

**THE ROLE OF THE *ἐκκλησία* IN
RELATION TO JESUS THE MESSIAH
IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL**

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by

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ABSTRACT

This study revisits the role of the *ἐκκλησία* (church) in the ministry of Jesus Christ the Messiah in the Gospel of Matthew. The interest to undertake this study evoked from my witnessing of the current tension between the secular politics of the state government of Samoa, and the church (the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS)), on the issue of the taxation of church ministers. There is a concern as history reveals that the church seems to overlook their important role as the church of God, when they give priority to their involvement in politics. The study focuses on Matthew 16:13-20 and 18:15-20, exploring the building of the *ἐκκλησία* (church) in relation to the Holy Spirit, in the context of the ministry of Jesus as told and shown in Matthew's Gospel. Peter's confession in Matt. 16:13-20 was met with a blessing which mentions *ἐκκλησία* (church) for the first time in the given order of the New Testament canon. The study will show how this blessing, in relation to the revelation of Jesus in Matt. 16:13-20, foreshadows the theological significances of directions for the church's roles, mentioned in chapter 18 – roles that are centred on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

DECLARATION

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in another institution. I also declare that the work has not used any material,
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family and my wife's family, who have loved and supported us spiritually through prayers, mentally with words of advice and encouragements, and physically with financial provisions, throughout our time here in Malua.

A special dedication to my late brother Puniitu'au who passed away in December 2019. May you rest in the loving arms of our Lord Jesus Christ. I also dedicate this thesis to my spiritual parents Reverend Eperone and Mafa Futi and their children; as well as our loving EFKS church families and villages; 'Fetu i Sasa'e' in East Tamaki, Fa'ala i Palauli and Fusi Safotulafai in Savai'i, Lotofaga and Vaiala in Apia.

It is not possible to include all our extended families and friends who have contributed to our life here in Malua. Thank you for your prayers, love and support throughout the endeavour in Malua.

My Family:

V.T.T.L. Palota Fa'alave (*father*)
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 T. Fialelei Fialelei (*brother*)
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May God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit bless you, and unto Him be all glory and praise. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

A. Why This Thesis:

Growing up in the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS), I have witnessed the excellent work done by the church, such as our East Tamaki church, for our families, our children, our youth, and all other church members. The CCCS parish I grew up in is in New Zealand. The youth of our church considers this church as our Samoan village in New Zealand. It is a place where our youth always gather to learn our Samoan language and culture, through programs set and implemented by our church minister and older members of our church. I have heard and seen in this upbringing the sacrifices made by our church members through offering of money and time, as *taulaga* (money and life offering to the church) and *alofa o le faifeau* (offering given for the church minister and family), to develop the church. Unfortunately, like any community or church, things do not always go smoothly. There are times when conflicts amongst church members occur at both a community and national level. Some of these conflicts occur when secular politics are brought into our dealings with church matters. For example, the EFKS church dealing with the Samoa government's exercising of power and authority upon the church regarding the issue of tax.

In 2017 the Ministry of Revenue amended the Income Tax Act, to include ministers of religion.¹ As covered by the media such as the Samoa Global News, this amendment resulted in 36 out of 37 churches in Samoa, registering their ministers to pay income taxes.² The CCCS being the only church in Samoa to reject the notion by the

¹ Samoa Legislative Assembly, *Income Tax Amendment No. 11* (Apia: Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, 2017), 3.

² Deidre Fanene, "National Council of Churches Intervenes on Faifeau Tax Issue," *Samoa Global News*, February 23 2019. <https://samoaglobalnews.com/national-council-of-churches-intervenes-on-faifeau-tax-issue/>

Ministry for Revenue, led to a two year tax dispute in the Samoa District Court between the Samoa government represented by the Samoan Ministry of Revenue, and the CCCS ministers. The charge against the CCCS ministers was specifically towards the love *alofa* (offering) to be treated as income for the *Faa-Feagaiga* (Samoan church minister), which then demands tax to be paid to the government. The case between the Ministry of Revenue and the CCCS ministers was dismissed on the grounds that the Ministry of Revenue failed to identify the CCCS ministers, or provide clear evidence, to identify the charged CCCS ministers, as ministers of religion. Since this verdict by District Court Judge, Leota Raymond Schuster, the message from Prime Minister, Tuilaepa Dr. Sa'ilele Malielegaoi, is that *"the Government is not giving up the fight to prosecute Ministers of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa over their refusal to pay taxes on the alofa."*³

This case evoked for me the desire to look back at the history of Samoa in the 1900s and how churches, such as the CCCS church, was involved in the development of Samoa as a nation – physically, mentally, politically and spiritually. I have found interesting historical events where both churches and the government, worked alongside each other for the purpose of promoting one's own goals and aims. Therefore, disputes between the churches and the government are not new. There were times in the history of Samoa when the government used the church to put through to the people some of their political plans and projects. Likewise, the church used the government to make their denomination the most prominent one over other denominations. An example of this, is the different denominations competing for favour from the German administration in Samoa, in the 1900s as described by Featunai Liuaana:

During the period of German administration, one mission would try to gain favor of the government at the expense of the other; depending on the issues and events transpiring at any given time. The two missions that caused

³ Ilia L. Likau, "Govt. Moves to Collect Taxes from Church Ministers," *Samoa Observer*, October 17 2019. <https://www.samoaoobserver.ws/category/samoa/14898>

the most agitation in state and church relations were LMS [London Missionary Society] and the Lotu Pope (Catholic Church). they took every opportunity for censuring, condemning, and insulting each other. In their effort to do Christian thing' both missions would drag along their Samoan adherents....⁴

Looking at leadership in the government from this point of view, some leader's running of the government seems to be influenced by their affiliation to a denomination. This can be seen in the present leader of the Samoa government's running of Samoa. There is suspicion among some Samoans, that the current Prime Minister who is Catholic, is running the government with favouritism given to Catholic ideas and beliefs. In this way, the church is used by a government leader to promote his running of the government. Sadly, in the history of Samoa as mentioned above, the churches involved in these political allegiances and alliances fell into these worldly political strategies, forgetting their role as churches of God in the world.

My brief evaluation of our Samoan history as mentioned, made me go back to the Bible to seek more understanding of the church as God's church, and its role in the world. I have always heard our church minister and elders during times of worship and church discussions mention the Holy Spirit as the power and force behind the work of the church. This interpretation is evident in the history of the early church, that regards the event of Pentecost (the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples) in the Acts of the Apostles, as the beginning of the Christian Church.⁵ However, the word church is first mentioned in the ministry of Jesus, as revealed in Matthew 16:18. If the word church is mentioned first in the Gospels, then I could say that the beginning of the church happened during the ministry of Jesus.⁶ If it was, then the Holy Spirit considered as the power behind the

⁴ Featuna'i Ben Liuaana, *Samoa Tula'i: Ecclesiastical and Political Face of Samoa's Independence, 1900-1962* (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 2004), 43.

⁵ Laurence W. Wood, *The Meaning of Pentecost in Early Methodism: Rediscovering John Fletcher as John Wesley's Vindicator and Designated Successor* (Boston: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 173.

⁶ This argument considers important the canonization of the New Testament. It does not discard the importance of the consideration of Paul's letters as first Christian writings.

church did play a part in the beginning of that church. This study aims to explore what the role of the church is, reminding us as church members of that role. This role is considered to have begun in the time of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God. What the church is and how its role in the proclamation of God's kingdom should be carried out was revealed in the ministry of Jesus. This claim is based on the words of Jesus to Peter: "*And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church*" (Matthew 16:18). The traditional interpretation of these words of Jesus is that the early church is built on the rock; but who or what this rock refers to has been one of the debated issues in this text, and will be one of the tasks of this paper.

There is not much study on Pneumatology unlike the many studies about Christology.⁷ One of the reasons for this is that the Holy Spirit as a nature of God cannot be seen. So, it is a challenge explaining what it looks like as reflected in these questions: What does the Spirit of God look like? How does a person know that the Holy Spirit is with them? This paper will try to find some answers. I have chosen the Gospel of Matthew, because it is the only Gospel in the New Testament, that mentions the word *ἐκκλησία* (church) more times, compared to the other three Gospels.⁸ The word church is mentioned three times – one time in Matthew 16:18 and twice in Matthew 18:17.⁹ Finding what the role of the church is in Matthew's gospel, cannot be studied separately from knowing who Jesus is in the first Gospel. In other words, part of this study is to find how the role of the church, helps to describe Jesus as the Messiah in Matthew's Gospel. The

⁷ Gary D. Badcock, *Light of Truth & Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapid: Eerdmans, 1997); Christopher J. Ganski, "Spirit and Flesh: On the Significance of the Reformed Doctrine of the Lord's Supper for Pneumatology," (PhD Thesis, Marquette University, 2012).

⁸ Benno Przybylski, "The Setting of Matthean Anti-Judaism*," in *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, ed. Peter Richardson and David Granskou (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986), 195.

⁹ Benno Przybylski, "The Setting of Matthean Anti-Judaism*," 195.

study will use narrative-rhetorical, literary criticism as a method to explore the role of the church in relation to who Jesus is in Matthew's Gospel.

B. Methodology

This thesis will use narrative-rhetorical in literary criticism, as the interpretational tool to explore the text. Literary criticism looks at the text or literature as a whole¹⁰, to discuss their function and meaning. It looks at the text, while putting aside all prehistorical speculations about it. In contrast to other approaches, especially historical criticism, interpretation is driven with questions such as who the author is, and aiming to find information about the author's world. It would also include political, social, and religious circumstances of the time. In terms of the text itself, questions are asked of its form, originality, editions and time it was included in the bible and to whom is responsible for its final form.¹¹ Literary criticism on the other hand, looks at how a text works as a complete genre. The imagery and metaphors are sought out, along with an analysis of characters presented. There is interest on the "*rhythm or other sonic qualities and how they add to the meaning*"¹² of its genre.

Parts of literary criticism, are narrative and rhetorical¹³ interpretational tools. Narrative criticism¹⁴ explores what the text tells and shows, looking at the overall plot of the story, as well as the sequence of events that the story relates. Through narrative criticism, questions are asked about different categories such as characters, setting, tone,

¹⁰ James Kugel, "On the Bible and Literary Criticism," *Prooftexts* 1, no. 3 (1981): 232.

¹¹ Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 239-55.

¹² "Reading Glasses: Literary Criticism," Society of Biblical Literature, updated 2020, 1880, accessed 24/02/2020, 2020, https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/TBReadingGlasses_BB.pdf.

¹³ Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3.

¹⁴ Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 239. See also, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean," in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, eds. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 23-49..

style, point of view, imagery, and themes. Rhetorical criticism¹⁵ explores how the persuasive language of the text, tell and show the story. Rhetorical criticism as part of literary criticism has the analytical ability, through imagery, structures and syntax, to get deeper and more subtle meanings that may not be obvious from a surface reading of the text.¹⁶ For this study, narrative criticism will be used to explore the setting, characters, their movements and conversations in the selected passages. Rhetorical criticism will be used to explore how the persuasive language of the selected texts, tell and show the narration of the story, the movements of the characters, their conversations and relationships to each other.

C. Chapters Outline

The thesis is divided into five sections. The introduction to the thesis includes the interest in the study, the methodology used in the exploration of the selected texts, and chapters outline. Chapter one deals with the literature review of Matthew 16:13-20 and Matthew 18:15-20. Chapter two is the exegesis of Matthew 16:13-20, followed by the exegesis of Matthew 18:15-20 in Chapter three, before the conclusion. This thesis utilizes the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

¹⁵ George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 3-4.

¹⁶ Lawrence W. Hyman, "Indeterminacy in Literary Criticism," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 59, no. 3 (1976): 345-356.

CHAPTER ONE:

LITERATURE REVIEW (MATTHEW 16:17-19 & 18:16-18)

The literature review will look at Matthew's scholars and their interpretations of the selected passages – Matt 16:17-19; 18:16-18. The focus of the review is on the scholars' interpretation of what the rock is, that Jesus says the church will be built upon. The interpretations of what the keys are, given to Peter, and which church Jesus refers to that ties and unties things on earth. The literature review will give the direction, to which this study's exploration of the selected passages is heading towards.

A. Scholars that consider Peter the rock upon which the church is built

The following scholars consider the rock that Jesus says the church will be built upon as Peter. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, follow the natural interpretation by the Roman Catholic Church of the 'rock', pointing to Peter and not anything else.¹⁷ According to Davies and Allison, the conversation between Jesus and Peter shows a wordplay of which Peter declares who Jesus was, and in response Jesus declares Peter as the 'rock', upon which his church is to be built. For Davies and Allison, the only sound objection coming from an Aramaic word *kephā*, of which can be used with different nuances. The translation of *kephā* to Greek explains *Πέτρος* to refer to the person, and *πέτρα*, referring to an aspect of the person to be played upon.

Davies and Allison argue that Jesus blesses Simon, for God has revealed the Son through him (as the Son revealed the Father in 11:27). Davies and Allison further say that, other scholars may point to the credibility behind the text, that could be for building on

¹⁷ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew VIII-XVIII*, International Critical Commentary (London, New York: T&T Clark International, 1988), 627.

Peter's status; not of the original text. This is largely due to the absence of this passage in the gospel of Mark. Davies and Allison interpret the second half of verse 17 as the reason Simon is blessed. It clearly points to God and not Simon himself. Therefore, Davies and Allison point to God as the initiator of the revelation. The purpose they believe is not for Simon's benefit, but for the unveiling of an eschatological secret, 'the hidden Messiah'.

Davies and Allison interpret that the keys ascribed to Peter, are also given to other disciples in Matthew 18:18, and are linked to Matthew 23:13. It is where Jesus gives woe to the scribes and Pharisees as hypocrites, because they shut the kingdom of Heaven to both themselves and other people. It is then probable that the keys taken from the scribes and Pharisees, are given here to Peter. It is Peter's confession that follows 16:5-12, where Jesus warns against the leaven of the scribes and Pharisees, referring to their teachings. Thus, Davies and Allison speak of Matthew's move in the next paragraph, as Jesus replacing Jewish academy, with his own 'chief rabbi'.

The word *ἐκκλησία* for them, is interpreted as a local community; not a universal church. The role of such community is not to rebuke or condemn, but to support the individual hoping to reconcile a brother in a final attempt.

Herbert W. Bassler and Marsha B. Cohun, also interpret Peter as the rock upon which the church is built.¹⁸ They consider Peter's answer "*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God*", as unexpected to both Jesus and the disciples. It is a sign for Jesus that Peter has been chosen among the disciples to lead the church. For Bassler and Cohun, this led to the respond by Jesus in blessing Peter, indicated by the Greek word *μακάριος*; translated "Fortunate are you". It reveals Peter as the one called to lead the church with authority. Bassler and Cohun add that Peter holds the keys that unlocks Paradise, and shuts

¹⁸ Herbert W. Bassler and Marsha B. Cohun, *The Gospel of Matthew and Judaic Traditions: A Relevance-Based Commentary* (Leiden, Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2015), 419.

and locks Hell. It is this special view of Peter that gave popes their power in medieval times. They were believed to have the authority that threatened kings with excommunication and damnation. The taking of one or two “with you”, is pointed out by Bassar and Cohun to an alternative, meaning one or two “more”.

R. T. France, is another scholar that interprets Peter as the rock upon which the church is built.¹⁹ According to France, different from Mark and Luke, Matthew’s intention upon the reader raises the question, why is a current and accepted answer kept from being made public? For France, one may see that Peter has answered without full knowledge of what the nature of the Messiah means in Jesus. According to France, this is not the only reason Matthew could have differed from Mark and Luke. Considering other additions by Matthew, it seems a tradition of the evangelist to add traditional material to the story to bring out specific meaning.²⁰ France then says that in the same way, verse 18 and 19 may have been added from traditional material of Jesus towards Peter, including the explanation of his name. These additions by Matthew however, show his sequence of the events as they happened; he recalls Jesus blessing and accepting Peter’s answer, before warning the disciples of publicly announcing this truth.

According to France, the acceptance by Jesus of Peter’s response, can be understood as a beatitude; but it is different to the beatitudes in chapter 5. It must be clear that the “because” clause in chapter 5, does not apply here. It is not because of anything Peter did, that he is said to be blessed. It is rather the fact God chose to reveal this divine truth through him. France adds, that the mention of “flesh and blood” emphasizes this point of a contrast between human and God who reveals divine revelation.

¹⁹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Michigan U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 568.

²⁰ 8:11-12 is included in 8:5-13; the extended prayer in 6:5-6, adding 6:7-8, 9-13 and 14-15.

France's interpretation of the nickname Peter given to Simon by Jesus, is now explained as the foundation of the church, figuratively as that of a building. It is on this rock Jesus will build his everlasting church. There is no relevance for France on the difference in Greek terms; which some argue the feminine *petra* differs from *Petros*. France argues that in Greek and Aramaic, the forms of the terms may be different, but their meaning remain the same. Peter is the rock Jesus spoke of.

France says that the translation of *ἐκκλησία* to church, does not at all refer in any part in our passage, to a physical structure as the English meaning may infer. It is rather used in this passage like that in the LXX²¹ for assembly of people; for political, social and religious reasons. Thus, Jesus referring to “my church”, encapsulates the people of Israel, as from the Old Testament to the New Testament as the (new) people of God. In regards to the “gates of Hades”, some have argued that it represents powers of the underworld that are demonic; some also point to a physical gate of Hell, which they see as an army trying to attack the church. However, for France, the “gates of Hades” can be best interpreted as a ‘death’ metaphor.²² This is a contrast to the “living God”. It is death, that will never destroy the church, or the community which Jesus will build.

Matthew switches to another metaphor, which explains Peter's role in the church development. The keys given to Peter for France, is as giving of the role of a steward. This shows Peter's authority over the church household. In other words, France interprets the keys of the storehouse of which to administer proper provision of the household. He has full responsibility to his master, to administer his authority accordingly.

²¹ The earliest extant Greek translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew.

²² Craig S. Keener, ed. *Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (United States: Inter Varsity Press, 2014), 81.

France interprets Matt 18:16-18 as showing the idea of more witnesses than one, as a widely recognized concept in the Jewish community. Evidence can be found throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament.²³ The two or more here in Matthew, are not indicated to be of any position of leadership, or how they came to be selected to accompany the initiator. It shows their witnessing role as back up for the one initiating the reconciliation. It is of no means a judicial setting, or that this situation is by any means in a legal sense.

B. Scholars that consider Jesus the rock upon which the church is built

The following scholars interpret the rock that the church is built upon as Jesus. One is Willoughby C. Allen, who says that the foundation of which the church was to be built on (*πέτρα*), is the equivalent of the object of *ἀπεκάλυψε* (*to reveal*) in verse 17; “*flesh and blood has not revealed this to you*”.²⁴ The Messiahship and divine Sonship of Christ is the revealed truth. The truth and the rock which the church shall stand on. It is the foundation and central doctrine of the church’s teachings. In explaining the reference by Jesus to the church, Allen believes that whatever word Jesus spoke that is now recorded as “*ἐκκλησία*”, would have referred to the community and society of his disciples. Those who believed in the Sonship and Messiahship of Jesus Christ; who have committed to spread the gospel and good news about Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Son of God. Allen adds that these teachings, which lay the foundation of the church of Christ, shall stand strong and will not be fazed by the organized powers of evil. The powers of evil which

²³ Deuteronomy 19:15; Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy*- 17:6; John 8:17; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Tim 5:19; Hebrew 10:28.

²⁴ Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments 26 (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1907), 176.

also are metaphorically put as a building with gates. This power will try, but shall not succeed to prevail over the church built on Son of God, the Messiah.

Furthermore, Allen interprets the keys in verse 19 given to Peter, as showing Peter being given insight of the divine truth by God. The keys represent a privilege promised to the Apostles as leaders of the church. They have the authority to bind and loosen, or rather to admit others to the kingdom. It is also authority to allow others to be part of the church. Considering 18:18 as the possible original place of the keys to bind and loosen, Allen suggests the possibility that verses 16:17-19 may be the work of the evangelist; compiling detached sayings to honour Peter as an Apostle.

For Allen in his interpretation of Matthew 18:16-18, the case of how one should deal with a fellow Christian in 18:16, is not particularly a political case of witnesses and offenders. It is rather about witnessing the unwillingness of one to reconcile with the group of fellow Christians, as well as the effort made by the offended, to reconcile and make right with them. Allen points out that there is a possibility that the mention of witnesses and associate ideas, are additions to the original saying by the Evangelist; or that who put the writing together as a Jewish Christian source. In 18:17, the church, being the society of those who follow Christ, needed all members to be reconciled with each other. One who refuses to reconcile with the church no longer becomes a member. In 18:18 Allen marks the power given to the church as a community regarding its decision making. What the church deems justifiable or not for the members, is regarded as final; a much more suitable context for the keys addressed to Peter in 16:19.

Wesley O Allen is another example of scholars that sees Matt 16:17-19 as a passage that reveals the rock upon which the church is built, as Jesus himself.²⁵ According

²⁵ O. Wesley Allen, "Capernaum-Based Ministry (4:12—18:35)," in *Matthew*, Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentaries (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, 2013), 165.

to Allen, Matthew's scene in this passage is theo-political. That is through theology, a political position of Jesus is being established by Matthew over and above Caesar. For Wesley Allen, Caesar was often referred to as the son of god. The keys of the reign of heaven also play against the reigning ruler, that being Caesar. The people have a high view of who Jesus may be, Jesus turns the question to the disciples of which Peter answers. In Mark, Peter answers "*you are the Messiah*"; while Matthew adds "*you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God*". Although Matthew has an added extension compared to Mark, it does not offer anything new in this verse 16. The identity of Jesus is clearly laid out in the introduction of Matthew for the reader, as well as the divine acts (walking on water, calms the wind) which revealed to the disciples who Jesus was. The purpose of these beginning verses is not to reveal Jesus as the Son of God, rather they are to set up verse 17 to 19.

It is here Jesus establishes the church (the word *ἐκκλησία* only other use is in Matthew 18:17). The church did not exist, but is brought forth in a theological statement rather than a historical one. The church which is founded on the identity of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of the living God. While interest may be drawn on Simon and his name being the Rock, the real primary actor is Jesus the Son of the living God. It is he who builds the church; his church, of which will endure forever. The authority given to Peter raises questions of whether this belongs to Peter alone, or does Jesus also give this authority to the church? Wesley believes the answer is that the authority is given first to Peter as a representative of all the disciples.²⁶ It is later given to the whole church in 18:18. Matthew's style of progression leads to the life and work of the church.²⁷ Jesus gives authority to Peter, then to the church.

²⁶ Acts, Gospels, and even Paul identifies Peter as a key figure for the early church.

²⁷ The lost sheep (10:5-6; 15:24), to the nations in (28:19).

The gift of the keys, does not make the church a doorway to the afterlife; rather it is a contrast to the scribes and Pharisees interpretation of the *torah*. The *halakic* decision traditionally in Jewish culture belong to the rabbis. However, instead of the rabbis, Jesus gives this authority to Peter and then to the church. It is the ultimate interpretation of the *torah*, to confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God.

In his interpretation of Matt 18:17-19, Allen sees that the reconciliation rests in verse 15 to 17. Particularly in verse 17, the next step of trying to fix the damage done to the community, is by taking one or two others from the community, to witness the offender still not listening. In which case the matter should be reported to the church (*ἐκκλησία*). The final choice when the offender still does not listen to the church, is to be excluded. It is not the purpose of such ruling to punish, rather it is the only way to repair the family of believers. In verse 18, the authority given to Peter in the verbal form of the keys, is given to the church. The interpretation of the reference to the Jewish *torah* meaning in chapter 16, is specifically aimed at the issue of inclusion and exclusion, to address the issue of sin and reconciliation.

The repeat of the matter in verse 18, is done in verse 19 in the retelling of the issue by Jesus. This is evident in the first line (v.18 “*Truly I tell you*” and v.19 “*Again I tell you*”). Verse 19 however, clarifies the “*you*” of whom Jesus is speaking to, or giving the authority to. Speaking in the second person plural, Jesus is referring to the whole community of believers, which are mentioned in verse 17. Specifically, to the church in agreeing to the decision about the sinner, after being offered the opportunity to repent and reconcile with a member of the church. To do justice to verse 19, it must be interpreted in the context it is in. It does not imply God will be obliged to listen to the church when paying together as a whole, rather God honours the authority of the church to attend to the needs of the community.

C. Conclusion

It is evident that the debate of interpretation of what the rock refers to, continues among the scholars. There are also other issues from the different interpretations. An example of this, is the interpretation of what has been revealed. All the above interpretations refer to the revealed truth as Jesus the Messiah. The community that ties and unties things in this earth, is mostly referred to the local community; not the universal church. The mentioned scholars all interpret the keys given to Peter, as the authority given to Peter on behalf of the disciples. Thus, the keys are given to Peter first and then to the local community. There are issues raised from this review that need looking at; which will be the focus of this study. The revealed truth is Jesus, but what needs more exploration is how that revelation is made. How does Peter know that Jesus is the Messiah? This study suggests that what reveals to Peter who the Messiah is, is the rock upon which the church is built upon; which is the Holy Spirit. This study will explore the Gospel of Matthew, and seek whether the Holy Spirit played a part in the revelation of Jesus as the Messiah to Peter. This will be the task of the following chapters.

CHAPTER TWO:

EXEGESIS OF MATTHEW 16:13-20

This chapter deals with the exegesis of Matthew 16:13-20. The attempt is to explore what the church is, in relation to Jesus the Messiah, and his ministry in Matthew's Gospel.

A. Placement of Matthew 16:13-20 in Matthews Gospel

Matthew 16:13-20 is part of the whole book, and as such in literary criticism, the meaning of this part relates to the whole story. It is therefore important to look briefly first at Matthew as a whole book, and the placement of 16:13-20 in it. From the literary criticism point of view, the placing of an event in the progress of a narrative, has literary significances in developing the author's theological arguments and interests.²⁸ For example, as widely accepted, one of the theological arguments in Matthew's gospel is revealing Jesus as the Messiah; as the King; the son of the living God; to a Jewish audience.²⁹ This interpretation considers Matthew 16:13-20 as a kernel of the plot in the Matthean narrative, which has a role in revealing who Jesus is.³⁰ There are various structures of how Matthew tells and shows the ministry of Jesus. However, to explore the significances of both 16:13-20 and 18:15-20 as kernels in the Matthean presentation of Jesus, I will use the outline of the Matthean narrative of the ministry of Jesus, by Frank J. Matera.³¹

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| 1. | 1:1-4:11 | The coming of the Messiah |
| 2. | 4:12-11:1 | The Messiah's ministry to Israel of preaching, teaching, and healing |
| 3. | 11:2-16: 12 | The crisis in the Messiah's ministry |
| 4. | 16:13-20:34 | The Messiah's journey to Jerusalem |
| 5. | 21:1-28:15 | The Messiah's death and resurrection |

²⁸ Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism*.

²⁹ Kenneth Baker, *The New International Version Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

³⁰ Frank J. Matera, "The Plot of Matthew's Gospel," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (1987), 237.

³¹ Matera, "The Plot of Matthew's Gospel," 238.

6. 28:16-20 The great commission

I would like to interpret the progress of the ministry of Jesus, in and through Matera's structure; to show if there are significances of the placement of 16:13-20, in the Matthean presentation of Jesus' ministry. In Matera's structure, 16:13-20 is part of a crisis in the ministry of Jesus. I interpret that crisis as the turning point of the whole gospel's narrative; which I will elaborate on later in this exegesis. The crisis part is followed by the Messiah's journey to Jerusalem. Whatever happened in the crisis point of the narrative, would be an important event that may contribute to the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem.

From the beginning (1:1-4:11), the story is set with Jesus as the main character; he is revealed by the implied author to the reader, to be the Messiah from the very first chapter (1:1-4:11). The events of the next chapters reveal Jesus as the son of the divine, the living God. His ministry is preached, taught, and performed, before the crisis in the ministry (4:12-11:1). It is followed by what Matera calls the crisis; the inability of the people of Israel to understand the teachings of Jesus, and the attacks of the religious leaders toward Jesus in 11:2-16:12. All these happened before Jesus makes the journey to Jerusalem, which begins with 16:13-20, one of the texts explored herein. One of the reasons behind the crisis is seen as the inability of the Jewish leaders, to see Jesus as the Messiah; son of the living God. Matthew from the beginning emphasizes Jesus as the Messiah; the King. One of the literary ways seen in Matthew's attempt to paint the picture of who Jesus is in Matthew, is the questions of who Jesus is from other characters in the story. Furthermore, how other characters understand the character of Jesus. We can see this in the way the questions and statements about Jesus as a character, are put forth from the beginning, up to the crisis in chapters 11-16. The progression of these questions and statements about Jesus are very important to this study, because they lead to the words of

Jesus, of what the rock is, upon which the church is to be built upon. Consider the following:

- 2:2 Where is **the one who has been born king of the Jews?**
- 2:4 He asked them where **the Messiah was to be born.**
- 3:14 John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by **you**, and do **you** come to me?”
- 3:17 And a voice from heaven said, “**This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.**
- 4:3,6 “If you are **the Son of God...**”
- 8:27 They were amazed, saying, “What **sort of man** is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?”
- 8:29 Suddenly they shouted, “What have you to do with us, **Son of God?**
- 9:11 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does **your teacher** eat with tax collectors and sinners?”
- 9:27 As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, crying loudly, “Have mercy on us **Son of David!**”
- 9:34 But the Pharisees said, “By **the ruler of the demons**, he casts out the demons.”
- 11:3 “Are you **the one who is to come**, or should we expect someone else?”
- 12:23 All the crowds were amazed and said, “Could this be **the Son of David?**”
- 13:54 “Where did **this man** get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?”
- 13:55 “Is not this **the carpenter’s son?** Is not **his mother’s** name Mary, and are not **his brothers** James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?”
- 13:56 “And are not all **his sisters** with us? Where then did **this man** get all these things?”
- 14:2 and he said to his servants, “This is **John the Baptist**; he has risen from the dead!”
- 14:28 Peter answered him, “**Lord, if it’s you...**tell me to come to you on the water.”
- 14:33 And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, “Truly you are the **Son of God**”
- 15:22 Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Lord **Son of David**, have mercy on me.”

The above questions and statements about who Jesus is, are some examples that show the development of Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus from the beginning of Matthew’s narrative, to Peter’s confession in 16:13-20. The different perceptions of who Jesus is, is manifestly shown in the progress of the story. The word limit for this essay will make me focus only on God’s revelation of who Jesus is in 3:17; it is important to Peter’s confession in the selected text, 16:13-20. God’s declaration of Jesus as his Son in this part

of Matthew's is very important; it is where Matthew reconfigures part of Isaiah's prophecy, in Isaiah 42:1 about the Messiah.

Isaiah 42:1 Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nation.

Matthew 3:17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

What is important in God's declaration of his beloved son in the baptism of Jesus, is a declaration revealed in and through the Spirit of God. The story says: *And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.* (Matthew 3:16) It shows that the baptism of Jesus gives more description of Jesus as the Messiah. It reveals that Jesus the Messiah is not only God in person, but God in Spirit on this earth. The baptism of Jesus, marks the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy; Jesus is the Messiah; God's chosen servant, and who will have God's spirit upon him. Thus, the ministry of Jesus is not only about the teachings, preaching and healings, but also about the Spirit of God with Jesus. Towards Peter's confession, the claim by Jesus that God the Father reveals to Peter who he is, is a reminder for the audience of Matthew, that the Spirit of God enables him as God's son, to fulfil God's will on earth. Thus, Matthew 16:13-20 as the literary turning point of Matthew's narrative, can be taken as both the revelation of who Jesus is, as revealed to Peter by the Father, and the revelation of the Holy Spirit, as the rock upon which the church is built.

This turning point is marked by the immediate reference by Jesus about the journey to Jerusalem, to finish his mission in Galilee. Jesus mentions the *ἐκκλησία* (church) in this part for the first time, as the believers and followers of his ministry; those who will continue his mission, when his time comes in Jerusalem. More importantly for the *ἐκκλησία*, as part of this turning point of the narrative, is the mention of the Holy Spirit by Jesus as the rock, upon which the *ἐκκλησία* is built. This event then is a signal that

suggests moving on to the next, or rather the last part of his mission; since the middle of the narrative ends, or is achieved with the revelation confessed by Peter. The event of 16:13-20 is immediately followed by 16:21 where the narrator indicates a change in the course of the plot:

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

The verb ἤρξατο in “Ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς” is translated “From that time on, Jesus began” in the indicative aorist. It means to rule, to lead or to begin, which the narrator uses to emphasize that Jesus never indicated his going to Jerusalem, and ending his mission with the struggles he must go through, until now. A question for the reader then is to ask why now? Why has Jesus decided at this point, to reveal such a crucial part of his mission in this moment? These are questions which demand the study of 16:13-20, as the connecting point in the narrative by Matthew.

B. Exegesis of Matthew 16:13-20

In verse 13, the setting is set in Caesarea Philippi. Scholars such as Donald A. Hagner have indicated that this location was not arrived at by chance.³² Jesus chose Caesarea Philippi to be in private, and away from the crowds with his disciples; perhaps to address the crisis in his mission. There is a relationship of this intention to isolate the disciples, that relates to the imageries used in the later verses of the passage such as ‘rock’, ‘building’, and ‘church’.

The verb ἠρώτα is from the root word ἐρωτάω which means to ask, entreat, or request. It is in the indicative mood and imperfect tense that can mean an act of asking in the past, that can be an ongoing real act of asking. The mood and tense of the verb,

³² Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002).

emphasizes the question being asked by Jesus – a question that was asked in the time of Jesus’ ministry to a real audience being the disciples. It is also an important question asked for the intended readers, and still yet a question that lingers today in the minds of the actual readers and believers of the bible. A question of identity and person of Jesus, that is timeless in its imperfect tense.

The dialogue continues in verse 14 with a reply by the disciples to the question asked by Jesus. While quotation marks (“”) do not exist in the Greek language, it is marked by phrases such as *οἱ δὲ εἶπαν*; translated as either ‘and they said’, or ‘they replied’. A reply with the verb *εἶπαν* that corresponds to the question asked (*ἡρώτα*). The verb *εἶπαν* is from the root word *λέγω* meaning to say or to speak. The aorist tense however indicates the reply that is a one-time action in the past. It is a reply that is for the time being, and does not continue or ongoing. Therefore, whoever the people believed Jesus was, there is flexibility it would change. He was believed by some to be John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

The disciples’ first reply, presents the crisis of misunderstanding the person of Jesus. While the people in question do not know Jesus to be the Messiah, it was the very first line of the whole book. It is where the narrator of the story reveals to the reader in verse one.³³ If the crisis of the gospel of Matthew is revealed here about the misunderstanding of Jesus, how is this crisis resolved? Let us look at what follows in the dialogue between Jesus and the chosen disciples.

Jesus turns from the people’s perception that seem to have failed; according to the disciples in knowing who Jesus is, and directs the same question to the disciples. ‘He said’ expressed by the Greek word *λέγει* from the root word *λέγω* meaning to say or speak. *λέγει* is in the present tense, which indicates a continuous action or an act in process. Jesus

³³ This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham

saying to them in such a way, shows that the disciples may not be ready to respond; or not ready to give the desired reply. It is a question that challenges the disciples' understanding of who Jesus is, and it is a question that needs an answer.

A disciple (Simon Peter) is singled out in the dialogue with a reply. The Greek word for Peter answering, is ἀποκριθεὶς from ἀποκρίνομαι. Peter's answer is in the aorist tense which implies a one-time answer. Peter may yet to understand the full meaning of his answer, as we later see the imperfections of Peter in denying Jesus in 26:33-34; 26:69-75. The gospel of Mark, which does not include the blessing of Peter, follows Peter's answer with a rebuking of his immediate action afterwards (Mark 8:29-33). The imperfection of Peter is highlighted, which confirms the disciples not being ready to answer. However, despite this, Peter gives an accurate answer that falls in line with the narrator's intention to reveal the person of Jesus. The narrator wishes to reveal a positive outlook of Peter through the eyes of Jesus, as Bassier and Cohun show.³⁴ However, it is *“not in the sense that Peter has himself puzzled out the truth but that, like all knowledge about God and his Son (11:27), it has been revealed to him”*, alluded to by France.³⁵ The truth of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of the living God has already been made known by the voice over of the narrator; but Peter's confession here is significant as it receives a positive response by Jesus in verse 17.

A blessing like the beatitudes in Matthew 5, is compared to words of Jesus to Peter's confession of who Jesus is. A contrast also made by France, with the Beatitudes;³⁶ a focus on the root word ἀποκρίνομαι, as mentioned above in the aorist tense, implies an action in the past that does not continue for Peter. In no way this blessing indicates a future

³⁴ Bassier and Cohun, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 421.

³⁵ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 567.

³⁶ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 567.

continuance of authority through Peter alone; such as pointed to by Bassar and Cohun.³⁷ It is rather a blessing for that moment in time because of the origin of such an answer he gave. The blessings in chapter 5, use ὅτι as a conjunction meaning ‘that’, ‘because’ or ‘since’. Like the beatitudes in chapter 5, the ‘because’ clause in verse 17 (*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For [ὅτι] flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.*) introduces a blessing that is linked to the previous action. In agreement with Davies and Alison, the blessing is not an attempt to build Peter’s character,³⁸ instead that of the Holy Spirit. Considering the setting of the scene, Jesus is with his disciples, and wishes to know what they think of him. He speaks of the blessing for Peter, because Peter has voiced God’s revelation to him; the identity of Jesus amid other disciples. Thus, Peter’s confession is not for Jesus, but for the disciples. For they will be the ἐκκλησία that will carry on the role and responsibility, of proclaiming God’s kingdom through identifying who Jesus is, revealed only by the Holy Spirit.

Σίμων Βαριωνᾶ, ὅτι σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα (Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood) shows a great emphasis of the limitations of Peter as a human being. Σίμων Βαριωνᾶ (Simon **son of Jonah**), points to Simon being a son of a mere human. It differentiates Simon from such divinity of Jesus as the **son of the living God**, as he confessed earlier. Furthermore, σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα (flesh and blood) drives this same point home in a more vivid way. An intentional directive to the physical aspect of being human, to differ from the spiritual source of the ἀπεκάλυψεν (he, she, it has revealed).

ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (my father who is in heaven) is the source of Simon’s confession according to Jesus. The negative particle οὐκ, in Jesus’ reply in verse 17 to Peter’s confession, indicates that Peter himself does not know who Jesus is, but the

³⁷ Bassar and Cohun, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 423.

³⁸ Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 622.

use of the conjunction *ἀλλ'* ('but' or 'except'), directs focus to God through the Spirit as the one who reveals.³⁹ This may be a step further from Davies and Allison's use of eschatological secret being unveiled.⁴⁰ Simon Peter has seen, heard and experienced the ministry of Jesus; but like other people and other disciples who have witnessed Jesus' ministry, they still have little understanding of Jesus as the Messiah. However, Peter's character as someone who always shows willingness to be the first one to know what Jesus wants, is here used by the disciple to confess the truth about Jesus. Although the Son is not explicitly said to have chosen Peter to reveal this truth, the Spirit of God is said to be upon the Son; as mentioned in the above interpretation, when God declares Jesus as his beloved son (Isaiah 42:1 "*my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations*"). Some may view the Isaiah prophecy to point to David while others like Alicia D. Myers, undoubtedly point to Jesus.⁴¹ Thus, the Holy Spirit that reveals to Jesus his Father's will, is the Holy Spirit that reveals to Peter the truth about Jesus.⁴² This is the blessing for Peter for the moment in the plot, for a confession which has been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit; but as the turning point of the plot, the blessing is further explained in the following verses.

In verse 18, the phrase *καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ σοὶ λέγω* (and I say to you), shows a relationship between the truth revealed to Peter in the previous verse by the Father as the subject, and Jesus' action of 'saying' here to Peter. *ἀπεκάλυψέν* from 17 and *λέγω* from 18 are both in the active voice. The action of revealing to Peter is done by the Father as the blessing in

³⁹ Chris Oyakhilome, *Seven Things the Holy Spirit Will Do for You* (Chelmsford: LoveWorld Publishing, 2005), 18.

⁴⁰ Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 623.

⁴¹ Alicia D. Myers, "Isaiah 42 and the Characterization of Jesus in Matthew 12:17-21," in *What Does the Scripture Say*, ed. Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 72.

⁴² Oyakhilome, *Seven Things the Holy Spirit Will Do*, 18.

17, Jesus now as the subject in verse 18 also adds to that blessing by building on top of the already given blessing.

The substitute of the name Simon for Peter is a controversial issue among scholars. However, to follow the revelation of confession that has just occurred, the mention of Peter can be understood relatively to this instance. He is the one whom God revealed the truth about Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, and not by flesh and blood. As a primary witness to being revealed truth from the Father, Jesus affirms “you are Peter”. It follows the contested interpretations of Πέτρος, meaning stone in Greek.

Jesus says in verse 18: *And I tell you, you are Peter [Πέτρος], and on this rock [πέτρα.] I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.* The fact is, there is a rhetorical problem in the use of ‘Peter (Πέτρος), and rock (πέτρα)’. Πέτρος is a masculine noun; and πέτρα is a feminine noun. It is so πέτρα as a feminine noun does not correspond to Πέτρος the masculine noun. Thus, πέτρα refers not to Peter but to something else. Verse 18 is part of Jesus’ reply that begins in verse 17 to Peter’s confession; it is connected by the conjunction δέ. If πέτρα does not correspond to the masculine noun of Πέτρος, then what πέτρα refers to as a feminine noun is in verse 17. The word revealed mentioned in verse 17 comes from the feminine noun ἀποκάλυψις, translated revelation. This interpretation claims that πέτρα as a feminine noun in verse 18, refers to God’s revelation in and through the Spirit to Peter. Thus, the rock that the church will be built upon is not Peter but the Holy Spirit of God.⁴³ This interpretation therefore suggests that what Jesus says, ‘...you are Peter’ in verse 18, is Jesus’ consideration of Peter (Πέτρος) as the disciple the revelation is revealed to, and the rock (πέτρα) that the church will be built upon, as the Holy Spirit.

⁴³ This interpretation challenges what Leon Morris said that Peter cannot be separated from the revelation without losing the respect of being the rock. See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, ed. D. A. Carson, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), p. 423.

The imagery *οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν* (I will build my church) of Jesus building his church on the revelations of the Spirit of God, follows the plot of revealing the person of Jesus. The verb *οἰκοδομήσω* from the root word *οἰκοδομέω* meaning to build, or edify in the future tense, points to the time of his physical absence, where a solid foundation of *ἐκκλησίαν* or an assembly, congregation or group of believers shall rely upon.⁴⁴ An image also used in Matthew 7:24-25, to credit those who heed his teachings as wise. As imageries in the narrative, Jesus speaks of building a group of people or an assembly (*ἐκκλησίαν*), as if it was a physical building that is built on a solid rock of revelations, by God the Father through the Spirit. The *πύλαι ᾠδου οὐ κατισχύουσιν αὐτῆς*, the gates of Hades shall not prevail or overpower such rock foundation as revelations. Jesus refers to revelation such as that Peter received, to be a solid foundation that will uphold the assembly of those who believe in him.⁴⁵

The roles and responsibility of the *ἐκκλησία* are now mentioned by Jesus in this part of his ministry revealed in verse 19. Jesus said: *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loosen on earth will be loosed in heaven.* An image of authority explained with binding and loosing on earth, which correlates to the things in heaven. The term *δήσης* is from the root word *δέω* meaning to bind, changes from its subjunctive mood and aorist tense, denoting a hypothetical action that would have been done, to *δεδεμένον*, in the perfect tense and passive voice. This is interesting as *δεδεμένον* would refer to binding that was done in the past and it continues in the present. This translates to something like “whatever you would bind on earth, will have been bound in heaven”. The perfect tense

⁴⁴ Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 176.

⁴⁵ Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 176. Willoughby C. Allen makes relations to the teachings of Jesus, of which one can then argue Peter only was able to understand here, through the revelation from the Father; according to Jesus.

passive voice suggests that an action already done in heaven, guides that which is done on earth. The explanation once again points to the revelation of the heavenly things, upon that which is on earth, where the Holy Spirit would be in play.⁴⁶ The same implications are evident in the Greek terms λύσης, and λελυμένον; from the root word λύω meaning to loosen, untie, or set free.

Seeing revelation on a personal level is praised, for a confession of the truth about Jesus. It is then, verse 20 concludes with an order for the disciples not to tell anyone the truth revealed by Peter, which implies what Jesus wants. That is for his disciples as the church, to put more emphasis on actions than words. This is one of the theological arguments of Matthew. It is what Jesus is going to do as he heads toward Jerusalem. France clarifies how this introduces the long way, and work to be done on the way to Jerusalem.⁴⁷ Thus, the role of the church in proclaiming God's kingdom is to be emphasized through actions. How these actions are to be carried out as examples will be explored in the exegesis of 18:15-20.

C. Conclusion

The interpretation shown above, reveals that one of the important theological arguments of Matthew as the author and narrator, is portraying Jesus as the Messiah. Part of this description of Jesus the Messiah is showing the importance of the Spirit of God upon Jesus, as one of the important parts of Isaiah's prophecy of the coming Messiah. It is manifestly shown in the interpretation that in the progress of Jesus' ministry, many questions were asked, and statements were made by people, mainly the Jewish people about Jesus. Still, for the readers and hearers of Matthew's presentation of Jesus' ministry,

⁴⁶ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 572. R. T. France explains this as 'divine guidance' and not divine endorsement.

⁴⁷ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 573.

God's declaration of Jesus as His Beloved Son, which according to Matthew, was revealed through the Spirit of God in the descending dove. This reveals the Holy Spirit as one of the important natures of Jesus the Messiah. Coming to Peter's confession of Jesus the Messiah in 16:13-20, Jesus himself reveals the source behind all the truth, which is the Spirit of God and is the rock upon which Jesus' established church is built upon. Matthew 16:13-20, considered in this interpretation, as the turning point of the Matthean presentation of Jesus ministry, not only points out the beginning of Jesus' way to Jerusalem, in order fulfil his Father's-given task of saving the world, in which continues to be carried out with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but also the beginning of the *ἐκκλησία* that has to be built upon the Holy Spirit. Thus, Matthew's portrayal of who Jesus is in relation to the Spirit of God, helps show what the church is, and its roles according to Jesus. The following interpretation of 18:15-20 will explore the roles and responsibilities of the *ἐκκλησία* guided by the Spirit of God.

CHAPTER THREE:

EXEGESIS OF MATTHEW 18:15-20

This chapter will be the interpretation of 18:15-20 exploring the roles and responsibilities of the *ἐκκλησία* guided by the Spirit of God.

A. Placement of Matthew 18:15-20 in Matthew's Gospel

The placement of 18:15-20 in the Matthean presentation of Jesus the Messiah; according to the structure proposed by Frank J. Matera⁴⁸. The passage lies in the Messiah's journey to Jerusalem. To locate the passage, the narrative continues from Matthew 16 to the transfiguration on a mountain in 17:1, where the narrator continues the timeline of the story in Jesus' time with the disciples. They came down from the mountain (17:9) the crowd appears on the scene (17:14) and Jesus rebukes a demon from a boy, only to continue to teach the disciples about faith such as the mustard seed in 17:20. The narrator continues to focus on the characters of Jesus and his disciples going from Galilee to Capernaum (17:23-24), with questions by the disciples and answers from Jesus such as questions on tax (17:24-27). The passage in question follows Jesus' answer to the disciples when they asked about who the greatest is in the kingdom of heaven.

Speaking of not despising the little ones, Jesus hints at the value of God as a shepherd, puts on the one that is lost out of the hundred. It is an indication of the disciples asking the wrong questions. Jesus answers the disciples' interest of the greatest in heaven,

⁴⁸ Matera.

Structure of Matthew's Gospel

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|-----------|--------------------|--|
| 1. | 1:1-4:11 | The coming of the Messiah |
| 2. | 4:12-11:1 | The Messiah's ministry to Israel of preaching, teaching, and healing |
| 3. | 11:2-16: 12 | The crisis in the Messiah's ministry |
| 4. | 16:13-20:34 | The Messiah's journey to Jerusalem |
| 5. | 21:1-28:15 | The Messiah's death and resurrection |
| 6. | 28:16-20 | The great commission |

that it is not about trying to be the greatest in God's kingdom. It is rather about their responsibility to care for those who are in need. That should be their role as disciples, to carry forward the will of the Father in heaven, which is to not let "*any of these little ones*" perish as in Matthew 18:14. All these teachings could be looked at as teachings of the building of the *ἐκκλησία*, elaborated upon, in 18:15-20, where decision making is emphasised within the church, by the church and for the church. Thus, the building of the *ἐκκλησία* is developed towards Matthew 18:15-20 by the narrator, through the focus on the disciples as first members and leaders of the church. According to the progression of the narrative by Matthew, Jesus focuses on the disciples in this part of Jesus ministry; teaching them how they should build the *ἐκκλησία* as members and leaders of the *ἐκκλησία*. They are to become like children to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, or to become excellent members and leaders of God's church on earth. They must depend on the Spirit of God, the rock which the church is built upon; the Spirit which will make them become great members of the *ἐκκλησία*. Jesus continues to teach and build his church in Matthew 18:15-20.

B. Exegesis of Matthew 18:15-20

The character of Jesus continues to further explain the role of the disciples in doing the will of the Father in building the *ἐκκλησία* in verse 15. A hypothetical situation is used as an illustration in Jesus' speech with the conjunction *Ἐάν*, meaning 'if' which is a Greek conjunction that also determines a circumstance of what action should follow. For instance, "*if x happens, y will follow*"⁴⁹. The layout of which the situation is that of a brother who sins against the disciples, in which the action that should follow on the part of the church is, *ὑπάγε* (you go). The verb *ὑπάγε* comes from the root word *ὑπάγω*, in the

⁴⁹ Danker, Greek NT Lexicon Frederick William Danker, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 104.

2nd person singular and in the imperative mood that show a command, to go. The command for the disciples in the present situation, is to initiate the responsibility to go. It is not the responsibility of the sinner or that who was in the wrong, as *ἔπαγε* is in the 2nd person singular. Jesus says to the disciples ‘you go’ – a role of taking up the responsibility to initiate the reconciliation of the sinner or wrong doer. A role of the church which means to initiate reconciliation, rather than wait for someone or something else to make a move.

The initiation is followed by another verb *ἐλέγχω*, to bring to light; also, in a command mood as in the imperative, expressing the role of exposing or correcting who has done wrong or sin. As Jesus is still in dialogue with the disciples illustrates how they are to carry forward the will of the Father as individuals. The individuality marked by the adjective *μόνου* (alone); in *μεταξὺ σοῦ καὶ αὐτοῦ μόνου* (between you and him alone). Thus, the role of the disciples to do the will of the Father as individual members of the *ἐκκλησία*, is to take upon themselves the responsibility to initiate the correcting or bringing of the sinner to light, in a private individual manner. The goal of which for the disciple, to regain (*κερδαίνω*; root word for *ἐκέρδησας*) their brother, and not have their sin lead them to perish, or be lost (*ἀπόλλυμι* root for *ἀπόληται*), as it is not the will of the Father stated in verse 14. The emphasis on the individual action correlates to the individual personal revelation, by the Holy Spirit to Simon Peter in chapter 16:18 – a personal revelation which brought by the first mention of the rock; upon which the church is to be built. This correlation also looks forward to verse 20 of chapter 18, where Jesus claims also being among where two or three gathers. Clearly Jesus is not talking of being present physically, but through the Holy Spirit.

The hypothetical situation marked by *ἐάν* (if) in verse 15 is repeated in verse 16, with the use of *δὲ* as the conjunction ‘but’ or ‘and’. Thus, the narrative shows a development of action in the unfavourable alternative case of rejection by the sinner. In

the case where the sinner does not heed the efforts of the individual, the followed action is again by the disciples as the audience Jesus is speaking to, to take one or two people along to witness. The word *σταθῆ* in the phrase *σταθῆ πᾶν ῥῆμα* (all words to stand), is from the root word *ἵστημι*, meaning to cause to stand or a stand one has taken.⁵⁰ It reveals the purpose of witnessing the context both for the sinner as well as for the church member. The witnesses are not to testify only of the refusal of the sinner to listen, but also if not more so, to make sure that the one initiating the reconciliation, has done all they could in effort to make amends with their brother. From the individual responsibility to the role of a gathered group in ensuring the will of the Father, utilizes all possibilities to allow the Holy Spirit to work through them.⁵¹ The narrator ties the role of the Holy Spirit in, by the use of *ἓνα ἢ δύο* (one or two) others, which then comes to a total of *δύο μαρτύρων ἢ τριῶν* (two witnesses or three). This is the underlying statement of verse 20, the number of gatherers, of which Jesus would be present through the Holy Spirit. Emphasis is on the group responsibility of the church, when the importance of the individual roles is established with Peter in chapter 16.

The narrative continues the remark by Jesus of dealing with such a one who does not heed the attempts of reconciliation. The conjunction *ἐάν* (if) is used twice in the same way it was used in the previous verses. The first is to set up the next action of these individual members from an individual personal effort with the Holy Spirit, to two or three witnesses where Jesus Himself would be present also, to the last stage of action being taken to the assembly of those built by Christ, upon the Holy Spirit. The goal is to provide every opportunity to reconcile the sinner through stages of involvement by the Holy Spirit. The second use of *ἐάν* (if) in this verse 17, points to the final action of the

⁵⁰ Friberg, *Analytical Greek Lexicon* Barbara Friberg and Timothy Friberg, *Analytical Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981).

⁵¹ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 467.

sinner *παρακούση* (he refuses to listen) from the root *παρακούω*, meaning being unwilling to hear. That person refusing to listen is regarded as a *ἐθνικός καὶ ὁ τελώνης* (gentile and a tax collector). In the absence of civil or physical punishment, the narrator reveals a contextual Jewish action of dealing with sinners by the local Jewish Christian church. The gentiles and those Jews who collect taxes for Rome are seeing in a despicable way by Jews.⁵² These actions from verse 15 to 17 explain how the authority and keys are to be put into use, as given to Peter in 16:19, as elaborated in the next verse.

Verse 18 at first glance seems to be a repeat of verse 19 of chapter 16. The authority by the keys given to Peter in chapter 16 is repeated here. It is applied to the *ἐκκλησία* as a gathering of people in the name of Jesus Christ, indicated by the plural form of the verbs. Consider the following comparison:

Matthew 16:19 δώσω σοι τὰς κλεῖδας τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν, καὶ ὃ ἐὰν δήσης ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται δεδεμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, καὶ ὃ ἐὰν λύσης ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται λελυμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

Matthew 18:18 Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν· ὅσα ἐὰν δήσητε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται δεδεμένα ἐν οὐρανῷ, καὶ ὅσα ἐὰν λύσητε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται λελυμένα ἐν οὐρανῷ.

From *δήσης* to *δήσητε*, *δεδεμένον* to *δεδεμένα*, and *λύσης* to *λύσητε*, *λελυμένον* to *λελυμένα*. The change from the 2nd person singular to the 2nd person plural points to who the ‘you’ in the English translation is. This is important for the narrative of dialogue between Jesus and who he is speaking to. In which case the authority he gave to Peter earlier in chapter 16, now he gives to the rest of the disciples,⁵³ as the *ἐκκλησία*,⁵⁴ illustrated in the hypothetical cases he demonstrated. It is a blessing for those who the Messiah is revealed to, by the Father through the Holy Spirit. A revelation visible through actions.

⁵² Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 532.

⁵³ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 630-31.

⁵⁴ Willoughby C. Allen suggest Matthew as the author, took from here in chapter 18 the sayings of which he used in chapter 16:19 in honour of Peter. See Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 178.

Jesus continues to stress the presence of the Holy Spirit in verse 19 with the word *Πάλιν* (again), among even at the least level of an assembly, which is more than one or *δύο* (two). Such an assembly qualifies as an *ἐκκλησία* of which is built upon the rock of the Holy Spirit, of whom makes possible the connection with the Father in heaven, not only as individuals, but as a church. The role of the church to include, is preferred over exclusion in the community; as demonstrated in the example by Jesus, the church's role of exercising its authority which includes the Holy Spirit in every step. This authority is well put by O. Wesley Allen, as not that God will grant all wishes of those who gather together, rather God honours the exercised authority of the church, under revelation by the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵ This involvement of the Holy Spirit must be understood together with the use of *παντὸς πράγματος* (all things or every matter). The phrase extends beyond the given hypothetical disciplinary cases already presented in the previous verses. It is an understanding that all things agreed upon by the two, are not without the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It then follows in verse 20, the confirmation of this involvement of the Holy Spirit representing Jesus.

The number of people that makes a gathering or *ἐκκλησία* possible needs to exceed a single unit, hence two or three (*δύο ἢ τρεῖς*). Such gathering needs to be in *τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα* (in my name), Jesus is speaking about himself. The words *ἐκεῖ εἰμι ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν* (there I am among them) are only understood through the Holy Spirit as the presence of Jesus Christ himself. This elaborates on the previous phrase *παντὸς πράγματος* (all things or every matter). It is all things agreed upon in the name of Jesus Christ, rather than anything and everything imaginable to be agreed upon. They are matters and things that separate church and secular politics. The role of the church as a community or gathering of people

⁵⁵ Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 184-85.

is important, so much so, that Jesus' church does not only emphasise individuality, but strongly suggest inclusion,⁵⁶ and reconciliation.

C. Conclusion

The narrative development from Matthew 16 after Peter's confession of the Messiah to decision making in the *ἐκκλησία* in 18:15-20, focuses on teachings and ways of building the church with utter dependence on the Holy Spirit shown in Jesus' relationship to his disciples. The mention and participation of other characters in the narrative through chapter 17 to 18 shows the involvement of other types of people in the process of building the *ἐκκλησία*. The passage 18:15-20 is introduced by the previous verses beginning with a question by the disciples that leads into explanations and demonstrations by Jesus. The established assembly of the disciples are taught the importance of tending to the needs of the least in the community. Jesus presents directions on how the disciples should go about reclaiming a lost brother and focusing on individual function within a group. Jesus continues to teach the disciples of the importance of a gathering in verse 16, to witness justice in the providing all opportunity for one to be reconciled. This emphasis on two or three witnesses is further explained in the concluding verse 20. The final step and disciplinary action in verse 17, draws attention and connections to the *ἐκκλησία*, introduced in 16:18. The keys given to Peter with the authority to bind and loose, is demonstrated by the actions of the church explained by Jesus in verse 17. Furthermore, a repeat and connection with the blessing to Peter in chapter 16:19, is repeated in 18:18. The study of the Greek verbs show the difference due to the plural forms of the terms. It refers to the church as also possessing the same authority – an authority given to Peter for being revealed to, by the Holy Spirit who the

⁵⁶ Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 185.

Messiah is. This is the role of the Holy Spirit Jesus refers to in accompanying the church or gatherings, of two or three. Jesus makes it clear in verse 20 that his presence amongst the church decisions, is through the Holy Spirit of which is the rock of its gatherings.

CONCLUSION

This study began with the mention of the issue of tension between the secular state as government, and the church as shown in the debate on the taxation of church ministers. There is a concern when the church seems to be dragged into the secular political game played by the government, which at times overlook the important role of the church as a church of God. Finding that role again is the task of this paper.

The entry point of the search in the bible for that role is the common belief of the Holy Spirit being the driving force and power behind the churches of God – a belief that is well grounded in the Pentecost and in the Acts of the Apostles as the birth of the Christian church. The earliest mention of the church in the bible by the Greek term *ἐκκλησία* is first mentioned in the gospel of Matthew. These mentions of the church in Matthew raise an alternative claim that the starting point of the church was during Jesus' ministry. The Holy Spirit as the power and force behind that church would also play an important role in Matthew's explanation of church. Limited studies on Pneumatology compared to Christology, is difficult to look at because of the intangible nature of the Holy Spirit. The mention of *ἐκκλησία* in Matthew 16:13-20 and 18:15-20, can also show the works of the Holy Spirit in the role of the church, and how it should carry out the proclamation of the kingdom of God.

The literature review of the selected texts, reveal the controversial issue of Matthew 16:13-20. The two major sides of the arguments are that of reference to the Greek term *πέτρα* "the rock" of which the church of Jesus Christ is to be built upon. The most accepted view among scholars is that Peter is this rock Jesus speaks of, while strong arguments are also in place to claim Jesus as the foundation rock of the church. Following in line with the claim of Jesus being the rock, and foundation of the church, exegesis in

this thesis drew the role of the Holy Spirit from the revelation of who Jesus is, as confessed by the disciple Peter.

Using the narrative and rhetorical criticism as the method of interpretation, the revelation of Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the Son of living God in Matthew as a kernel, can be elaborated. The event of Jesus' baptism gives declaration of this motive of the author by God himself, that includes the Holy Spirit descending as a dove, and a fulfilment of the prophetic voice of Isaiah. This gives light to "the rock" Jesus refers to as revelation by the Holy Spirit. A correlation can be drawn to the Pentecost in Acts of the Apostles, which give rise to the beliefs of the church that the Holy Spirit is the power and driving force behind the church today – the church, as this study claims, began in Jesus' ministry as shown in Matthew's account of Peter's confession, in revealing Jesus as the Messiah. The authority is first introduced in the blessing such as the revealed truth by the Holy Spirit to Peter, explained with symbols such as keys and the actions of bounding and loosening. The climax of Matthew's narrative relates to the role of the church as declaring Jesus the Messiah. A role further explained in Matthew 18:15-20.

The focus of the narrator on Jesus and his disciples reiterates the building of a gathering (*ἐκκλησία*) of those in the name of Christ. The church of which Jesus as the Messiah makes clear its focus being the needy, and those disregarded and often found the least important in the hierarchy of society – a focus group that is often shaped by decisions of secular politics. It is reflected in the question of the greatest in God's kingdom, the human interest often found in self-promotions in the world of secular politics. Jesus builds his church with a view that is rather opposite to the usual human desire to be the greatest. The function of the church according to the direction by Jesus to his disciples, highlights the responsibility of reconciliation. It considers individual personal and private roles of each members of the church, to the collective role of the whole in response to conflict.

Throughout this role of the church, the presence of the Holy Spirit in personal revelation as to Peter, as well as the presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit among two or three, allows the keys to function in loosening and bounding interchangeably between earth and heaven.

It is so, that the role of the church in Matthew's gospel, is to declare Jesus the Messiah, the Son of the living God. A role that cannot be achieved without the Holy Spirit of which allows the presence of Jesus Christ to be among the church. Jesus through the Holy Spirit among the church will address matters with selfless promotion to positions of greatness. The church's role, if guided as such by the Holy Spirit, should focus on those marginalised and often in the least benefitted by concerns of secular politics. Such focus is reflected in the works such as that of the EFKS, in providing for the community in New Zealand. In addition, a responsibility to correct wrongdoing and condemn sin, is a responsibility that must be upheld and initiated by the church guided by the Holy Spirit. It is of no surprise then that the church will encounter conflict with the world of secular politics, such as the current case on tax between the Samoan government and the EFKS church ministers. Although the collaboration between the church-matters and secular politics is arguably inevitable, and can have positive benefits for both, a need exists for the church to stand its ground as a gathering that belongs to God. A church that falls into self-promotion lacks the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As such, the church fails to identify that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, in its actions.

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