

# **A KIRIBATI READING OF THE WEDDING FEAST IN MATTHEW 22:1-14**

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By

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## CONSENT FORM

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## ABSTRACT

*Te baka* (feast) is one the many aspects of *Te I-Kiribati* (Kiribati way) culture. It is an occasion where different traditional foods are prepared in traditional ways. As an *I-Kiribati*, we believe that we are not known to the world without our *te baka* or feast. Currently *te baka* become an issue as most people in Kiribati are relying more on imported goods (especially food) rather than our own traditional food. One example is the issue of the slow vanishing of the traditional significances of ways of preparing local foods of feasting in Kiribati. It is caused by the impact of the modern world's new cultures and materials, such as imported foods, new style of clothing, and new cultures brought in by foreigners, and Kiribati people living abroad. This change is seen in the way our people now practice our traditional Kiribati wedding feast. The objective of this study seeks to find how the significances of feasting in the Bible could help our Kiribati people maintain and uphold our traditional feastings as social and cultural events which help to maintain some of our traditional ways and values. To do so I will explore the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:1-14 using my understanding and experience of feasting in my Kiribati world as a reading hermeneutic. This understanding and experience is called *te baka ni mare* (wedding feast). This hermeneutic, together with socio-rhetorical criticism will be used as a method of reading, to revisit and explore Matthew 22:1-14.

## DECLARATION

I, *Kaititi Tokaia*.

hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Malua Theological College or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in this thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Malua Theological College or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ (month and year)

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work and thesis as a testament to my late dad and mom Tokaia and Tetera Eritaia for their effort in raising me to know Christ, and also to my dear wife Teneke Tebokateaba and my son Kareo Tekem Kaititi and the all family for their constant praying, waiting, and loving unconditionally while I pursue my studies in Malua Theological College.

Kam bati n raba.

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All praise, honour and glory to my Lord Jesus Christ for His richest grace and mercy for the accomplishment of this thesis.

Accomplishments in life are achieved in partnership with others. So, on completion of this study, I express tremendous gratitude to several role-players who have helped me to put this piece of work, well above the level of simplicity and into something concrete.

First of all, to Almighty God, to whom I offer myself as an instrument to His most holy mission. Thank you for the gift of life and the countless bounties that inspires, nourishes and sustains me in the making of the paper.

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## I. INTRODUCTION: WHY THIS STUDY AND FORMAT OF THE THESIS.

One of our tasks as Christians is finding how the message of the Gospel makes sense to the reality of life we encounter in the different worlds we live in. One way of doing this is by interpreting the Bible using a reading framework that considers how important the location of the reader now is, such as reading a text from a hermeneutic. The aim of this thesis is to explore the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:1-14 using my understanding and experience of feasting in my Kiribati world as a reading hermeneutic. This understanding and experience is called *te baka ni mare* (wedding feast). The study seeks to find how the significances of feasting in the Bible could help our Kiribati people maintain and uphold our traditional feastings as social and cultural events which help to maintain some of our traditional ways and values.

Reading the text using a hermeneutic is not new. As Werner Jeanrond writes, “The development of hermeneutical activities...is linked in a special way to the Jewish and Christian search for models of adequate interpretation of the Scriptures.”<sup>1</sup> What Jeanrond means is that Jewish and Christian traditions have always been interested in hermeneutics. For example, in Judaism the Mishnah as ‘Oral Law’ (which was put into writing after the fall of the second temple in 70 B.C.E) is an interpretation of the Hebrew Scripture.<sup>2</sup> This interpretation can be seen as being carried out from the hermeneutics of the Rabbis – the hermeneutics of the Rabbi’s experiences of living life in the Jewish

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<sup>1</sup> Werner Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* (SCM Press: London, 1991), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Mayer Gruber, “The Mishnah as Oral Torah: a reconsideration,” *JSJ* 15 (1984): 112-122.

world as chosen people of God. Another example<sup>3</sup> is the New Testament which can be considered as the Christian understanding of the Hebrew Scripture – an understanding based on Jesus’ interpretation of the Torah. Jesus’ interpretation of the Torah is seen in his ministry as told and shown in the Gospels and could be regarded as an interpretation taken from Jesus’ perspective or hermeneutic of being the Son of God sent to save the world.<sup>4</sup>

These examples show how the interpreter’s view of the world in which he/she inhabits influences his/her interpreting of a text such as a text considered sacred by a community. The Bible is an example of a sacred text. Our Kiribati community always refers to the Bible for answers to our many questions on issues we encounter in our Kiribati Christian world/s.<sup>5</sup> One example is the issue of the slow vanishing of the traditional significances of feasting in Kiribati. It is caused by the impact of the modern world’s new cultures and materials, such as imported foods, new style of clothing, and new cultures brought in by foreigners, and Kiribati people living abroad. This change is seen in the way our people now practice our traditional Kiribati wedding feast.<sup>6</sup> The scope of this thesis allows this study to focus only on the parable of feasting in Matt 22:1-14. Another reason for the selection of this parable is the interesting involvement of

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<sup>3</sup> These examples are from an overview of the Mishnah and New Testament writings described in our course of Introduction to the New Testament by Dr. Vaitusi Nofoaiga in 2018.

<sup>4</sup> For example is Matt 5:17 “*Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.*” Jesus here talks about his being the Son of God as the fulfillment of the law. This is revealed in his ministry, death, and resurrection as told by Matthew. Another example is John 6:35 “*I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*”

<sup>5</sup> I put the singular and plural form for the noun world as ‘world’ and ‘worlds’ to show that there are many worlds our Kiribati people now face. For example is the Kiribati traditional social and cultural world. Another world is the mixed Kiribati social and cultural world – the mixed Kiribati and Outside cultures.

<sup>6</sup> The change began from changing the traditional naming of the Kiribati wedding feast. The traditional name for the Kiribati wedding feast was *te baka ni iein* but now it is *te baka ni mare*. The word *mare* is the Kiribati transliteration of the word marriage. This transliteration is found in M. Oliva, *A Combined Kiribati-English Dictionary* (Manoa: University of Hawaii, 1978).

different characters in the preparation of the wedding feast, and in the invitations to the wedding feast, which are all told and shown in this parable. Hence, I raise the questions: Does the parable of the wedding feast in Matt 22:1-14 show local people's upholding of their local traditional values and ways? If it does, how does the text show it? If not, why?

The thesis will be divided into four chapters. Chapter One shows the brief literature review of the text studied in this thesis, and the reading methodology used to read and interpret the selected text. The methodology is the use of my Kiribati hermeneutic of *te baka ni mare*<sup>7</sup> to analyze a sociorhetorical interpretation of the selected text (Matt 22:1-14). Chapter Two is an inner textual interpretation of the text, followed by a social and cultural textual interpretation of the text in Chapter Three. Chapter Four deals with how the hermeneutic, *te baka ni mare*, functioned in the sociorhetorical interpretation of the text made in chapters two and three. Chapter Five as the final chapter is the conclusion of the study where answers to questions raised at the beginning of this thesis will be given.

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<sup>7</sup> *Te baka ni mare* as mentioned is translated into English as "The wedding feast". I will elaborate on this feast in the context of our Kiribati social and cultural world in Chapter One of this thesis.

## **II. CHAPTER ONE: A BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW OF INTERPRETATIONS OF MATTHEW 22:1-14, AND THE READING METHODOLOGY**

This Chapter has a twofold division. The first section will show a brief literature review of Matthew 22:1-14. The scope of this thesis makes me to focus only on reviewing some scholars' interpretations of the selected text that lead the study in the direction this thesis will focus upon. Section two will deal with the reading methodology used in this study. The reading methodology shows that attention will be given to the text first, followed by an analysis of how the hermeneutic, *te baka ni mare*, functioned in the sociorhetorical interpretation of the text made herein.

### **1. A Brief Literature Review of Interpretations of Matthew 22:1-14.**

My survey of the interpretations of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:1-14 by various scholars is divided into the following five points.

First, the parable of the wedding feast pictures the rejection by the people of Israel of their roles and responsibilities as God's chosen people.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the parable shows Israel's failure to honor their "preexisting status" as God's selected nation. John Nolland wrote that to replace the people of Israel who have ignored the invitation to the banquet by the king (22:8), is one of the main focuses of the parable.<sup>9</sup> Nolland talks about the result of the first invitees (Israel) not accepting the summons when the wedding feast is ready. Likewise, Stuart K. Weber's interpretation of the parable of the wedding feast

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<sup>8</sup> Examples of those scholars are: John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 884-885; Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew* HNTC (Nashville: Holman Publishers, 2000), 350-351; Margaret Hannah, *The Nature and Demands of the Sovereign Rule of God in the Gospel of Matthew* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 182-183.

<sup>9</sup> Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 889.

said, “The hypocritical Jewish leaders had not only rejected their responsibilities; they were turning their back on the privileges of their inheritance.” The implication of this interpretation is that it is the Gentiles, the invited people from the streets that are given the honor and privilege of acceptance, into salvation in God’s kingdom. However, Anthony Saldarini from the point of view of a member of the Christian-Jewish community said that the parable is not about the Gentiles.<sup>10</sup> For Saldarini, the first invitees to the feast are the leaders of Israel and the second invitees from the streets are the people of Israel. Saldarini therefore said, the words, “*For many are called, but few are chosen*” in verse 14 refers to all people of Israel as the called people of God, but only a few of them, those who believe in Jesus Christ become the chosen ones. Saldarini’s interpretation reflects his strong support of the Jewish members of the Christian community. Saldarini speaks from the new perspective of considering important the Jewish community in the reading of the New Testament – the approach that abolishes the anti-Semitism look at Jesus’ ministry.

Second, the parable of the wedding banquet emphasizes the authority and ruling power of God. According to Saldarini, the difference between Luke’s and Matthew’s versions of the parable of the wedding banquet shows Matthew’s accentuation of God’s authority.<sup>11</sup> Saldarini observed that the parable of the wedding feast in Luke emphasizes wealth, and in Matthew the parable focuses on God’s authority. Again, reflected in Saldarini’s interpretation is the fact he considers important the Jewish people as the elect by God’s authority alone for a particular purpose. In this regard, Saldarini said that there

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<sup>10</sup> Anthony Saldarini, *Matthew’s Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 63-64.

<sup>11</sup> Saldarini, *Matthew’s Christian-Jewish Community*, 63-64.

is significant link of Jesus' ministry to the people of Israel who fail to honor Jesus, those regarded as the lost sheep of Israel (10:5-6). Daniel Patte is another scholar whose interpretation of the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew shows the importance of God's power and authority in and through Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup> Patte argues that the parable portrays the authority of God as not a manifestation of a demonstration of God's power, but a manifestation of inviting people into God's kingdom. Patte's interpretation reflects generosity and hospitality. Nolland's interpretation of the wedding banquet also reflects the emphasis placed on the importance of God's authority in the parable. According to Nolland, in Luke's version of the wedding banquet parable there is no king and son involved, but there is in Matthew's version. In Matthew, it is the king that arranges the wedding feast for his son. Thus, Matthew's version of the parable of the banquet asserts God's authority and sovereignty.

Third, the parable reflects the destruction of Jerusalem and the condemnation of God's servants such as the prophets and Jesus. For example, Craig A. Evans interprets Matthew 22:1-14 as depiction of the destruction of the Jerusalem city in 70 A.D.<sup>13</sup> Evans wrote, "This Matthean detail (wedding banquet) could mirror the horrors of the capture and destruction of Jerusalem and the temple."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Ulrich Luz in his studies of Matthew said that the parable of the wedding feast refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., as a consequence of Israel's condemnation of Jesus.<sup>15</sup> Douglas R. A. Hare also saw the parable of the wedding banquet as showing Israel's not accepting Jesus. For

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<sup>12</sup> Daniel Patte, *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) 301-305.

<sup>13</sup> Craig A. Evans, *Matthew* NCBC (Cambridge: University Press, 2012), 377.

<sup>14</sup> Evans, *Matthew*, 377.

<sup>15</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Studies in Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 210, 246; Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of Matthew: New Testament Theology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1995), 120.

Hare, “The burning of the rebels’ city seems to be allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E....”<sup>16</sup>

Fourth, the parable demonstrates the importance of practicing hospitality. Stanley Hauerwas saw the wedding feast as an event about hospitality, looking at it from the perspective of the church charity’s work of helping those in need. For Hauerwas, in this way, the church as a holy community needs to remember that God’s kingdom is a kingdom about food and mainly food for the poor. It is remembering God’s abundance. Hauerwas’ interpretation is different in the sense that he emphasizes the significance of the social and cultural situation of people in need in the parable such as those from the streets. Nolland’s interpretation of the parable also touches the importance of generosity.

Fifth, the parable speaks of the eschatological aspect of Jesus’ ministry. Nolland and Weber are examples of interpretations that show this point. Nolland observed that the summons to the people to come to the feast is a calling to the eschatological banquet. For Weber the parable reveals the eschatological union between the Messiah and God’s saved people.

Overall, the five points mentioned show two important functions of the parable of the wedding banquet. Firstly, it expresses the salvation of God’s people (either Israel or Gentiles). Secondly, the parable speaks of God’s judgment in and through Jesus Christ. Only a few scholars considered the social and cultural aspects of the parable in terms of the social and cultural values and situations embedded in the text as reflected in the hospitable aspects of the parable. For example is the significance of inviting people as an

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<sup>16</sup> Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 251. See also, John F. Walvoord, *Matthew Thy Kingdom Come: A Commentary on the First Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1974), 164-165.



act of hospitality. Considering the social and cultural values and situations embedded in the text is the emphasis the interpretation below seeks.

## **2. Reading Methodology – My Kiribati hermeneutics of *Te Baka Ni Mare* with Sociorhetorical Criticism as the Interpretational tool.**

### **2.1. My Kiribati Hermeneutic of *Te Baka Ni Mare*.**

#### **2.1.1. Hermeneutics and its function in the world of biblical interpretation**

This section describes what hermeneutics is and its function as a new change to the world of biblical interpretation. In interpreting sacred texts using hermeneutics, Jasper writes, “Hermeneutics ...is about ‘interpretation’ ... especially the interpretation of sacred texts, which believers may understand as in some sense divinely inspired or ‘the word of God’”.<sup>17</sup> Jasper in these words, speaks of sacred texts as divinely inspired word of God. Accordingly, this study considers the chosen text studied in this thesis as a divinely inspired word of God. As such, the text becomes the basis and center of the interpretation.<sup>18</sup>

As mentioned in the introduction, using hermeneutics has been part of the interpretation of the Bible. Therefore, I would like to briefly describe what hermeneutics is and its function now in biblical interpretation – that function is considered the new change in the world of hermeneutic. This is important because it shows why I have used the hermeneutical approach in my search for meaning of the chosen text studied in this thesis.

‘Hermeneutics’ is an English translation of the classical Greek word *hermeneus* which means a person who explains things.<sup>19</sup> Jasper describes that what hermeneutics is about reflects the task carried out by Hermes, a messenger of the gods of Olympus in Greek mythology. Hermes’s job was to carry to the people of earth the messages of the

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<sup>17</sup> David Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics* (Westminster John Knox: Louisville, 2004), 7; Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 12-13.

<sup>18</sup> The use of hermeneutics has deficiency when the hermeneutics is imposed on the reading of the text. This way might produce a different interpretation of a text that could be looked at as an eisegesis.

<sup>19</sup> Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, 7; Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 1

gods of Olympus.<sup>20</sup> In other words, Hermes was a mediator between the gods and the people of the earth. This sense of responsibility is seen in the function of the use of hermeneutics in interpreting a text where a hermeneutic bridges the gap between the reader and the text. It is a way of approaching the text in which contemporary issues and social status are signified. Thus, biblical interpretation in today's world continues to consider important how the world/s of the reader now could make sense the message of the Gospel in his/her own context. It is a change that recognizes the significance of the social status of the reader and of the contemporary issues he/she encounters in the worlds he/she inhabits. The significance of recognition of the reader's world now was brought into hermeneutics by Martin Heidegger<sup>21</sup> and Hans-Georg Gadamer<sup>22</sup> - two of the famous philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The change was brought about by the continuous changing of cultures and the way people think about the world.<sup>23</sup> It is transformation from the classical hermeneutical approach to the structuralist, humanistic, and critical approaches. It shows a contrast between the traditional approach of interpretation that focuses on the author, and the biblical interpretation that considers important the world of the reader now, which evokes a new dimension. Fernando F. Segovia speaks of location of meaning as a meaning that is found in the encounter between the reader and the text.<sup>24</sup> Thus, my use of a hermeneutic

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<sup>20</sup> Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, 104-06. Jasper states here Martin Heidegger's contribution to humanistic approach. One is the idea of "Being and Time". Two is the 'significance of language.' According to Heidegger, language indicates 'being'.

<sup>22</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 356-57.

<sup>23</sup> The overview of the historical progress of hermeneutics is described in, Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*.

<sup>24</sup> Fernando F. Segovia, "Cultural Studies and Contemporary Biblical Criticism: Ideological Criticism as Mode of Discourse," in *Reading From This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in*

is not to impose the reader's situation and understanding of his/her context on the biblical text but to raise questions which are seeking answers in the biblical texts. Furthermore, my use of this approach as an island reader of the Bible<sup>25</sup> is not to nullify the traditional interpretations of the Gospel brought into our small island nations by missionaries (asserted by the conservativeness of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Christian scholars from Europe and the Western world) but to provide other interpretations from our worlds to go with those traditions.

### **2.1.2. Te baka ni mare (Wedding feast), a hermeneutic to analyze my sociorhetorical interpretation of Matthew 22:1-14.**

I will begin the description of my Kiribati hermeneutic with an explanation of the Kiribati word *te baka*. Knowing what this word means is important because it describes what 'feast' is according to our Kiribati social and cultural world. The word *ni mare* is the Kiribati transliteration of the word 'wedding' which I will describe later.

#### **a. Te baka (Feasts)**

*Te baka* (Feast or Feasting) is important in Kiribati. It is one among the many important aspects of *te I-Kiribati*.<sup>26</sup> Feasts are always celebrated with love, joy and happiness. Every Kiribati feast is part of our identity as *I-Kiribati*. It is an occasion where different traditional foods are prepared in traditional ways. There is a belief in our social and cultural world that we are not known to the world as *I-Kiribati* without our feasts.

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*Global Perspective*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tobert, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 1-17.

<sup>25</sup> Islander criticism as a reading approach where readers from our Pacific Island world or Oceania world use their knowledge, understanding and experience of their island worlds to read the Bible is becoming popular in our worlds. Examples: Vaitusi Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew's Gospel* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017); Nasili Vakauta, *Reading Ezra 9-10 Tu'a-Wise: Rethinking Biblical Interpretation in Oceania* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> *te I-Kiribati* means Kiribati way or culture.

There are many different feasts in Kiribati and they all have different meanings and significances according to the occasions they are practiced in – occasions such as thanksgiving, dedication, welcome, and farewell.

Every Kiribati *baka* (feast) is a family affair. Whoever has a *baka* the whole family is invited. For instance, if one member of the family has a *baka*, he or she must go around the village or the whole island and tell them about *te baka*. The purpose of this is to let all members of the family know about one's *baka* so that family members can come together and give a hand in the preparation. Most importantly, they are to come together to share in fellowship in love, joy and happiness in accordance with the purpose of *te baka*. Feasting in our culture determines the type of relationship members of our family have with each other. Feasting strengthens family ties.

One of the significances of our feasts is that they help maintain some of our social and cultural ways; one of these is our traditional foods and how they are prepared. Nowadays most of the Kiribati people are relying more on imported goods for our Kiribati feasts. Now, not many of our people labor the land for customary food. Relying on imported goods will make our own traditional ways of providing food for feasts disappear. The effect of climate change is another problem which brings many changes to the fertility of our island lands. So cultivating the land is not like in the past days. It is harder to cultivate the land nowadays.

The word *baka* literally means red or vermilion (used especially for the ripen pandanus fruit).<sup>27</sup> *Baka* as ripen pandanus fruit and in abundance is when it is ready to be used, is the meaning carried by the use of the word *te baka* – the Kiribati word for

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<sup>27</sup> Oliva, A *Combined Kiribati-English Dictionary* .

feasting. Thus, one other important aspect of *te baka* is it shows feasting as a celebration of abundance of food produce from people's lands, and from fishing the sea. As Reverend Mareweia Riteti<sup>28</sup> said, "*te baka* is a special occasion where the harvesting of food when they are ripe and ready to be used is celebrated." These foods are local foods from the land and the sea. These foods are to be planted in abundance so that when they are harvested, there is enough food for everyone who will present on the day of the celebration. For example, the pigs are to be fed and looked after carefully until they become big enough to be used in such celebration. And *te b'ab'ai* (the swamp taros) are watched daily to make sure they grow into big taros for *te baka* celebration. Apparently *te baka* in the old days relied on our local food produce. Riteti also mentioned that every *I-Kiribati baka* is a celebration of special occasions important in the Kiribati culture such as *te baka ni iein* (marriage celebration); an inauguration of a *m'aneaba* (meeting house), *b'akanibuto* (the fall of the remaining part of the umbilical cord of a child), *raniwi* (first birthday of a child); and to remember the dead. *Te baka* therefore can be either for joyfulness (wedding feast) or for sorrow (death).

As mentioned, the time of when *te baka* is to be carried out is very important. It should be undertaken in the time of food abundance in conjunction with the phases of the moon (first quarter, full moon, last quarter and new moon). *Te baka* nowadays also depends on different seasons as impacted by climate change. Planning for a good sunny day to carry out *te baka* helps improve the gathering of food from the land and sea. This means that *te baka* cannot be held at any time the family or the village wants. They have to wait for the right time so that preparation can be carried out accordingly. But despite

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<sup>28</sup> Reverend Mareweia Riteti is the former theology lecturer in Tangintebu Theological College. He is now the General Secretary of the Kiribati Uniting Church.

this important part of our *baka* culture, the impact of the outside world in terms of money and foreign materials and cultures have changed *te baka* in today's Kiribati world; now it depends on how much money the family can provide to make a good *baka* celebration.

According to Riteti, *te baka* is not for a celebration of harvesting food only, but also a celebration where a Kiribati person reveals his/her identity and position he/she holds in his/her village community. In other words, *te baka* shows recognition of the Kiribati people in terms of who they are as people in their society. It is an occasion of claiming and reclaiming rights and positions in families and villages based on how abundant the food that you are able to produce. It is a day that showcases a villager or family member who has been working hard on planting his/her land and fishing the sea. *Te baka* therefore reveals the life of *te I-Kiribati* in terms of wealth, strength, courage, skills, and utter beliefs in the spirits of the ancestors and God. This thesis focuses only on one *baka* from our Kiribati social and cultural world which will be used as a hermeneutic to read the wedding feast in Matt 22:1-14. It is *te baka ni mare* or wedding feast in Kiribati. Below I will describe *te baka ni mare* and how it will be utilized in this study as a hermeneutic.

**b. *Te baka ni mare* (Wedding Feast)**

*Te baka ni mare* is a combination of two Kiribati words which is '*te baka*' and '*ni mare*'. '*Te baka*' as described above is a special occasion of feasting in Kiribati social and cultural world hosted by a village or family. *Ni mare* is the translation of the word 'marriage.' The Kiribati word '*mare*' is not a traditional Kiribati word or concept. According to Tooma Boata (a former secondary school teacher on Kiribati linguistics and culture or customs), he said that our word *mare* is the transliteration of the English word

‘marry’ or ‘marriage’, because our own Kiribati word for marriage is actually *‘iein’*. *Mare* is a word introduced into our *I-Kiribati* vocabulary by the *i-matang* or missionaries.

Reverend Kaireiti Ekebat<sup>29</sup> said that our Kiribati word *iein* comes from the word *ie* which means mating – mating between animals or people. So *iein* literally means living together as husband and wife. In the past days most *ieins* or marriages in Kiribati were simply based on the parents’ arranging of *iein* or marriage. When the parents of a boy want their son to marry, they would approach the family of the girl they want their son to marry. On some islands, children are betrothed at a very early age, sometimes even before birth; but others after puberty. All marriage negotiations are conducted by the parents, brothers, sisters or first cousins of the couple. Usually the first choice is a girl whose parents are from a *kāinga* (family) that owns many lands. The negotiation would have less chance of being accepted by a girl’s parents or family if the boy comes from a family of low class, or is the youngest of a large family for he is unlikely to inherit much land. The girl’s parents would be pleased to accept if the boy’s parents are from a wealthy family – a family with a *m’aneaba* (small canoe), a *baurua* (a large sailing canoe), or a *mā* (fish trap), as they know the boy would inherit considerable property. This was the practice of bringing a couple into marriage since *te iein* is not only based on love but also in wealth (especially land). The parents decide for their son’s future. A son has no say, if he doesn’t like what his parents choose for him, he has to accept it.

This study prefers to use *te baka ni mare* as this phrase makes it clear this study is not discussing the arranged marriage practice of *te iein* that is based on wealth and status.

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<sup>29</sup> Reverend Kaireiti Ekebat is one of the pastors of the Kiribati Uniting Church of Onotoa. He is one of the elders and a well-respected pastor in the Kiribati community.

*Te baka ni mare* designates the merging of Kiribati and Christian cultures of egalitarian love and respecting of each other. This merging carries the importance of what *te baka* is as mentioned in the description of *te baka*. It speaks of feasting in Kiribati as an occasion that not only invites people to participate in sharing food and fellowship but it is also an occasion to showcase abundance of food and hard work. More importantly, feasting in Kiribati also defines the identity of who a Kiribati is.

## **2.2. Sociorhetorical Approach as the interpretational tool to explore the Matt 22:1-14**

Vernon K. Robbins developed Sociorhetorical criticism as a combination of a Social Science approach with Literary-based features of texts in Biblical studies.<sup>30</sup> Robbins aimed to develop a rhetorical approach that integrated literary, social, cultural, and ideological issues in the interpretation of biblical texts. Sociorhetorical criticism considers the text having its own world encoded and embedded in the language of the text.<sup>31</sup> The sociorhetorical approach provides tools for readers to explore how the language of a text makes meanings and how the interpreters relate those meanings to their own world.<sup>32</sup> Readers with different perspectives and views of life from various and different locations may examine the same text.<sup>33</sup> Hence, the sociorhetorical approach is not meant to abolish other methods and interpretations but to make dialogues with them. This way will produce new meanings that are relevant to our worlds and locations. This

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<sup>30</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to the Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996), 1.

<sup>31</sup> Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 1–2.

<sup>32</sup> Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Robbins, *The Invention of Christian Discourse*, 5: “a socio-rhetorical interpretive analytic applies a politics of invitation, with a presupposition that the people invited into the conversation will contribute significantly new insights as a result of their particular experiences, identities, and concerns. In other words, a socio-rhetorical interpretive analytic presupposes genuine team work: people from different locations and identities working together with different cognitive frames for the purpose of getting as much insight as possible on the relation of things to one another.”



emphasis of the sociorhetorical approach gives me the opportunity to bring into the interpretation of a text my situation as a reader from our Kiribati world.

Sociorhetorical criticism has five stages which are inner textual, intertextual, social and cultural texture, ideological texture, and sacred texture.<sup>34</sup> This study will use only these two stages: inner textual, and social and cultural texture.

The inner textual analysis will explore the placement of the parable of the wedding feast (Matt 22:1-14) in between the parable of the wicked tenants (21:33-46), and the Pharisees' questioning of Jesus about paying taxes (22:15-22). This leads to the consideration of the parable of the wedding banquet (22:1-14) as a literary unit which has an opening and closing signs – word signs that reveal the context in which the banquet takes place as a local place. Thus, the wedding feast has a world of its own and as such it is to be treated as a literary context that has its own literary local space with people in it as characters in different local social and cultural situations. The characterization of these characters will be explored by examining word patterns, the flow of the parable, and the movement of the characters and their relationship to each other.

Exploring the social and cultural texture will be followed where the social and cultural values as embedded in the text will be examined. It will look at different social and cultural values and situations encoded in the world of the text. In this way, how the invitees responded to the summons will be explored examining why they respond the way they do.

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<sup>34</sup> Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 2-4.

### 3. Summary

This Chapter shows the brief literature review of the text studied in this thesis. The end of the review indicates the direction the study follows. The study looks at the social and cultural aspects of the wedding feast as told and shown in the world encoded in the text. The chapter also describes the reading methodology which is the explanation of my hermeneutic called *Te baka ni mare* and the sociorhetorical criticism as the interpretational tool. The reading methodology shows that the hermeneutic will be used to analyze the sociorhetorical interpretation of the text at the end. It is the task of the next chapter to deal with the sociorhetorical interpretation of Matthew 22:1-14 according to the framework set out above.

### **III. CHAPTER TWO: A SOCIORHETORICAL INTERPRETATION OF MATTHEW 22:1-14**

This chapter is the interpretation of the text (Matt 22:1-14) using sociorhetorical criticism. The interpretation follows the framework laid out in the previous chapter. The interpretation begins with an inner textual exploration of the text. The inner textual exploration will examine the placement of the parable of the wedding feast and the consideration of this parable as a literary unit. Exploring the social and cultural texture will be followed where the social and cultural values embedded in the text will be examined. A conclusion to the interpretation ends this chapter. The New Revised Standard Version is the English translation of the Bible used in this interpretation. The Greek version of the New Testament used in this study is 'The New Greek English Interlinear New Testament'. This Greek version of the New Testament' is the UBS 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Nestle-Aland 26<sup>th</sup> edition.

#### **1. Inner textual Analysis**

The inner textual analysis will be the exploration of the placement of the parable of the wedding banquet between the parable of the wicked tenants (21:33-46), and the Pharisees' questioning of Jesus about paying taxes (22:15-22).<sup>35</sup> This leads to the consideration of the parable of the wedding banquet (22:1-14) as a literary unit which has an opening and closing signs. Thus, the wedding feast has a literary world of its own and as such it will be treated as a literary context that has a literary local space with people in it. These people are characters in the text in different local social and cultural situations.

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<sup>35</sup> Identifying the literary significance of the placement of the selected text is important. It shows the function of the text in the progression of the story or narration. It is also seen as the part of the narrational texture and pattern of the narrative or story. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 15.

The characterization of these characters will be explored by examining how the word patterns and progression of the text tell and show the movement of these characters and their relationship to each other. This is important because it will show that the characters as local people inhabiting the local space (as reflected in the local world encoded in the language of the text) do have their own local social, cultural, and traditional values of dealing with wedding feasts.

### **3.1. Placement of the wedding feast (Matt 22:1-14) in Matthew**

The exploration of the significance of the placement of Matthew 22:1-14, in Matthew's presentation of Jesus' ministry, is important. It shows why Jesus speaks of this parable in this part of his ministry as a parable of inviting people into God's kingdom. Matthew 22:1-14 is about the parable of the wedding banquet. The parables in Matthew's gospel are stories about the kingdom of heaven. In Matthew's presentation of Jesus' ministry each parable has its own literary and theological significances in the accentuation of Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom. These significances relate to a certain emphasis of Jesus' ministry in particular moments of Jesus' journey towards Jerusalem. Thus, each parable is regarded as a literary and narrative unit. In other words, each parable as a rhetorical and narrative unit has a literary function important to the meaning of Jesus' ministry at the moment the parable is told. For example, Matt 22:1-14, the parable of the wedding banquet is considered to function as a literary amplification of Jesus' teachings on what judgment is, told and shown in chapters 19 to 25, before Jesus enters his passion and resurrection in chapters 26 to 28.<sup>36</sup> It is important therefore to explore the significance of the placement of Matt 22:1-14 in Matthew's presentation of

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<sup>36</sup> The proposed structure of Matthew by Benjamin W. Bacon shown below which the interpretation herein is based upon shows what these chapters are.

Jesus' ministry. In doing so, this thesis will deal with the placement of Matt 22:1-14 in Matthew's gospel in light of Benjamin W. Bacon's proposed fivefold structures of Matthew's gospel in Bacon's work called *Studies in Matthew*.<sup>37</sup>

There are various structures of Matthew's gospel to make sense of Matthew's emphases.<sup>38</sup> This thesis chose Bacon's proposed outline of Matthew's presentation of Jesus' ministry based on this fivefold formula – "And when Jesus finished...." (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). This fivefold formula is considered by Bacon as representations of Moses' five books. According to Bacon, Matthew as a converted rabbi became a Christian legalist who considered Jesus as the new Moses. In this regard, Bacon saw Jesus as a teacher.<sup>39</sup>

### **Bacon's Structure of Matthew**

Prologue: Infancy Narrative (1-2)

Book 1: Discipleship (3-7)

A. Narrative (3-4)

B. Sermon on the Mount (5-7)

Book 2: Apostleship (8-10)

A. Narrative (8-9)

B. Missionary Discourse (10)

Book 3: Hiding of Revelation (11-13)

A. Narrative (11-12)

B. Parable of Discourse (13)

Book 4: Church Administration (14-18)

A. Narrative 14-17)

B. Community Discourse (18)

Book 5: Judgment (19-25)

A. Narrative (19-23)

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<sup>37</sup> Benjamin W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* (New York: Henry Holt, 1930), 82, 265-335

<sup>38</sup> For various and different structures of the Gospel of Matthew see David R. Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 21-56, and M. Eugene Boring, "The Convergence of Source Analysis, Social History, and Literary Structure in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Seminar Papers: Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting* (Georgia: Scholars Press, 1994), 587-611.

<sup>39</sup> Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel*, 11, 26-30.

B. Eschatological Discourse (24-25)  
Epilogue: Passion and Resurrection (26-28)

The part of this structure on Judgment which is regarded as Book 5 is where the parable of the banquet is placed. It is the narrative section that begins with chapter 19 and ends with chapter 23. This narrative section tells and shows Jesus' responses to the many challenges to Jesus' ministry from the Jewish leaders and the continued-lack of faith of the disciples. These events are in anticipation of what the eschatological discourse is, as shown in chapters 24 to 25.

The narrative part of Book 5 begins with the formulaic saying that marks the beginning of each section according to Bacon's fivefold structure: *When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.* Jesus' entering Judea is first met by another challenge by the Pharisees on the law of divorce. This is followed by more questions from Jewish leaders against Jesus, and Jesus' responses to these questions while disciples listen. It is a moment of obvious rejection of Jesus' saving mission by Jewish leaders as Jesus enters Jerusalem (in chapter 21) on his way to his death and resurrection. So Jesus' teaching on judgment in this part of Matthew's gospel, as Bacon proposed, does make sense. The teaching in this part could be interpreted as foreshadowing the passion and resurrection of Jesus in the final chapters of Matthew's gospel. More importantly, the teaching about judgment implies joy in the everlasting life for the followers who believe in Jesus Christ as manifested in the parables of the Two Sons, the Wicked Tenants, and the Wedding Banquet in chapters 21 and 22. Some of the followers of Jesus are disciples. These parables therefore could be interpreted as assertion of Jesus' willingness to make his disciples and all those who

follow him accept his proclamation of the kingdom of heaven. It is God's invitation of all to God's kingdom. Hence, it is important to now explore what the parable of the wedding banquet means in relation to Jesus' teaching on judgment and invitation to the kingdom of heaven in this part of Matthew's gospel.

Jesus speaks in parables in chapters 21 and 22 to answer the questioning of his authority by the chief priests and elders in 20:23-27. The questioning of Jesus' authority occurred when Jesus drives out the people that sold and bought goods in the temple and Jesus' healing of the sick in the temple. The first of the three parables spoken by Jesus in this part is the parable of the two sons. This parable emphasizes the importance of decision making and repentance. It is a call to those who are still not listening to Jesus' teachings on God's kingdom that they have a chance to listen, obey, and accept Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom – the opportunity to become members of God's kingdom. The invitation is for all including the Jewish leaders.

This is also the message in the next parable, the parable of the wicked tenants (21:33-45). This parable speaks of the tenants wicked way. The owner of the wine press gives the tenants the opportunity to lease his wine press. But when the owner sends his slaves to the tenants to collect the lease payment, tenants seize the slaves. The tenants beat one of the slaves, kill another, and stone another. The owner then sends his son, but the tenants kill him too. This is the picture of those who are given the opportunity to become members of the kingdom of heaven, or to be in the promised salvation but refuse it. Instead, they kill those who proclaim to them the message of salvation. The similar message is seen in the next parable, the parable of the wedding feast (22:1-14). How does

the parable of the wedding feast tell and show God's invitation of all as an opportunity for anyone to become a member of God's kingdom? The following sections will try answer that question.

### 3.2. Matt 22:1-14 as a rhetorical and narrative unit

A rhetorical and narrative unit<sup>40</sup> has a beginning, middle, and ending with literary opening and closing signs. The interpretation presented in this study divides Matt 22:1-14 as follows.

V1	Beginning	-	Jesus continues to speak in parables
Vv2-13	Middle	-	What the parable is about – Invitation to God's Kingdom
V14	Ending	-	The result of the invitation

The division of the wedding banquet as a rhetorical and narrative unit written above shows that the beginning is told in one verse and the ending in another. They are the opening and closing signs of the unit. I will firstly analyze these signs.

V1 (*Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying*) as the beginning of the unit indicates, there are two important rhetorical and narrative features that are important to the understanding of the parable of the wedding feast. First, the mention of the name Jesus from a rhetorical point of view is significant. This is revealed in the function of these four important factors in any rhetorical situation: "a speaker or writer, and audience, and a discourse... [and] the occasion or context in which the work is composed or delivered".<sup>41</sup> According to Aristotle, there are three factors that define who the

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<sup>40</sup> Kennedy wrote that a "rhetorical unit must have a beginning, a middle, and an end." George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (The University of North Carolina: University Press, 1984), 33.

<sup>41</sup> Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 15.



speaker is. They are “*ethos, pathos, and logos.*”<sup>42</sup> The factor of the consideration of who the speaker is in relation to the credibility of his/her *ethos* or character, is very important. This credibility is defined by the status of a speaker and how he/she carries out his/her role in relation to that status. In other words, believing and trusting one’s message depends on who the messenger is in the eyes of the audience. The mention of Jesus’ name in the beginning of the parable brings attention to the parable. It suggests that the message that will be told in the parable of the feast should not be missed. Second, the mention of Jesus speaking in parables in verse one shows the continuation of the use of parables by Jesus to put through to people the message of ‘invitation to God’s kingdom’.

Verse 1 as the opening sign of Matt 22:1-14 as a unit shows Jesus’ continuation of the use of parables as a method of teaching to deliver the message of salvation for all. Verse 1 begins with the conjunction *καὶ*<sup>43</sup> (and) indicating a literary connection of the parable of the wedding banquet to the preceding parables – the parable of the wicked tenants and the parable of the two sons. What this means is that the parable of the wedding banquet continues to reveal the message presented in the first two parables. Because the parable of the wedding feast is considered the last parable of the threefold-parables put together in the part of Jesus’ entering Jerusalem (in Matthew’s Gospel), the parable of the wedding feast therefore is interpreted as a summary of what the first two parables describe – the invitation to God’s kingdom.

V14 (*For many are called, but few are chosen*) as the end section of the unit, shows what the middle part of the unit (vv. 2-13) holds which is something to do with being called to do something. V14 as the end section of the unit marks the closing sign of

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<sup>42</sup> Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 15.

<sup>43</sup> *καὶ* translated ‘and’ is a conjunction in Greek language. Jeremy Duff, *The Elements of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: University Press, 2005), 107.

the unit. V14 begins with the conjunction coordinating of γάρ<sup>44</sup> (for). This conjunction is usually used as a literary indication of a discourse or story coming to a conclusion. It marks a rhetorical result of a speech or narrative. What this verse shows is that what the parable talks about is something to do with being called or calling. The meaning of what is being called or what is being called to, will be found when the middle part is explored. It is the task of the next section to explore that.

The middle part of the unit (vv.2-13) starts with the words ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (the kingdom of heaven) showing the parable as the parable about the kingdom of heaven. This kingdom is where a king is planning a wedding for his son. The words ἀνθρώπῳ βασιλεῖ (to a man king) in verse two show that the king is a king of man. These words suggest that God as king portrayed in this parable is God the Creator. Verse 2 mentions not only what the parable is about which is God's kingdom, but also what that kingdom is compared to. It is compared to a king who gives a wedding banquet for his son. The purpose of the parable is to compare God's kingdom to a king's preparation of a wedding feast for his son. This comparing task is described in the following verses of the rhetorical and narrative unit (vv3-14).

Comparing God's kingdom to a king's preparation of a wedding feast for his son begins in verse 3 which is the indication of the rhetorical situation<sup>45</sup> of the parable of the wedding feast in two levels (of the literary context of the text). One level is the historical situation of the intended audience of Matthew – the Jewish people. Matthew's presentation of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of heaven is to invite all to believe

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<sup>44</sup> γάρ translated as 'for' or 'because' is a causative conjunction. Duff, *New Testament Greek*, 106-108.

<sup>45</sup> A rhetorical situation is where an individual is called upon to make a response. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 34. See also John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A beginner's Handbook* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Louisville: Westminster: John Knox Press, 2007), 74.

and follow the good news of Jesus Christ. This level emphasizes the world behind the text or the world of the author. The other level is the literary context of the parable itself which is considering the importance of the text. This is shown in Jesus' relationship to his audience in the text such as the disciples or the crowd. It is also shown in the king's relationship to the invitees and his servants. Thus, invitation to a wedding feast as a picture of invitation to God's kingdom is the rhetorical situation of the parable.

At times, the rhetorical situation evokes a rhetorical problem. This is when an audience does not want to listen to a speaker because they may perceive the speaker as someone having the authority to "advance the claims he wishes to make."<sup>46</sup> This is seen in the reason why Jesus says the parable of the wedding feast. And this reason is revealed in the parable. Jewish leaders (going against Jesus' ministry) do not want to hear Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom. They do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah. According to the parable of the wedding banquet, the first invitees do not accept the king's invitation. It is not mentioned why they do not accept the first invitation. One simple answer as mentioned is that the first invitees do not perceive the king as someone having the authority to invite them. Another reason could be that the first invitees prefer to concentrate on their business and farm. This shows that the first invitees are not poor people. They have money and are well off people of society. But any rhetorical problem has a resolution in the text in which the problem occurs. That resolution is described beginning in verse 4.

In verse 4, the king is shown telling the servants to tell people the food he had prepared. The words on food and how they are prepared is a way of getting the attention of an audience. The calves that have been slaughtered are fat calves. They are the best

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<sup>46</sup> Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 36.

calves. The ox and the fat calves mentioned are associated with the sacrifice ritual of the Jewish religious belief. Thus, food as prepared by the king for the wedding feast is traditional food – prepared in a Jewish traditional ways. Furthermore, the king's preparation of the feast and the inviting of guests are hospitable acts showing hospitality as one of the important cultural practices of the Jewish social, cultural, and religious world. Most importantly, the invitees do not need to bring anything or to come and help cook the food. The parable says that everything for the wedding feast is ready. These words should help attract the attention of the invitees. But the delicious food and the already prepared food are not sufficient to convince the first invitees. Instead, the king's servants are killed by the invitees. The first invitees continue on with their own personal works and ways which make the rhetorical problem as a problem not easy to resolve.

The king takes over the task of resolving this problem and is shown in verses 7-8. The king sends his troops to destroy those who kill the king's servants. It is not the end of the story. Different people are invited and have accepted the invitation. They are from the streets. These people although they are invited guests, it did not stop the king from scolding one of them who did not wear the right costume. It shows that everyone has a chance to enter the wedding feast to enjoy the meal and the fellowship with other invitees. But everyone regardless of who they are should obey the rules of the feast. The one who does not obey is taken out of the feast. In the end the parable finishes with v14 that many are called but few are chosen.

Verse 14 as mentioned begins with the conjunction coordinating γάρ (for). A conjunction coordinating joins together two sentences with one of the sentences as the resulting sentence. This is the function of v14 in the parable of the wedding feast. It

shows the reason or the result of accepting the king's invitation. In other words, it reveals that the invitation by the king should not be ignored. The importance of this message is shown in revealing that message in and through the parable as an enthymeme.<sup>47</sup> An enthymeme as a rhetorical device has three parts: the major premise, the minor premise, and the conclusion. The major premise is the main argument followed by the minor premise which is a supporting explanation to the major premise. The last part is the conclusion which usually is indicated by the conjunction γάρ (for).

Vv11-14 is seen as an enthymeme which illustrates the importance of knowing one's role and responsibility as a follower of Jesus. The major premise of this enthymeme is shown in vv. 11-12 which is the king's visit to the wedding banquet where the king finds one person not wearing the wedding robe. The minor premise is told in the king's commanding the attendants to bind the one not wearing the costume and take him outside. The conclusion part of the enthymeme is v14: *For many are called, but few are chosen.*

Hospitality is seen in the king's invitation of guests but it should not be taken advantage by the guests. There are certain protocols they need to follow such as wearing the right costume to the feast. As shown in the story, one of the guests did not wear the costume which resulted in his being thrown out of the feast.

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<sup>47</sup> An enthymeme is a rhetorical syllogism that is assumed from general and special truths. See Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, trans. J. H. Freese (Massachusetts: Harvard, 1991), xxxvi-xxxvii. In other words, it is a statement that infers a proposition or shows arriving at a conclusion. See also Burton L. Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 38-39. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 16-17.

#### **4. Summary**

This chapter shows the inner textual analysis of Matt 22:1-14. It explores the placement of the text in the progression of Jesus' ministry according to Matthew. The exploration reflects the significance in Matthew of putting together the parable of the two sons, the parable of the wicked tenants, and the wedding feast towards the end of Jesus' ministry. They show that there is chance and opportunity to accept God's invitation to his Kingdom. Getting free food should be the emphasis but taking part in sharing food in accordance with the rules of feasting is the most important part. The thesis will move to the next Chapter which is exploring the social and cultural texture of the text to seek whether this point of participation in sharing the feast is one of the emphases of the text. Analysing these interpretations with my Kiribati hermeneutic will follow in Chapter Four.

#### **IV. CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL TEXTURE OF THE TEXT (Matt 22:1-14)**

The inner-textual interpretation has shown the importance of the wedding feast in the Jewish world as a special social, cultural, and religious occasion where certain protocols are to be carried out by participants such as the guests. The consideration of Matthew's gospel as a presentation of Jesus' ministry's disregarding of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean social and cultural values that marginalized people, and resistance of the Roman imperial power, are widely accepted.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the social and cultural textual analysis in this chapter will explore the text seeking how the king's invitation of guests to his son's wedding is an event that reflects resistance of the Roman imperial power, and Jesus' confronting of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean social and cultural values and practices. These worlds and powers had been entrenching unequal opportunities for the poor and the disadvantaged in the Palestinian world. The chapter will examine the text finding how this resistant approach shows the importance of feasting as a social and cultural event. It is an event upholding the social and cultural values of hospitality, traditional food preparation, and wearing of traditional attire of the Jewish world from the point of view of Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom. Jesus in his ministry upholds these Jewish traditions according to God's will. In other words, it is Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom from his consideration of the Jewish community's social and cultural values in God's ways as values entrenching and accentuating egalitarianism and equality.

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<sup>48</sup> Warren Carter argued that Matthew's Gospel cannot be fully understood without taking into account the way Jesus' ministry interacts with Roman imperialism. This argument is supported by the interpretation herein. Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001). For some details regarding the existence of Matthew's community in the Roman Empire and its system see David L. Balch, ed., *History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disiplinary Approaches* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991)

From this point of view, Jesus in his ministry transforms the social, cultural, economic and political values of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean world, and Roman imperial power that had been oppressing the people on the margin in the Palestine society, into the ways of God. The following sections will elaborate on these claims.

### **1. Transforming ‘Patron-client relationship’ in Matthew 22:1-14**

One of the predominant interpretations of the parable of the wedding feast mentioned in the literature review of Matt 22:1-14 is the authority of God in and through the king’s character. Hence, the king’s actions in the interpretation herein are looked at as actions of resisting the Roman imperial power, and defying of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean world’s practice of the kinship system as a patron-client relationship.<sup>49</sup> Another interpretation of Matt 22:1-14 shown in the literature review is the behavior of the king in sending his troops to destroy those who murder his servants; this is an allusion to the destruction of the temple by the Roman Empire. The interpretation in this chapter sees this sending of the king’s troops as not destruction of the temple but the destruction of the Roman imperial power and 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean world’s exercise of the patron-client relationship value. The interpretation implies the importance of upholding traditional social and cultural values of a community as ways of sustaining faith in a community.

The patron-client relationship is the social, cultural, and economic system behind the running of farms and businesses that the first invitees prioritize as mentioned instead

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<sup>49</sup> Bruce J. Malina, “Grace/Favor,” in *Biblical Social Values and Their Meaning: A Handbook* (ed. John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 83-85. See also Jerome Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 37-39, 47-48, 108-14, 156-61.



of the king's invitation. This relationship helps identify the honor and the shame in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean world. Thus, the social and cultural textural interpretation explores how that relationship is reflected in the text.

The parable of the wedding feast itself has in view the household of the people at the lowest social order of the first century Roman imperial society. The parable reflects the rural culture in the first century Mediterranean society as shown in the description of farms and businesses the first invitees decided to go to instead of accepting the king's invitation. That rural image indicates the presence of the kinship system<sup>50</sup> in the parable. The kinship system runs every household in the Roman imperial society, either "small subsistence households" or "larger units with slaves" households<sup>51</sup> which encourages gender specific roles. Those households were the bases of production and consumption in the Roman imperial society. Under that system, every household must undertake properly its function to ensure better food production. Better food perpetuates good economic stability. It is undertaken under the trade or business system of patron-client relationship where certain representatives of the Roman imperial power are regarded as the patron and the rest of the people as client. It is a result or quality of favoring an individual or a group of people over another individual or another group.

This relationship is linked to taxation in the Roman imperial ruling of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean world. In this relationship the patron as the elite does not pay tax and the client is the tax payer. Thus, the patron as the elite enjoys better lives than the tax

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<sup>50</sup> David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity*, 157-158; K. C. Hanson, "Kinship," in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (ed. Richard Rohrbaugh; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 62-79.

<sup>51</sup> Richard Saller, "Women, Slaves, and the Economy of the Roman Household," in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (ed. David L. Bach and Carolyn Osiek; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 191.

payers.<sup>52</sup> The Jewish leaders were considered as brokers between the Roman power as the patron and the rest of the Jewish people as client.<sup>53</sup> As such, if the Jewish leaders pay tax, they only pay a little compared to the rest of the Jewish people. Failure to abide by the imperial system's obligations makes a kinship face its consequences such as the forced taking of their belongings or land. One of the obligations as mentioned is taxation. This could be one of the reasons why the first invitees in the parable of the wedding feast chose to go to their farms and business rather than accepting the invitation. They have obligations to fulfill such as collecting taxes from the farms and businesses of their people – the Jewish people.

The Greek word ἐμπορίαν<sup>54</sup> in v. 5 translated as business is a word that speaks of business in relation to trading between the patron and client in the patron-client relationship. This trading is linked to the Roman taxation system. The Greek word for farm (that the first invitees go to) is ἀγρόν.<sup>55</sup> Another translation for this Greek word is 'field'. The field is the place where food is produced by every household – to supply markets and the Roman imperial households. The first invitees' attitude that it was more important attending their farms and businesses than it was to attend the king's invitation is revealed in their murdering of the king's messengers or servants. It suggests desperation on the part of the first invitees to prioritize attending their farm and business tasks in order to fulfill their obligations to the demands of the Roman imperial power. It is the pressure or influence from an external political power that is affecting their

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<sup>52</sup> See Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 9-35.

<sup>53</sup> According to Carter, some of the Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus' ministry were the leaders who do not want to accept Jesus' vision of God's kingdom because it will remove their religious and imperial status. Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 9-35.

<sup>54</sup> Michael H. Burer and Jeffrey E. Miller, *A New Readers Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008), 57.

<sup>55</sup> Burer and Miller, *A New Readers Lexicon*, 57.

treatment of their traditional ways of dealing with their farms and businesses – the so-called subsistence ways that is based on egalitarian sharing of work and food without any cost. For example, in the festival of the Passover when lands and farms were harvested, all food left behind un-harvested are left on the field for the poor of the community and usually plenty of food is left behind for the poor.

The subsistence way as Jewish social and cultural ways of producing food and preparation of food is reflected in the narrator's telling of the king's preparation of the wedding feast shown in v. 4: *Again he sent other slaves, saying, "Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet."* The dinner prepared here is the afternoon meal and the food prepared is oxen and fat calves. These are usually the animals used in the offering of sacrifices in the Jewish world.<sup>56</sup> The oxen and fat calves meat are considered expensive and are only seen and eaten in special feasts such as wedding feasts. The fat calves are the best calves for they are well looked after for special occasions – these are animals that are well kept and cared for, for special occasions. The words '*everything is ready*' suggest that the feast is already prepared according to the Jewish ways of preparing a wedding feast. Thus, the wedding feast considered as a feast prepared in the traditional Jewish ways is interpreted as a representation of the household system of God's kingdom because it is from the Jewish world that the will of God came through for the world. As such, it challenges other ways or foreign ways such as the Roman imperial ways that has been oppressing the usual social and cultural ways of living in the Jewish world.

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<sup>56</sup> Leviticus 3-5; 11:1-47. Mentioned in Lev. 11:1-47

In other words, the king's invitation of guests to his son's wedding as shown in the parable of the wedding feast is Jesus' way of teaching. He is transforming or reversing the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean world and Roman imperial power practice of the patron-client relationship into the household of God's undertaking of that relationship. That is, the king as representation of God is the patron. The servants sent by the king to invite the guests are the brokers and the invitees are the clients. The invitees include both the ones who did not want to come and those on the streets. Thus, the client can be looked at as anyone. Sadly, some of the servants as brokers were killed.

Behind this undertaking of the patron-client relationship is the significant upholding of traditional ways pertaining to the king's household. These ways include the food he prepares which is the traditional food – the oxen and the fat calves. Another part of those traditional ways is wearing the right costume to be worn to a wedding feast – or the right traditional attire. Also important in this practice of the patron-client relationship is the order of calling the invitees. The first invitees are the people with high status in the community. They own farms and businesses. They run the economic life of the community and then they are followed by the invitation of the rest of the community. It shows that in Jesus' ministry, Jesus regards important those who have status in the Jewish community and he teaches them to carry out their roles appropriate to that status. And one of those roles is making the right decisions; these are mainly decisions that affect the livelihood of other people in the community. In this way, their personal need should be secondary and other people's needs their priority. For example is acceptance of an invitation to a community event by someone from a community that considers the presence of the invitee as a person in status in that community very important

## 2. Challenge-response social communication

In the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean world, the type of social communication called ‘challenge-response (riposte)’ is a social communication used in public place where messages are passed on from a source to receiver. The source is the challenger and the receiver is the one who responds to the challenge. The function of this type of social communication is a chance given to anyone to gain honor in public. The honor gained in this communication depends on the characterization of the challenger and his/her message in terms of ethics, emotion and logic.<sup>57</sup> In other words, the importance of the message transferred by the challenger to the receiver should be reflected in the life of the character of the speaker. It is important therefore to consider that message in the presence of the challenger as speaker in relation to the speaker’s life. That consideration is significant as it will make certain the continuity of the importance of the message the challenger delivers. It identifies honor and shame in a public space.

The parable of the wedding feast shows the king as the challenger and the invitees as the respondents. The message is to come to the wedding banquet where food is already prepared by the king. The language of the parable presents the characterization of the king as ethical, emotional, and logical. The king’s ethical character is shown by way of his characterization as king who has servants and who has power. As king he not only has power but is a caring king who loves the people under his kingship. As such, the king is an honored person in the parable. The king’s emotional character is expressed by his compassion for the people he invites. He sends his servants not once but twice. The

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<sup>57</sup> 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.”

king's logical character is revealed in his not using his power to force the invitees in the first place. He gave them chances to accept his invitation. His sending of the troops to kill those who murder his troops is not because of their refusal of the invitation but their killing of his servants. Thus, the logical character of the king is seen in the reason he sends the troop to destroy the murderers. The king's ethical, emotional and logical characteristics as noted above describe the king as the only character in the parable in the wedding feast who has competence and as the only one in the parable who knows the invitees who deserve honor. Manifestly, those who accepted the king's invitation and abide by the rules of the feast are the honored ones. In other word, those who followed the traditions of feasting according to the expectations of the king are the honored ones. The expectations of the king are to attend the feast according to its traditions as laid out by the king – the food and right attire.

### **3. Summary**

The social and cultural textual interpretation has shown the king's invitation of the guests to his son's wedding feast as reversal of the patron-client relationship practiced by the Roman imperial power and the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean world. The transforming of this relationship is reflected in the consideration of the king as the patron and the invitees as the client. The servants sent to invite guests are the brokers. The important part of this interpretation regarding the preparation of the feast and its undertaking is that the wedding itself entrenches the significance of traditional ways in terms of food, clothes to wear, and the etiquette in inviting guests. The food prepared is obviously shown as the Jewish traditional food – the oxen and the fat calves. The clothes to wear to the feast are also important as can be seen in what happened to the person who

did not wear the right clothes. Also important is how the king carries out the invitation issued to the guests. There were guests invited first and the guests invited second. This is important in a community especially in recognition of the status of the various invitees. Sadly as mentioned, the recognition given by the king to the first invitees was ignored and not accepted and this constituted an insult to the king. The social and cultural interpretation ends with an extension of the interpretation of how the king's invitation of guests shows the significance of who is invited and how their acceptance of that invitation is a very significant factor to the host of the event. It shows that recognition is one important reason why a person is invited to a special occasion and how the invitee should likewise respond

**V. CHAPTER FOUR: HOW THE HERMENEUTIC OF *TE BAKA NI MARE* FUNCTIONED IN THE SOCIORHETORICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE TEXT (Matt 22:1-14)**

The purpose of this chapter is to explain how the hermeneutic of *Te baka ni mare* functioned in the sociorhetorical reading of Matt 22:1-14. As mentioned in the beginning of this study, the use of a hermeneutic from the reader's world to explore a text is a way of approaching the text in which contemporary issues and social status are signified. In this way, biblical interpretation now considers important how the world/s of the reader in today's world could make sense of the message of the Gospel in one's own situation and context. It is revisiting the text and finding more meanings relevant to my world as a Kiribati. I wanted to find out how feasting in the Bible could help make more sense of our practicing of our traditional Kiribati feasting in our Kiribati world. This is important because our Kiribati community as a Christian community always look to the Bible as the Scriptures that contains directions on how to go about dealing with life according to God's will. For this chapter, I will firstly recapitulate what *te baka ni mare* represents, followed by my analysis of how it functioned in my sociorhetorical interpretation of the text.

**1. Recapitulation of what *te baka ni mare* is**

*Te baka ni mare* is wedding feast. It is a very special traditional event in our Kiribati world. As such, it is an occasion that displays who we are as Kiribati people. This is reflected in one of our sayings about our feasts: "We are not known to the world as I-Kiribati without our feasts. *Te baka ni mare* as a family affair invites people from the bride's and bridegroom's families and villages. When a member of the family is to get



married, he or she must go around the village or the whole island and tell them about the wedding. The purpose of this is to let all members of the family know about one's wedding so that family members can come together and give a hand in the preparation, mainly the preparation of the *te baka ni mare* or the wedding feast. Most importantly, they are to come together to share in fellowship in love, joy and happiness in accordance with the purpose of '*te baka*'. Feasting in our culture determines the type of relationship members of our family have with each other. Feasting strengthens family ties.

*Te baka ni mare* is an occasion where different traditional foods are prepared in traditional ways. It helps maintain some of our social and cultural ways such as recognition of people of status in our community such as elders, and includes such matters as hospitality, traditional attire, and traditional speeches. But some of the things in our feastings are changing now, such as the popular demand for imported foods. The use of traditional food is slowly vanishing. One of the reasons for this change is that not many of our people work the land for customary food any more. Relying on imported goods will make our own traditional ways of providing food for feasts disappear. The word *baka* literally means red or vermilion (used especially for the ripen pandanus fruit).<sup>58</sup> *Baka* as ripen pandanus fruit, in abundance and when it is ready to be used, is the meaning carried by the use of the word *te baka* – the Kiribati word for feasting. One other traditional important aspect of *te baka* is that it shows feasting as a celebration of abundance of local food produced from people's lands, and from fishing the sea.

According to Riteti, *te baka* is not just for a celebration of harvesting food only, but also a celebration where a Kiribati person reveals his/her identity and position he/she holds in his/her village community. In other words, *te baka* shows recognition of the

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<sup>58</sup> Oliva, *A Combined Kiribati-English Dictionary*.

Kiribati people in terms of who they are as people in their society. It is an occasion of claiming and reclaiming rights and positions in families and villages based on how abundant is the food that you personally are able to produce. It is a day that showcases a villager or family member who has been working hard on planting his/her land and fishing the sea. *Te baka* therefore reveals the life of te I-Kiribati in terms of wealth, strength, courage, skills, and utter beliefs in the spirits of the ancestors and God.

## **2. How *te baka ni mare* functioned in the sociorhetorical interpretation of Matthew 22:1-14**

From the inner textual interpretation of the text, the parable of the wedding feast has a world of its own. It is a wedding feast carried out in a local context. It shows that the wedding feast told and shown in the text is context-based and people-based. The context is a Jewish context in the Roman imperial ruling world and the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean world. As such, Jesus' telling of the parable is to show how the Jewish people as followers of God's king as proclaimed by Jesus should maintain their Jewish identity in the midst of other dominant and influential cultures. From the hermeneutic of *te baka ni mare* this point is very important. Despite the influence of other cultures and values it is important to uphold our traditional values and ways such as our traditional feast. The influence of the outside world is manifestly seen and witnessed in our Kiribati world. And one very clear example is shown in our constant use of imported foods such as soft drinks and imported chicken meats.

The inner textual interpretation emphasizes that Jesus' telling of the parable of the wedding feast to the crowd is part of his proclamation of the kingdom of heaven. In other words, the telling of the parable is part of His proclamation of the ways of God that are to be received in order to partake in the blessings of that kingdom. From the point of view

of *te baka ni mare*, this interpretation shows that *te baka ni mare* as a Kiribati wedding feast can function as a way of showing to the world the Kiribati kingdom – the kingdom of its cultures and values or the so-called paradise of Kiribati. And in doing so, it is not only a way of showing and proclaiming the Kiribati world but also a way of inviting people into the Kiribati world. It is important to be aware as told in the interpretation that there will be people disrupting this proclamation and some of them are our own people. In other words, the feastings we hold such as our wedding feasts which we regard as important feasts in our Kiribati world are being ignored and not respected by some of our own people.

Coming to the social and cultural interpretation of the text, many important social and cultural values pertaining to feasts such as wedding feasts are brought up to be kept and looked after, for they maintain the beauty of a community in terms of its traditional values. Firstly is the importance of traditional food. The interpretation has shown the importance of upholding traditional foods as revealed in the king's preparation of his son's wedding feast. The food as described in the interpretation is food that is organized for a long time ahead, such as the fat calves. These animals are fed and taken care of for a long period of time in order to become fat and good animals to be used in the wedding feast. This affirms how we prepare for *te baka ni mare* in our Kiribati world. We have to put aside pigs to be fed well until they become bigger pigs, better for the wedding feast. We do the same with our plantations. We plant food to the time that they should be ready to be harvested for the wedding feast. So a wedding feast is not only a feast where we celebrate the marriage of a couple but it is also a feast when we celebrate our harvesting and our producing of an abundance of food for our community.

Secondly, from the hermeneutic of *te baka ni mare*, the parable of the wedding feast has shown the significance of considering the importance of the status of guests invited to a wedding feast. I find this important from a Kiribati perspective. We invite people to our wedding feasts according to their status in our community and we seat them as such in the arrangement of seats in the wedding feast. This is important because it shows recognition of our community's hierarchical system in the sense that they respond as such. The way the first invitees respond to the king's invitation in the parable of the wedding feast is an insult to the king. They should have recognized the invitation put forward especially by the king himself. Thirdly is the hospitality shown by the king shows another value we practice in our *baka ni mare*. The hospitality shown by the king is that he prepares everything himself and his inviting of the guests is not once but twice. This is how we invite people to our wedding feast in our Kiribati world. We invite them many times and we always say not to bring anything, we only need their presence. But usually, they always turn up with something to help out. Fourthly, the wedding feast is an event where we have to wear the right clothes. We have certain traditional wear for wedding feasts in Kiribati. Wearing the right clothes is a sign of respect for the given invitation.

### **3. Summary**

I have explained in this chapter how my hermeneutic of *te baka ni mare* functioned in my sociorhetorical interpretation of the text. I have found from my interpretation that the wedding feast as told by Jesus is a transforming event. It is to challenge Jesus' community to hold on to their ways and values as a way of confronting

the external forces trying to push out our traditions and our cultural values. It shows who we are in relation to our traditions and values.

## **VI. CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION TO THE THESIS**

This study is my attempt to make sense of the reality of life I live and encounter as a Kiribati Christian in my Kiribati world. It is an exercise to utilize new approaches to reading the Bible text which have now emerged and are considered important in the world of biblical interpretation. One approach is using a hermeneutic from the reader's world to revisit a text. It is not an approach to nullify other interpretations of a text but to seek other meanings of a text to be laid alongside those other interpretations.

This is the aim of my interpretation of Matt 22:1-14 from the Kiribati hermeneutic called *te baka ni mare* or the wedding feast. I have put forward in the beginning of this study questions about why I wanted to revisit the selected text studied here from that Kiribati hermeneutic. The questions are: Does the bringing in of the new imported food, materials, and new people (foreigners) help keep our traditional ways alive or Do they make our traditions disappear?

To find answers to these questions, the study in the form a thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter One shows the brief literature review of the text studied in this thesis, and the reading methodology used. Chapter Two is the inner textual interpretation of the text. Chapter Three deals with the social and cultural textual interpretation of the text. Chapter Four shows how my hermeneutic functioned in the sociorhetorical interpretation of the text made in chapter two and three. Chapter Five as the final chapter is the conclusion of the study stating the answers to questions raised above.

In the first chapter is the brief literature review of the text studied in this thesis and the end part of the review indicates the direction the study aims to follow. The study was to look at the social and cultural aspects of the wedding feast as told and shown in

the world embedded in the text. The reading methodology is described in this chapter as well which is the explanation of my hermeneutic called *Te baka ni mare* and the sociorhetorical criticism. The reading methodology states that the hermeneutic will be used to analyze the sociorhetorical interpretation of the text at the end.

In the interpretation of the text that starts in Chapter Two, it shows an inner textual interpretation of Matt 22:1-14 focusing on the placement of the text in the progression of Jesus' ministry in Matthew. This focus takes into account the consideration of the parable of the wedding feast as a rhetorical unit. This is an important part of the interpretation because it reveals that the wedding feast is a locally based event – held in a local space encoded in the language of the text. The summary of this inner textual interpretation shows that the king's character as the main character has shown the significance of upholding traditional values pertaining to preparing and undertaking of a wedding feast. This interpretation is extended in the social and cultural textual interpretation of the text where production of traditional food and preparation in traditional ways are to be maintained. Upholding these traditions help us in our pushing out the so-called oppressive values and cultures that are foreign to us – the values and cultures that are slowly destroying our worlds. And one such tradition is *te baka ni mare*. *Te baka ni mare* as a traditional event helps maintain the etiquette of recognition of certain people in our communities such as elders. Overall, the study has shown that keeping our traditional ways and values such as *te baka ni mare* is a way we can rely on to transform and reverse the changes that are now causing troubles and problems in our churches and communities.

## GLOSSARY

**B'ab'ai:** another species of taro but bigger in size (giant swamp taro)

**Baka:** red or vermillion, used especially for the ripen pandanus fruit.

**B'akanibuto:** the fall of the remaining part of the umbilical cord of a child.

**Baurua:** large sailing canoe.

**Ie:** mating between animals or people. It can also means a canoe sail. But here in this thesis, it refers to mating.

**Iein:** Kiribati word for marry or marriage.

**I-Kiribati:** a citizen of Kiribati/Kiribati ways

**I-matang:** foreigner especially a white man.

**Kāinga:** a particular place or piece of land allotted as a heritage to an extended family. Te utu (family) can also mean te kaainga.

**Mā:** a fish trap.

**M'aneaba:** a Kiribati meeting house or hall.

**Mare:** transliteration of the English word marry or marriage.

**Ni:** preposition 'of'.

**Raniwi:** the first birthday of the first-born child, especially a son.

**Te:** definite article 'the'.

**Te baka:** feast or feasting.

**Te baka ni iein:** the traditional name for the Kiribati wedding feast but today it is a baka ni mare.

**Te baka ni mare:** wedding feast.



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