

*The Widow's Offering From A Socio -
Rhetorical Reading of Mark 12: 41 - 44
in the Context of CCCS*

By

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**THE WIDOW'S OFFERING FROM A SOCIO-
RHETORICAL READING OF MARK 12:41-44 IN
THE CONTEXT OF CCCS.**

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by

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ABSTRACT

In the Bible, there are many ways that Jesus uses to teach his disciples or a group of people. Some of those teachings are delivered by using parables, metaphorical language, signs, miracles and healings. Jesus always uses the marginalized and the suppressed people to reveal His Will for His people. One of those teachings of Jesus is reflected in the story of Mark 12:41-44. Jesus utilises the poor widow to teach His disciples and the crowd a lesson. And the questions are: Why did Jesus praise the poor widows offering? What is a true offering? Was not the rich peoples' offering enough? Using the Socio-Rhetorical method asking questions of the text, the context of the CCCS is enlightened by the widow's offering. The spirit in which she gave all that she had as opposed to the rich who gave much. The honour and shame core values of Jesus' and the widow's context and its great similarity to my Samoan context is conducive to the analysis of the Widow's story.

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the memory of my late grandparents Saolele Le'aupepe Peleti
and Fa'apopo Peleti. You are always forever in my heart.

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manuia. Ia i le Atua poto pea lona lava viiga e favavau.

List of Abbreviations

CCCS	Congregational Christian Church Samoa
EFKS	Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa
Mk	Mark
Mt	Matthew
Lk	Luke
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament

Introduction

Purpose of this Research

The passage about the widow's offering in Mark 12:41- 44¹ is a thought provoking story. For me it evokes an issue which has its origins back in my childhood days. On Sundays my mother's concern over our family's *alofa* was the cause of many arguments in our household. For her, the amount we give has to be on par with or above everyone. The story about the Widow's offering is problematic for me when I try to relate my mother's teaching to how Jesus views the widow's minimal offering compared to the large contributions of the rich. Questions such as: How can her two coins be greater than the larger sums of all the others? Was my mother's attitude justified in her wanting to give more? Literally, for me this text teaches that Jesus measures the offering based on proportion of one's wealth. The question is which is considered more important? Give what we have or give some of it? Some say in Samoa, "*ave ma le lotomalie*," which in English simply means give with all your heart. If my mother knows that the *alofa* on Sunday is not enough she would not go to church. She believed in giving the best we can for the church despite the fact our earnings at times could not sustain what she wanted to give. This is a common phenomenon in many Samoan parents and the young ones tend to learn without clarification as to why we give more for the church.

As a result, I raise some of the important questions that will help guide this research. What is the significance of the widow in this story? Why did Jesus praise her offering? Were the rich peoples' offerings not enough for Jesus?

¹ Unless otherwise specified, all Biblical citations in English are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to revisit the story of the widow's offering in Mark 12:41- 44 and Jesus' response. In addition, this thesis hopes to bring to light relevant responses to the above questions and perhaps reveal an informed meaning of *faigataulaga* or offering using the Socio-Rhetorical Reading Method.

Mark 12: 41-44 as the Selected Text

The selection of Mark 12:41-44 as the main text to explore for this research is based on these reasons:

Traditionally the passage about the widow's offering in Mark 12:41-44 has been used by the Church as an example of humble faithfulness to God. Further, it speaks to the people of God about the true nature of giving. Calvin considered this account as providing

"a highly useful doctrine, that whatever men offer to God ought to be estimated not by its apparent value, but only by the feeling of the heart, and that the holy affection of him who, according to his small means, offers to God the little that he has, is more worthy of esteem than that of him who offers a hundred times more out of his abundance."²

Outline

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter one focuses on the reading method that is used to revisit the text, namely Socio-Rhetorical Criticism.

² John Calvin, Harmony of Matthew, Mark and Luke. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 3,113 (cited via Geoffrey Smith, "A Closer Look at the Widow's Offering: Mark 12:41-44" *JETS* 40/1 (March 1997) 27-36.

Chapter two and three contains the exegetical analysis of the text using the Socio-Rhetorical Criticism's three stages – Innertexture, Intertexture and Social and Cultural texture. The final chapter four applies the passage's interpretation to our church context and perhaps highlight some suggestions to enlighten our issues with giving to the church.

Limitations of Research

The process of research for this study, warns of the confines of responsible interpretation. I am therefore aware that this study is only one contribution to the discussion on the selected text, in the field of biblical studies, as well as the context of our church ministry. The fact that no methodology or methodologies can lay claim to a one true interpretation, that all methodologies and interpretations have their limitations, is of primary importance that this study works within the confines of responsible interpretation.³

³ Mark Ledbetter, "Telling the other story: a literary response to socio-rhetorical criticism of the New Testament," *Semeia* No. 64 (1993):289-301.

Chapter 1: Methodology

Reading Methodology: Socio-Rhetorical Criticism

Why and What is Socio-Rhetorical Criticism?

I have selected the Socio-Rhetorical Criticism which is a reading method that incorporates the social sciences with other more literary approaches in biblical studies.⁴ For Culpepper it is a scientific method, which is a complete approach of interpreting text. It brings together different approaches such as, "literary, narrative, rhetorical, intertextual, social-scientific, cultural and ideological criticism" and other.⁵ Socio-rhetorical criticism therefore takes into account the original context of the text – 'world of the text'.

The main objective here is to develop a rhetorical method which utilises literary, social, cultural and ideological features of texts.⁶ The aim is to find meaning of texts through studying the core values and beliefs that influenced the world of the text.⁷ To understand those values and beliefs, we are better equipped to make meaning of texts. As Bible readers from different contexts, we may compare or contrast them with our own world, in the hope of finding relevance for us. Therefore for the purpose of this study, I will look into the text of Mark 12:41-44 as a reader and as a CCCS member using the Socio-Rhetorical criticism.

⁴ Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation*. (Harrisburg: Trinity International, 1996), 1.

⁵ Alan R Culpepper, "Mapping the Textures of New Testament Criticism: a response to Socio-Rhetorical criticism." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* no. 20 (70):72.

⁶ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 1.

⁷ Ibid., 1.

Vernon K. Robbins' stages of Socio-Rhetorical Criticism

Robbins details five stages of socio-rhetorical approach. These are 'Inner Texture', 'Inter Texture', 'Social and Cultural Texture', 'Ideological Texture', and 'Sacred Texture'.⁸ Given the limitations of space and time for this thesis, I opted to use just the first three stages in this research as discussed below.

Innertexture

Innertexture is an analysis which looks at the use of words in the text. This includes looking at word structures, devices, and contraries. It also refers to the positioning of the selected passage within the passage itself, as well as other parts of the overall text. In other words the innertexture is how the given passage deals with the other parts of the whole text or simply means the bigger picture.

Intertexture

The intertexture part of Robbins idea⁹ refers to how other texts speak through Mark 12:41-44. The intertexture analysis explores what some of the stories from the Old Testament have said about the offerings. I would like to use the story of the Widow's Deeds in 1 Kings 17:8-16, and some of the OT texts in order to extend the research and give some ideas to help get the meaning of this text. The question is, how do the selected Old testaments texts describe the true meaning of offering revealed in the innertextural reading of Mark 12: 41-44?

⁸Ibid, 96.

⁹Ibid., 96.

Social and Cultural texture

The Social and Cultural texture is where the language used in the text reflects the culture, norms and style of the society where the text was written.¹⁰ So therefore this section focuses on the social and cultural values established in the social and cultural features of the language of the text.

¹⁰Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation*, 71.

Chapter 2: Exegesis of Mark 12:41-44

Innertexture Analysis

In this chapter, I will analyse Mark 12:41-44 as a rhetorical unit, exploring Mark's story of the widow's offering as encoded in the text, and how it answers the issues of *faigataulaga* not only in my family but the CCCS church as a whole.

In the analysis of the innertexture, a progressive texture is shown in Mark 12:41-44, which reveals the true meaning of offering. The questions that will guide this are: How does the language of the text show the meaning of offering? Do the literary features of Mark 12:41-44 as a rhetorical unit reveal why Jesus praises the widow's offering and not the rich peoples'? Does the language of the text and its literary features show that the amount of the offering does not matter but the motive and spirit in which the offering was made?

To begin this analysis, I will start with a concise explanation of the rhetorical structure of Mark 12. This study considers the importance of this rhetorical structure because it specifies the importance of the placement of the selected passage in the whole book of Mark. This progress of the paper is very important because it attempts to suggest alternative solutions to the above underlying questions.

The Structure of Mark

Based on the structure of Mark's gospel by Paul J Achtemeier, Mark 12:41-44 is placed in Part Five (11:1-16:52); and this part he refers to as "*Jesus in Jerusalem*."¹¹

Mark 12 starts with the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, (chapter 12:1-12) followed by the Questioning of the Resurrection by the Pharisees, (12:13-27), The First Commandments, (12:28-34) and then the Question about David's Son (12:35-40) and lastly with The Widow's Offering, (12:41-44). However the passage begins with Jesus, sitting opposite the treasury and watching people putting money into the treasury.

Analysis of Mark 12:41-44 as a rhetorical unit

I consider Mark 12:41-44 to be a Rhetorical unit, because it has an opening and closing sign. The opening sign is where Jesus sat down opposite the Temple treasury and watched the people dropping money into the treasury box; and many rich people put in large offerings but a poor widow came and dropped in two small coins. The closing part of the unit is where Jesus is praising the widow's offering. Therefore the analysis of the rhetorical unit is based on the following threefold structure.

- (1) **Opening** - vs. 41: Jesus observes the peoples' offering
- (2) **Middle**- vs. 42: The widow's offering
- (3) **Closing**- vss. 43-44: Jesus praises the widow's offering

¹¹Paul J. Achtemeier, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4 (2009), 546.

Opening part of the unit: (v. 41)

In the opening sign of the rhetorical unit, Jesus sits in front of the temple opposite the Temple treasury, watches and observes the people put money in the collection boxes. The temple plays an important part in the religious, social and political aspects of the Jewish people during Jesus' ministry.¹² It is the centre of Jewish worship, yet it is also the centre of Jerusalem's collaboration with Rome's control¹³. Even worse, the temple has become the centre of commerce and exchange where making a profit is the main concern¹⁴. Furthermore, it differentiates against the marginalized people like the poor widow in the story. And I consider that is why Jesus says that the temple should be the house of prayer not a den of robbers (Mk 11:17). For Jesus, the temple is a place to worship and give devotion to God and where He is always present.

The temple treasury (γαζοφυλακίου)¹⁵ is located at the Court of Women, which is the easternmost court in the temple.¹⁶ The porch is around the court and within it against the wall and thirteen trumpet-shaped chests where charitable offerings are placed. The chests get thinner at the mouth and wide at the base. Each treasure chests was specifically marked: nine assigned to receive legally due from worshippers, and the others were assigned to receive gift offerings.

This procedure for offering even distinguishes the poor from the rich judging by where they place their donations. Only the rich people can donate voluntary gifts because they have enough and they can afford them. That is, they can afford and show

¹²Ben Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 334-35.

¹³Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple and Its Ministry and Services at the Time of Jesus*. (Grand Rapids: Christian Classic Ethel Library, 2000), 22.

¹⁴Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 495.

¹⁵Addison G. Wright, "The Widows Mite: Praise or Lament? A Matter of Context," *Catholic Quarterly* 44 (1982): 19.

¹⁶Edersheim, *The Temple and Its Ministry and Services at the Time of Jesus*, 2000, 22.

off their wealth by donating voluntary gifts, whereas, the poor widow can only pay what is due for worshipping in the temple. But according to Vincent Taylor, the treasury is the space in the temple where donors announce the amount of their gifts and the purpose of which it was given to the priest in charge. These can be seen and heard by bystanders as the door is always open.¹⁷ This is where Jesus sits and observes the people as they make their offering.

Sitting (καθισας)¹⁸ is a usual action of Jesus in the gospels as written in the different gospels.¹⁹ It is clear from this that Jesus sitting position usually leads to a lesson be taught. However, in the selected passage, Mark records that Jesus does not sit down and teach straight away, but he firstly watches (έθεώρει), as the crowds cast money in the treasury. Instead of sitting down and teach right away as mentioned above Jesus takes some time to observe. The use of the word έθεώρει here has a sense of "taking in" as contrasting to just a mere glance²⁰. Myers agrees that when he says that in "this scene Jesus carefully examines."²¹ Jesus is also quiet as he looks to be fascinated by what he observes and possibly considering his next move.

In Jesus' observation of the crowd (όχλος), he notices rich people (πλουσιοι) putting in large sums. The presence of the rich here is not surprising for two reasons. Firstly, they are part of the rich class that makes up the society in Jesus time, Secondly, the treasury is the place where they need to be, to either pay their dues and offering there or to deposit some of their wealth.

¹⁷Ibid, 495.

¹⁸This term can also refer to a seat in the future realm as in Mt 19:28; 20:23; Mk. 10:40.

¹⁹For example, when Jesus is about to teach he always sits. In Mt. 5: 1-2, it records that "when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him." Also in Mk 9:35 says, "He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Lk 5:3 also records this same action of Jesus says, "Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat."

²⁰C. S. Mann, ed. *Mark: The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 27 (New York: Doubleday, 1986), 495.

²¹Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 321.

There are different kinds of people of social, religious and political standing in the crowd that follow Jesus in this unit. Interestingly, Mark here in verse 41, makes specific mention of the rich (πλουσιοι) and their extensive offerings in Jesus' observation²². The rich in the gospels always seems to be at the end of Jesus' negative teachings and sentiments.²³

Jesus also teaches parables that refer to the rich, such as 'the parable of the rich fool' (Lk. 12:13-21), 'the parable of the dishonest manager' (Lk. 16:1-9) and 'the rich man and Lazarus' (Lk. 16:19-31). Jesus is also challenged by a rich person who wants to know how will he inherit eternal life (Mt. 19:16-22; Mk. 10:17-22; Lk. 18:18-25). After hearing what Jesus was saying about his request, the rich person went away grieving, for he had many possessions. In what can appear to be a twist of Jesus' negative image and teachings about the rich, he notices here that they contributed large amounts of money to the treasury. The mention of many people (πολλοί πλούσιοι έβαλλον πολλά) is hardly necessary but Mann rightly suggests that it gives added point to the poor²⁴. Nevertheless, Jesus sees not the amount of the giving that matters the most but the heart of the giver.

Middle part of the unit: (vv. 42-43)

The middle part of the unit is where the poor widow (χήρα πτωχή) comes and puts into the treasury two small coins, which are worth a penny. Among all the people who were there at the time giving money to the treasury, Jesus notices a poor widow

²²Ibid., 321.

²³For example, Mt. 19:23 says: "Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." Furthermore, Mt. 19:24 reads: "...it is easier for the camel to go through the eye of the needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." Lk. 6:24 also records Jesus saying: "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation." Jesus also teaches in Lk. 12:15, saying: "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possession."

²⁴Mann, *Mark: The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 495.

putting in two copper coins (λεπτα δύο) which are worth a penny (κοδράντης). The woman is defined inconveniently twice. For she is not only a widow, meaning she has no husband and also has no one to help provide for her needs, but she is also poor meaning she is broke and needy.

It is not astonishing that the word πτωχός is used here as a suitable adjective to more explain the status of the widow as being a poor widow. A poor person refers to someone of insufficient resources, culturally oppressed, hated and depressed. It also carries with it the sense of the experience of oppression and helplessness as Malina²⁵ states that it is the inability to maintain inherited status. The poor is part of the marginalized group that Jesus is always identified with those he cares for and prioritizes in his teachings.

The reference to the widow as being poor may be attributed to Jesus' own assumption, based on his observation of the widow giving only a penny to the Temple treasury. A widow (χήρα) especially the one who does not have a male heir and she can be led to a life of poverty and hardships because she no longer affords any land or properties. Widows with little means of support are socially powerless and without honour in a society that emphasized status and honour.²⁶

Widows are one of the most vulnerable groups of people in a society. They have no family to support them; and provide them with identity, support, protection, status, wealth and honour.²⁷ Therefore, belonging and holding a place with a family household builds one's identity and status through which one is classified within the community. In other words, widows have no position within the society.

²⁵Bruce Malina, *The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels*. (London: Routledge, 1996), 23.

²⁶Craig S Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 169.

²⁷Michael F. Trainor, *The Quest for Home: The Household in Mark's Community*. (Collegeville: A Michael Glazier Book: Liturgical Press, 2001), 19.

It is the responsibility of the family household to work the land where kinship and loyalty are primary values²⁸. But in reality, this traditional way of life changes due to influence from foreign occupation. For example, a peasant family, which lives under force and are continually exposed to stress and disasters²⁹. According to Horsley³⁰, there are two official layers of rulers over the people who demand their produce under the imperial rule of Roman. So therefore these people are required to provide compliments to Rome they also have to meet their vital offerings to the temple as part of their religious commitments and they still have to produce enough to feed their families and animals, and some other seeds are put aside to plant in the next year. So therefore if a family household can be made disadvantaged of due to this two layer control mechanism, how much more can a poor widow get, knowing that there's no one else to depend on for support? Where can this widow get more than just a penny to give for her Temple obligations and worshipping her God? It is all she can afford because her society has driven her to her current status of being a poor widow. But Paul in his letter to Timothy (1 Ti. 5:1-6:2) talks about how to provide good advice of how to treat widows along with the elder slaves. This was also highlighted by James when treating orphans and widows in their suffering (Jas 1:27). In fact, widows along with orphans are special objects of God's compassion so therefore without a man to provide for their needs and wants, they would be the most vulnerable people in the society.³¹ Borg says that the treatment of the poor is to be a measure of justice and or injustice in the society.³²

²⁸John Stambaugh and David Balch, ed. *The Social World of the First Christians*. (London: SPCK, 1986), 91.

²⁹Sean Freyne, *The World of the New Testament*. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 8-22.

³⁰Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 36.

³¹Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 170.

³²Marcus J Borg, *The Last Week: A Day by Day Account of Jesus' Final Week in Jerusalem*. (New York: Harper, 2006), 74.

Closing Part (v.44)

Jesus action here is calling (προσκαλεσάμενος) and saying (εἶπεν) to his disciples (μαθητάς) is a combination often used by the Gospel writers especially to express the purpose of teaching a lesson. For example, Jesus summoned his disciples and gave them authority to heal sickness and drive out evil spirits. (Mt. 10:1 and Mk. 6:7). On most occasions, his calling and teachings are directed to his disciples. However, in some cases, he called the crowd and directed his teachings at them (Mt 5:10, Mk 7:14) to listen and understand. Quite often, he called attention to lessons of humility and servant hood (Mt 20:25-28; Mk 10:42) as the basis of his teachings. Such was the importance of what the widow did that Jesus summoned his disciples in order to teach them a lesson from it. Ben Witherington refers to Jesus calling the disciples to Him as wishing to use this woman as a model to His disciples.³³

Jesus opened his teachings with the word Ἀμὲν (Truly). Ἀμὲν emphasizes truth and is often used as a formula of certain expression or of certainty.³⁴ Luke usually used this expression "truly," half as often as Mark whereas Mathew uses it thirty times.³⁵

In the case of the widow in my chosen passage, Jesus' use of the word Ἀμὲν indicates that there is a very special lesson to be learnt from the action of the widow. It shows that what he is about to say is of great significance and that it should be taken to heart.³⁶

νηχήρα αὕτη ἡ πτωχή- the Greek here can be literally translated as "this widow and this poor one," This attributive construction in Greek clearly places the emphasis on

³³Ben Witherington, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 18.

³⁴C .S. Mann, ed. *Mark: The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 27 (New York: Doubleday, 1986), 496.

³⁵ibid.

³⁶William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1975), 507.

the poverty status of the widow. It makes sure that the reader is left with no doubt that the widow is indeed a poor person.³⁷ In comparison to verse 40 where Jesus accuses the scribes of devouring widow's houses, Jesus here in verse 43 is the second time posing another contrast when he distinguishes the poverty of the widow against the wealth of the rich. In an odd reference to what she gave, Jesus announced that she πλείον πάντων ἔβαλεν (she puts more) than all those that contributed to the treasury. The aorist use of ἐβαλεν (give/threw) signifies the complete action.³⁸ In other words, I agree with Witherington that ἐβαλεν signifies that it is not the amount given, but the attitude of self-sacrifice on which the narrative focuses.³⁹ A most and sincere offering or giving is done only with the purest heart. This emphasis is made clear when Jesus used the same verb in verse 44 with ὅλοντόνβιον αὐτῆς (her whole life), to further enhance his teaching about servant hood and discipleship – you offer your whole life to serve God. (Mk 12: 29-33)

In verse 44, Jesus' responds to the offering of the widow which he backs up what he said in verse 43. His response seems to indicate his willingness to further elaborate on the immense value of what the widow had given as her offering. In reality, she gave the least as indicated by the value of her two *lepta*. However, Frances refers to Jesus' response as turning upside down the normal valuation of the people.⁴⁰ The point here is affirmed by the use of word ὑστερήσεως (poverty) compared with περισσεύοντος (abundance) of the other givers. It means that the widow has nothing else left and yet she voluntarily ἔβαλενὅλοντόν βιοναὐτῆς (gave her whole life). Her devotion and self-sacrifice were complete. This is a clear model of total devotion.

³⁷Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 495.

³⁸Mann, *Mark: The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 496.

³⁹Witherington, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, 18.

⁴⁰R. T France, *The Gospel of Mark in the New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdsman Publishing Company, 2002), 493.

Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, it is clear from the exegesis and the interpretation that Jesus praises the poor widow's offering for a reason. Jesus at the same time teaches his disciples a good lesson and so as the crowd. Jesus clearly states that the offering is not about the amount that is given, but it is how we give it. The poor widow has only two copper coins but she gives it all, she gives it from her heart. She believes that Jesus will bless her abundantly.

Chapter 3: Intertexture, Social and Cultural Analysis of

Mark 12:41-44

Intertextual Analysis

This chapter focuses on the intertextual; it is an analysis of Mark 12:41-44 in relation to other texts in which it states the same issue. It discusses what has already been stated in the previous chapter. I therefore use the story of the widow's deed in 1 Kings 17:8-16, 2 Corinthians 8:2 and Philippians 4:15, to further elaborate the meaning of the widow's offering. I will also use Re-contextualization which is one of the 3 types of Intertexture to discuss my selected readings from both the OT and NT.

The Widow's deed in 1 Kings 17:8-16

The story of the widow's deed in 1 Kings 17:8-16, a woman who had not enough; had no husband to support her; struggled to support her only child; and yet was asked to provide food to a third person. I therefore seek to investigate this deed by the widow and its significance in the context of the Elijah narrative. The widow's deed for Elijah did not give silently but she then told Elijah of her situation, a poor widow with no one to support and care for her and her child. In verse 8, the widow was instructed by God to sustain the prophet Elijah. According to Isara Melepone, he said that this part of the story is the last of the four (4) ironies in this story.⁴¹ The widow would be the last person in that society to be assigned with such a task. In the Old Testament, widows were vulnerable members in the society and were viewed with shame and blame. It was even more difficult if a widow had a child that depended on her, for she also had to take

⁴¹Melepone Isara, *A Widow's Worth: A Taulaga Reading of the Widow of Zarephath's Deed in 1 Kings 17:8-16* (Malua Theological College, Samoa: Malua Printing Press, 2016), 6.

care of the child as well. They were the poorest of all society. Yet, in the story, God has commanded the widow, of all the people, to endure the prophet Elijah. So therefore this irony is very important in my reading of this passage as it highlights the magnitude of the widow's service to the prophet. A woman who had little, had no husband to support her, struggled to support her only child and yet he was asked to provide food for Elijah. No matter how hard the situation this poor widow had faced, she did what the prophet told her to do, for she knows that Elijah is the prophet of God, therefore she gave it from the heart knowing that she will be blessed by the man of God. It was a deed done with faith and believing that God will provide for her and her only child.

2 Corinthians 8:2

"for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part."

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians chapter 8 verses 2, Paul praises the Christians in Macedonia. It seems even though they do not have much money, they give generously to the assembly. During his third missionary journey, Paul collects money for the impoverished believers in Jerusalem from the churches in Macedonia, Philippi, and Thessalonica. This is a sacrificial giving as they were poor themselves but they still offer help. Although they are also suffering a severe test of their belief, their joy is great, their gifts are generous. They give as much as they can afford. Nobody forces them to do it but their desire to serve God by helping fellow Christians with what they can give. They also ask Paul to allow them to help the Christians in Jerusalem. "Their abundance of joy"- This phrase is odd to occur between "great ordeal of affliction" and "their deep poverty". Joy in this context of difficulties is a characteristic of the fellow Christians

(Mt. 5:10-12; Rom. 5:3; James 1:2). Joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) which is not influenced by their circumstances.

For Paul's repeated use of *abundance* or *overflow* 2 Cor. 1:5 "*their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality*" The term *poverty* (πτῶχος) is a Greek term for extreme poverty. (Dt. 8:9; Jdgs. 6:6; 14:15; 2 Cor. 6:10; Rom. 15:26; Rev. 2:9; 3:17). They did not give out of excess. They trusted God to provide their needs (Mk. 12:42; Lk. 21:2). Judging from their context it appears "*their deep poverty*" appears to be a consequence of their persecution because of the gospel (2 Cor. 8:13-18).

"Generosity" - This term comes from the Greek root word meaning *single-mindedness*, which can also mean *genuine* or *sincere*. It is used in the NT specifically in Paul's writings in the sense of *generosity* (2 Cor. 9:11, 13). The word connotes the meaning of *perfection* or *integrity* which refers to the pure condition of their motives. The motive(s) for their giving is crucial to their offering.⁴²

The point of giving is not so much the amount that is given but why and how the giving or the offering was done. In other words, the gifts given by the Macedonians was a devotion to Christ, love for fellow believers, the joy of assisting those who are in need and as well as the fact that it was simply the good and right thing to do. The Macedonian believers have offered their gifts from their hearts. The money they gave to the Christians in Jerusalem is a sign of giving themselves to God. He gave them His Grace so they want to share that grace with other people. Even though they are poor, they still feel find the inspiration in their hearts to help the needy in Jerusalem. Just like the poor widow's offering, she is poor with no one to help her, but she gave all she had as her offering to God.

⁴²Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds. *The New Jerome Biblical Bible Commentary*. (London: Englewood Cliffs, 1989), 284.

Philippians 4:15

In 1 Corinthians 9:11-18, Paul wrote that he did not accept gifts from the Corinthian Church because he did not want to be accused of preaching only to get money. But Paul maintained that it was the church's responsibility to support God's ministers. He then accepted the Philippians' gifts because they gave it willingly and because he was in need. According to Paul, "once you have determined that a project honours the Lord, do not hold back but give it generously and joyfully."⁴³ Paul believes that when giving to those in need, there is not only benefit to the receiver, but they are benefited as well. It was not the Philippians' gift, but their spirit of love and devotion that Paul appreciated the most. Paul was not referring to a sin offering, but a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice which pleases God.

Social and Cultural texture analysis

The Mediterranean world is the social, cultural, and political context of Mark's community. Therefore the social and cultural values of the Markan community in the Mediterranean world will be reflected in the text.⁴⁴ The following analysis focuses 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 crucial values of honour and shame as social and cultural values.

⁴³Tyndale, *Life Application Study Bible* (Carol Stream, Illinois and Zondervan Grand Rapids, Michigan: Tyndale House, Inc., 2005), 2002-03.

⁴⁴Bruce J. Malina, "Understanding New Testament Persons," in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation*, ed. Richard Rohr Baugh (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.

Honour and Shame

Honour and *Shame* are the core values of the ancient times. They are parts of the daily life of people in the Mediterranean world.⁴⁵ These values are considered important because they express an understanding of the difference between being honoured and being shamed in social, cultural, religious, and economic situations of the first century. In a Mediterranean society, people get and achieve honour when they are recognized in public.⁴⁶ On the other hand, 'shame' seems to be the opposite of honour. Although there is negativity in 'shame', it has a social and cultural recognition in the Mediterranean world.⁴⁷ Shame was accepted as a cultural norm. In the biblical interpretation, readers need to pay attention to the rhetoric of the text in which these values are established. According to ancient rhetoric in Greek, these values are introduced in the language of a text as *rhetoric of praise and blame*. This rhetoric is one of the main elements of 'progymnasmata'⁴⁸ – a Hellenised way of writing and thinking. This method was usually used in the Mediterranean world. The rhetoric of praise and blame is an *epideictic speech*,⁴⁹ which explains an important subject revealed by a comparison of praise and blame.⁵⁰ The significance of the message said by that speech should be

⁴⁵ These books provide very useful explanation of 'Honour and Shame'. See de Silva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity, 2000), 43-93; Halvor Moxnes, "Honor and Shame," in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation*, ed. Richard Rohrbaugh (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 19-40.

⁴⁶ John H. Elliot, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 130, 133-134.

⁴⁷ Moxnes, "Honour and Shame," 31-33.

⁴⁸ 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.

⁴⁹ According to Aristotle there are three types of rhetoric: (1) the deliberative which encourage audiences to do good discourages them from doing bad in the future. Its end is convenient or the harmful; (2) the forensic which accuses or defends – its time is past, and its end the just or unjust; (3) the epideictic which praises or blames – its time is present, past or the future, its end honour or shame. Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, xxxvii. In Vaitusi Nofoaiga's, "Towards a Samoan postcolonial reading of discipleship in the Matthean gospel." PhD Thesis, University of Auckland, 2014.

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, xxxvii.

reflected in the life and character of the speaker. This is why it is important to contemplate that message in the attendance of the speaker in the present, in relation to the speaker's life in the past. That contemplation is important as it will make certain the continuity of the importance of the message of that speech. Such a comparison identifies honour and shame.

In the story of the widows offering in Mark 12:41-44, Jesus is honoured already because He is the Messiah, the Son of God. In the Mediterranean world the honour is given to those especially in the upper class. But the widow's offering was honoured by Jesus. It is because Jesus knows that it is from her heart that she does her offering. Also is that Jesus knows that she had given out of her poverty, meaning that she gave all she had for living. So therefore the honouring of the widow's offering by Jesus also makes the widow honoured by her society for she was already shamed of her poor condition and being the marginalized of society. However Jesus praises the poor widow's offering for she was offering it from the heart and not the amount.

The shame in the story refers to the amount of the widows offering. According to her offering, she gave only two copper coins (λεπτα δύο).⁵¹ As Taylor writes, the two *lepta* offered by the widow refers to the smallest coin in flow used in Late Greek. The value of two *lepta* taken together is no more than a portion of a penny.⁵² In terms of monetary value, the widow's offering is so trivial compared to the rich peoples' offering. But Jesus there changes the status quo, meaning that however the small the widow's offering Jesus still praises it. For Jesus, the value is not important but the spirit in which the offering was made.

⁵¹ Sperber Daniel, "Mark Xii 42 and Its Metrological Background. A Study in Ancient Syriac Versions." (Novum Testament, 1967), 178-90.

⁵² Stambaugh John and David L. Balch, eds., *The New Testament in Its Social Environment*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 80.

Conclusion

To conclude this part of my exegesis, it is fair to state that the intertextures of my chosen texts highlights offering. Those who are giving all have the same issue of giving out of their poverty, they still willing to give for the needy. Lastly, the most common issue of offering their gifts that the amount they all gave does not matter, but the way they give them, the spirit and their self-devotion to God whose judgement on what is given matters most.

Chapter 4: Mark 12:41-44 relative to the context of the CCCS today

In our church today, we have our *faigataulaga* every year. We have our *Taulaga o le Talalelei*, *Taulaga o Nuuese*, *Taulaga mo Samoa* and others. In all these *taulaga*, every church member contributes to their own parish and these are given to the church headquarters to work on contributing them according to their purpose. Prior to the collection of these *taulaga* family members of the church would have been saving for their *taulaga*. They always put aside some money from what they earn in the week or fortnightly for their *taulaga*. In reality, people have different perspectives and how they offer themselves serving God through the church. Some other families do not want their *taulaga* to be of the least amount in the whole church *matāfale*. Others believe that it depends on what they have earned. As an EFKS member, this issue is happening in every parish, but that is the real situation of the people. Also the Samoan way of doing things is that, “*e i ai a le tomumu*”, but at the end, they still do it.” *E tomumu a, ae fai a.*” This is not so much because the people are murmuring to God and blame Him for all that but that is how our people do things, the murmuring is the way of releasing the stress but the heart is willing to give more for the church. Also in other parishes, some people are ashamed when their *taulaga* is smaller than others but they give from what they can afford. And some other people do their *taulaga* in the way that everyone knows that they are wealthy people in the church. And the last one is that if the *taulaga* last year was \$21,500, the church would then target an additional \$3000 to make it higher than last year’s.

This study recognizes that there are motivational factors in our church context which have been criticized that adversely affect the image of church giving as well as

the social, economic, financial and spiritual well being of members. The competitive nature of the Samoan culture and its acknowledgement practice (*folafola*) of announcing offerings in church as done in traditional gift-giving is influencing people to give much above their means.⁵³

For all these issues, the story of the poor widow's offering set us a good example. It is not the amount of what we give, but the spirit and our devotion to the one whom our offering is given to. It is not the how much we give for the church but our commitment and how we dedicate ourselves to God that matters. It does not mean that we have to give less to the church but if we have more, give it from the heart, if we have not enough do it from the heart. Lastly is that we must also not taking our weakness and the small amount we earn as an excuse of our laziness but we need to work hard and depend on God, for he will give us the strength and His blessings on us to serve Him whole heartedly.

⁵³Samuelu gives a detailed discussion of the Samoan context as well as the CCCS context and the motivational factors which have given rise to issues related to giving. This highlights the urgent need to address this issue of giving in the church, as this research attempts to participate in. Olive Samuelu, "Salvation in Church Offering? Towards a Theology of Giving in the Context of the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa", The Pacific Theological College, M.Th thesis, Suva Fiji, 2010.

Conclusion

Throughout the exegesis and the discussion of my chosen text, I have come up with alternative solutions to the questions that I already asked before. So therefore to conclude my thesis, Jesus uses the poor widow as an instrument to teach his disciples a lesson. Secondly, the poor widow's offering is important to Jesus. Even though she only has two copper coins, but what matters to Jesus is the way she does it. The rich peoples' offering is not rejected by Jesus, but He looks at how their hearts are reflected in their offerings. They give large amount of money but they give some that they have but the widow gives it out of her poverty status, everything she had - her whole life. The amount is not important to Jesus, but the commitment and the self-devotion in which the offering was made. And this is how Jesus sees our offering, He wants us to give it all ourselves to Him for He is the source of power and wisdom. He likes to praise our offerings that proceed from our hearts but not for other people that watch us. As a solution for my issue, is the thought that perhaps my mother's offering resonates the widow's devotion and giving out of her poverty in worldly material wealth; the idea that giving all to God is her response to God's grace. This is something which Jesus is the only one who sees and desires for his disciples and all to know.

The reading of this text is also a reminder for me to know how to give and offer what we have to God. Give and offer God everything we have for in Him, all our needs are provided.

Appendix

Glossary

- Alofa:* money given to the pastor every fortnightly or in every week.
- Aulotu:* parish or congregation
- Faigataulaga:* the act of giving offering.
- Folafofa:* the practice of announcing all gifts given to the church or traditional ceremonies
- Taulaga:* offering
- Taulaga o le Talalelei:* offering for the Gospel.
- Taulaga mo Nuuese:* offering given to help the missionaries and the scholarship students of the church. It is also given to help other nations when they face natural disasters and unexpected accident.
- Taulaga mo Samoa:* it is the offering for the day to day running of the church. For example, the money from this is given to help in developing the church schools and other important things for the betterment of the church.
- matafale:* a name given to individual families of a parish/congregation
- tomumu:* murmuring or muttering.
- ave ma le lotomalie:* give with a satisfied heart.

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