have to meet their required offerings to the Temple as part of their religious obligations, while still, they have to produce enough to feed their families and animals while putting aside some seeds for next year’s planting.

So if a family household can be made disadvantaged of due to this two-layer control mechanism, how much more can a poor widow endure, knowing that there is no one else to rely on for support? Where can this widow get more than just a penny to meet her Temple obligation and for worshipping her God? It is all she can afford because society has driven her to her current status of being a poor widow.

⁷⁴ Craig S Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 169.

⁷⁵ Michael F. Trainor, *The Quest for Home: The Household in Mark’s Community*. (Collegeville: A Michael Glazier Book, The Liturgical Press, 2001), 19.

⁷⁶ John Stambaugh and David Balch, *The Social World of the First Christians*, (London: SPCK, 1986), 91.

⁷⁷ Sean Freyne, *The World of the New Testament*, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 8-22.

⁷⁸ Horsley, *Whole Story*, 36. See also Myers, *Strong Man*, 51-52.

Luke is the only other Gospel apart from Mark and Matthew that has more references to widows. This is not surprising as Luke's interest in Jesus' ministry among women is well known.⁷⁹ Luke 2:36-37 records the account of the prophetess Anna who was a widow and always worshipped, fasted and prayed in the temple night and day. When Jesus was presented to the temple as required by the Law of Moses,⁸⁰ she spoke about him as the child whom all is looking forward to for Jerusalem's redemption. Luke also presents Jesus talking about injustice against widows through the parable of "The Persistent Widow" (Lk. 18:1-8).

Furthermore, Paul in his letter to Timothy (1 Ti. 5:1-6:2) goes to great lengths to provide advice of how to treat widows along with the elderly and slaves. This care was also emphasized by James when treating orphans and widows in their distress (Jas. 1:27). As a matter of fact, widows (along with orphans) are special objects of God's compassion, for without a man to provide for them, they were the most vulnerable people.⁸¹ Their treatment was a measure of justice or injustice of society.⁸² Widows are dependent on the charity of the temple or the temple worshippers where they would beg for money. However, instead of depending on this charity, the poor widow mentioned here by Mark gave to the treasury which has no doubt caught the attention of Jesus.

The poor widow's offering is mentioned to be two small copper coins (*lepta; duvo*).⁸³ According to Taylor, the two *lepta* offered by the widow refers to the "smallest coin in

⁷⁹ Mann, *Mark*, 497.

⁸⁰ As it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord. And they offered sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two small pigeons." Lk 2:23-24

⁸¹ Keener, *IVP Bible Background*, 170.

⁸² Borg & Crossan, *The Last Week*, 74.

⁸³ Daniel Sperber, "Mark xii 42 and its Metrological Background: A Study in Ancient Syriac Versions. *Novum Testamentum* 9 (1967): 178 – 190. A detailed treatment of the value of the widow's two *lepta* against the available currencies of the time is presented by Daniel Sperber.

circulation, used in late Greek.”⁸⁴ The value of the two *lepta* taken together is worth no more than a fraction of a penny.⁸⁵ He elaborates further saying that it takes more than one hundred *lepta* to equal a denarius, which is a day’s wage. This comparison indicates how small the widow’s offering is. It is all she has and she offers it to the Temple.

**2.3 [Verse 43] *kai; proskalesavmeno" tou;" maqhta;" aujtou' ei\pen aujtoi'*:
*ajmh;n levgw uJmi'n o{ti hJ chvra au{th hJ ptwch; plei'on pavntwn e[balen tw'n
ballovntwn eij" to; gazofulavkion:***

Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury.

Jesus action here in calling (*proskalesavmeno"*) and saying (*ei\pen*) to his disciples (*maqhta;"*) is a combination often used by the Gospel writers especially to express the purpose of teaching a lesson. For example, Jesus summoned his disciples and gave them authority to heal sickness and drive out evil spirits, (Mt. 10:1, Mk. 6:7). On most occasions, his calling and teachings are directed to his disciples. However, in some cases, he called the crowd and directed his teachings at them (Mt. 5:10; Mk. 7:14) to listen and understand. Quite often, he called attention to lessons of humility and servanthood (Mt. 20:25-28; Mk. 10:42), as the basis of his teachings. Such was the importance of what the widow did that Jesus summoned his disciples in order to teach them a lesson from it. Ben Witherington refers to Jesus calling the disciples to Himself as “wishing to use this woman as a model to His disciples.”⁸⁶

⁸⁴ John E. Stambaugh and David L. Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environments*, ed. Wayne A. Meeks (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 80.

⁸⁵ Stambaugh and Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environments*, 80.

⁸⁶ Ben Witherington, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 18.

Jesus opened his teachings with the word *Amevvvvv* (Truly). *Amevvvvv* emphasizes truth and is often used as a formula of certain expression or of certainty.⁸⁷ Luke often used this expression ‘Truly,’ half as often as Mark whereas Matthew uses it thirty times.⁸⁸

Mathew 6:2, 5 records Jesus condemnation of those who announced their giving to the needy with trumpets. He likened them to the hypocrites who stand in the synagogues and on the streets seeking the honor of men. In the end, he says “I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full.” Jesus is thus, relaying the truth to his listeners, about those who seek public endorsement for their action.⁸⁹ By placing this expression at the very beginning of most of his teachings, Jesus makes sure that whatever lesson he was about to relay, it was a lesson of truth. The audience therefore should hear and follow those lessons, in order for them to become his disciples and inherit the kingdom of God.

In the case of the widow in our story, Jesus’ use of the word *Amevvvvv* indicates that there is a very special lesson to be learned from the action of the widow. It shows that what he is about to say is of great significance and that it should be taken to heart.⁹⁰

h chvra au{th hJ ptwch – the Greek here can be literally translated, “this widow, this poor one.” This attributive construction in Greek clearly places emphasis on the poverty status of the widow. It makes sure that the reader is left with no doubt that the widow is indeed a poor one. Compared to verse 40 where Jesus accuses the scribes of devouring widow’s houses, Jesus here in verse 43 is for the second time posing another contrast when he distinguishes the poverty of

⁸⁷ Mann, *Mark*, 496.

⁸⁸ Mann, *Mark*, 496.

⁸⁹ Some other examples of how Jesus uses this formula, include Mt. 8:10 - I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith; Mt. 13:17 - For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it; Mt. 16:28; Mk. 9:11 - For I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom; Mk. 3:30 - I tell you the truth; this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

⁹⁰ Hendriksen, *Exposition of Mark*, 507.

the widow against the wealth of the rich. In an odd reference to what she gave, Jesus announced that she *plei'on pavntwn e[balen* (she puts more) than all those that contributed to the treasury. The aorist use of *ebalen* (threw/gave) signifies complete action.⁹¹ In other words, I concur with Witherington that *ebalen* signifies that “it is not the amount given, but the attitude of self-sacrifice on which the narrative focuses.”⁹² A most true and sincere offering/giving is done only with the purest of heart. This emphasis is made clear when Jesus used the same verb in verse 44 with *o{lon to;n biron aujth'"* (her whole life), to further enhance his teaching about servanthood/discipleship – you offer your whole life to serve God. (Mk. 12:29 – 33)

2.4 [Verse 44] *pavnte" ga;r ejk tou' perisseuvonto" aujtoi'" e[balon, au{th de; ejk th'" uJsterhvsew" aujth'" pavnta o{sa ei\cen e[balen o{lon to;n biron aujth'"*.

For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

Jesus' response to the offering of the widow continues here in which he backs up what he said in verse 43. His response seems to indicate his willingness to further elaborate on the immense value of what the widow had given as her offering. In reality, she gave the least as indicated by the value of her two *lepta*. However, France refers to Jesus' response as “turning upside down the normal valuation of the people”.⁹³ The point here is affirmed by the use of the word *uJsterhvsew"* (poverty) compared with *perisseuvonto"* (abundance) of the other givers. It means that the widow has nothing else left and yet she voluntarily *e[balen o{lon to;n biron aujth'"* (gave her whole life). Her devotion and self sacrifice were complete. This is a clear model of total devotion.

⁹¹ Mann, *Mark*, 496. Mann prefers here the use of the perfect tense (gave) which indicates a past action with continuing effects in the present.

⁹² Witherington, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, 18.

⁹³ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 493.

3. Analysis:

The analysis takes into consideration some scholarly views that analyze and critique the moral value of the widow's offering and the response of Jesus.

3.1 The Widows Offering:

The widow's offering in Mark 12:41-44 shows the poor widow's sacrifice of giving all she had as a "model for discipleship".⁹⁴ An act that is applauded by Jesus in his response by calling in his disciples which was a formula he often used to teach them a lesson as discussed earlier.⁹⁵

According to Dennis Nineham, the emphasis is on the catchword 'widow' as a fitting contrast to the previous section (Mk. 12:38-40).⁹⁶ It pitted the bad scribes who 'devour widows houses' (vs. 40) against the story of the good widow and her offering. The irony is in the importance of the teaching that a true gift or giving is to give everything we have, as compared to those who have plenty to give, but yet, they devour other's wealth for their own gain. This poor widow's action underscores the story of how Jesus gave everything for the world. Nineham, on the one hand sums up his views on the poor widow's giving as paradigmatic service or self sacrifice.⁹⁷

However, on the other hand, to illustrate further the motive behind Jesus' response, the story of the widow's offering contains an alternative interpretation, in which Jesus' words are to be understood ironically. The attempt here is to highlight the irony whereby Jesus' response can be seen as a lament.

⁹⁴ Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Story*, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2001), 216.

⁹⁵ See discussion on pages 32-33.

⁹⁶ Dennis Nineham, "The Gospel of St Mark" in *Pelican New Testament Commentaries*, (Baltimore: Penguin, 1963), 335.

⁹⁷ Nineham, *The Gospel of St Mark*, 335.

In Mark 12:38-40, Jesus is depicted to have argued against the teaching (Mk. 12:35-37) and the practices (Mk. 12:38-40) of the scribes. One of the practices of the scribes that Jesus warned his disciples and the crowd to beware of is that they "devour widows' houses" (Mk. 12:40). According to France, the vulnerability of widows is a recurrent theme in the biblical literature "so to defraud them is particularly despicable."⁹⁸ France points to "devouring widows' houses" as a vivid phrase for taking material advantage of them. In relation to scribes as condemned by Jesus, France offer various explanations. For example, scribes were usually trustees of widows' estates. The service was normally for free. Yet, scribes sometimes claim fees from widows for their service to an extent that it deprives the widows of their properties – what Jesus refers to as 'devouring widow's house.' In addition, the practice of promoting temple offering consumes the resources of the poor such as the widow in the story.⁹⁹ In general, the phrase – devouring widow's houses indicates the scribe's exploitation of widow's hospitality and trust.¹⁰⁰

The irony of Jesus' mention of widows and the actions of the scribes is evident in his observation afterwards (Mk. 12:41-42). As Jesus watches people putting money into the treasury, he notices a poor widow (*χήρα πτωχή*) among them. The connection then seems obvious by the repetition of the word 'widow' (Mk. 12:40, 41, 43). Thus, it can be inferred from this connection that the scribes, who devour widow's houses, are probably the reason why this

⁹⁸ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 491.

⁹⁹ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 491; Mann, *Mark*, 392. Mann says that this charge must be understood together as a unit with 'for the sake of offering long prayers'. That is, the scribes part in support of the temple corrupt practices were regarded by Jesus as equivalent of depriving widows of their property.

¹⁰⁰ Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the time of Jesus: An investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the NT Period*, (London: SCM Press, 1969) 111-116. Jeremias provides a fascinating study of the economic circumstances of scribes. He concludes that this passage refers to the scribe's habit of sponging on the hospitality of people with limited means.

widow is poor.¹⁰¹ It appears that she is not simply a faithful giver but she is also a victim of the oppressive practices of the scribes.¹⁰² This connection shifts the focus from an individual, the widow, to an oppressive system, the practices by which the scribes devour widows' houses. This, as the narrative goes, warranted Jesus' response.

3.2 Jesus' Response

The motive of Jesus response has been a subject of scholarly arguments. On the one hand there are those who support the interpretation that Jesus applauds the action of the widow. For example is Henry Barclay Swete in the late 19th century.¹⁰³ Swete emphasizes the lesson that Jesus would teach the disciples about giving through the example of the widow's giving. It is confirmed as concrete by the use of the solemn formula *amen....λεγω ὑμιν* (Amen, I say to you). Furthermore, Vincent Taylor refers to the narrative as a 'Pronouncement story' and Jesus' response was in support of 'Almsgiving'.¹⁰⁴

On the other hand, there are others who argue that the response of Jesus is to be understood as a 'lament' instead of an appraisal for the widow's offering. In support of the lament interpretation, A. G. Wright¹⁰⁵ and Elizabeth Malbon¹⁰⁶ point to the context of the story and especially in Jesus' response having contained no evidence that supports Jesus praising what the widow has done.

¹⁰¹ Edwards, *Gospel according to Mark*, 23-8. This alludes to the fact that her continued giving from the meager resources she has is the result of the giving system as encouraged by the Temple leaders. The connection then and Jesus disputation of the scribes for devouring widows houses seems likely to be an attack not only on their actions and attitudes, but also the system in place.

¹⁰² William L Lane, "The Gospel according to Mark" in *The New International Commentary of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1984) 442. William Lane supports this view saying "It serves to sharpen the contrast between the sham righteousness of the scribes and that wholehearted devotion to God characterised by an unnamed widow whose poverty was absolute;

¹⁰³ Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Mark* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 294.

¹⁰⁴ Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 495.

¹⁰⁵ Addison G. Wright, "The Widow's Mite: Praise or Lament? A Matter of Context," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 256-65.

¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth S. Malbon, "The Poor Widow and Her Poor Rich Readers," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53 (1991): 589-604.

Wright in arguing against the appraisal theory says that “the proper context has not been rightly identified in any of the commentaries....”¹⁰⁷ He identifies two areas to backup his ‘lament theory’. Firstly, is what he referred to as “the immediate context at hand”¹⁰⁸ pointing to the three immediately preceding verses (Mk. 12:38-40). With reference to the mention of scribes ‘devouring widows’ houses’,¹⁰⁹ Wright adds that if Jesus condemned such actions of the scribes, then he would not be pleased with what he was witnessing with the poor widow’s offering. How were the scribes doing this? The most common suggestion is that the scribes were taking advantage of the kindness and hospitality of well to do widows beyond all reasonable bounds.¹¹⁰ Likewise, Duncan M Derret holds that these scribes, as a trade were legal managers of well-to-do widows’ estates, and were taking more than their fair share of expenses for the task.¹¹¹ It presents us with a picture of widows being taken advantage of by the unscrupulous scribes who were their legal estate managers.

His second argument is that the poor widow’s story “if viewed as an approbation, does not cohere with the immediate preceding widow saying than it does with the Corban statement,”¹¹² in which the truly “religious values are human values.”¹¹³ He concludes that what

¹⁰⁷ Wright, *The Widow’s Mite*, 259.

¹⁰⁸ Wright, *The Widow’s Mite*, 261.

¹⁰⁹ Witherington, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, 17. Witherington refers to ‘devouring widow’s houses’ as abuse of a widow’s property. It is a technical phrase in extra biblical Greek sources for bilking someone of their funds or property.

¹¹⁰ Witherington, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, 17.

¹¹¹ J Duncan M Derrett, “Eating up the Houses of Widows: Jesus’s Comment on Lawyers?” *Studies in the New Testament*, vol.1, (1977): 120.

¹¹² Wright, *The Widow’s Mite*, 262. The Corban statement mentioned here is found in Mark 7:10-13 in which Jesus says: Moses said, “Honor your father and your mother”; and “He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die”; but you say, “If a man tells his father and mother, ‘What you would have gained from me is Corban’ (that is, given to God)”—then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God through your traditions which you hand on.

¹¹³ Wright, *The Widow’s Mite*, 261. Wright here refers to Jesus for having said that human needs take precedence over religious values when they conflict, that God gave the law not for itself but for people, and that religious values are human values.

Jesus meant was not really praising the widow's action, but a lament for her ill treatments by the religious system and the attitude and actions of those managing it.

Malbon supports Jesus lamenting the poor widow's treatment. She reiterates the contrast that exists between the action and status of the scribes to that of the widow but chose to expand it further. For example, the poor widow who gives all, her whole means of living is in striking contrast to the scribes who take all her means of living.¹¹⁴ Moreover, the attention seeking attitude of the seeking attention of the scribes is compared to the poor widow who appears to be shy and to be unnoticed, that only Jesus notices her. In light of Jesus' ministry, Malbon notices that "from beginning to end, Jesus' ministry is in striking contrast to the scribes' activities and attitudes...."¹¹⁵ Jesus is stepping forward as a strong advocate of oppressed or abused widows.¹¹⁶

Joel B. Green in analyzing the same units in Luke's gospel (Lk. 20:45-47 and 21:1-4) saw the same situation concerning the scribes as corrupt representative of the religious system and the widows as victims of that system. The two texts are arranged in the same order in Luke as in Mark which, in my opinion solidifies its genuineness. According to Witherington, Luke follows Mark but he has "considerably alter the wording of a Markan narrative whole but preserving the element of the discourse almost unaltered."¹¹⁷ However, Green sums up the relationship between the two units as a "counterexample, pitting the concern with status honor evident among legal experts over the sacrificial generosity of the widow."¹¹⁸ Green also points to the literary composition of the text as in this case, Jesus indicts the scribes for consuming

¹¹⁴ Malbon, *Poor Widow Poor Rich Readers*, 595.

¹¹⁵ Malbon, *Poor Widow Poor Rich Readers*, 596.

¹¹⁶ Witherington, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, 17.

¹¹⁷ Witherington, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, 17.

¹¹⁸ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 728.

widows' houses. He now laments the sham of a religious system that includes the devouring of widow's houses. He backs up his claim saying:

Note that in no way does Luke suggests that Jesus finds the widow's action exemplary or praiseworthy. How could he when the religious system that was supposed to care for such as these (cf Acts 6:1-6), not render them utterly destitute? Jesus mission is to bring good news to the poor including this widow, not to impoverish the poor even further.¹¹⁹

Luke according to Green draws attention to a system, the temple treasury itself setup in a way that it draws people to continually provide to the temple. The worst factor is that the temple treasury has an inherent to the divine legitimation regarding offering but is involved in such injustice.¹²⁰

3.3 The Widow and Other Women Characters of Mark

The character and action of the poor widow is worthily compared to other women characters in the Gospel of Mark to highlight the issue of discipleship. Other women of exceptional faith and characters in Mark for example are the hemorrhaging woman (Mk. 5:28-34) and the Syrophoenician one (Mk. 7:24-30). These two took decisive actions to which Jesus makes a significant reaction. The hemorrhaging woman touches Jesus garment and is immediately healed prompting Jesus to admire her faith (Mk. 5:24-34). The Syrophoenician woman argues against Jesus metaphorical use of dogs and children and Jesus reacts by healing her daughter from a distance. The poor widow gives her last two coins for others and Jesus reacts by making her a model of sacrificial giving for his disciples. The woman who anoints Jesus with expensive ointment urges Jesus to react by saying that her action will be told in memory of her wherever the gospel is preached (Mk. 14:3-9). For Mark, the devotion and self sacrifice of the poor widow stands out against the dark background of the self-indulgence and

¹¹⁹ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 728.

¹²⁰ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 729.

false piety of the scribes. Moreover, her offering is far more valuable than the easy and ostentatious giving of the rich. Jesus' special concern and admiration for women is perhaps nowhere more strikingly juxtaposed with His disgust over certain groups of privileged and pious men than here.¹²¹ It is obviously clear from these examples the importance of women discipleship as a fitting image of the Markan discipleship theme.¹²²

4. Summary

The exegesis is clear on certain points, that there was an imbalance caused by a class society and the existence of taxation practices that put pressure on the marginalized people. The common factor whether you are rich or poor is you have to perform your offering for the upkeep of the temple and also pay your taxes to the government. The role of the temple treasury as the centre for these offerings was also part of Jesus' concern. Instead of being a place for people to worship God, it becomes a place of economic trade and corrupt practices. The scribes who administered and managed the temple are seen to be unfaithful in performing their duties. Their actions have caused marginalized people such as the widow a lot of hardship and strife. As leaders, they have been obligated to take care and offer support to those who are vulnerable such as widows.

On the contrary, the marginalized people still serve without complaint. They still contribute despite the very little means that they have. This is represented by the offering of the poor who 'gave all' with little regards for her welfare. I believe these factors contributed to Jesus' silence in his observation. It also forms the basis of his response as a lament for the offering of the poor widow and her unjust treatment by the system that she served.

¹²¹ Witherington, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, 18.

¹²² Myers, *Strong Man*, 396. Myers found Mark's treatment of women as 'True Disciples' of Jesus. He points out that Mark as saying that not only did women follow (evkolouqoun), but it is the women who serve (diakonen). He points to the fact that the women came up with Jesus from Jerusalem and stayed with him till death.

Chapter Three

Comparative Study between Mark 12:41 – 44 and Samoan Ecclesiastical Giving and Announcement

Introduction

This chapter provides a comparative study between the aspects of giving and announcement in Mark 12:41-44 and its ecclesiastical implementations. The aim of this chapter is to highlight similarities and differences between Mark's narrative of the widow's offering with the ecclesiastical practice of giving and announcement in the *Sinamoga* Parish. The study will follow the literary composition of the narrative unless mentioned otherwise.

2. Giving, Announcing - Mark 12:41-44 and the CCCS

2.1 Observing:

The narrative opens with Jesus sitting down and observing the crowd putting money into the treasury. The depiction of Jesus is of interest because it can mean more than just an observation. Having just taught the crowd about the corrupt practices of the temple leadership and the unjust treatment of the underprivileged such as devouring the houses of widows, he now assumes the normal teaching position by sitting¹²³ and observing the crowd. His actions without words can be interpreted as an indication of deep thoughts not only on what has been taught the crowd, but also composing his thoughts on what to say next based on what he is witnessing.

From the Samoan perspective, the action of Jesus has a similar notion to those who are well versed and have deep insights of the Samoan customs and traditions. They are referred to as

¹²³ The sitting position is the proper position assumed by rabbis when teaching. It is also used similarly in Samoan culture as a respectful position when addressing someone else. The house of *matai* where deliberation for villages affairs are discussed is referred to as *saofaiga a Matai* (lit. the sitting of *matai*)

‘o le au faitofā’ (Samoan sages). Their experience over long life means that their *tofā*¹²⁴ (wisdom) is much more composed to deal with certain situations in life concerning that of the family, the village, and the Church. The Church Minister can also be viewed in this sense as a spiritual father and advisor to the parishioners. He should provide ethical advice from the bible to difficulties faced by people.

2.2 Rich versus Poor

In Jesus’ observation, he identifies the different class of people as part of the crowd contributing to the temple treasury. Those he identifies as the rich were contributing lots of money to the treasury as discussed in chapter two. Jesus’ recognition of the poor widow in comparison to the rich points to the fact that there were marginalized people in the crowd.

This distinguishing class of people is also evident in the makeup of the *Sinamoga* parish. There is a clear indication of people with good source of income and those who are average wage earners. This makeup is also a common feature in the whole *Faleata* district. Moreover, the rich in Samoan standard can be identified with most of the clergy in the CCCS Church. This is due to the high regard that Samoans from the arrival of Christianity have for them. As mentioned in chapter one, they are treated in high respect by the parishioners, no matter what the cost, but all in the name of God. I agree with Faalili¹²⁵ that this is the general understanding amongst the CCCS members regarding the church, that it is ‘the Church of God’ which means that everything about the Church is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Faalili further states that:

Any positive impression on the Church and people will give thanks and praise God for the good things in life through the Church. In contrast, any negative perception regarding the Church and people will remain

¹²⁴ The term *tofa* has more than one meaning in the Samoan language such as ‘good bye’ and ‘sleep’ but is also referred to as ‘wisdom’ as used here. The *tofa* is reserved for those who are not only well versed with Samoan cultural traditions and history. They are also known to have *tofā faalē Atua* (Godly wisdom) to settle disputes.

¹²⁵ Faalili, “A Congregationalist’s Perspective on Giving,” 5.

silent with the insistence that it is not theirs to judge their leaders, rather they are held accountable to the highest authority namely God alone.¹²⁶

It is in such context between the leaders and the parishioners that the notion of hardship emerges, and thus influences the decision making of the people. It creates a similar gap to that recognizes by Jesus between the rich and the poor. This relationship is almost seen as taboo, which causes the silence of subjects under the care and authority of the Minister to speak and act freely against any injustice in the Church.

2.3 Giving

It is also interesting to note the amount mentioned of the widow's contribution of 'two copper coins which are worth a penny' (Mk 12:42b). The narrative is clear that it was all she had but she decided to give it all.

In contrast to the giving of the CCCS parishioners, it is deemed an embarrassment to give such a small amount. This is the influence that large giving has had on the minds of the parishioners. It is almost shameful and an embarrassment to give something so small. I put the question straight to a seventy year old widow¹²⁷ in the *Sinamoga* CCCS.

If she had only \$10.00 for the Minister's weekly *alofa*, (donation to the minister) would she turn up to give it? Her response was: "My week revolves around saving money for my offerings on Sunday. If it is closer to Sunday and I do not have enough, then I will borrow money either from the women's committee or from someone else, and then ring my children overseas to settle the debt."

What is enough? I asked, in which she replied:

"I would feel comfortable going to Church if I have a \$100.00 or more so I can meet all my financial obligations¹²⁸ to the Church. But I give the most to the Minister, since he is God's representative on earth. For me personally, he deserves more than \$10.00. I know God looks after my family so I must give whenever the Church asks no matter the cost." [My translation]

The widow's response to me is a typical reflection of what giving is to the majority of the CCCS followers especially those who have been church faithful for decades. This means that

¹²⁶ Faalili, "A Congregationalist's Perspective on Giving," 6.

¹²⁷ Paula Tupu, *Personal Interview*, Sinamoga, 8 August 2010. Paula is a 70 year old widow and a deaconess of the Sinamoga CCCS parish.

¹²⁸ The different giving means of the Sinamoga CCCS church is mentioned in chapter two.

their parents and grandparents have had an influence on them on how to serve the Church with dignity and perseverance. They were taught not to question the work of the church but to fulfill one's obligation as required.¹²⁹ Comparing the Markan widow with that of the *Sinamoga* parish one, the common factor is in the willingness to give in spite of difficulties encountered in life. No matter how small the offering of the Markan widow, the narrative is clear that she gives all she had. Similarly, the *Sinamoga* one would not settle for anything small when it comes to giving to the Church.

2.4 Announcing:

The narrative in Mark takes a turn when Jesus became vocal after watching and observing the events unfolding before him. Verse 43-44 says that;

Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those contribution to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

Jesus' action here gives the impression that he publicly announced the result of his observation despite Mark's reference that he only called his disciples.¹³⁰ As discussed in chapter two, calling and saying is a common action of Jesus to teach a lesson. He announces as a lesson the value of amount offered by the widow as being more than everyone else who contributed to the treasury.

This action of Jesus is similar in a sense to public announcements of offerings in the *Sinamoga* parish. The practice applies to reading out the parishioner's contributions and gifts to the congregation before the service ends. Such practice which surely is an influence of the Samoan culture is to acknowledge offerings of the people. Selota Maliko explains that

¹²⁹ Tupu, *personal Interview*. She further adds that God is the only one that judges people.

¹³⁰ Calling the disciples is not mentioned by the gospel parallel in Luke 21:3 which reads: "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them."

acknowledging gifts and offerings is part of the Samoan traditions when on the receiving end of generous gifts from others.¹³¹ The motive of the Samoan tradition then in announcing gifts and offerings as a token of appreciation is clearly defined and done in good faith.

However, the Church seems to use it as a way to attract and in some cases demand people to give more and more. As a result, people are pressured to give and offer more to avoid the embarrassment of publicly announcing a small amount.

2.5 Comparison, Measuring:

Jesus' words in announcing the widow's offering also have a notion of comparison; "this poor widow has put in more than all those contributing to the treasury...." It is an interesting acknowledgement by Jesus because in reality she gave less compared to the others who are known to be rich. Since Jesus observation of the crowd at the start of the unit (Mk 12:41), he identifies those who are rich along with the widow who is poor. A comparison he also seems to use in comparing the widows offering to that of everyone else.

Similar comparisons are also observed not only in the *Sinamoga* parish, but also in the *Faleata* Sub District. Around the time of annual offerings for the Mother Church, the parish secretary would always read out the total offered the previous year as a target to meet or better. It is a constant reminder that is announced every Sunday. The parish secretary and committee in recognition that the previous year's total will not be met would keep reminding people what needs to be given to make up the difference with their aim being on a surplus. If up to the final day when offerings are due and the previous year's total has not been met, then they would

¹³¹ Selota Maliko, "The Impact of Globalization on Samoa", Unpublished Master's thesis, Pacific Theological College, Suva, Fiji, 2001, 111.

request more money from other sections of the Church.¹³² These include the choir, the women's fellowship, the youth and if still not enough, the Sunday school's savings. It is a hard act to follow for those with little income but they fully accept it as part of their service to the *Sinamoga* parish and the Church.

When the *Faleata* Sub District congregates together when parish offerings are due,¹³³ the secretary would read each parish's offering with a comparison to what they offered the previous year. He also reads them out from the highest to smallest along with announcing that it is either a surplus or a loss for a particular parish. I think it is safe to assume that this way is to remind people that they did not give enough. The message is driven home by the sermon of God's everlasting love but the parishioner's response is just not enough. I believe the parishioner's donations are good for the development of the Church. But it must be accepted as what the people were able to give out of what they were able to afford.

2.6 Discipleship:

The motive of the widow's offering as confirmed by Jesus is that she gave all of what she had to live on (Mk: 12:44). Her whole living was not in the amount that she gave, but in essence, doing what she believed to be right. Jesus called his disciples over so that they learn a lesson about true discipleship. That those who believe and trust in God would give up everything to follow him in faith.

This is also similar to the giving practice by parishioners in the *Sinamoga* parish. It may not be in the sense of sacrificial giving but they always try to give the best of what they can

¹³² Church has different savings to cater for the different needs of the church. For example, Savings to pay for bills such as electricity, water, and church property insurance; Savings for Sunday offering which is collected during service; Fix deposits; along with the respective savings for the various church groups such as choir, women's fellowship, Youth, Sunday school.

¹³³ These offerings are done twice every year in September and November where the *Faleata* Sub district come together to worship and hear each parish's offerings being read out.

provide. This is clear in the attitude of the elderly and their belief in giving. Such dedication to the parish and the Church can only be attributed as an expression of their faith in God who they believe is the source of blessings. Thus, it is their way of returning thanksgiving for His blessings upon them and their families.

3. Summary:

In analyzing the aspects of giving and announcing mentioned above, it is clear that the contrasting status of the rich and the poor in the Markan narrative is similar to that of the CCCS setup. The narrative of the poor widow's offering is the culmination of Jesus' condemnation of a system that deprived people of their resources. A system made worse by corrupt leaders who are managing and administering it. As a result, the corruption influenced the purity of the temple and deemed it unworthy to be called the house of God. It is clear then that Jesus was not happy with such injustice as evident in his condemnation of the temple in Mk 13:1-2.

Moreover, it is important that lessons can be learned from Mk. 12:41-44 and how Jesus has interpreted the widow's giving and the practices that encouraged such giving. The narrative serves as a reminder to the CCCS to consider the welfare of the parishioners. To revisit and reconsider some practices such as announcing offerings in Church. Such things include the exorbitant pressure put on the parishioners to give more to a Church that is already well off¹³⁴ and Ministers who are quite wealthy in Samoan standards. The pressure caused by the practice of publicly announcing offerings is a way to force people to give more. On top of this is their struggle to feed families and still have the sanity to serve the Church. The Church Minister must take the initiative to make sure his parishioners are happy to worship God and to give what they

¹³⁴ The annual conference in May is where the financial statements of the church are tabled. It shows a church having fixed deposits at almost every major bank in Samoa as well as offshore fix deposits in New Zealand, Australia and the USA.

can afford. He needs to identify with their social status and how they are faring in the face of economic hardships and the rising cost of living. We must be reminded of Jesus' condemnation of the scribes that ignorance of proper leadership roles in caring for the poor and the oppressed has serious consequences as in Jesus' words in verse 40; 'they will receive greater condemnation'.

Conclusion

It is clear from the examples presented in this paper that giving is a way of life in the Samoan Culture. People share and give to each other because as Samoans, they have the sense of family unity which is the basis of the Samoan existence. The respect that exists among members of a household molds them to respect one another as well as other people. Within the extended family environment, respect is rendered to the *matai* as a leader who makes good decisions for the family. Samoan culture encourages that respect is to be performed in the form of *tautua* (service). Through Samoan special occasions discussed in Chapter One, *tautua* in the form of giving shows that love and mutual respect must be exercised to one another and especially to those in leadership positions.

It is this notion of cultural service that Samoans should also render to the Church Minister and the Church because they have been brought up to respect them. In addition, one of the messages that Christianity has embedded in the hearts of most Samoans is ‘to love God with all your mind, heart and soul: and to love your neighbor as yourself’ (Mk. 12: 30 – 31). Through such message, the Samoans treat the Minister and the Church with utmost respect. They understand giving to the Church as means of fulfilling their service to God for his blessings no matter what the cost. However, it is this mentality which has caused people to give less attention to their own welfare and also that of their families. The mentality of giving more to the Church than one can afford caused hardship and has made serving the Church seemingly burdensome. Moreover, the Church seems to be silent on the hardship of the people, which can be interpreted as condoning the way giving is done as part of their service to God. This is through the demands of giving to the Church which is enforced by the practice of publicly announcing what has been given.

The message from the widow's offering and Jesus' response suggests important lessons that are to be considered appropriate for the Sinamoga CCCS parish as well as the CCCS. As this paper has pointed out, the widow's offering can be rightly interpreted to reflect discipleship. However, the alternative interpretation that Jesus' response strongly invokes a sense of lament suits the widow's situation and that of the CCCS.

Firstly, the amount of the poor widow's offering should become an encouraging message for the parishioners of the Sinamoga parish, as well as members of the CCCS, that they should not feel small or unworthy because they can only afford so much. It is not the amount of giving that matters most, it is rather the attitude of commitment to giving.

Secondly, Jesus words in appreciation of what the poor widow offers must be a vital message for the parish or the CCCS to greatly appreciate what the people can afford. In that case, parishioners will surely be able to balance his/her obligations to the family as well as to the Church.

Thirdly, Jesus in Mk. 12:41-44 recognizes the ill practices which contributed to the social situation of the widow being poor. It is a good message for Church ministers as well as CCCS leaders to be alert to some practices in the Church that caused embarrassment due to what people can afford. The Church ministers should also be sensitive to parishioners' feelings and prioritize their responsibility to them. They should recognize the hardships that people go through and address them through moral and ethical decisions that can alleviate hardships and burden. They should lead by example and reach out and share with those in need.

Fourthly, ministers should find an alternative way of acknowledging people's offerings. The practice of public announcement of offerings in church, as this paper has discussed puts

pressure, hardship, and even shame on people. In that regard, public announcement of offerings in church should be abandoned but rather issue receipts or put offerings in envelopes.

The sacrificial offering of the widow has been recognized by Jesus because he knew that soon he would also sacrifice his life for the sins of the world. It is the greatest offering that we should appreciate because it is the sole means for our salvation. It is the message of victory and the Good News that Jesus wants us to first and foremost publicly announce, instead of seeking our own pride and glory in what we do.

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