

**What Jesus said about divorce: A Samoan Christian biblical
interpretation of Matthew 19:1-12**

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Declaration

I declare that this work has not without due acknowledgment of any material that has been previously submitted for a degree or diploma in another institution. I also declare that the work has not used any material, heard or read, without proper acknowledgment of the source.

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ABSTRACT

Many questions have been raised among our church members regarding the allowing of divorce, in the Samoan society. One of these questions considers the allowing of divorce, as contradicting Jesus' prohibition of divorce as demonstrated in his teachings. Contrary to this, according to some Samoans, is that Jesus' teachings on divorce actually reveal allowing it. This debate is not new. The subject of divorce was debated by some Church Fathers and Reformers. According to the Church Fathers, Jesus' words on divorce show the prohibition of divorce. However for the Reformers, Jesus does allow divorce; an interpretation that has considered the context of the biblical text in which Jesus' words on divorce is placed. The Reformers' interpretation is explored in this study in relation to my Samoan Christian perspective of gender equality. It considers the recognition of women in divorce-making. My Samoan Christian perspective comes from my understanding of egalitarianism in the sister-brother relationship in the *faa-Samoa*, and the inclusion of everyone in becoming a member of God's family. This perspective challenges the subordination of women in the husband-wife relationship. This thesis will be concerned with an inclusive re-reading of Jesus' words on divorce in Matthew 19:1-12. From a Samoan Christian perspective that emphasises both inclusion and egalitarianism. Incorporating Vernon K. Robbins' interpretational approach of 'socio-rhetorical criticism', the meaning and significance of Jesus' words on divorce as found in Matthew 19:1-12, will reveal a rhetorical composition of this text. This interpretation will show Jesus' words on divorce as recognising women's roles and voices in divorce-making. Discussion presented herein will explore the inclusion of women, in sharing roles with their counterparts in the husband-wife relationship.

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May God's blessings be upon you all!

DEDICATION

*This work is dedicated to my dear wife, Faalua
and my precious children; Brandon, Christopher, Desmond, Dawson, Kimberly, and
Prince.*

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INTRODUCTION

Patriarchy is a socio-cultural system in the Mediterranean world in which the rights of a woman were subordinate to that of a man in various ways. This system was apparent in the time of Jesus' ministry. In this system the husband rules over all matters of the family. Patriarchy existed in the biblical period and exists in our contemporary time. As a cultural system in contemporary Samoa, it slowly nullifies the equal and shared-roles of men and women in Samoa; the roles that ensure peace and harmony in their community.

This study will be concerned with the reading of Matthew 19:1-9 from a Samoan Christian perspective; a biblical interpretation that considers my view as a reader. In this investigation I will re-examine Jesus' teaching on divorce in the Gospel of Matthew, addressing the issue of women in marriage and divorce in Samoan society. The focus of our interpretation is based on Jesus' challenge to the subordination of women in divorce making from the perspective of a brother in the 'sister-brother relationship'¹ in *faa-Samoa*.

The sister and brother relationship exercises egalitarianism. They share equal roles in the social, cultural, political and religious life of the Samoan family and village. These roles continue to be practised by both the sister and the brother when they move on to marriage life. Unfortunately these roles were/are being destroyed by male dominancy in our society. The fundamental question is; 'how does Jesus bring recognition and integrity to a woman in the husband-wife relationship?' Jesus says: "*And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.*" (Matthew 19:9) Matthew states that Jesus does not say anything about the husband having the authority to put into effect a divorce. Jesus only reveals the grounds why divorce should be made. Matt. 19:1-9, indicates that both women and men are implicitly mentioned as having the egalitarian roles in deciding divorce. It stresses the significance of the function of sharing egalitarian roles in marriage, within the Christian community.

My knowledge and experience of the recognition of women in our Samoan society will shape a reading framework that identifies and recognises the voice of women

¹Penelope Schoeffel, "The Samoan Concept of *Feagaiga* and its Transformation," in *Tonga and Samoa: Images of Gender and Polity*, (ed. Judith Huntsman; Canterbury: Canterbury University Press, 1995), 85-105. This article explains the significance of the sister-brother relationship in the social and religious life of a Samoan family and polity.

in the text. This study will explore how egalitarianism is identified in divorce. Man has the authority to divorce his wife contradicts Jesus' proclamation of egalitarianism in God's kingdom. To elucidate egalitarianism as the critical element, this study will use 'socio-rhetorical criticism' as the methodology. This criticism integrates women as the 'other' in the Samoan context, the world of the 'other' in the world of the text and the world of the 'other' in the author's world.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter One will outline my Samoan perspective and the socio-rhetorical approach used in this study. This chapter provides a brief literature review on some of the Church Fathers and Reformers' views on divorce and remarriage. The conclusion of this chapter evokes the interpretation that will be explored by this paper. Chapter Two begins with the interpretation focusing on the innertexture and the intertexture parts of the reading framework. Chapter Three gives the social and cultural texture, and the ideological texture interpretations. The final chapter brings forth the conclusion of the paper by discussing how the Samoan component of my Samoan Christian perspective is identified in the analysis of the text (Matt 19:1-9).

CHAPTER ONE: METHODOLOGY, AND BRIEF LITERATURE

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section One deals with the methodology used in this paper. Before putting the methodology into practice it is important to review the Church Fathers and Reformers' traditional views on divorce and remarriage. This review leads the thesis to the beginning point of our interpretation. Section Three provides a conclusion.

I. Methodology

The methodology will be explained in two parts. The first part will deal with the Samoan Christian perspective. This perspective will be utilised to read the text. In the second part, a brief explanation will be given of 'socio-rhetorical criticism'; the interpretational tool used to interpret the text.

A. My Samoan Christian perspective

My objective is to reveal that Jesus' teachings on divorce in Matthew 19:1-9, suggest that the husband should treat his wife with respect in marriage and even in the case of a divorce. Jesus' words correspond to my understanding of that of the *faa-Samoa*,² and the basis of Christian teachings concerning the recognition of women. This is my situation or location as a reader in the Samoan Christian community.

From my understanding of the cultural protocol of the *faa-Samoa*, the egalitarian understanding of sharing of roles between men and women is practised in the sister-brother relationship³ of a Samoan family. The sister-brother relationship is known as the *feagaiga*.⁴ This relationship is special and considered the most significant aspect of the male-female dualism in the Samoan culture.⁵ It is regarded as a covenant between brothers and sisters which implies a powerful undertaking of the social and cultural roles for all male-female relations. For example, one of the brother's obligations is to consider

² *faa-Samoa* means Samoan cultural values.

³ Schoeffel, "The Samoan Concept of *Feagaiga* and its Transformation," 85-105. Schoeffel writes that since the arrival of the missionaries, the sister-brother relationship has undergone change because attention was given to husband-wife relationship.

⁴ This word means a bond between two people. In the Samoan context both the sister and brother are specially bonded by shared-responsibilities. The title is particularly given to the sister.

⁵ Lowell D Holmes, *Samoa Village* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1974), 18.

the interests of his sisters and their children. Failure to do so might give him and his descendants a curse. There is a belief in the practice of the sister-brother relationship in the *faa-Samoa* that the sister is considered to have the power to curse her brother.⁶

The family is the foundation of the social and religious life of every Samoan. It is the main learning context of the sister and brother before moving on to the community level. One of the learning objectives focuses on how a sister or a brother shares the undertaking of his/her responsibilities because failure to do so brings shame into the family.

The undertaking of these responsibilities is still expected to be carried out when both the brother and sister move on to the marriage stage of their lives. As a married woman, the sister is expected to fulfill her roles as a female which were nurtured in her family. She is expected also to treat her husband with respect.

The brother, as a married man should treat her wife with respect by providing all that is needed by his wife. He is supposed to treat her with the same respect he has for his sister because his children are considered as sacred children (*tama sa*) by his wife's family. He should regard his sister's children in the similar way. Both the sister and the brother share egalitarian roles, and if these roles are performed well, it should lead to the maintenance of harmony and well being of the family and the village.

As a believer of the Christian faith, I believe that the subordination of women contradicts the inclusive purpose of the gospel message. The inclusive purpose of the gospel is shown in Jesus' words to a member of the crowd, who told him his mother and brothers standing outside (Matthew 12:46-50). Jesus replied,

Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother. (Matt. 12:50)

The inclusive purpose of the gospel is also emphasised by Jesus in his answer to the Pharisees' questions regarding divorce in Matt. 19:1-12. It shows evidence of egalitarianism.

⁶J. W. Davidson, *Samoa mo Samoa: The Emergence of the Independent State of Western Samoa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 23.

Egalitarianism is a form of thinking that opposes hierarchical thought about human relationships in society.⁷ It is about people having equal power in sharing different roles and responsibilities.⁸ Egalitarianism in the New Testament opposes fatherhood because it represents the patriarchal tradition.⁹ It accentuates ‘personhood’ where everyone relates to each other on the same level.¹⁰ Egalitarianism is used in this study to describe equal sharing of roles and responsibilities. Exercising power and authority in egalitarianism entails the obligation to serve people, not to oppress them.

That integration of my Samoan and Christian understanding formulates my Samoan Christian perspective. To explore egalitarianism and inclusion in the text requires an interpretational approach, so I have chosen Vernon K. Robbins’ ‘socio-rhetorical’ approach to further elaborate on my investigation.

B. Socio-rhetorical criticism

1. What is socio-rhetorical criticism?

This interpretational approach seeks to identify the marginalised in the text. Socio-rhetorical criticism was developed by Vernon K. Robbins as an attempt to integrate social science with more literary based advances in biblical studies.¹¹ His goal is to develop a rhetorical approach that combines literary, social, cultural and ideological issues in texts. Socio-rhetorical criticism integrates the world of the text, the world behind the text and the world of the reader.¹² The approach focuses on finding the meaning of the text by examining the values, convictions and beliefs in the world of the text.¹³ It examines how those values help shape meaning and as readers, we compare or contrast them with the world in which we live in, in order to make meaning relevant to

⁷Richard Bauckham, “Egalitarianism and Hierarchy in the Biblical Traditions,” in *Interpreting the Bible: Historical and Theological Studies in Honour of David F. Wright* (ed. A. N. S. Lane; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1997), 259.

⁸Bauckham writes, “...for egalitarian thought, human beings are fundamentally equal, such that one is entitled to status and privilege above others...the exercise of power and authority...is justifiable only as a responsibility to be exercised on behalf of all and in the interest of all.” Bauckham, “Egalitarianism and Hierarchy,” 259-260.

⁹Bauckham, “Egalitarianism and Hierarchy,” 269.

¹⁰Bauckham, “Egalitarianism and Hierarchy,” 269-270.

¹¹ Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to the Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996), 1.

¹² Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 1-2.

¹³ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 1.

us.¹⁴ For the purposes of this study, socio-rhetorical criticism will bring my world as a Samoan man in a Samoan society into dialogue with a socio-rhetorical reading of Matthew 19:1-9, to resist the dominating perspective and practices communicated in the text.¹⁵

2. Vernon K. Robbins' stages of socio-rhetorical reading

Vernon K. Robbins' socio-rhetorical approach has four stages. They are: 'innertexture', 'intertexture', 'social and cultural texture', and 'ideological texture'.

(i) Innertexture

An innertextual analysis focuses on exploring the ways the text uses words, such as word structures, devices, contraries, and modes of text.¹⁶ For this study, in the examination of the innertexture, a progressive texture is revealed in the Matthean presentation of Jesus' ministry in chapters 18 and 19. The texture discloses the husband's recognition of his wife in marriage and divorce.¹⁷

(ii) Intertexture

Intertexture is the second arena of Robbins' idea. It shows how "...the interpreter works in the area between the implied author and the text, not between the text and the reader."¹⁸ This part of the methodology looks at how other phenomena speak through Matt 19:1-12, or how the implied author used them to render Jesus' meaning of marriage and divorce. In other words, it indicates how the implied author used the phenomena to show Jesus' recognition of women in making their voice heard in marriage and divorce.

The task of this section of the methodology is to identify how other phenomena speak through Matthew 19:1-12. Firstly, this part of the analysis will look at Matthew's recitation of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. It will look at the use of contraries in the text

¹⁴ Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 26.

¹⁵ Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse*, 11. Robbins states here that this is one of the goals of socio-rhetorical criticism.

¹⁶ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 7.

¹⁷ "Progressive texture resides in sequences (progressions) of words and phrases throughout the unit." See Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 9.

¹⁸ Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourses*, 96.

(Matthew 19:1-12) in the form of an enthymeme, to find what the language of the text presents. Secondly, it will explore Matthew's recontextualisation of Deuteronomy 24:1. Matthew's recitation and recontextualisation of these texts from the Old Testament brings in the significance of recognising women's voice in divorce.

(iii) Social and cultural texture

Any authors' construction of a text is influenced by the world around him/her. Given that Matthew is a gospel written in the first century somewhere in the Mediterranean world, indicates that Matthew must have an understanding of the Roman imperial system. This section focuses on analysing the social and cultural values embedded in the social and cultural codes of the language of the text.¹⁹ It explores Matthew's use of rhetorical compositions commonly used and understood in the first century, such as the rhetoric of praise and blame. This reflects the social and cultural values of "honour and shame."²⁰ It conveys the idea of Matthew resisting the social and cultural values of the first century Mediterranean society which was largely influenced by Roman imperialism.

(iv) Ideological texture

Robbins states that the "ideological texture concerns the biases, opinions, preferences, and stereotypes of a particular reader."²¹ Here, I will show the biases and opinions of the Roman imperial and Jewish worlds reflected in the text. I will attempt to identify the difference in the egalitarian sister-brother relationship of Samoan culture, and in the egalitarianism shown in the exceptive phrase according to Jesus. This part of the reading framework will define systems of differentiation that make dominant persons subordinate others. This section will discuss the contrast between the Roman Empire and the lordship of Christ where God is the head of the whole creation.

Before we put this framework into practice, it is important to look at a brief literature review of the Church Fathers and Reformers' interpretations of the texts

¹⁹ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 71.

²⁰ One of the characteristics of the Mediterranean Families and societies. Halvor Moxnes, "What is Family: Problems in Constructing Early Christian families," in *Constructing Early Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor* (ed. Halvor Moxnes; London: Routledge, 1997), 20.

²¹ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of the Texts*, 71.

concerning divorce. Their findings and interpretations have greatly influenced the ways marriage and divorce have been understood in the church. This review will direct us to the beginning of our interpretation.

II. Brief literature review

The traditional view on divorce and remarriage is that Jesus forbade divorce except in the case of adultery, and that he forbade remarriage. This view can be traced to the Church Fathers and the writings of the Reformers.

A. Church Fathers

The Church Fathers basically looked at the Gospel traditions about divorce in an uncomplicated way. Considering the final form of the divorce texts in the Bible, the Church Fathers suggested that it is wrong to divorce, with the only exception when adultery is involved. From further elaboration of their interpretation it is also wrong to remarry in any case.²² The scope of this paper will not be able to mention all the Church Fathers and their interpretations of divorce, and I have selected only a few for examination.

Justin Martyr had a viewpoint that it is sinful to remarry. Concerning chastity, Martyr said that a husband who looks upon a woman with lust has committed adultery with her in his heart and whoever marries her also commits adultery.²³ Martyr also suggested that a Christian woman who marries an unbeliever should divorce him because of the threat of being spoilt by his sin. Thus, in this case, the woman should be allowed to remarry.²⁴ Martyr did not say whether the church would have allowed such a remarriage.

Theophilus quoted Jesus' words along with Proverbs to emphasise the biblical teaching on chastity.²⁵ He concluded that the man who wants to court a married woman is

²² In recent years some scholars supported this view in their interpretations of the Matthean divorce texts such as William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce: The Problem with the Evangelical Consensus* (Nashville: Nelson, 1984). They maintain that the exception clause in Matthew grants the right to put away an offending partner in marriage, but not the right to remarry.

²³ Philip Schaff, ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 38 vols. (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1886-90), 1.15.1-4.

²⁴ Schaff, *A Select Library of the Nicene*, Justin, 2.2.1-8.

²⁵ David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdsman, 2002), 243.

guilty of adultery. Theophilus allowed divorce on the ground of fornication, but said nothing about remarriage.

Clement of Alexandria's view on divorce was not easy to make because of the struggle he had between his ascetic feelings and the need to have children. However, he concluded that there must be marriage, and passion should be confined within marriage. He stated that punishment for adultery should be acute.²⁶ Clement of Alexandria also took on the argument that those who are put together in marriage, should not be allowed to break that union except in fornication. He talks about divorce in terms of separation; so the one who remarries while the other is still alive is considered to commit fornication. The man who puts away his wife makes her an adulteress and he who takes a woman that has been put away also commits adultery. Clement further suggests that the adulterous partner should be put to death. This penalty can be overturned in the case of repentance. Clement suggests that remarriage should be avoided to allow room for reconciliation, though he does not state whether or not to allow remarriage if reconciliation occurs.

Origen struggled with the ideas as to why the New Testament seemed to have a fundamentally different teaching about divorce from the teachings of the Old Testament. Origen viewed that Moses looked at it all wrong because he was just stating his own opinion.²⁷ However, he stated that in the Old Testament, God is portrayed as a divorcee. For Origen, God as a divorcee is also shown in the New Testament. It is applied to Christ divorcing Jerusalem, who showed her adultery when she chose to free Barabbas. Origen further said that when Christ marries the Church, this would most probably be a remarriage after a divorce. Origen did not say much about remarriage of humans because he looked upon Christ as being above the Law. However, he concluded that remarriage for humans should be allowed only after the death of a former spouse.

Augustine along the similar lines as Origen, established the theological basis for the teaching that the only ground for divorce is adultery. Such a divorce does not allow remarriage because only death can break the marriage union. He added that the unbreakable nature of the marriage bond is appropriated by the sacramental nature of

²⁶ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, 244.

²⁷ Harold Smith, *Ante-Nicene Exegesis of the Gospels*, Translations of Christian Literature Series 6 (London: The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; New York and Toronto: Macmillan, 1925-29), 4:216.

marriage. Similar to baptism which symbolically represents a marriage to Christ, human marriage is a permanent union.²⁸

Thomas Aquinas sided with Augustine with regards to marriage as a sacrament. Aquinas looked at marriage as a cause of grace.²⁹ To Aquinas, this was the final basis for understanding marriage as everlasting. This basis evokes his belief that any reference to divorce in the New Testament should be referred only to separation. Separation which Aquinas talked about is that the husband and wife are still married but should not lie or sleep together unless reconciliation is made. It means that in spite of marriage problems marriage should still be upheld.

Two points, I would like to make from the Church Fathers' views on divorce. Firstly, the Church Fathers from their strong personal ascetic feelings allow marriage. For divorce, they seem to suggest that they do not allow divorce but separation in accordance with the exceptive clause mentioned in the gospels. Remarriage is avoided in order to allow for the process of reconciliation and repentance. Secondly, they did not mention anything about who is to authorise separation. However, if this is not a subject of discussion to them, then the assumption is, they are advocates of the traditional view. That is, 'the husband authorises divorce.'

B. Reformers

The Reformation initiated a fresh look at the Scripture, and brought forth another dimension into the discussion of Christian doctrines. In the area of divorce and remarriage this new approach was a result of a wide diversity of interpretations, which were all biblically based. It was clear to most theologians that there were weaknesses in the traditional approach.

Erasmus was one of the prominent Reformers whose publication of his Greek New Testament in 1516 was an important source used to answer some questions regarding the debate on divorce and remarriage.³⁰ He pointed out that the Roman

²⁸ David Atkinson, *To Have and To Hold: The Marriage Covenant and the Discipline of Divorce* (London: Collins, 1979), 42.

²⁹ Alex R. G. Deasley, *Marriage and Divorce in the Bible and the Church* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2000), 205.

³⁰ David L. Smith, "Divorce and Remarriage from the Early Church to John Wesley," *TJ* 11 (1990): 134.

Catholic concept of marriage as a sacrament was founded on the Vulgate translation of *μυστήριον* in Ephesians 5:32 as *sacramentum*. This translation made sense in early centuries when *sacramentum* was considered in the broader sense as “symbol” or “mystery”. In the Middle Ages the theological meaning of *μυστήριον* in the context of the kingdom of God, had become widely accepted as grace.

Erasmus also took a new look at the divorce texts and tried to interpret them in the context in which they occurred. He suggested that the divorce sayings like those in Matthew 19, were spoken to disciples who acted on behalf of truly entrusted members of the kingdom of God, rather than to imperfect ones. In the time of the Reformation almost every member of the Christian community was regarded as a member of the kingdom of God. It was difficult to relate these perfect regulations to an imperfect society.

Erasmus also pointed out that none of the proof texts such as Romans 7:2-3 and 1 Corinthians 7:39 reveals that marriage ends only with death. They are in fact dealing with divorce. Erasmus finishes by saying that Jesus’ exceptive clause on divorce for adultery as shown in Matthew 19:3-9 allows divorce and remarriage, and Paul also allows divorce and remarriage when an unbeliever has left his/her partner.

Luther agreed with the Church Fathers that only death can end a marriage, but his view differed concerning the argument that the adulterer or unbeliever was spiritually dead.³¹ To Luther, adultery deserved death punishment in the Old Testament, and so an adulterer could be considered dead in God’s eyes, as was also the unbeliever. Thus, he claimed that remarriage during the lifetime of a former spouse should be allowed. Luther allowed divorce with remarriage on the two grounds advocated by Erasmus; they are adultery and desertion by an unbeliever. Similar to Erasmus, Luther saw this as divorce that permits remarriage.

C. Beginning point of our interpretation

The Reformers allowed divorce and remarriage on the understanding that the one who commits adultery is spiritually dead. So the innocent party should be allowed to remarry. The Reformers’ emphasis on accentuating the context of the text is significant in presenting other interpretation concerning Jesus’ teachings on divorce. The point of

³¹ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage*, 260-61.

direction this paper sees as a focal point for analysis follows the view of Erasmus regarding divorce, who interprets the divorce texts in relation to the context of the text. In his interpretation of the divorce texts in Matthew 19, he suggested that the sayings in this text were addressed to disciples who represented truly committed members of the kingdom, rather than to ordinary, imperfect ones. Erasmus did not elaborate on this point. This paper offers an interpretation that will explore this point. Exploring this view will reveal that Jesus' words on divorce in Matthew 19:1-12 illustrate how a husband, as a true member of God's kingdom should treat his wife in marriage.

III. Conclusion

The traditional view forwarded by the Church Fathers does not mention anything about how the husband and wife should undertake their rights in divorce. It was not the focus of their discussion. Instead, they stressed that divorce is allowed, but give time to both parties for reconciliation and repentance. They did not say whether or not remarriage is permitted if there is reconciliation. It is clear that the Church Fathers understood Jesus' teaching to be an absolute prohibition of remarriage after divorce.

The Reformers on the other hand respect the Church Father's view but add that the one who commits adultery and the unbeliever are spiritually dead. Therefore, divorce and remarriage should be allowed for the innocent party. They argued that the Matthean exception clause allows for divorce and remarriage, when one partner commits adultery. The Reformers' interpretation derives from their accentuation of the context of the text in which the divorced sayings are mentioned.

This paper emphasises this approach in exploring Matthew 19:1-12 from a Samoan Christian perspective. The Samoan Christian perspective shows egalitarianism as a characteristic of the relationship between men and women. The perspective is rooted in the importance of the egalitarian sharing of roles in the sister-brother relationship in the *faa-Samoa* and in the inclusion of everyone in becoming a member of God's family. That sense of inclusion or egalitarianism is reflected in Jesus' teachings on divorce in Matthew 19:1-12. The inclusive language of Matthew 19:1-12 goes in conjunction with chapter eighteen. It portrays Jesus' proclamation for the recognition of women in marriage and divorce. This is the main exploration of this paper.

CHAPTER TWO: INNERTEXTURE AND INTERTEXTURE

This chapter is divided into two sections. Section One deals with the innertextual interpretation and Section Two explores how some texts from the Old Testament speak through Matt 19:1-12, or how the implied author used them to render Jesus' meaning of marriage and divorce. The innertexture stage will show how the language of the Matthean Gospel communicates the objective of this thesis, that is, Jesus' proclamation of God's *basileia* reveals that the husband should respect his wife's right in divorce-making.³² Exploring the innertexture is revealing that chapters 18 and 19 in Charles H. Lohr's chiastic structure of the Matthean gospel, shows a narrational and progressive texture that displays how the husband should acknowledge his wife based on Jesus' words on divorce. The intertexture stage will show how Genesis 1:27; 2:24 and Deuteronomy 24:1 elaborate the meaning and significance of Jesus' answer (Matt 19:4-6, 8-9), to the Pharisees' questions on divorce (Matt 19:3, 7). This explains more clearly the difference between the Pharisees' and Jesus' understanding of divorce. This section deals with the intertextual reading made under these two modes of intertextuality: recitation and recontextualisation. The final part of this section will state whether the intertextual elements have any impact on what Jesus says about divorce. The chapter will end with a conclusion.

I. Innertexture

A. Chapter 19:1-9 in Charles H. Lohr's structure

There are various structures of the Matthean Gospel by which to make sense of the Matthean emphases.³³ In this thesis I have chosen Charles H. Lohr's structure³⁴ because according to the evangelist it displays the key meaning of the gospel, that is chapter 13 or the parables of the kingdom. These parables speak of the importance of

³² It is important to point out here in the beginning of this thesis before the interpretation starts, that this paper is familiar with the ongoing debate on the discussion of the views of the Hillel and Shammai schools regarding the permission of divorce as shown in Markus Bockmuehl, "Matthew 5. 32; 19. 9. In The Light of Pre-Rabbinic Halakah," *NTS* 35: (1989): 291-295. It is not the purpose of this work to be part of that debate.

³³ For examples: The *Geographical-Biographical Model* proposed by W. C. Allen; the *Fivefold Discourse Model* attributed to W. Bacon; and the *Biographical and Theological Model* proposed by N. B. Stonehouse. See Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 529-530.

³⁴ This structure is a *Chiastic/Concentric Model*.

hearing and obedience as a way of becoming a member of God's kingdom. According to Lohr, chapter 13 is the central point that other teachings and works of Jesus revolve around. Lohr's consideration of chapter 13 as the central point of the Matthean presentation of Jesus' ministry, is the emphasis of the innertextual interpretation in conjunction with Matt 19:1-12 the main text. Those chapters that are the foci of this part of our exploration, chapters 18 and 19, revolve around the central point (chapter 13) of the chiastic structure.

The chiastic Structure by C. H. Lohr

<i>"A 1-4 Birth and beginnings</i>	<i>Narrative</i>
<i>B 5-7 Blessings, entering the kingdom</i>	<i>Discourse</i>
<i>C 8-9 Authority and invitation</i>	<i>Narrative</i>
<i>D 10 Mission Discourse</i>	<i>Discourse</i>
<i>E 11-12 Rejection by this generation</i>	<i>Narrative</i>
<i>F 13 Parables of the kingdom</i>	<i>Discourse</i>
<i>E' 14-17 Acknowledgement by disciples</i>	<i>Narrative</i>
<i>D' 18 Community discourse</i>	<i>Discourse</i>
<i>C' 19-22 Authority and invitation</i>	<i>Narrative</i>
<i>B' 23-25 Woes, coming of the kingdom</i>	<i>Discourse</i>
<i>A' 26-28 Death and rebirth</i>	<i>Narrative</i> ³⁵

According to Lohr's structure chapter 18 is called the 'community discourse' and chapter 19 is entitled 'authority and invitation.' We find in the arrangement of these chapters a connection which evokes the meaning of Jesus' words on divorce. Therefore,

³⁵Charles H. Lohr, "Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew," *CBQ* 23 (1961): 427. This structure is part of Lohr's attempt to identify the oral techniques Matthew used in the actual composition of his gospel.

the innertextual interpretation will begin from chapter 18. Chapter 18 anticipates Jesus' understanding of divorce in chapter 19. In these parts of Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom, the narrator through Jesus reminds the Christian community,³⁶ of the qualities required by members of God's kingdom which should be shown and demonstrated in how Christian community members relate to one another. As Donald Hagner writes the community discourse in chapter 18 is devoted:

“...to church order or church discipline...where specific instructions are provided for dealing with a member of the community who has offended another person. (It) concerns relations between members of the community dealing in turn with such particular matters as humility, the avoidance of causing others to stumble, and the importance of forgiveness.”³⁷

This discourse implies that the type of community the narrator talks about is similar to any other Christian community that is made up of different kinds of relationships such as parents-children relationship, a mother-father relationship, a sister-brother relationship, and a husband-wife relationship. For these different forms of relationships, to become a true Christian community they should treat each other with respect and honour. It is a practice that involves recognising each other's roles and values, where each member should undertake his/her role for the interest of those in that relationship he/she is adhered to and for all members of the community. This is an exercise of egalitarianism in a Christian community.

The implied author continues to underscore in this part of Jesus' ministry the importance of hearing and obeying Jesus' teachings. They continue to emphasise how one should become a member of God's kingdom as proclaimed in the parables of the kingdom in the central point of the Matthean story (Matt. 13). In review of Lohr's structure, the placement of Jesus' words on who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (chapters 18 and 19) towards the end of Jesus' ministry, is a good time to remind the disciples afresh the qualities required in God's kingdom. The expected and acceptable actions are consequences of obeying Jesus' teachings concerning God's kingdom.

³⁶ Although the term Christian community is not explicitly mentioned in the text to identify the community in which Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom is made to, the Matthean scholars refer to that community as the Christian community. This is also used in this thesis. For example: Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (WBC 33B; Texas: Word Books, 1995), 514.

³⁷ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 514.

From a literary point of view, Matthew 18:1-19:15 is a rhetorical unit³⁸ and its placement in this part of the Matthean story asserts treating one another with respect as a characteristic of a member of God's *basileia* or as the way of life in a Christian community.³⁹ This is revealed in Jesus' use of the husband-wife relationship as an example to demonstrate that characteristic in 19:1-12. This demonstration affirms the husband as a member of the kingdom of God if he hears and obeys God's ways of honouring his wife. The narrational and progressive texture of the rhetorical unit reveals this objective. The analysis of the rhetorical unit is based on the following threefold structure.

- (1) Beginning 18:1-35
- (2) Middle 19:1-12
- (3) End 19:13-15

The unit begins with Jesus' words on God's ways, as a guideline to direct the lives of members of the Christian community to ensure a life of peace and harmony. These ways are demonstrated in the middle of the unit and stresses the words of Jesus, on the undertaking of the husband-wife relationship. In this way, divorce is the last option that should be taken if reconciliation fails in a marriage. Moreover, Jesus' words on the husband-wife relationship also indicates that there is another option for those who do not want to get married such as those who are considered as eunuchs.

The end of the unit (vv.13-15) recapitulates the whole purpose of Jesus' teaching in this part of Matthew's story. Jesus accentuates again the necessary way that will make a person in any relationship become a member of God's kingdom. That is, to be like children. He blesses them before he moves on to the next part of his ministry.

In this rhetorical unit, there is a rhetorical situation that suggests social and

³⁸ The rhetorical unit is attributed to Jesus. The narrator, in the beginning of the unit establishes Jesus as the main character, who will narrate the characteristics of the least as the member of God's kingdom and showing them in the husband-wife relationship. These characteristics are emphasized in verses 13-15. Thus, for this paper, it argues that Jesus' words on divorce cannot be interpreted as a text isolated from chapter 18:1-35 and 19:13-15. For the meaning of the 'rhetorical unit', see George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 33-34.

³⁹ Daniel J. Harrington, S. J., *The Gospel of Matthew* (Sacra Pagina 1; Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1991), 265.

cultural codes of the environment that shapes the meaning of the text.⁴⁰ Jesus is called upon by the Pharisees regarding the issue of divorce. It is a question which aims to challenge Jesus' understanding of the Jewish laws. This situation evokes the rhetorical problem⁴¹ that puzzles the reader; that is there is uncertainty in the text as to what Jesus says about divorce. This is caused by Jesus' direct words to prohibit divorce in verses 4-6, in contrast to Moses' allowing divorce which is what the Pharisees argued. The uncertainty is further made by Jesus' exceptive words on divorce in verse 9 which evokes a contradiction to his former statement. The exception suggests that divorce after all is allowed. Exploring Matt. 19:1-12 in conjunction with chapter 18:1-35 and 19:13-15 would clarify that uncertainty.

B. Narrational and Progressive texture in Matthew 18:1-19:15.

The arrangement of chapter 18 and Jesus' sayings on marriage and divorce in chapter 19 has a connection. In this part of the Matthean story, the teaching, preaching and healing of Jesus' ministry evolves around the theological idea of 'the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.' The implied author in chapter 18 speaks of the way the husband and wife should treat each other in accordance with the will of God, if their marriage relationship breaks down. Those ways are the characteristics of the greatest member of the kingdom of heaven.

The rhetorical unit is arranged to show clearly the significance of encouraging peace and harmony in different kinds of relationships in the Christian community. The arrangement begins with Jesus, being the most important character whom the disciples went seeking, in order to understand teachings concerning the greatest in the kingdom of God. In approaching Jesus, it was apparent to them that Jesus was a competent speaker whose character reflected the moral excellence and passion. It was also evident that he possessed wisdom and the power of knowledge. The narrator, through this movement in the beginning of this unit persuades the hearers/readers that the main actor and speaker of

⁴⁰ According to Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 35; the rhetorical situation "is a situation under which an individual is called upon to make some response: the response made is conditioned by the situation and in turn has some possibility of affecting the situation of what follows from it."

⁴¹ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 36.

this event is Jesus. Thus, the message of becoming the greatest in the kingdom of heaven he preaches is important.

In the beginning of chapter 18, the narrator states the time of Jesus and his disciples' movement in this time of Jesus' ministry. The words *At that time* refer to the time when Jesus was talking with his disciples in Capernaum (Matt. 17:24) regarding the paying of taxes to the temple, and it is the same day in which Jesus speaks of the characteristics of the greatest in the kingdom of heaven in chapters 18 and 19.

In verses 2 to 6, Jesus speaks of the reality of becoming the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. It is revealed and practised in a relational manner. In these verses, Jesus speaks of two kinds of people in a relationship acceptable to being members of God's kingdom. The first should be like a little child. A little child conveys an image of a humble person (vv. 3-4).⁴² The second welcomes that little child (v. 5). Verse 6 reveals the consequences of those who do not choose to live by those qualities. The implication of their failure to behave in such a way is that they are blamed for alleviating peace and harmony in the Christian community. Thus, they should be drowned in the depths of the sea (v. 6). This is followed by the narrator's showing of the reason why people fail to accept those ways of God's kingdom (vv. 7-9). It is sin caused by things from the world and it is the reason why Jesus woes the world in verse 7.

In verses 10-14, the implied author returns to emphasising 'welcoming' one another in human relationships practised by not looking down on the little ones. The little ones can be symbolically referred to the disadvantaged or the unrecognised people in the community or society in which Jesus is undertaking his ministry. Naturally, the mothers are expected to be with their children.⁴³ Thus, Jesus' words, 'not to look down on the little ones' implicitly send a message to the patriarchal society that in the kingdom of

⁴² The child in the Graeco-Roman is without power and significance. See David de Silva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 185-187. L. A. Oepke, "παῖς, παιδίον, παιδαριον, τέκνον, τέκνιον, βρεφός," *TDNT* 5:836-653. John Wall, "Human Rights in Light of Childhood," *IJCR* 16 (2008): 523-543. In the Christian community the child is the important task of the community. The community is to support the followers of Christ, their wives and their children. Oepke, *TDNT* 5:649. See also, Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdsman, 1992), 458-459.

⁴³ As mentioned in the previous footnote, in the Graeco-Roman world the children have no place in the families. They live life under the authority of their fathers. Naturally, the mothers are expected to be with their children. So Jesus' use of children in his ministry to put through a message of his kingdom to his disciples or crowds who followed him implicitly includes mothers or the wives.

God, the little children, a group that also includes mothers and wives are welcomed and recognised by God. Hence, the dominant groups in society should follow God's ways of accepting 'the so-called little ones' into their social and religious decision makings.

How the little ones are to be recognised are portrayed in how a shepherd commits himself to finding the lost sheep from his flock (18:10-14). The shepherd will leave the ninety-nine sheep and seek the lost one until he finds it. Thus, the narrator presents the little ones as the most important members to the Father in heaven (v. 14). The implied author, through Jesus in this part of the rhetorical unit keeps reminding the disciples the importance of undertaking any kind of human relationships in peace and harmony.

No human relationship remains perfect all the time, because theologically as Matthew presents, the evil continues to find ways to ruin humankind's reception of God's love and mercy.⁴⁴ But God's sovereignty continues to prevail. This is shown in verses 15-19, in which the implied author reveals a process of how a Christian community uses God's ways to deal with broken relationships. The process is that the affected party should talk alone to the person who has caused disorder to his/her relationship (v. 15). The Greek verb *ελεγχον*⁴⁵ only appearance is found here occurs in verse 15 and its meaning asserts the importance of dealing with the problem privately for the sake of the accused. It upholds peace and harmony in the affected-relationship and community. Its meaning "is not to scold someone or to abuse them verbally for their conduct but rather to bring the offensive matter to their attention, in the hope that they will repent of their actions and be restored to the community."⁴⁶ This way upholds peace and harmony in the affected relationship and community. Thus, pointing out the fault of the person who sins

⁴⁴ The evil's involvement in countering Jesus' mission is shown in the beginning of the Matthean presentation of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was led up to the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (4:1). This testing of Jesus in his ministry is seen throughout his work such as his encountering of the oppositions of the Jewish leaders. One example is the Pharisees' testing of Jesus' understanding of divorce; our main text. According to Mark Powell, the main plot of Matthew's story of Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom is 'God's Plan and Satan Challenge.' See Mark Powell, *The Plot and Subplots of Matthew's Gospel*, *NTS* 38 (1992): 187-204. Mark Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 44-49.

⁴⁵ The parsing of this Greek verb is: second person, singular, Aorist, Imperative, Active of the verb *ελεγχω* translated into English: rebuke or convince of his fault. When this verb becomes a noun *ελεγχος*, it "means proof or persuasion rather correction." See F. B. Rostock, "*ελεγχω, ελεγξις, ελεγχος, ελεγμας*," *TDNT* 2:473-476. The verb and noun forms of *ελεγχω* suggest giving a chance to the person who sins against you to repent and on the other hand, it reflects forgiveness on the side of the affected person.

⁴⁶ Bostock, "*ελεγχω*," 473.

against you begins the process of reconciliation. If that way does not work then the concerned party should take someone with him/her as a witness to help settle the problem (v. 16). If not then take the matter to the church level (v. 17). The narrator suggests through this system that if the church deals with human-relationships in accordance with God's will, then it is considered acceptable to God in heaven (vv. 19-20). At this stage of the rhetorical unit, the implied author indicates the importance of the church in restoring peace and harmony to the affected relationships and more importantly the community.

Chapter 18 finishes with asserting the theological idea of forgiveness in order to accentuate the importance of bringing reconciliation into a relationship (vv. 21-35); another characteristic required in order to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus emphasizes the importance of forgiveness by ten times when Peter asked how he should forgive his brother who sinned against him seven times (vv.21-22). The narrator puts more emphasis on this characteristic in the conclusion of chapter eighteen, by pointing out Jesus' emphasis with regards to forgiveness as a response that comes from the heart.

After the narrator through Jesus preaches the characteristics of the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, chapter 19 now demonstrates those characteristics in the husband-wife relationship. This is the focus of the middle part of the rhetorical unit (Matt. 19:1-12), the main text which will be dealt with separately in section C.

The implied author concludes the rhetorical unit in verses 13-15 with the repeated usage of the image of children, to recapitulate the assertion of how human relationships should be undertaken in a church community. The image of children as a symbol of humility, was used in the beginning of the rhetorical unit to reveal the characteristic of a Christian community member, who recognises and welcomes other members; the little ones regardless of their status into social, family or religious relationships. In this concluding part of the rhetorical unit, Jesus commands the disciples to let those little children come to him. It is his continued-invitation or welcoming of the marginalised into his kingdom. This is shown by putting his hands on them and blessing them, before he leaves and moves on in his ministry. Leaving and moving on are his actions that indicate the end of the rhetorical unit.

C. Narrational arrangement of Matthew 19:1-12

The beginning of chapter 19 indicates that the narrator now moves the narration of Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom from Jesus' discourse on the characteristics of the greatest in God's kingdom to the narrative of deeds that will demonstrate those characteristics. This is illustrated in the husband-wife relationship in Matt. 19:1-12. The analysis of the main text is based on the following threefold structure.

Beginning	(19:1-2): Setting of the narrative
Middle	(19:3-9): Jesus and Pharisees' conversation on divorce
End	(19:10-12): Another option apart from marriage

The narrative begins with the narrator's description of the setting where the Pharisees test Jesus' understanding on divorce. It is in Judea on the other side of the river Jordan. This geographical change is not about distancing Jesus from other people whom he left in Galilee, but a transitional point to change the focus from Jesus' teachings on the greatest in the kingdom of God in chapter 18, to the reality of being the greatest in a human relationship. This time the narrator uses the husband-wife relationship in chapter 19 as an example. Jesus' movement in this transition is made on the same day he delivered the teachings on 'the greatest in the kingdom of God' (Matt. 18:1-35). The large crowds followed him, and he cured them there (Matt. 19:2). The disciples and Pharisees are not explicitly mentioned in the beginning of chapter 19, however the mentioning of the crowd suggests that the disciples and the Pharisees are other members of the crowds who followed Jesus. There is a debate concerning the ambivalent and ambiguous characteristics of the crowds in the Matthean gospel. However, this thesis has put together these views concerning the crowd in brief to bring forth the argument that will support the purpose of this task. Tilborg considers the crowd's following of Jesus as similar to the disciples' following which implies that the disciples are members of the crowd.⁴⁷ Wainwright speaks of the crowd's role from a feminist approach in her interpretation of the crowd's following in Matthew 4:25. She claims that the crowd's following, includes any member of the crowd as shown in the women and men who

⁴⁷ Sjeef Van Tilborg, *The Jewish Leaders in Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 164.

responded positively to Jesus' ministry.⁴⁸ Cousland interprets the crowd in the Matthean gospel as having various characteristics which he speaks of as having different identities such as Gentiles and Jews.⁴⁹ Thus, he considers Jewish leaders as members of the crowds. Putting all these arguments together, we take the point that the crowd in the Matthean gospel is composed of all different kinds of people and identities who follow Jesus. It includes men, women, children, disciples, Gentiles and Jews. Here we argue that in Matthew 19:1-12, the crowds mentioned in verse 1 include all those who followed Jesus, and those who were cured were the crowd members who responded positively to Jesus' proclamation of God's *basileia*. Hence, making verses 1 and 2 as the transitional point foreshadows the Pharisees' conversation with Jesus concerning divorce in verses 3-9.

The middle section begins with the Pharisees' approaching of Jesus testing him with these two questions.

- v. 3 *Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?*
- v. 7 *Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?*

Both questions are centered on the subject of divorce and Jesus' reply gives an understanding of divorce that contradicts the Jewish traditional understanding as voiced by the Pharisees. The Pharisees have been following Jesus from the start of his ministry and at times they tried to find ways to test him with an intention of catching him out according to Jewish Law and traditions. Thus, the Pharisees' test of Jesus' understanding of divorce in this time of the Matthean story is another plot to destroy him.

But Jesus' answers suggest that the sovereignty of God can not be challenged by any worldly power as shown in his creation (Genesis 3:1-19). Despite the evil's attempt to tempt the woman to eat the fruit of the tree that was forbidden by God in the Garden of Eden, God's sovereignty over evil was demonstrated in the end. Evil's power was not able to stop God's sovereignty from fulfilling his rule when Adam and Eve were punished for their disobedience. Jesus' answers to the Pharisees' questions reveal that God's sovereignty continues to reign over heaven and earth. The earthly rule of God's

⁴⁸ Elaine Mary Wainwright, *Towards a Feminist Critical Reading of the Gospel According to Matthew* (BZNW 60; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991), 80-81.

⁴⁹ J.R.C. Cousland, *The Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew* (NovTsup 102; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 50-51.

sovereignty is shown by Jesus' reply; ...*what God had joined together, let no one separate*. Here the narrator continues to emphasize the place of Jesus as Son of God in the ongoing relationship between Jesus and all those who follow him in God's *basileia*. Looking at the issue this way, Jesus' words on divorce also illustrates God's kingship through Jesus Christ.

Jesus' answers to the Pharisees' questions also show the Jewish leaders' failure in their attempt to find a way to accuse Jesus. Their usage of Moses' command in their second question is deliberate, with the intention of luring Jesus to accuse Moses for allowing men to give their wives certificates of dismissal. Instead Jesus' reply redirects the blame to them. It is their hard-heartedness that made Moses gave them a command of permitting divorce. Also, in this second reply of Jesus, the implied author mentions again the word 'beginning'. This repetition emphasises the point that the husband-wife relationship as in God's creation in the beginning, is meant to be an everlasting relationship. The arrangement of this passage ends with a comment by Jesus' disciples, anticipating Jesus' teaching on those who are called eunuchs. The narrator in this time of the story raises another important point which aims to declare the right or the need of those who are considered eunuchs.⁵⁰

The narrational and progressive arrangement of Matthew 19:1-12 reveals two important points. Firstly, the nature of the husband-wife relationship is everlasting. It is a relationship made by God therefore no one should separate them except for unchastity. There is an exception but only as the final option when reconciliation fails. Secondly, not all humans are meant to be in a husband-wife relationship such as the eunuchs and their choice of lifestyle must be respected. The first point will be explored further in the intertexture interpretation.

II. Intertexture

The intertexture looks at how God's creation of the male-female dualism relates to Jesus' teaching on divorce. It also looks at how the implied author tells Jesus' understanding of the husband-wife relationship, to render the inclusion of women in the

⁵⁰ This teaching on the eunuchs is peculiar to Matthew. For the scope of this study, we will not make a profound discussion on the subject of eunuch. We will concentrate only on the husband-wife relationship.

husband-wife relationship in God's kingdom. This section will briefly explore the implied author's recitation and recontextualisation of Genesis 1:27; 2:24 and Deuteronomy 24:1.

A. Recitation of Genesis. 1:27 and 2:24

In the analysis of Jesus' words on divorce in the previous section (innertexture), the reply of Jesus to the questions of the Pharisees (19:3) recites God's creation of male and female. What we find in Matt 19: 4-5 is a verbatim recitation of the LXX text. In the text, the narrator, through Jesus attributes the beginning of a male and female relationship as husband and wife to God. Such an attribution of a male-female relationship draws a Matthean audience into God's creation, in order to assist the hearers and readers to understand Jesus' words on divorce. The recitation reflects a contrast of understanding on marriage and divorce between the Pharisees and Jesus, where on one hand the Pharisees acts in accordance with Moses' law, whilst on the other hand Jesus bears the meaning of the male-female relationship in marriage in relation to God's creation. The recitation reminds hearers and readers that to be the greatest in God's kingdom one is required to carry out human relationships in peace and harmony.⁵¹

The arrangement of the text (Matt 19:1-12) indicates how the recitation functions in the progression of the narrative. The recitation is part of the middle section (19:3-9),⁵² which connects the setting of the narrative (19:1-2) to an alternative choice, that of being an eunuch. So the recitation is the main part of the narrative which helps make clear what Jesus really means about divorce. In doing so, the recitation of Gen 1:27 and 2:24 are used in the text as part of an 'enthymeme'.⁵³ An 'enthymeme' begins with a main premise and this is followed by minor premise and ends with a conclusion.

⁵¹ Fulata Moyo writes that Jesus' answers to the Pharisaic question addresses the point that in God's kingdom the husband and wife should complement each other in harmony, a harmony which reflects God's reign in a society. Fulata Moyo, "Can Divorce Be a Solution to Marriage Problems in a Christian Marriage?" *TER* 56 (2004): 437-447.

⁵² This middle section is referred to the threefold structure of Matthew 19:1-12 shown in the innertexture interpretation.

⁵³ An 'enthymeme' is a rhetorical syllogism that is deduced from general and special truths. Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric* (trans. J. H. Freese; Massachusetts: Harvard, 1991), xxxvi-xxxvii. Paul Holloway, "The Enthymeme as an Element of Style in Paul," *JBL* 120 (2001): 329-339. Holloway writes that an enthymeme in the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods are brief and pointed arguments from contraries.

The main premise of the recitation is;

“Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female...?’ (19:4)

This part of Jesus’ response recites the last words of Genesis 1:27; which are *made them male and female*. It counters the Pharisees’ question which asked of whether a man is allowed to divorce his wife on ‘any cause.’ Assuming that Matthew used Mark’s gospel as a source, he added the words *any cause*. The addition of this clause shows that Matthew has brought the question of divorce into a strict legal discussion more closely than Mark.

The pronoun *you* in the beginning of verse 4 refers to the Pharisees who asked Jesus the question about divorce. The phrase *the one who made them at the beginning* is an indication of God the creator, the one who has the ultimate authority and sovereignty over the husband-wife relationship. He is the one who created that relationship in the beginning. The phrase *made them male and female* are some of the actual words of Genesis 1:27 and their recitation in the major premise is to emphasise the male-female dualism.

The next part of the recitation is the minor premise which indicates how the male should undertake his role as part of God’s creation of that relationship.

‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ (19:5)

This is the minor premise of the ‘enthymeme’ which provides a reason why a man leaves his parents and joins his wife. The reason is indicated by the use of the conjunction *for* which implies that two become one flesh. In other words, a husband should join his wife because in a marriage relationship they are one. Therefore, as husband and wife, they are expected to live in peace and harmony. Humankind was created in the image of God, and God’s other purpose of creating the male and female dualism is for them to help each other; to be a companion and a helper to one another in accordance with God’s ways. Thus, the husband-wife relationship should be a strong and firm relationship because it should reflect the image of God.

The conclusion of the ‘enthymeme’ emphasises that if that relationship is founded in God, not one person or any worldly thing could destroy it.

‘So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate’ (19:6)

The conclusion suggests that being in a husband-wife relationship is a life commitment under God’s reign. It is stressed in an imperative mood, suggesting that it is God’s command. Although, its consequences are not mentioned, its warning mood is sufficient to suggest that God will deal with anyone outside the marriage who tries to separate a husband-wife relationship. Manifestly, the implied author through the inclusion of the recitations of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 in Jesus’ reply to the Pharisees accentuates the point that marriage is a relationship that is meant to be an everlasting relationship. The condition is that both the husband and wife carry out their relationship according to God’s will. However, not all husband-wife relationships remain joyous all the time. The implied author, then through Jesus comes up with an exception that is meaningful and realistic to the human world. This is shown in the implied author’s recontextualisation of Deuteronomy 24:1 in Matt 19:7-9.

B. Recontextualisation of Deuteronomy 24:1

The narrator, through Jesus, recontextualises Moses’ command in an implicit way to bring forth a word of hope for a husband-wife relationship to remain faithful in their marriage. It revolves around Jesus’ proclamation of God’s *basileia*. Before this recontextualisation is explored, we should first look at Moses’ law of divorce in the context of the book of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 24:1 talks about parts of the specific laws Moses gave to the people of Israel concerning how various human relationships should be exercised in Israel’s community. Verse 1 should be interpreted in relation to verses 2 to 4 because they speak mainly of the husband-wife relationship.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

v. 1 *Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house. (Deut. 24:1)*

v. 2 *and goes off to become another man’s wife.*

v. 3 *Then suppose the second man dislikes her, writes her a bill of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house (or the second man who married her dies)*
 v. 4 *her first husband, who sent her away, is not permitted to take her again to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that would be abhorrent to the Lord, and you shall not bring guilt on the land that the Lord your God is giving you as possession.*

The law of divorce in these verses speaks mainly of the husband's right as head of the family. It concentrates on the reasons why a man can dismiss his wife.⁵⁴ They are; 'when she does not please him and when he finds something objectionable about her.' As Bockmuehl explained, 'verse 4 reveals that the woman who is divorced second time is not allowed to remarry to her first husband because she is considered defiled by another man.'⁵⁵ Thus, sexual interferences with an existing marriage produce impurity. It is clearly shown in the command on divorce that the woman is the oppressed character in the process. This is also evident in how the husband dismisses his wife. He writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house.

However, the recontextualisation of that command in the Matthean gospel revises the recognition of women or a wife in the husband-wife relationship. This will be explained in three parts. Firstly, Moses' command on divorce is used by Jesus as a rhetorical of blame,⁵⁶ to counter the Pharisees' understanding that the command was not Moses' fault. Therefore Jesus' answer suggests that Moses' command of a certificate of dismissal is not a law to allow divorce, but as a resolution when reconciliation is not reached in a marriage.

Secondly, the Matthean text recontextualises Moses' command in a reversed way bearing God's kingship into the setting of Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees in the dispute. It evokes a contrast between Moses and Jesus. Jesus' answer in which he says the words '*in the beginning it was not so*' implicitly reveals God's sovereignty upon 'husband –wife relationship.' It reflects the image of God's kingship as universal, which implies that Jesus' saying of those words in the context of that setting (Jesus' encounter with Pharisees on divorce) indicates that they are truly words of God. Thus, the Matthean recontextualisation of Deuteronomy 24:1 identifies Jesus as king.

⁵⁴ See Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerds man, 1976), 304-305.

⁵⁵ Bockmuehl, "Matthew 5. 32; 19. 9," 294.

⁵⁶ I will elaborate on what the rhetorical of blame is in the social and cultural section of this thesis.

Thirdly, the Matthean text uses Moses' law as a contrast to Jesus' words on divorce to show clearly one of the important values of God's *basileia*. That is, everyone has equal power in sharing different roles and responsibilities. This is shown in these words of Jesus' answer:

"...Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery." (Matt 19:8-9)

The use of the conjunction *but* indicates the contrast between the Pharisees and Jesus' understandings on divorce. In the beginning there was no divorce because marriage is thought to be an eternal union. Jesus' view on divorce is amplified in the next sentence which implicitly shows the husband's recognition of his wife's voice in divorce making. The reply suggests that Jesus is talking to men - the husbands.⁵⁷ Jesus is warning the husband that divorcing his wife and marrying another woman is committing adultery. Here Jesus is saying that the reason which makes men divorce their wives is because of sin. Specifically, the husband's motive for divorcing his wife is to marry another woman. But to Jesus, the only exception that will allow divorce is when there is unchastity.⁵⁸ In other words, for Jesus adultery is a violation of the oneness of husband and wife marriage.

The interpretation suggests that the husband cannot dismiss his wife when he wants to. It also suggests that the husband is not allowed to divorce his wife for any reason except unchastity,⁵⁹ It implicitly means that he should recognise his wife's right in any decision regarding their marriage. Thus, the husband and wife are fundamentally equal according to God's creation of the male-female dualism, and their roles and

⁵⁷ J.A. Fitzmyer writes that Matthew 19:9 is an accusation made against the man. J. A. Fitzmyer, "The Matthean Divorce Texts and Some New Palestinian Evidence," *TS* 37 (1976): 207.

⁵⁸ Fitzmyer writes that the exceptive phrase stems from the pen of the author who was facing a problem he/she was trying to solve in the community he/she was writing to. Fitzmyer, "The Matthean Divorce Texts," 208.

⁵⁹ Allison, makes a very interesting but valid interpretation of this exceptive clause. He says that the exception "comes not from extra-biblical sources but from Matthew itself. The First Gospel contains a story in which a decision to divorce is made by a main character." He refers to Joseph who was going to give Mary a certificate of divorce before he was told by an angel about the supernatural cause of Mary's pregnancy. Dale C. Allison, "Divorce, Celibacy and Joseph (Matthew 1:18-25 and 19:1-12)," *JSNT* 43 (1993): 3-4.

responsibilities are to be exercised for the interest of each other and their community. This is egalitarianism in the husband-wife relationship in God's *basileia*.

The implied author's recitation and recontextualisation of those texts from the Old Testament, anticipate the importance of celibacy in verses 10-12. We take Allison's interpretation of these verses which is connected to Joseph's wish to divorce Mary when he found out that she was pregnant in the 'Birth narrative of Jesus' (1:18-25).⁶⁰ According to Allison, the conclusion of the passage⁶¹ reveals "acceptance of or sympathy for an ascetic manner of life including sexual abstinence for a religious cause. Thus, there are those whose calling is such that the married life must be forsaken."

III. Conclusion

The narrational and progressive texture in chapters 18 and 19, shows Jesus' proclamation of undertaking acceptable human relationships in accordance with God's will in a Christian community seriously. The aim is to ensure peace and harmony among community members. The flow of these chapters suggests ways that should be carried out by the participants of those relationships to resolve any problems that could cause disharmony. For example, Jesus' teachings on humility, caring and forgiveness remind the intended readers/hearers the qualities of God's kingdom that should be exercised by the members of the Christian community. These qualities are demonstrated by Jesus' words on marriage and divorce which assert treating each others with honor and respect. The recitation and recontextualisation of the Old Testament references amplify that message. Marriage works when the married couple recognises each other's roles, needs and responsibilities. Divorce can only be made when there is committing of adultery. This means that the husband is not the only authority to decide making a divorce in a husband-wife relationship. Everyone in a relationship has equal rights concerning making decisions to make their relationship works. The implied author in this interpretation suggests that this is a good example that should be exercised by any human relationship in God's *basileia*. All in all, there is a chance to make divorce but only as the final option when reconciliation is not possible.

⁶⁰ Allison, "Divorce, Celibacy and Joseph," 5-6.

⁶¹ Matthew 1:24-25 *Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son....*

CHAPTER THREE: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL TEXTURE, AND IDEOLOGICAL TEXTURE

I. Social and cultural texture

It is widely accepted that the Mediterranean world is the context of Matthew's community. Therefore, it is certain that the social and cultural values of Matthew's community in the Mediterranean world will be reflected in the text.⁶² It is not the purpose of a socio-rhetorical reading to provide a thorough discussion of Matthew's community and its social and cultural values.⁶³ Rather, it focuses only on the social and cultural texture embedded in the language of the text which will advance the reading being undertaken in this thesis. Therefore this part will be focusing only on the pivotal values of 'honour and shame' as social and cultural values. Although the interpretation is not about Matthew's community and its historical, social and cultural values; understanding how these are embedded in the text is significant for its interpretation.

A. Honour and shame in the Matthean text

'Honour and shame' have been widely accepted among the Matthean scholars as pivotal values of antiquity which structured the daily life of people in the Mediterranean world.⁶⁴ Scholars have considered it important, for it brings an understanding of the significant difference between being of worth or being shamed in various social, cultural, religious and economic situations of the first century. In the Mediterranean society, the person with 'honour' was a person with high status either in the external or internal

⁶² Bruce J. Malina, "Understanding New Testament Persons," in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (ed. Richard Rohrbaugh; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 42-43. Here, Malina suggests that to be fair to the writers of the New Testament, it is important to understand how they understood people in their world. Another question could be raised here regarding the writer or author of Matthew. But, this study assumes that the Matthean Gospel was written sometime in the first century Mediterranean world in the time of the Roman Empire.

⁶³ For some details regarding the existence of Matthew's community in the Roman Empire and its system see Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 9-35; Rodney Stark, "Antioch as the Social Situation for Matthew's Gospel," in *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches* (ed. David L. Balch; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 189-200; L. Michael White, "Crisis Management and Boundary Maintenance: The Social Location of the Matthean Community," in *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches* (ed. David L. Balch; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 211-47.

⁶⁴ These books provide very useful explanation of 'Honour and Shame'. See de Silva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity*, 43-93; Halvor Moxnes, "Honor and Shame," in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (ed. Richard Rohrbaugh; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 19-40.

government. He/she had abundance of land and was born from an elite family. People receive and achieve honour when their worth and standing are acknowledged in public in accordance with the public social, cultural, economic and religious expectations.⁶⁵ On the other hand, a value called ‘shame’ is the reverse of ‘honour’. Despite the sense of negativity entailed in ‘shame’, it has a cultural acceptance in the Mediterranean world.⁶⁶ For example, gender difference which regarded the man’s place as public and woman’s place as private considered the woman’s role as carrying ‘shame’ in terms of her housework.⁶⁷ Having a sense of shame was accepted as a normal way of life. In another situation, ‘shame’ occurred when there was loss of wealth and position in the power structure.⁶⁸ Given these social and cultural values, interpreters need to be attentive to the rhetoric of the text in which these values are embedded.

The first century writers who studied ancient rhetoric in Greek learned to write events, histories and stories using different components of ‘progymnasmata.’⁶⁹ One of its main elements is called ‘rhetoric of praise and blame.’ Whoever was educated with this method of writing has entered into the Hellenised way of writing and thinking. This method was commonly used in the Mediterranean world. Neyrey writes that such common use indicates that understanding the ‘rhetoric of praise and blame’ in the text will give us understanding of the social and cultural topic of ‘honour and shame’ in the Mediterranean world.

The ‘rhetoric of praise and blame’ is an ‘epideictic speech’⁷⁰ which explains an important subject elucidated by a comparison of praise and blame.⁷¹ The importance of the message held by that speech should be reflected in the life and character of the

⁶⁵ John H. Elliot, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 130, 133-134.

⁶⁶ Moxnes, “Honour and Shame,” 31-33.

⁶⁷ Moxnes, “Honour and Shame,” 21-22.

⁶⁸ Jerome H. Neyrey, “Loss of Wealth, Loss of Family and Loss of Honor: The Cultural Context of the Original Markisms in Q,” in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its context* (ed. Philip F. Esler; London and New York; Routledge, 1995), 139-158.

⁶⁹ Progymnasmata is where a student learns compositions in writing such as styles and forms of compositions. George A. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), ix-xiv. Kennedy in this book has provided a very useful and valuable study and historical account of ‘progymnasmata’ in the introduction.

⁷⁰ Aristotle writes that there are three kinds of rhetoric: “(1) deliberative; (2) forensic; (3) epideictic” which he explains: “The business of the deliberative kind is to exhort or dissuade, its time the future, its end the expedient or the harmful; of the forensic to accuse or defend, its time the past, its end the just or unjust; of the epideictic praise or blame, its time the present (sometimes the past or the future), its end the noble or the disgraceful.” Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, xxxvii.

⁷¹ Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, xxxvii.

speaker. This is why it is important to consider that message in the presence of the speaker in the present in relation to the speaker's life in the past. That consideration is significant as it will make certain the continuity of the importance of the message of that speech. Such a comparison identifies 'honour' and 'shame'.

The Matthean use of the rhetoric of praise and blame presents the characterisation of Jesus as 'ethical', 'emotional' and 'logical'.⁷² Jesus' ethical character is shown by way of his characterization as Son of God ("*This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.*" (Matt 3:17)) whose 'honour' is displayed in his healing, teaching and preaching which were recognized publicly by the crowds (7:28). Jesus' emotional character is expressed by his compassion for the crowds (9:36) and his logical character is shown by his use of prophecies and some historical events of Israel's relationship with God to underpin his teachings. A good example of this is Jesus' use of Moses' command of divorce in Matt. 19:8. Jesus' ethical, emotional and logical characteristics as noted above describe Jesus as the only character in the Matthean story who has competence as a healer, teacher and preacher to know the people in the story who deserve praise and honour.

The Matthean use of the rhetoric of blame to show 'honour' in Jesus' proclamation is shown in Matt 19:1-12. Jesus' answer to the Pharisees' questions in 19:4-6; 8-9 shows 'honour and shame' in the husband-wife relationship. Considering the husband as the dominant figure in this relationship is a result of the *paterfamilias* system which runs a family life in the Mediterranean world.⁷³ This means that the use of 'rhetoric of praise and blame' in the text (Matt 19:1-12) is to display the husband-wife relationship in God's *basileia* in contrast to husband-wife relationship in the Roman imperial and Jewish patriarchal systems. This contrast will be described and explained in the ideological texture section. The concern here is to show how the 'rhetoric of praise and blame' encodes the husband-wife relationship.

⁷² Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, xxxvi; writes that 'artificial proof in rhetoric has three kinds; (1) ethical, derived from the moral character of the speaker; (2) emotional, the object of which is to put the hearer into a certain frame of mind; (3) logical, contained in the speech itself when a real or apparent truth is demonstrated.'

⁷³ The terms 'husband', and 'father' designate the head of the family to whom the other family members take their bearings. This is part of the household structure in the Mediterranean world. See deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity*, 173-74.

Jesus' honour is shown by his healing of the large crowds that followed him (19:2). According to the Matthean story, those healed are the people from the crowd who have faith in Jesus' proclamation. Their being healed in the public place shows their public recognition of Jesus. Their responses prove publicly Jesus' ascribed honour. God's acknowledgement of Jesus as his Son in 3:17 indicates that Jesus has God's favour to undertake his will and this placed Jesus as a special and competent character in the family of God. Thus, Jesus is considered God's representative to present God's will in the undertaking of the husband-wife relationship in God's *basileia*. These words of Jesus' answer show the honored husband-wife relationship in God's kingdom.

"It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity and marries another, commits adultery." (Matt 19:8-9)

The words *It was because you were so hard-hearted* are a 'rhetorical of blame.' They speak of Jesus' blame on them for their divorcing of their wives. If Jesus is considered the competent speaker who is ethical, logical, and emotional and whose life according to the Matthean story reflected his character as the Son of God, then his words of blame to the hard-hearted people are words of shame. In other words, 'shame is the one who divorces his wife because of his hard-heartedness.'

On the other hand, Jesus' answer reveals a God-given honour received only by those in a husband-wife relationship who are not hard-hearted. In this reversed way, Jesus' words of blame implicitly reveal his words of praise; praising those who do not divorce their wives. They are people who listen and obey God's ways. Thus, the narrator, through Jesus' answer to the Pharisees' questions (19:8-9), indicates that a husband-wife relationship that is founded on God receives honour. Those who decide to take divorce because of personal desires such as courting other women are considered shame in God's *basileia*.

This honoring of the so-called husband and wife who commit to their marriage is shown in the deliberative sense of Jesus' answer. A deliberative speech speaks of what is

honourable.⁷⁴ Its aim is to exhort or dissuade a listener/reader and its purpose is to have an expedient outcome from that speech for the audience.⁷⁵ The narrator's use of a 'deliberative subjunctive clause'⁷⁶ in the Pharisees' question (*Why then did Moses command us...?*) anticipates the deliberative sense of Jesus' answer. The question indicates that the Pharisees deliberate among themselves regarding the subject of divorce before asking Jesus. Their deliberation maintains upholding Moses' law. To the Pharisees, it is the honourable understanding. But Jesus' answer suggests that their deliberation is a shame. Jesus' response is an appeal to husbands not to divorce their wives, except for unchastity. It is an appeal for honorable behaviour towards women. It addresses the themes of honour; which are just, piety, equity and mercy. It suggests that Jesus wants his audience to be like what God created in the beginning in being just, merciful, equitable and pious. Jesus' answer as a deliberative speech aims at the heart of the so-called honored cultures in the Mediterranean world ruled by male dominancy and suggests that it is the true people of God that will not practise their gendering values they admired and called honourable. This point will be the focus of the following section.

II. Ideological texture

The writers in the first century Mediterranean society who were educated in rhetorical compositions brought into their writings their understanding and experience of social, cultural, political and religious values and ideologies of the world in which they lived.⁷⁷ Some ancient writings reflect the first century's values and ideologies. For example as this thesis suggested, the Matthean Gospel's presentation of Jesus' words on divorce seems to resist patriarchal dominancy in the first century Mediterranean world. The varied interpretations of Jesus' words on divorce in Matthew 19:1-12 manifest different ideologies brought by readers and interpreters to the text. This chapter will explore the 'ideology of resistance' of Matthew 19:1-12 in correspondence with Jesus' proclamation

⁷⁴ An example of how the deliberative speech is interpreted as recommending an honorable course to honorable men is shown by Witherington. See Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdsman, 2004), 47-51.

⁷⁵ Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, xxxvi.

⁷⁶ J. W. Wenham, *The Elements of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: University Press, 1965), 163.

⁷⁷ Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, ix.

of egalitarianism in God's *basileia*. God's *basileia* as superior is the basis of the ideology of resistance.

A. Ideology of resistance in Matthew 19:1-12.

The passage on Jesus' words on divorce itself has in view the status of women at the low social order of the first century Roman imperial society; a society of mixed-communities.⁷⁸ Other customs such as the Jewish custom which were part of that society also signified that low status of women and the Romans' authority allowed the practice of those customs to be part of its society. The text (Matt 19:1-12) itself reflects those customs. It reflects the *paterfamilias* feature of the Roman household⁷⁹ where its power lied in the hands of the male head.⁸⁰ The *paterfamilias* system runs every household in the Roman imperial society which encourages gender specific roles. This household was made up of "husband, wife, unmarried children, slaves, freedmen and clients."⁸¹ In the Roman imperial society, "wives were expected to obey their husbands in all things."⁸² They must subordinate herself to her husband's leadership. Manifestly, the husband had much authority over his wife. Thus, in terms of marriage the husband also has much authority and power to divorce his wife.

Likewise, the Jewish family structure also exercised the hierarchy of male and female where the male is the dominant gender.⁸³ This is seen in their undertaking of the husband-wife relationship in which the husband has sole authority to dismiss his wife with a certificate of divorce.⁸⁴ According to the Jewish law, a wife could not divorce her

⁷⁸ According to Fitzmyer, the Matthean prohibition of divorce (minus the exceptive phrase) has to be regarded as derived from Mark 10 and adapted by Matthew for the sake of the Christians living in the mixed community for which he was principally writing." The point I would like to emphasise in this comment by Fitzmyer is that the implied author through Jesus in Matthew 19:1-12, presented the prohibition of divorce to a mixed community in the Roman imperial world. Fitzmyer, "Matthean Divorce Texts", 197-226.

⁷⁹ This paper takes Warren Carter's argument that Matthew's Gospel assumes the political, socioeconomic, military and theological ways of the Roman imperial power on every page. Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 35. This is seen in this text (Matt 19:1-12) but it will only look at the sociological influence of the Roman imperial power in the husband-wife relationship.

⁸⁰ James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of The New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 238.

⁸¹ Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World*, 238.

⁸² Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World*, 241.

⁸³ Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World*, 242.

⁸⁴ This is shown in the intertextual interpretation in chapter two.

husband unless she prosecuted him. Manifestly, the husband predominantly has authority to dismiss his wife when he wants to. The use of these words in this passage shows how influential the imperial and the Jewish systems knowledge were to the compositions of writings of the first century.

Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause? (Matt 19:3)

The implied author through this question presents to the readers/hearers the hierarchy of male and female which bears the low status of women. The question implies that in the Mediterranean society which consists of the imperial and Jewish systems, man has power and authority in the husband-wife relationship to divorce his wife. The question also suggests that the wife seems to have no right in divorce-making. But the question itself anticipates Jesus' answer as a resistance of the gender difference which had been marginalising women in that society. Jesus says:

Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh, let no one separate. (Matt 19:4-6)

Jesus replies to the Pharisees' question with another question is a rhetorical way of stressing to the readers the point that the male and female dualism according to God's creation is a partnership meant to be in a relational existence. In doing so, the husband initiates that relational existence by leaving his parents and be joined to his wife. This practice demonstrates that in a husband-wife relationship, the husband should be the first person to exercise treating his wife with honor and respect in the relationship. It is the beginning of his practicing of recognising the needs of the woman to whom he will take to be his wife. The husband's recognition of his wife is amplified in Jesus' response to the Pharisees' second question regarding Moses' command of divorce. Jesus answers, *"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, marries another commits adultery."* (Matt 19:9) Arising from that recognition, should be a realisation that the sharing of various egalitarian rights and roles for the interest of both the husband and wife should be considered as more important than the differentiation of roles and status. Thus, there should be no gender and specific roles. Hence, the Roman imperial and Jewish control as viewed in Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees (Matt 19:1-12) and its

purpose shows that Jesus' words on divorce is vigorously ideological. In this sense, Jesus' words on divorce show the *paterfamilias* of the Roman imperial system and patriarchy as a socio-cultural system in the Jewish world are inferior to the household of God or God's *basileia* proclaimed by Jesus.

Jesus' response to the Pharisees' question on divorce brings forth a view of the *basileia* of God. As Boring writes, Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees is "an expression of the continuing conflict of kingdoms...which intensifies when Jesus leaves Galilee and enters Judea."⁸⁵ It illustrates how a husband is considered doing the will of God. As shown, Jesus' use of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 describe the kind of husband who does the will of God as the one who leaves his parents and be joined to his wife. This is the person who listens and obeys God's command as emphasised in the central part of the Matthean gospel (Matthew 13:1-17) which Jesus' words on divorce revolves around. The husband who does that is characterised as the one whom God has joined together with his wife. Thus, he is a true member of God's *basileia*.

The implied author, through this description of a true member of God's *basileia*, informs the reader of the difference between becoming a member of God's *basileia* and the Roman Empire in the husband-wife relationship. In the Roman Empire, the husband has much authority to dismiss his wife on any cause which assures him fulfillment of his own personal desires. Thus, as a man in the husband-wife relationship in the imperial world will always have satisfaction. For the women, their lower status and lack of power keep them in their places as wives. However, in God's *basileia*, power and status, gender and class do not give a person joy but obedience to God as asserted by the husband's action of recognising his wife's roles and rights (Matt 19:3-9). Hence, the wife as well can get joy in God's *basileia*. This suggests that Jesus emphasises staying in marriage

⁸⁵ M. Eugene Boring, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NIB 8; Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 385-386. Boring further says: "In the Matthean story, Jesus is paired with John the Baptist, who has already been executed for objecting to Herod Antipas's divorce and remarriage to a divorcee (cf. 3:2; 4:12; 14:1-5). The Pharisees' question uses the same vocabulary as John the Baptist in 14:4 ("it is lawful"...). The question thus evokes the conflict between the representatives of God's kingdom (John and Jesus) and the hostile kingship of this age, and reminds the readers that Jesus' destiny will be like John." Boring speaks of the existence of the conflict between God's kingdom and other world kingdoms such as the Roman imperial power in the time of Jesus' ministry. As this thesis, this is also seen in Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees concerning the issue of divorce.

and if there are going to be differences that would ruin the husband-wife relationship, reconciliation is the next option. Divorce can be made only if there is unchastity.

Conclusion

In the Matthean Gospel, the quality and worth of women characters seemed to be unheard because of the way they are portrayed as minorities in the text which has impacted on the way readers interpret the text. The social and cultural and ideological textures show that Jesus' words on divorce are the declaration of a firm and stable husband-wife relationship in God's *basileia* that will resist the husband-wife relationship in the household of the Roman imperial and Jewish power and control. Those who listen and obey God's teaching of how human relationships such as the husband-wife relationship should be undertaken is considered the 'honour' in God's kingdom. Those who treat relationships he/she adheres to in accordance with his/her own personal desires are looked at as the 'shame' in God's *basileia*. The ideological texture stresses the significance of breaking barriers that differentiate people in the *paterfamilias* and Jewish patriarchal systems. It is the shift from gender stereotypes to an egalitarian husband-wife relationship that recognises both parties. Hence, the 'ideology of resistance' is an inclusive ideology. The interpretations shown in this chapter continues to stress the objective of this thesis. That is, in a husband-wife relationship in God's kingdom both the husband and wife are expected to share egalitarian roles and rights in the undertaking of that relationship. The husband is revealed as the person to initiate that practice.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

The conclusion will summarise the four textual interpretations made by this study and including how the Samoan part of the Samoan Christian perspective is identified in these interpretations.

The Church Fathers' interpretation of Jesus' understanding of divorce can be summarised as 'Jesus prohibits divorce.' This differs from the Reformers' interpretation which this study has demonstrated, in that Jesus allows divorce and remarriage, when one partner commits adultery. In exploring this point using Matthew 19:1-12 as the main text, I began with an explanation of a Samoan Christian perspective; a lens that has influenced how I have experienced the above-mentioned text. From the Samoan Christian understanding of the *faa-Samoa* and Christianity, there is no gender distinction in the husband-wife relationship.' The interpretations of the literary textures of the text in this study support this point. However, the Samoan Christian interpretation of Matthew 19:1-12 will be incomplete unless a discussion of how the Samoan understanding of gender relations (as explained in the undertaking of the sister-brother relationship) is identified in the analysis of the text. Consequently this becomes the focus of this concluding chapter, together with the recommendation of whether or not, the practice of divorce should be allowed to continue in the Samoan society today.

I. Recapitulations of the four textual interpretations

The innertextual interpretation of Matthew chapters 18 and 19 shows Jesus' signifying of communal living; how community members should relate to one another. It speaks of different kinds of relationships that formulate a community: such as parents-children relationships, a father-mother relationship, a sister-brother relationship, and a husband-wife relationship. It explains how Jesus addresses these relationships, in that they must be undertaken in accordance with God's will. God's will is to respect and honour each other, in order to maintain peace and harmony within a Christian community. It is expected to be exercised in and through humility, caring for each other, and with forgiveness. According to the innertextual interpretation, the implied author in Matt 19:1-12 uses the undertaking of the husband-wife relationship as an example to

clarify what Jesus proclaimed in chapter eighteen. It presents the egalitarian sharing of roles between men and women.

The implied author through Jesus speaks of allowing divorce when either the husband or wife is found to be unfaithful within the marriage. The allowing of divorce is only granted when reconciliation cannot be reached between the husband and wife. It suggests that Jesus has proclaimed maintaining the marriage. The husband and wife are meant to be together for life.

The intertextual, socio-cultural and ideological interpretations also explore this proposition. As the intertextual interpretation reveals, the recitation and recontextualisation of the Old Testament references (Genesis 1:27; 2:24; Deuteronomy 24:1) amplify the above findings. Marriage works when the married couple recognises each other's roles, needs and responsibilities. According to God's creation of the male-female dualism, when they become husband and wife, the husband is expected to leave his parents and join his wife. The implication of this is to show that the husband should initiate recognising and acknowledging the woman he marries. This can be shown in caring for her needs and respecting her voice. The intertextual interpretation reveals that both parties in the husband-wife relationship have equal rights, concerning making decisions in order to uphold a healthy relationship between them. The implied author in this interpretation suggests that this is a good example that should be exercised by any human relationship in God's *basileia*.

The social and cultural interpretation continues to emphasise that message of egalitarianism in the husband-wife relationship. It speaks of the quality and worth of women whose voices seemed to be unheard in the Matthean story because of the way they were portrayed as minorities in the text. However, the implied author's use of Jesus' character as the competent speaker in the story, to challenge the patriarchal sense of the Pharisees' understanding of divorce suggests the importance and significance of the recognition of women in Jesus' words on divorce. This has impacted on the way readers interpret the text. The social and cultural interpretation puts the accent on the husband-wife relationship that is carried out in accordance with God's will. It is a relationship considered to be the receiver of honour in God's kingdom. The relationship in which both the husband and wife respect and care for each other. It is a practice of gender equality.

This is also shown in the ideological texture interpretation. It stresses the significance of breaking barriers that differentiate people in the *paterfamilias* and Jewish patriarchal systems. It is the shift from gender distinctions to inclusiveness.

II. How the Samoan component of the Samoan Christian perspective is identified in the textual interpretations

The undertaking of the sister-brother relationship in the *faa-Samoa* does function in the above-mentioned interpretations. It shows a similar understanding of exercising the values of respecting and caring for each other. The Samoan part of the Samoan Christian perspective as explained earlier in this study speaks of the family as the foundation of the social and religious life of every Samoan and it is the main learning context of the sister and brother in the Samoan community. The family is where the sister and brother learn the egalitarian sharing of roles. It is the place where they both learn and exercise their sisterly and brotherly roles. They learn at the young age respecting each other, caring for each other, forgiveness and humility, within the setting of the family, before they move on to the larger community level. Jesus proclaims these human qualities in Matthew chapter 18 anticipating his use of the husband-wife relationship in chapter 19 to demonstrate how those values should be practised in any relationship. As a result of this study, both the *faa-Samoa* and Jesus' teachings and values on undertaking human relationships, emphasise respecting one another as it develops and maintains peace and harmony within the community.

When the sister and the brother move on to being a wife or husband, either in their community or another, their families expect them to bear the husband-wife relationship they have become part of in accordance with the family and community values that they have learned. As a husband, he should care for his wife similar to the way he cares for his sister. As a wife she should do likewise. She should treat her husband similar to the way she respects her brother. This is also the central part of God's creation of the husband-wife relationship. They should treat each other respectfully beginning from the husband's leaving of his family to join his wife. Failure to do so will bring shame to God's family and community. Likewise, it is also the sense of shame felt

by a Samoan family or community when a husband-wife relationship fails to exercise the *faa-Samoa* values of sharing egalitarian roles in a respectful way.

In the *faa-Samoa* the expectation of practising caring for each other (the prerogative of exercising the sisterly and brotherly roles) in the undertaking of a husband-wife relationship is to ensure that the marriage is maintained. Divorce is not the first option that should be taken by any married couple. They are expected to make amends and reconcile any differences they may have.

Committing adultery is a crime in the village and a punishment is given to the accused if found guilty. He or she will be scolded by the village and the innocent party is given the option to pursue a divorce. If divorce is finally decided upon by the innocent party, he/she will be formally escorted to his/her own family or village by the guilty party. In this process, a chief will speak on behalf of the guilty party, pleading for forgiveness from the family of the innocent party. In this practice, it shows that the husband-wife relationship is meant to be an everlasting relationship. It implies that the innocent party can remarry. In the *faa-Samoa* divorce is only allowed when adultery has been committed. This is the teaching of Jesus on divorce, according to the interpretations discussed earlier. This similarity stresses the point that both husband and wife are to share egalitarian roles in the undertaking of their responsibilities as husband and wife.

Manifestly, egalitarianism is shown in the four textual interpretations of Matthew 19:1-12 and the practising of *sister-brother relationship* in the husband-wife relationship. They explain a similar understanding of sharing egalitarian roles in any human relationships where both men and women involved.

Questions are still being raised within the Samoan society, regarding the allowing of divorce, as opposed to what Jesus has taught about divorce. As a result of this study, from a Samoan Christian perspective, it suggests that Jesus' words on divorce reveal some important points that may answer many of these questions. Firstly, the husband-wife relationship is everlasting. Secondly, when there is a problem that has the potential to ruin the husband-wife relationship then reconciliation must be sought. Thirdly, divorce is allowed only when adultery has been committed by either the husband or wife. Fourthly, the innocent party is allowed to remarry. Therefore, divorce is allowed, but only when either the husband or wife commits adultery. The outcome of this study

emphasises the significance and importance of treating each other with respect and honour in the husband-wife relationship to ensure living in peace and harmony in the Christian community. They are the values of the *faa-Samoa* that are practised and learned by any young Samoan through administering of the sister-brother relationship in the Samoan family. More importantly, these values are human qualities expected of any member of God's *basileia*.

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