FACING FINANCIAL HARDSHIP AS A MEMBER OF EFKS, AND MARK 12:41–44.

A Thesis Presented to the

Faculty of Malua Theological College

In Partial Fulfilment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Divinity

By La’au Mila Tanielu

September 2022

CONSENT FORM FOR THE RETENTION AND USE OF THE THESIS

I, **La'au Mila Tanielu,**

agree that the thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with the normal conditions established by the Malua College Librarian for the care, loan and reproduction of the thesis.

Signature:_____ Date: _____ (month and year)

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP OF THESIS

I, **La'au Mila Tanielu,**

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 the 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)

ABSTRACT

Financial hardship is a contentious issue anywhere and has plagued the Ekalesia Fa'apotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa (EFKS) church, not only within Samoa but also in New Zealand and other countries. However, this apparent problematic topic (for many devout EFKS followers), on the one hand, can be attributed to a personal choice. On the other hand, the church has as much responsibility to ease parishioners' financial burden regarding church contributions and fundraising activities.

This thesis discusses financial hardship by re-reading the story of the poor widow's offering in Mark 12:41–44 analogously as a biblical reference for understanding modern aspects of giving to the church. As a church minister's son, I draw on my experiences and observation of how my parents dealt with financial hardship within their ministry as a platform for understanding the selected biblical text. I use the reader-response method to engage with the poor widow's offering in Mark and Social Rhetorical Criticism (SRC) to interpret the text so that we may obtain a local perspective and guidelines on how to approach this issue in our church ministry.

DECLARATION

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

Signed: _____

Date: _____

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents,

La’au Ioritana Tanielu and Lonise Sera Tanielu.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly I want to acknowledge our heavenly Father for the countless blessings bestowed upon everyone who helped make this possible.

I cannot acknowledge every individual who has helped us on this journey, but your prayers, generosity and sacrifices have not gone unnoticed.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my supervisor Rev Dr Vaitusi Nofoaiga, for your encouragement, expertise and your immense contribution to this writing. I also acknowledge Rev Dr Visesio Saga for your guidance in the final stages of this thesis.

Thank you to the Malua lecturers for your feedback and assistance throughout the course of this study.

Thank you to my spiritual parents within Malua, Rev Dr Alesana and Lemau Pala'amo and family, for your encouraging words and continued support.

To Rev Sesera and Litara Tolova'a and the congregation at Blockhouse Bay. Thank you for your endless prayers, support and encouragement.

Thank you, Rev Iese and Siaea Uele and my village at Vaiala, for your support and continued prayers.

To my beloved parents, La'au Ioritana Tanielu and Dr Lonise Sera Tanielu. Thank you for always encouraging, counselling and motivating us never to give up. I acknowledge and thank my sisters Helen, Loana, Sosefina, Veraina and your families. Thank you all for the sacrifices, prayers and moral support.

Thank you to my wife's family, Afualo Tamali'i, Uati and family. We appreciate all the help and the sacrifices you have all made for us.

Last but certainly not least, my wife, Fa'alaniga. It is a privilege and an honour to have accomplished this with you. Your patience and constant support have helped us get through the hard times. To my sons Lalofala and La'au Junior. Thank you for being a blessing and for your patience during this journey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GLOSSARY

alofa	love; caring for someone; can also mean the church minister's fortnightly stipend (*alofa o le Faifeau).*
ʻāoga amata	Early Childhood Centres for children aged 0–5 years. Aoga Amata is referenced explicitly to Samoan-language-based Early Childhood Centres.
atinae	referred to the weekly offering to help with weekly church expenses (power, water, and other costs)
Autalavou	Fellowship group within the church made up of young unmarried men and women. Although in New Zealand, there is now the inclusion of married and elderly couples.
EFKS	Congregational Christian Church Samoa.
faalavelave	an interruption to one's daily order – when family members have to amass enough financial resources to meet familial obligations.
faifeau	church minister(s)
fanau a faifeau	children (offspring) of the *faifeau*
faletua	wife of a church minister
maliu	funeral
matāfale	nuclear family/household who are contributory members to a church (financial and/or otherwise).
matai	reference to a Samoan chief (either an orator or a sitting chief)
palagi	reference to people of European heritage.

INTRODUCTION

1. Aim of The Study

This study explores in the Gospel of Mark a biblical understanding of facing financial hardship and seeking a practical and theological way of coping with such adversity. For the scope of this thesis, I will focus only on the financial hardship that I experienced in my parents' church ministry in New Zealand. Among other things, it was one of the issues I observed, particularly their approach to addressing financial hardship experienced by parishioners, that gave me the desire to pursue this study. Specifically, my interest is to explore remedies and strategies to help our parishioners and wider congregations in the contemporary Samoan society in Samoa and abroad.

2. Doing the Study

In this study, I consider the reader's background, location, and worldview as departure points for biblical interpretation.[1] As such, my experience as a minister's son born and raised in the EFKS in New Zealand is the local force to analyse the Markan narrative to form a relevant biblical and theological understanding of financial hardship. This shift from the traditional approach in biblical interpretation[2] explores and includes the reader's worldview in their location, worldviews, and experiences. Its significance resonates with a revised understanding of the chosen text for this study, Mark 12:41–44. It is shifting from the classical hermeneutical approach to the humanistic and critical processes.[3] This reader-response

[1] The scope of this paper does not allow me to give an overview of what hermeneutics is about in biblical studies. I have mentioned here only the shift from 'classical hermeneutics to humanistic emphasis,' which considers essential to my world as a reader. It highlights the importance of my location as a reader in our Samoan Christian Community.

[2] The traditional approach focuses on the author and their worldview to interpret written word on its formation and context.

[3] For a brief historical outline of the progress of hermeneutics, see David Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 104–06. Also, Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutical Philosophical Description with particular references to Heidegger,*

approach is appropriate for this purpose, given my background. This is meaning-making shaped by the questions and issues from a reader's perspective, with socio-rhetorical criticism as a framework to elicit a meaningful interpretation.

3. Why Socio-Rhetorical Criticism

While the reader-response approach highlights the reader, SRC[4] universally prioritises the language of the text (the literary features of the text). In particular, it explores how the language of the text may or may not elicit social and cultural values and systems. Furthermore, SRC looks into the composition of the text and the purpose behind the use of specific literary techniques, such as repetition, structure, and so forth. Hence, this thesis engages SRC to elucidate and highlight the issue of financial hardship embedded in the language of the chosen text to effect a meaningful understanding we can relate to as Christians and EFKS parishioners. I will elaborate on what SRC is and how it will be used in the next chapter.

4. Why the Gospel Of Mark

The Gospel of Mark emphasises Jesus, the suffering Messiah, and the Son of Man who came not to be served but to serve (cf. 10:45).[5] This scholarly consensus resonates with the early Christians facing suffering and persecution at the hands of the Roman imperial power in the first century. The selected Markan narrative, 12:41–44, reflects this hardship issue in the

Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein (Exeter: Partenoster, 1980), 24–47; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth, and Method,* trans., Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 356–357.

[4] This multifaceted interpretive analytic was pioneered and developed by Vernon K. Robbins. See Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to the Socio-rhetorical Interpretation* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996); Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 1996). For a Samoan scholar who utilizes the sociorhetorical approach, see Vaitusi Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017); Vaitusi Nofoaiga, "Enacting Sociorhetorical Interpretation in the Island Nation of Samoa in Oceania," in *Welcoming the Nations: International Sociorhetorical Explorations,* eds. Vernon K. Robbins and Roy R. Jeal (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020), 57–70.

[5] See R. Kent Hughes, *Jesus, Servant and Savior (Preaching the Word)* (Illinois: Crossway, 2015); Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 5–25.

poor widow's offering – giving all she had from almost nothing. This is amplified further by her linguistic identity and social status as a "poor widow" (12:42).[6] This surfaces a research question of whether the hardship suffered or experienced by the poor widow is caused by the social, cultural, economic, and political system of the first-century Mediterranean world. An exploration of the text will be discussed later in Chapters Two, Three, and Four of this thesis.

5. Limitations of the study

I recognise that this study is limited by my background as a minister's son growing up in the EFKS. As such, we benefit from the committed servitude of the church parishioners to God and Church through food, financial donation, and other contributions, significantly differentiating my personal experience from those of other churchgoers. Despite this, this study serves as a platform to examine this issue of financial hardship.

I also profess that being a Samoan born in New Zealand does not equate my experience of financial hardship with other Samoan EFKS churchgoers (outside of New Zealand) due to vastly different circumstances. So, financial hardship must be understood in the local context – my location and situation. It recognises that finding meaning in a text is shaped by the questions and issues I bring from my background, particularly observing how my parents dealt with financial hardship within their ministry and my subsequent experience as an adult.

Financial hardship continues to be encountered by members of the EFKS church in contemporary Samoan society. I have also observed and seen my parents' approach to dealing with financial hardship, which has polarised many Samoans within the church and those who no longer attend church for similar reasons. This thesis hopes to assist our approaches as future church ministers in the field.

[6] All biblical references are from the Gospel according to Mark, unless clearly stated.

6. Thesis outline

The thesis consists of six Chapters. Chapter One relays my experience of financial hardship in my parents' ministry, which dictates a reader-response approach to interpretation, with help from SRC, to explore the text. Chapter Two provides background information on the Gospel of Mark and the literary placement of the selected text, 12:41–44, within the Markan narrative. The innertextual analysis of the text follows this in Chapter Three. Chapter Four continues this analytical examination by interrogating the text's intertextual, social, and cultural textures. My response to the socio-rhetorical finding is the subject of Chapter Five, which is followed by the main conclusion of the study in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER ONE: MY EXPERIENCE OF FINANCIAL HARDSHIP AND READER-RESPONSE WITH SOCIO-RHETORICAL CRITICISM

1. Introduction

This chapter is twofold in purpose. I begin by explaining my background growing up as a minister's son in the EFKS church. According to Werner Jeanrond, when we read a text, we have our pre-understandings of what a text may mean. This re-reading prompts questions that help guide our interpretation of the text.[7] Accordingly, these questions are directed by the reader's life experience and understanding of the issue raised in the text. For this study, my pre-understandings of the story of the widow's offering, coupled with my life experience and understanding of encountering financial hardship, guide my search for answers on how to deal with financial hardship in our worlds. Thus, it is essential to explain my life experience and personal understanding of facing financial problems because it propelled my desire to find biblical solutions to a topic that many parishioners encounter within the EFKS.

The second part of this chapter will briefly explain the reader-response approach alongside the SRC methodology to interpret the biblical text, Mark 12:41–44.

1.1 My Experience of Financial Hardship in my Parents' Ministry:

1.11 My Life Story:

I am the youngest of La'au Ioritana and Lonise Tanielu's children. My parents served as *faifeau* (church ministers) for various EFKS churches for twenty-plus years. I have four elder sisters who were also raised as *faifeau* children.

[7] Werner Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 5.

I was born in Porirua, Wellington, New Zealand, in 1982 while my parents were ministering at EFKS Porirua, Waitangirua.[8] My earliest memories growing up in Porirua were that our area was not the richest in Wellington. I now understand that Porirua was (and still is) regarded as a lower socio-economic area at the time. On our street lived many gang-affiliated families of mainly Pacific and Maori heritage and perhaps one or two *palagi* (European) families. It was an early indication of my parent's ministry and my brush with people and children who did not have much but remained happy despite their circumstances.

I remember our blue bongo van which my parents bought. It was an inexpensive car that was practical and convenient to transport not just our family but many of our church families to and from church events. We did not have many clothes when my parents became the *faifeau* in Porirua. My siblings and parents reminded me that many church families donated used clothing for us to use.

There was, however, a strong sense of communal living and sharing from my experience in Porirua, mainly because my parents drew on the financial support of our extended *aiga* (family) and church people to raise my sisters and me. At the time, an outstanding debt with creditors in Auckland motivated my parent to clear all financial debt and retain church assets. This contributed to a shared motivation and camaraderie to work towards a common goal. Many people from EFKS Porirua were low-income earners but still managed to contribute to all church activities (financial and otherwise) and gave us an *alofa* (a stipend) for the *faifeau* and his family.

My mother, a qualified teacher, continued with her profession to support our family and increase our financial contribution to the church. As a *faletua* (minister's wife), she worked

[8] This was one of the areas in Wellington where many Samoans lived when our parents worked in the EFKS Porirua in the 1980s. The principal, Vaitusi Nofoaiga, went to our church during this time when he was a student at Porirua College.

sporadically to help out and set up the *Aoga Amata* (pre-school). We left Porirua when our family moved back to Samoa, as my father took the role of General Secretary of the EFKS and remained in Samoa for five years.

I was ten years old when we moved back to New Zealand, as my father accepted the invitation from EFKS Grey Lynn to be their *faifeau* after serving two terms as the General Secretary. Most of my upbringing was at Grey Lynn, and my parent's service there significantly impacted my views and experience on the issue of financial hardship. I remember my parents experiencing this particular issue due to the dire economic circumstances the church was in when we arrived. EFKS Grey Lynn was in more of a vulnerable financial situation than Porirua because of the urgency to meet bank and creditor demands. Like Porirua, in Grey Lynn, my parents, alongside church members, organised several fundraising initiatives to clear church debt. All the groups within the congregation (Women's Fellowship, Sunday School, Autalavou (Youth Group) and Aoga Amata, and so forth) contributed financially to help clear this debt. It was a significant time of financial pressure not only on the families within the church but us also. I distinctly remember my father announcing to the congregation the change (reduction) of his fortnightly stipend to a monthly occurrence. This was unheard of at the time for a *Faifeau* to do so. As the *faifeau*'s children, we cut onions in the summer, like many other families within our church, to raise funds to help our parents' contributions to the church. We worked part-time jobs for the same purpose.

My parents received money from the church, but they never wanted us to benefit financially from it. My father knew that many families struggled financially weekly, especially those who did not earn much and lived far away from the church. But they were quite happy (their total devotion to God, through the church) by doubling or, even more, the monetary amount they donated.

The way my parents helped families at Grey Lynn made me see life differently as a *faifeau*'s son. When the church informed us that they wanted to renovate the minister's house, my parents disagreed because they wanted to limit church costs and financial strain on the faithful church adherents.

In 2011, we left Grey Lynn when I married and decided to finish my studies. In their rental abode, we lived with my wife's family in South Auckland,[9] contributing financially to payments and other living expenses. My wife was the primary income earner as I studied full-time. At the same time, we were still expected to help with my parent's *matafale* (church contributor) at their church.

It was difficult financially as my wife had just started as a junior lawyer in a community law centre, and her salary was just enough to cover our living expenses. She was pregnant with our first child, so I worked part-time to make ends meet. To complicate matters, she was made redundant from her job months before having our baby. The financial pressure was immense, exacerbated by minimal monetary resources. At the same time, we continued to help my parents contribute money to the church through their *matafale*.

Being a minister's son, there is always this misconception that we have it easy. But an important lesson my parents instilled within me was to love God first and foremost, serve the people of the church, and appreciate with grateful hearts whatever we got given. This faithful devotion stems from my parent's humble beginnings.

[9] It was a new life experience especially when I left my parents to be with my wife. The responsibility of looking after a family became surreal during this time.

1.2 Financial hardship: What I have learned from my life experience:

Financial hardship is "a situation that causes difficulty or suffering to a person (or by extension their family), for example, being without a job or not having enough money for their day-to-day living." [10] This stressful experience, for this thesis, is happening within the context of the EFKS church and my own experiences as a Samoan raised in New Zealand. Many causes (outside the scope of this study) create financial hardship within Samoan families due to significant financial obligations to families and churches.

For example, family "*fa'alavelave*,"[11] such as weddings, requires family members to contribute money or other resources. In addition, personal financial obligations (mortgages, rents, student loans, and so on) must also be met weekly or monthly. From my experience growing up in New Zealand, almost every aspect of daily living requires money. In Samoa, in contrast, food can be grown and harvested from your surrounding without the need for money, for example, taro, yams, banana, fish, livestock, and the like. Hence, in New Zealand, there is more of a demand to have money to meet all financial obligations daily.

For Samoans, another common *fa'alavelave* is the death of a family member, relative, or church member. This occasion triggers an expectation for everyone with a familial or communal relationship with the deceased and their family to give financially to show respect and *alofa* (love). In New Zealand, these contributions come in various forms, primarily financial. Associated financial costs of funerals, expounded by cultural protocols, have become so extravagant that monetary donations are much needed.[12]

---

[10] Cambridge Dictionaries online, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/hardship

[11] This refers to when families have to reorganize their day or week in order to rally family members for enough financial resources (or otherwise) to meet their *fa'alavelave* obligations.

[12] Samoans talked about trying to cope with all these *fa'alavelave.* Some blame the *fa'aSamoa* (a Samoan way of doing thing) while others, it is the *Lotu* (church). Whatever the cause, financial hardship is real. But, for Samoans, family connection is more important and remains very strong despite life's difficulties.

In my upbringing, we attended several of these family *fa'alavelave* while my parents served in their ministry and after they retired. There were significant financial pressures on our family and everyone involved. Given my parents' status as *faifeau*, there was an implicit expectation that they would contribute the most towards family obligations because, supposedly, they had the means to (like contributions from church members). Perhaps, this cultural mindset is a sort of an inherent curse (being a *faifeau*) and, therefore, an expectation of *faifeau* (and their families).

During my parents' ministry at Grey Lynn, my father never told church members about our family *fa'alavelave* because of the added financial burden they would bear. In some circumstances, church members would eventually find out afterwards, resulting in heated debates with church elders. Such disagreement was an expression of their covenant failure to provide for their minister's needs, which they professed as their God-given duty to do. From my father's viewpoint, it was an added burden for church members to contribute financially (or otherwise) to the *faifeau*'s personal matters.

Apart from the family *fa'alavelave*, there are also church-related activities that require financial resources. Continuous financial contribution to church activities is part of the calling but not compulsory. One should give freely with a sincere heart. From my experience growing up in New Zealand, there is usually a fortnightly rotation of church contribution:

1. Week one – financial contributions to pay church-related expenses (mortgage/rent, electricity, water, and the like), commonly referred to as *atina'e* (development contributions);
2. Week two - the minister's stipend, commonly referred to as the *alofa o le faifeau*.

As the *faifeau*'s son, I had an obligation toward my parent's ministry (and retirement) to support and help them meet their financial obligations to the church. Weekly monetary donations were given as my service of love towards my parents (to alleviate any financial pressure on them) and God as a loving Christian son. Similar fundamental views were shared

by several of my peers growing up in the church. As young Samoans, it was our duty (culturally and spiritually) to serve our parents and their *matāfale* instead of having one of our own. Like me, that was their act of love and service towards their parents and God.

In hindsight, financial hardship profoundly affects a person emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually. But Samoan pride presents a barrier to open discussion about such stressful situations experienced in familial and communal settings. The mental-health impact of experiencing financial hardship can spiral into depression, anger, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, and stress. More severely, financial trouble can cause adverse outcomes if left unchecked, like terminal illness and sometimes suicidal tendencies. Likewise, many of our Samoan people suffer from non-communicable diseases, such as high blood pressure and diabetes, thus, elevating financial pressure upon their physical and spiritual wellbeing. When the church and its various obligations become a source of constant worry and stress for parishioners and their families, it becomes unhealthy, distressful, and troublesome. For these reasons, I seek to provide answers to these questions:

1. Can financial hardship issues experienced by parishioners be alleviated by the *faifeau* in their capacity as church leaders?
2. What biblical guidance is embedded in the chosen text to direct our giving towards the church?

Financial hardship is an issue that needs to be addressed because it negatively affects everyone mentally, physically, and spiritually. We need to look to the Bible for guidance on how to give financially. Sometimes, we offer money based on cultural expectations and financial pressure. As a Christian reader of the Markan narrative, it is essential to discern a biblical understanding of "giving" (to the church) and how, as future church ministers, we can share and practice such knowledge within the EFKS context.

1.3 A methodology for this study:

I have adopted a two-fold approach to analyzing the text. Firstly, I examine the text from the reader's perspective (a reader-response approach), and secondly, exploring a world emerging from the text (a social and historical view).

1.4 A reader-response approach:

I have chosen to use a reader-response strategy[13] to read and interpret the selected text – Mark 12:41–44. The viewpoints of the leading scholarly authorities on such an approach, such as Hans Robert Jauss, Stanley Fish, and Wolfgang Isler, will guide this analytical exercise to abstract a relevant interpretation that is meaningful to our understanding of "giving" or "offering".

As an essential component of the reader-response approach, Jauss' 'Reception theory' emphasizes the reader's part in seeking and searching for the meaning of the text.[14] This aspect focuses on the literary text being a dialogue between the text and the reader. Accordingly, the reception theory for Jauss is as much about the reader's questions and assumptions of the text as it is about the text. The literary text is not necessarily an object or thing, but an event perpetually interpreted whenever a reader continues to respond to it from their informed background.

[13] In undertaking any biblical interpretation, a clear description of a reading method is needed, such as Literary Criticism, Socio-Rhetorical Criticism, Reader Response Criticism and others. See Stephen D. Moore, "A Modest Manifesto for New Testament Literary Criticism: How to Interface with a Literary Studies Field That Is Postliterary,Posttheoretical, and Postmethodological," in *The Bible in Theory: Critical and Postcritical Essays*, ed., Stephen D. Moore (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010). Similarly, Samoan biblical scholars have used the similar approach with their unique ways, see Vaitusi Nofoaiga's reading of discipleship in Matthew from his experience of *tautua* in Samoa. See Vaitusi Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2021).

[14] See Hans Robert, Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception,* transl., Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 34.

Thus, Jauss emphasizes the reader building a relationship with the text. Within that interaction, the text provides instructions or questions for the reader to begin and develop an interpretation. Stanley Fish asserts that at this point, the reader starts to interpret and find meaning(s) in a story.[15]

Wolfgang Isler, another innovator of the reader-response approach, considers the reader of the text as the implied reader.[16] According to Isler, as readers of today's world, we are distanced through time and place from the text's author; there is no other text to help us understand the meaning and the world intended by the author. In contrast, the intended readers consisted of those readers at the time of the authorship. Through the process of reading, the implied reader's task and role are to interpret the text according to questions and instructions embedded in the language of the text. Thus, fusing the horizons of the reader and the horizons from the text allow the reader to answer questions from the story.[17] This fusion brings together the holistic meaning of the text and fills the gaps found in the text.

The reader-response approach begins with the reader's questions about financial hardship (as experienced and encountered in the life of an EFKS church member) and the interpretation from a personal perspective. SRC follows this to dissect the world presented by the author and the context of the Markan text.[18]

---

[15] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities* (Harvard: Harvard University, 1982), 272.

[16] Iser, Wolfgang, Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1978), 278–279.

[17] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, transl., Joel Weinsheimer and Donal G. Marshall (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

[18] Other Samoan biblical scholars who use sociorhetorical criticisms in their works are Vaitusi Nofoaiga and Fatilua Fatilua. See Vaitusi Nofoaiga, "The Gracious Torah of Christ in the Gospel of Matthew: Christ in the Parable of the Sower as an Example (13:1–23)," *Samoa Journal of Theology,* vol.1 (2022): 50–64; Fatilua Fatilua, "Who gets what, when, and how: Appropriating the political economic context of Luke 18:18–30 with implications on the political economies of the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs)," *Samoa Journal of Theology*, vol.1 (2022): 65–74.

1.5 Socio-Rhetorical Criticism:

SRC is a multifaceted interpretive, analytical tool by Vernon K. Robbins. It integrates a social science approach with literary methods in biblical studies.[19] Robbins aimed to develop a rhetorical strategy for reading the text that explores the literary, social, cultural, and ideological issues in interpreting texts. It presumes a world encoded in the language of the text.[20] Thus, SRC provides tools that enable the reader (or the implied reader) to examine the text's language, intertextuality, and encoded worlds. In doing so, SRC helps us shape meaning relevant to the readers and relates (or not) to the world (in the text) and our world.[21] It invites people with different insights from diverse backgrounds to interpret the text in a meaningful and relevant way.[22] This is not an approach meant to nullify other interpretations and methods of interpretation but to engage with them so that new meanings are produced and made relevant to other readers' worlds and locations. This part of the SRC approach is essential in two ways. First, it allows my world to be part of the interpretation and analysis of the text. Second, it reflects that my interpretation does not nullify but complements traditional interpretations of Mark 12:41–44.

SRC focuses on the world encoded in the text as a reading method. In particular, it is an interpretation tool to decipher how local people in the text (for example, women) interrelate with their world and deal with their local needs. Socio-rhetorical looks at exploring the

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

[20] Robbins, *Exploring the Texture,* 1996, 1–2. Elaine M. Wainwright, "Reading Matthew 3–4: Jesus – Sage, Seer, Sophia, Son of God," *JSNT* 77 (2000): 28–29, explains clearly this combination in her article. She writes, "The extension 'socio-rhetorical' indicates that account is taken of the socio-cultural context of reading and meaning production."

[21] Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts,* 1.

[22] Robbins, *The Invention of Christian Discourse*, 5, says: "…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."

language of the text in the Markan story of the poor widow's offering in Mark 12:41–44 and the links to Jesus' ministry. In doing so, it is hoped that the narrative will reveal the kind of world inhabited by the people in those stories, their relationships with each other, and the systems that govern and control those who operate within it.

There are five stages of Robbins' socio-rhetorical method, but I will focus only on three relevant stages for this study:

1) Innertexture;

2) Intertexture; and

3) Social and cultural texture.

1.5.1 Innertextual Analysis

According to Robbins, innertextual analysis explores the text's use of "word patterns, voices, structures, devices, and modes in the text."[23] Hence, this study firstly explores whether the language, narrative, and progressive texture of Mark 12:41–44 give primary attention to the needs of local people, especially those marginalized, within Jesus' Galilean ministry. Secondly, innertextual analysis explores how "the interpreter works in the area between the implied author and the text, not between the text and the reader." This means the interpreter looks at how outside phenomena speak through Mark 12:41–44 and how these are encoded in the text to reveal Jesus' relationship to the poor widow and other characters in the story. Thirdly, the Markan text encodes a social and cultural context, which focuses on analysing the text's "social and cultural nature *as* a text."[24] The interpreter examines such echoes in the text of first-century Christians, who experienced hardship and oppression under Roman imperial

[23] Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 7.

[24] Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 71.

power. It is widely accepted that the Mediterranean world is the context of Mark's community; thus, its social and cultural values are reflected in this text.[25]

1.5.2 Intertextual Analysis

Intertextual analysis of the chosen text looks at the use of various layers of texts that can be reconfigured and used to refer to other texts. I will use the oral-scribal intertexture, which looks at the complex ways a text has been received, and the reference to the culture of the text.

1.5.3 Social and Cultural Texture Analysis

Social and cultural texture analysis examines how the text interprets the world. According to Gowler, the social and cultural texture of a text shows how the text interacts with the culture and society.[26] Social and cultural texture looks at the "social and cultural systems presupposed in the text" and "opens up the potential of the text to encourage its readers to adopt certain social and cultural locations and orientations rather than others."[27] The interaction between the text and the culture/society can result in either sharing, rejecting, or transforming the values and/or belief system of that social/cultural structure.

1.6 Conclusion:

This chapter also lays out the method used to explore the selected text. It is a reader-response interrogation of the text using socio-rhetorical criticism, with my experience of financial hardship as a local guide. The following chapter explores the general background of the Gospel of Mark as a platform to launch the interpretative analysis of the text.

---

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

[26] Gowler, "Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation: Textures of a Text and its Reception," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33(2) (Emory University, 2010): 195.

[27] Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 71, 72.

CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK AND THE PLACEMENT OF MARK 12:41–44

2.1 Introduction:

This chapter describes a possible background for the Gospel of Mark as a platform to exegete Mark 12:41–44. This will be made by placing Mark 12:41–44 in Clifton Black's structure of Mark, as shown in the second part of this chapter.[28]

The Gospel of Mark is the shortest of the Gospels and presents the quick movement of Jesus' ministry from Galilee to Jesus' passion in Jerusalem. Even so, Mark sometimes slows down his narrative to make essential and assertive points. Mark does this with unique features and characteristics, such as the common Greek language, the pace, and the energetic writing style.[29] According to Craig Evans, Mark's Gospel has a distinct style of writing that is strong, fresh, and exuberant, and even the frequent use of the present tense expresses an action as happening all at once. For instance, the regular use of the Greek adverb *euthys* (immediately, 41 times) is an example of Mark's unique style.[30] This study also looks at crucial aspects of authorship, date and social setting, and themes to establish the context upon which our interpretation emerges.

2.2 Authorship:

Many scholars consider the Gospel of Mark to be written by John Mark, who was with the Apostle Paul.[31] Early tradition is unanimous that the author of this Gospel was John Mark, a close associate of Peter (1 Peter 5:13) and a companion of Paul and Barnabas on their first

[28] C. Clifton Black, *Mark, New Interpreter's Bible One-Volume Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 965.

[29] William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, revised ed. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1975), 45.

[30] Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary: Mark 8:27–16:20*, vol. 34B (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2001), 60–62.

[31] William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 21. Despite this consensus, many other scholars argue that we still do not know who Mark was.

missionary journey.[32] The earliest witness to Markan authorship stems from Papias, bishop of the Church at Hierapolis (about 125 CE), a witness preserved in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History.* Papias describes Mark as the interpreter of Peter while in Rome. According to Hengel, Mark did not record his Gospel in chronological order or rhetorical and artistic. Still, he recorded accurately from the experience of Peter's story of his relationship with Jesus.[33] Mark, Peter's interpreter, provides the literary knowledge and skills to connect and put together a story that starts with the baptism and ends with the resurrection, to steer the messianic secret or the Servant Saviour Messiah carefully.

2.3 Date and Background:

The date of the Gospel of Mark is highly contested among scholars. The church fathers, like Clement of Alexandria and Origen, state that the Gospel of Mark was written before and after Peter's death, placing it during the persecutions by Emperor Nero in about 67 CE.[34] However, the Gospel itself, mainly Chapter 13, indicates that it was written before the Temple's destruction in 70 CE. Some arguments suggest that Mark's emphasis on Jesus as the Suffering Son of God illuminates the idea of a suffering disciple (cf. 8:31–9:1), which suggests Mark was perhaps written to Christians enduring persecutions.[35] Most scholarly views support the Gospel written between 63 and 70 CE. The dating corresponds with the Roman Emperors and the period of persecution suffered by the Jews and the followers of Christ in the first century. This provides an important context and platform for how Mark highlights the theme

[32] Jens Schroter, "The Gospel of Mark," in *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament,* ed., David E. Aune (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 277.

[33] Martin Hengel, *Literary, Theological, and Historical Problems in the Gospel of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 48. See also Robert Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26, World Biblical Commentary Series* (Dallas: Word Pres, 1989), 27.

[34] A. E. J. Rawlinson, *The Gospel of St. Mark: Westminster Commentaries Series,* 5th ed. (London: Methuen Press, 1995), 21.

[35] James R. Edwards, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 6.

of Jesus being God's servant, but more importantly, the context in which the poor widow in the selected biblical text is to be viewed.

In 64 CE, Nero is said to have wrongly accused the Christian community of setting the city of Rome on fire, which led to the fearful persecution of early Christians in which Paul and Peter perished.[36] As a persecuted church, early Christians constantly lived in fear under the threat of death, which prompted Mark to write his "good news" (1:1). The purpose is to encourage these Christians to have courage and strength, as reflected in the life of Jesus. As Jesus suffered in his earthly ministry, his faithful followers are expected and encouraged to encounter a similar fate in their proclamation of the good news.

At the heart of the Gospel is the explicit pronouncement "that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected …and after three days rise again" (8:31). This declaration of suffering and death is not only repeated in 9:31 and 10:32–34, but it becomes the norm for committed discipleship: "Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (8:34). Mark leads his readers to the Cross of Jesus, where they can discover meaning and hope in their suffering.

2.4 Placement of 12:41–44 in Mark's Gospel:

Many structures of Mark's Gospel show the literary and theological significance of Mark's presentation of Jesus' ministry.[37] I have chosen to use Black's structure of Mark's presentation of Jesus' ministry, shown below.

[36] William Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark: The International Commentary of the New Testament Series* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 23.

[37] For examples of other structures and their discussion, see B.M.F. Van Iersel, "Concentric Structures in Mark 1:14–3:35 (4:1) With Some Observations on Method," *Biblical Interpretation* 3 (1995): 75–97.

I. Prologue: Introducing Jesus (1:1–15)
II. The Early Days (1:16–10:52)
III. The Final Days (11:1–15:47)
IV. Epilogue: The Resurrection (16:1–20)

The prologue (1:1–15) of Black's structure begins with Mark introducing Jesus. According to Black, the prologue is followed by the early days of Jesus' ministry in Galilee and Judea. In the final days of Jesus' ministry, Jesus' time in Jerusalem is in part three of Black's structure. This part is the passion narrative which ends with the story of the resurrection of Jesus, and Black considers this part the epilogue.

Black's structure is geographical and theological. This emphasis is considered necessary in placing the text 12:41–44 as a rhetorical and narrative unit in this study. It reveals that the whole ministry of Jesus (which begins in Galilee and ends in Jerusalem) could be seen as a challenging journey. It is a journey of many encounters with difficult experiences faced by Jesus and his followers, including women who followed Jesus from Galilee. Such threads link the whole narrative to the characterisation of Jesus, the soldiers, the crowd, and the women, encountering different hardships and suffering along the way.

Hence, 12:41–44, as a rhetorical and narrative unit, has a literary function that correlates with other stories within its broader narrative unit. For example, it is in line with the crucifixion of Jesus, his burial, and his resurrection. In this way, the beginning of the good news (in Galilee) demonstrates how Jesus and his followers encounter (suffer) the shameful experience of being instruments of the proclamation of God's salvation. Such hardship ultimately reveres them as honoured servants of God. This is the essence of this study to examine Jesus's suffering with the proclamation of good news as an example of facing hardship and shame that leads to an honoured place in the Kingdom of God. The following exegesis in the next chapter demonstrates this purpose.

2.5 Conclusion:

This chapter sets the platform and basis of the socio-rhetorical analysis of the selected text, Mark 12:41–44. Establishing this parameter is essential to ground an understanding of the placement of the poor widow's story in the Markan narrative, its significance, and the author's emphasis on the character of Jesus. These factors have beneficial contributions to the socio-rhetorical interpretation, the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: INNERTEXTURE ANALYSIS OF MARK 12:41–44

3.1 Introduction:

Chapter Three deals with the innertextual analysis of the text as a rhetorical and narrative unit.[38] According to George A. Kennedy, to understand a rhetorical unit in complete writing, it is essential to have an awareness of the overall rhetoric of the book. In this case, the rhetoric of the Gospel of Mark is a story of Jesus' ministry.[39] Therefore, seeking to understand Mark 12:41–44 as a rhetorical and narrative unit, considers Mark's presentation of Jesus' ministry as a Gospel story. Mark 12:41–44 is about a widow's offering. Its literary significance and theological emphases allow for a smooth flow and progression of the story of Jesus' ministry to its climactic ending. To this effect, the placement of 12:41–44 is essential in Mark's narration of Jesus' ministry.

According to Black's structure of Mark's presentation, Mark 12:41–44 is placed in the final days of Jesus' ministry. The last days are in Jerusalem, where Jesus faces challenges from the Jewish Leaders, who stir up a crowd (cf. 15:11) to force Pilate to crucify Jesus (15:15). Mark 12:41–44 is at the height of Jesus' conflict with the Jewish leaders and before the apocalyptic discourse in Chapter 13, and the anticipation of the passion narratives in Chapters 14–15. In other words, 12:41–44 is the climax of the conversations between Jesus and the Jewish leaders about their different understanding and interpretations of Jewish traditions and beliefs about God before Jesus entered the beginning of his final days, considered Jesus' passion narrative.

[38] "A rhetorical unit must have a beginning, a middle, and an end." See George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 33–34.

[39] Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism,* 33.

Before focusing on Chapter 12 of Mark's Gospel, it is essential to revisit some prior examples of events to analyse progressive textures as a precursor of what comes next. For example, Chapter 11 explains the scribes, elders, and chief priests questioning Jesus' authority, which continues into Chapter 12. Chapter 12 begins with Jesus telling the Jewish leaders about the parable of the wicked tenants, who beat and killed the vineyard owner's slaves, who were sent to collect the share of the produce. In the parable, these tenants even killed the vineyard owner's son, who was sent to evict the former from the vineyard. This brutal treatment of the vineyard owner's son resonates with Jesus himself in the context of the parable. He is considered the rejected stone by builders but became the cornerstone with which God's Kingdom was built.

The narrated events of Chapter 12 continue with the Jewish elders challenging Jesus' authority concerning paying taxes (12:13–17) and their different opinions regarding the resurrection (12:18–27). This is followed by the scribes testing Jesus' understanding of the commandments (12:35–37) and the lordship of Jesus Christ (12:35–39). These interactions end with Jesus denouncing the scribes' attitude of longing for respect, honour, and praise (12:38–40), which the Markan Jesus wants his followers to know of the scribes' (and the Jewish leaders') self-righteous and self-centred attitudes. Such selfish piety is embedded and demonstrated in 12:41–44 when Jesus witnesses the poor widow's monetary contribution (offering) compared with those with means.

The placing of the widow's offering in this part of the Markan narrative contrasts the Jewish leaders' self-serving and self-righteous attitudes against the widow's total devotion. This narrative logic illuminates how Mark and Jesus treat the marginalised people and those from low social standing, as represented by this poor widow. This interpretation will be elaborated upon in the following exploration of the selected text as a rhetorical and narrative unit.

To demonstrate the validity of the above logic, some questions need to be asked: How do the linguistic features of Chapter 12 show the type of society in which the widow lives? How do these literary features show the financial hardship faced by the widow; and her response to such reality? How do the text's literary features reflect the rich's monetary contributions to the temple? How does the widow's way of giving her offering resolve the situation for the poor, portrayed in Chapter 12? The innertextual features of SRC may provide an answer.

3.2 An Innertextual analysis of Mark 12:41–44 as a Rhetorical and Narrative Unit:

Robbins explains innertexture as "relationships among word phrase and narrational patterns that produce argumentative and aesthetic patterns in texts." SRC challenges interpreters to use rhetorical resources as they analyse and interpret five kinds of innertexture in texts: (l) repetitive progressive, (2) opening-middle-closing, (3) narrational, (4) argumentative, and (5) aesthetic.[40] I will focus only on three of these: the opening-middle-closing textures that identify a rhetorical unit, the narrational textures as the progression of telling the story, and the repetitive textures, which are the repetitions of words.

Mark 12:41–44, as a rhetorical and narrative unit, has opening and closing signs,[41] which link and relate the unit to other events prior and afterwards. Hence, the innertextual analysis of Mark 12:41–44 uses the following threefold structure of the selected text:

1. Beginning (v.41–42), Jesus witnesses the offerings,
2. Middle (v.43), Jesus' revelation of the best offering,
3. Ending (v.44), The essence of the best offering.

The opening signs of this unit are shown in verse 41. The first open sign is the statement on what the unit is about, which is putting money in the treasury in the temple. This is followed by the next opening sign, which shows the offering in the temple where Jesus sits. Thirdly,

[40] Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse,* 46.

[41] Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism,* 34.

Jesus witnesses the widow offering money contributions. Fourth is the mentioning of the crowd of an unspecified group of people from whom those who contribute offerings emerged.

The closing signs of the rhetorical and narrative unit are:

a. the conjunction *γὰρ* (for, 12:44) indicates the unit is coming to its end.
b. further mention of the people, including the rich, who contributed out of their abundance and the poor, such as the widow, who contributed out of her poverty.
c. thus, the middle part of the unit could be Jesus' revelation of which contribution is the best offering.

The literary context of Chapter 12 depicts a picture of a society governed by a social and economic system controlled by those who hold power and authority.[42] For example, the rich people were at the top of the Roman hierarchical imperial system and those closely associated with them, like the Jewish leaders who became tax collectors (collaborators) for the Roman government. The bottom end of this system languishes those facing financial hardship, who are the taxpayers – the people, the marginalised, the poor, the widow, and so forth.

Such a discriminated and unjust system is also reflected in the preceding stories about the fate of the son of the owner of the vineyard and the Pharisees' and the Herodians' questioning of Jesus about paying taxes. These stories support the idea that the minority elite in positions of power and authority control and oppress the majority of society, the people. Such authoritative figures use violence and money to conquer the poor and those marginalised in the community. And according to Jesus, those who control and manipulate power are the Jewish leaders, whom Jesus denounces (12:38–40).

The implications of Jesus' dealing with these people of high status in the Roman imperial and the Jewish religious systems are two-fold. First, Jesus displays through his actions that it is hard for poor and marginalised people to operate within a political system that benefits the rich. Secondly, Jesus also exhibits ways to overcome hardship experienced and endured

[42] K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the time of Jesus: Social structures and social conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 63–160; John J. Rousseau and Rami Arav, *Jesus & His World: An Archaeological and Cultural Dictionary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 93–96; 146–151.

under such systems of governance. The latter is evident in Mark 12:41–44, where Jesus portrays hope by identifying those who embrace the privilege of the Roman government system and the Jewish religious system as being implicitly challenged by the disadvantaged group – the poor encountering hardships in society.

The above threefold structure highlights a progressive and narrational texture that begins with Jesus witnessing the widow putting in her offering (cf. 12:41). Secondly, this structure also reveals how the poorest of Jewish society epitomises financial hardship by offering 'all' (12:44, cf. 12:42). Thirdly, the temple is the place where the offering takes place. The temple acts as the place and space where the poorer of society seek peace and spiritual strength (blessing) to continue living. How is this so?

The beginning of the unit in verse 41 mentions Jesus as the primary witness who watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Different members of this unspecified crowd put in varying amounts of money based on their socio-economic status. According to Jesus, many of them are the rich who put in large sums of money. This high number suggests that the poor woman, as one of the few in the temple, is probably trying to find her way to the treasury or waiting until all the rich have put in their contributions.

Verse 42 states a poor widow follows and puts in two small coins. In the eyes of those who embraced the economic system of the Roman government at the time (cf. 11:15–19), she should not have been there in the first place – she did not belong. Her offering of two penny is nothing compared to the money put in by the rich. But, the system of the Kingdom of God, which Jesus values as the primary source of measuring wealth and prosperity, is not the same as those set by Jewish Religious leaders or Roman Imperial society. For Jesus, the poor widow has put in more than everyone who contributes money (12:42). How is this possible?

The poor widow has put in more than everyone who contributes to the treasury. Maybe Jesus considers the widow's offering necessary because she is a woman without a husband. A

woman without a husband in society is a woman without anyone to depend upon. What Jesus thinks about this woman and why Jesus assesses her offering the best is mentioned in verse 44. Jesus says: *For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.* Jesus has given his reason for why he praises the widow's offering. The widow contributed out of poverty by giving everything she had, all she had to live on. She suffers the most from the financial hardship she is facing due to the impact of societal structures and functions. Despite such adversity, the poor widow's offering is the best because she gives it wholeheartedly. She gives faithfully and devotedly with an assured heart that God will take care of her.

The progressive pattern of the rhetorical unit is an enthymeme.[43] It has a major premise which is evident in verses 41–42. It is about putting money in the temple treasury as Jesus observes the rich putting in large sums while the poor widow offers two small coins. This is followed by the minor premise, verse 43, where Jesus calls the disciples and tells them that the poor widow has put in more. The enthymeme ends, as indicated by the conjunction "for", which is the reason for Jesus' judgement of the widow's offering. For Jesus, the poor widow contributes out of her poverty; she gives all. The poor widow has given everything out of her suffering. The implication is that she accepts her low position of standing in society and encounters hardship, but for the glory of remaining in God's eternal Kingdom.

This interpretation is further demonstrated by the repetitive textures revealed in the repetition of some words in the text. The occurrence of a word more than once represents a repetitive feature. The interpreter may display the repeated words and phrases in vertical

[43] An enthymeme is a rhetorical syllogism that is assumed from general and special truths. See Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, transl., 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.

columns and best display words with some systematic relation throughout the unit.[44] Below is the highlighted text that shows the words that appear twice or more in the text.

41 He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums.
42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.
43 Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury.
44 For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

41	He					put		in		
42		poor	widow			put		in		
43	he	poor	widow				put		in	
44						she	she	she	put	in

The important words in the selected passage are *he*, *poor*, *widow*, *put*, *she*, and *in*. The top display highlights that in Mark 12:41, He (Jesus) sees what the crowd put in to the treasury. In verse 42, the Poor widow has put in her two coins. In verse 43, he (Jesus) tells the disciples about the poor widow and how much she has put in. Then in verse 44, she (poor widow), out of her poverty she, put in everything she had to live on.

The word he (Jesus) is mentioned twice (verses 41 and 43). The word put is mentioned four times, once in each verse. Its usage as a verb (on all four occasions) demonstrates the action of placing or depositing something monetary or a gift. The word in immediately follows the word put four times as well. The poor widow is cited twice in the second and third verses. The word 'poor' identifies and provides background information about the widow. She is stated only in the last verse (but mentioned three times) as a personal pronoun for the poor widow in the second and third verses. The two words put and in are repeated the most (four times) and,

[44] Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse*, 49.

thus, have great significance in interpreting the passage concerning the issue of financial hardship. Therefore, the repetitive textures emphasise the action of ‘putting the offering in’.

3.3 Conclusion:

The innertexture analysis of the text reveals the important literary function of the placement of the widow’s offering in the Markan narrative. It is considered the climax of Jesus’ conversation with the Jewish leaders about their beliefs and traditions before Jesus enters the beginning of his passion. This point is further amplified by the significant literary connection between the selected text and the immediately preceding events. Concerning faithful followers of the Markan Jesus, facing and dealing with hardships of following Jesus tests one’s faith in proper submission to God. It reveals that financial hardship is part and parcel of becoming a faithful follower of Christ, as demonstrated by the poor widow’s offering. Further demonstration of this interpretation will be evident in the following inter-textual and social and cultural analysis, discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: INTERTEXTUAL AND SOCIAL CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF MARK 12:41–44

4.1 Introduction:

This chapter examines the intertexture and the social and cultural texture of Mark 12:41–44. The first part of the chapter analyses the intertexture aspect, where a phenomenon from outside of the text helps amplify its meaning. In this case, Mark's recitation of 2 Kings 12:9 reveals more about why Jesus sat at the temple's door and how and why the contributions of offering to the treasury in the temple were made. Part two of this chapter analyses the text's social and cultural texture, where the social and cultural values reflected in the linguistic composition of the text is examined. Notably, the language of praise and blame depicts the culture of honour and shame in the first-century Mediterranean world. Thus, this analysis suggests some potential benefits, if any, of encountering hardships in following Jesus. This presupposition explores whether the cause of hardships we face in life may not be society's fault but our own doing.

Intertextual analysis of the chosen text looks at the use of various layers of texts that can be reconfigured and used to refer to other texts. I will use the oral-scribal intertexture, which looks at the complex ways a text has been received, and the reference to the culture of the text.

4.10 Intertextual Analysis – Oral Scribal

Reconfiguration of a text is said to use a prior event to promote the interpretation of the latter because the preceding event is used to foreshadow the latter.[45] In this case, 2 Kings 12:9 can influence the interpretation of the Markan text.

[45] David B Gowler, "Social Rhetorical Interpretation: Textures of a text and its interpretation".

9 Jehoiada, the priest took a chest and bored a hole in its lid. He placed it beside the altar, on the right side, as one enters the temple of the Lord. The priests who guarded the entrance put into the chest all the money that was brought to the temple of the Lord.

The event explained in the 2 Kings passage describes the rule of Judah by King Jehoash around 835–796 BCE. Scholars suggest that King Jehoash's rule was the beginning of a 100-year reign that the authorship of 2 Kings deems good.[46] Jehoash was under the mentorship of the high priest Jehoiada and was believed to have been a good influence on his rule. In the above passage, we see the introduction of Jehoiada as the "priest" who bore a hole in the lid of a chest. The focus of the narrative here is threefold:

1. That Jehoiada made the chest
2. The location of the chest
3. What goes into the chest.

The verse begins with Jehoiada making a chest by boring a hole in its lid. The language implies the secular nature attached to the chest. The plain and simple language used to describe the chest does not identify any unique attributes. However, we will later see that this normal chest would become significant.

Secondly, the location of the chest is placed by Jehoiada "beside the altar", which highlights its significance. It illuminates a transformation (of the chest) from being a normal one to that which has been set apart for divine use and purpose. The authorship of 2 Kings also states that the chest was put on the "right side" of the altar as one enters the Temple of the Lord. The significance of the "right side" is evident in Jesus' seated location at the "right hand" of God after his ascension in Mark 16:19. The placement and location of the chest become

[46] Constable commentary: for 2 Kings, 32

significant and thus highlight the chest transform from an ordinary and plain chest with a hole in it to a glorified chest for use in the temple. The purpose of the chest becomes significant.

Thirdly, the entrance point to the Temple of the Lord has the chest in a visibly public location for all to see. Furthermore, in the second part of 2 Kings 12:9, the word "guarded" is used, indicating that the priests guard the Temple of the Lord and observe all the money placed into the chest upon entering. OT scholars suggest that King Jehoash's reign is synonymous with rebuilding the Temple; thus, the chest (treasury) was a means to fund the priesthood for the Temple restoration.[47] Ironically, the priesthood did not support this arrangement, and eventually, the Temple chest (treasury) was administered by non-priests.

Analysis of the 2 Kings text reveals three exciting points: firstly, a priest (Jehoiada) made the chest into which people contributed money; secondly, the chest was placed at the right hand of the altar and visible to all who entered the Temple; thirdly, the chest was guarded by priests who put all the money into it, as people entered the temple.

41 He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums.
42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.
43 Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury.
44 For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

Similarly, in the Markan narrative, innertexture tells us that Jesus is teaching in the temple (12:35) and then leaves (13:1). Thus, Jesus is identified as the person who is the observer, He. The location of the treasury in Mark is in the temple (12:41), and directly opposite the treasury was Jesus, also commonly referred to as the High Priest (cf. Heb 5:9–10). Secondly, Jesus is also referred to as sitting on the right hand of God. Thirdly, Jesus, being the

[47] *Constable commentary*, 32

High Priest, watched the contributions of all who had entered the temple and had given to the treasury. Jesus observed and deemed the poor widow's offering "more than all those contributing to the treasury." Jesus was guarding the temple treasury, seeing all who gave to the treasury, just as many priests referred to in the 2 Kings. The above colour-coding analysis of 2 Kings and the Markan text shows intertextual references between the two passages and their similarities. Both texts reflect the Jewish culture of giving in the temple, which exists both in the reign of King Jehoash and that of Jesus. This comparison identifies a public domain of giving that is overseen by priests.

4.11 Social and Cultural Texture

Social and cultural texture analysis looks at how the text interprets the world. According to Gowler, the social and cultural texture of a text shows how the text interacts with the culture and society.[48] Social and cultural texture explores, among other things, the "social and cultural systems presupposed in the text" and "reveals the potential of the text to encourage its readers to adopt certain social and cultural locations and orientations rather than others."[49] The interaction between the text and the culture/society can result in either sharing, rejecting, or transforming the values and/or belief system of that social/cultural structure.

4.2 Conclusion:

In light of the selected text, many Markan scholars argue that Mark's Gospel was written primarily for the benefit of the Roman Christians, who were experiencing persecution under the rule of Emperor Nero. Hence, the audience was not only Christian Jews but also Gentiles. This is consistent with much of the Markan Gospel's focus on faith and Jesus' ministry incorporating places outside the usual Jewish epicentre, Galilee. The effect of Jesus

[48] Gowler, "Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation: Textures of a Text and its Reception," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33(2) (Emory University, 2010): 195.

[49] Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 71, 72.

having to cross borders and cultural boundaries support the universal narrative of Jesus' ministry to all people. Perhaps this is why throughout the Gospel of Mark, there is an explanation and reference to Jewish customs that may be unfamiliar to the Gentile reader.

At times, the author of the Markan Gospel has Jesus rejecting certain Jewish religious ideologies and standard practices to embrace a more universal and faith-based ministry. Continuing with this line of argument, Chapter 12 begins with Jesus trying to convince the scribes, high priests, and Jewish elders of his being and mission. They have no idea of who Jesus is but remain sceptical and reluctant to do anything to Jesus because of his growing popularity amongst the people. In Mark 12:41–44, Jesus wants his disciples to observe physically, with their own eyes, how much the widow gave to the treasury. The observance of Jewish religious systems dominates much of the treasury and temple offerings. In this case, Jesus emphasises distinguishing between the rich and the poor, the seen and the unseen, and the observance of the law versus obedience to God out of love and faith. Jesus' response reminds the disciples of the necessity to give what you have with conviction and from your heart.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESPONSE TO THE SRC INTERPRETATION OF MARK 12:41–44 FROM MY LIFE EXPERIENCE OF FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

5.1 Introduction:

This chapter highlights a personal response to the socio-rhetorical analysis of the poor widow's offering in Mark 12:41–44, reflecting my experience of facing financial hardship as a church minister's son and a member of our EFKS church.

5.2 A personal response to the innertexture interpretation

Jesus' proclamation of the good news in the Markan narrative prioritises his role as the suffering servant. The placement of the narrative unit of which 12:41–44 is a part of highlights this and points to Jesus' journey towards the passion and final moments at the cross. Mark's priority and Jesus' emphasis are embedded in the poor widow's offering, which resonates with the issue of financial hardship experienced locally by church members in the EFKS. This local issue (financial hardship) encompasses church members' sacrifices to serve this good news as the embodiment of our faith journey as Christians towards greater glory in God's Kingdom.

The Markan narrative can detect a possible reflection of authoritative influence (indulgence) by Roman imperial powers and Jewish religious leaders. This perception overtly criticises and rejects public forms of donation that benefit the elite members and exploit the poor in society, as represented by the widow's offering. This is reflected in Jesus' observation and conclusion regarding the public outlook and outwardly appearance of people rather than their inward spiritual relationship with God.

This reader-response interpretation reflects the financial hardship some EFKS church members face, as they sacrifice much of their financial revenues as an offering to God via the church's numerous obligations. And this places greater emphasis on the EFKS *faifeau* to act in

the best interests of the faithful followers while continuing the proclamation of God's glory and good news in our service.

The EFKS tradition of publicly announcing any form of contribution[50] can sometimes be perceived as a form of pride and acceptance into the church community. However, what Jesus highlights in the widow's offering is not her lowly position in society but her heart and faith in God. And this hermeneutical analysis recommends that our motives ought to guide giving to the church, as expounded by Jesus concerning the poor widow's offering.

5.3 My response to the intertexture interpretation

Giving to the church is vital to our faith journey as Christians. The interpretive analysis above has demonstrated this, from the Temple restoration (cf. 2 Kings) to the time of our Lord, Jesus. While giving and financial contribution to the church remain a public affair in the EFKS tradition, the Markan Jesus illuminates one crucial aspect of giving – inwardly and from the heart. Jesus "watched" everyone (rich and poor alike) contributing to the treasury. But he identified and praised the poor widow's offering simply because he knew and recognised her circumstances, who, despite her financial woes, could give faithfully to God. This total devotion, according to Jesus, was more than what money could buy. The poor widow's offering reflected a heart willing to serve God; in faithful submission and trust that God would be with her despite her severe hardship.

From my reading site and experience, the poor widow's circumstances resonate with many of our church families' struggles. Their demographic dynamics reflect similar conditions in the Markan narrative. Despite this, EFKS church's faithful adherents are quite willing to give to the church (sacrifice) because of their love for God in answering their call. This steadfast devotion is enshrined in their minds, hearts, and souls. Most significantly, this

[50] This follows a cultural protocol of publicly acknowledging contribution by another party as a form of appreciation and acknowledgement.

sacrifice glorifies God through their service to God's ministry and provision for the *faifeau* and their families.

This local interpretation is supported by the biblical passages discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis, which suggest that financial contributions to the church are necessary, not only for the welfare of the *faifeau* (priesthood) but also for the physical upkeeping (restoration) of church facilities and missionary works. It also provides a biblical guide to giving from the heart, not based on wealth. Also, the *faifeau*, like Jehoiada, has a fiduciary duty to act in the best interests of the people under their custodianship.

Many churchgoers in the EFKS context have experienced financial hardship, and this is one of the leading reasons for the EFKS church haemorrhaging attendance numbers. While this particular reason is beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate, this study has provided a biblical basis for giving, as reflected in the poor widow's attitude to offering. This faith conviction offers a solid foundation that encourages EFKS adherents to meet their church obligations despite their financial hardship. Because they believe God has abundantly blessed them, they are happy to endure their calling as faithful servants through their service to God's church.

5.4 My response to the social and cultural interpretation

The social and cultural analysis of the Markan narrative reveals opposition to Jesus politically (Herod) and religiously (the Jewish leaders). Likewise, Jesus discredits the Jewish leaders and the inner workings of the Temple due to their exploitation of the poor in society. The rich and powerful elites control and dictate the social-economic systems of the time to satisfy their indulgence. Despite the vast gap in centuries and traditions, modern Christians face opposition from within and without the church. We are not immune from life's difficulties, and it is expected of us in our faith journey as followers of Jesus.

Financial hardship and exploitation (in their modern sense) are real elsewhere and within the EFKS churches throughout New Zealand, Samoa, and so forth. Significant building developments include elegant church buildings, halls, and mansions, which are unnecessary but examples of excessive pride. Subsequently, the people (churchgoers) bear these costs through financial donations. In the infancy stages of both Porirua and Grey Lynn EFKS churches, for example, these financial contributions were to finance external loans and debts. While the parents were (are) heads of the *matafale*, the financial obligation to the church are shared by immediate and sometimes extended members of the *aiga*. As children of the *faifeau*, we took on extra part-time work to help our parents with their financial contributions to the church. Similarly, when my parents retired, my sisters and I contributed to my parents' *matafale* as they no longer had any source of financial income besides their pension.

It is customary in the EFKS tradition to announce each *matafale*'s financial contributions after church services, and this practice closely follows the *fa'aSamoa* way of acknowledging someone's generosity. Some parishioners, particularly those I grew up with, questioned whether this public announcement created undue expectation and pressure on the amount of money to give. This may be subjective, and both the church and the *faifeau* can resolve this through dialogue, thus avoiding public embarrassment for the people.

Analytic biblical examinations above support the public display of offering under the watchful eye of the priest. This ancient practice is similar to the EFKS tradition. Likewise, EFKS leadership and churches can adopt the Markan Jesus' example by emphasising how to give instead of the amount donated. EFKS should reconsider the necessity of public announcement of the financial contribution of each *matafale* with encouragement from Jesus' observation and judgment of the poor widow's offering. A consensus between the *faifeau* and the congregation can control church fundraising activities, considering people's circumstances.

Such an accord reflects the best interest of the *aulotu* but alleviates the financial pressures on churchgoers and their families.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter highlights the importance of Jesus' advice to faithful disciples, then and now, especially in my context as a modern reader of Mark's Gospel. The poor widow offered to the temple 'all' she had without being pressured to give. She gave of her free will. She did not compete with others. She gave with a loving heart to serve God and his ministry. Her motives were purely to give and not for others to see her give. Others also gave generously for different reasons, perhaps, for wanting attention and seeking glory from those around them. This is also the current reality of giving (in the EFKS and elsewhere), where people within the church donate competitively, which may compromise our devotion to God through our offering to the church.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Examining Mark 12:41–44 analogously with our recent experience of financial hardship within the EFKS has influenced our revised interpretation as Samoan Christians. Mark's portrayal of Jesus as the suffering servant contributes to this understanding. Hence, the interpretive analysis suggests that, as followers of the Risen Christ, one is expected to encounter and endure all forms of hardship in our calling to serve God using all of his providence for us. This interpretation values the importance of an analytic emphasis that "we put the offering in", as discussed in chapter three of this study. This is supported by Jesus' priority of 'how' to give (offer) instead of the amount we put in. This way of giving illuminates a faithful offering based on a mutual and reciprocated relationship founded on God's love.

6.1 Faith-based giving

The poor widow's offering highlights the accepted type of giving Jesus commends. She gave all she had, two copper coins worth only a penny. The offering seemed insignificant according to Jewish society at the time. It was revered in Jesus' eyes because the poor widow gave out of her faith and love for God, as analysed in chapter four above. She did not realise that Jesus (or anyone else) was watching. But still, she gave all that she had to God; a faithful offering based on an inner feeling instead of outside influence, just as the author of the Hebrews states, "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb 11:1).[51]

6.2 Public versus private offering

The openness (public environment) of offering to the temple treasury highlights Jewish customs, as evident from the Old Testament (cf. 2 Kings 12:9) and the selected Markan text.

[51] Hebrews 11:1 NRSV Bible.

This commonality is broken in the Markan narrative when other sections of the broader literary unit in Mark's Chapter 12 (of which Mark 12:41–44 is a part) point to Jewish and Roman leaders' extravagance that implies discrimination against the marginalised of society, such as the poor widow and her small offering.[52]

Internal evidence supports this as Jesus states in verses 43 and 44 of his approval for the poor widow's offering. It is an offering done in faith (inwardly motivated) before putting it in the public domain as an expression of one's love and devotion to God and his earthly ministry, proclaimed by Jesus. This personal devotion sets an example that *faifeau* EFKS adherents need to imitate in their calling as faithful believers.

6.3 The *faifeau*, as a fiduciary to his congregation (*aulotu*)

From chapters four and five of this analytical exercise, the importance of the priest's role is reflected in that of an EFKS *faifeau*. He is obliged to God and man to act fiduciary to his congregation to intercede between the faithful followers and God. In performing this role, the *faifeau* may find ways to support both the needs of the church and his personal obligations instead of total reliance on the people who are also facing their costs of servanthood and daily livelihoods. For the faithful believers, their act of complete devotion to God (and family) knows no boundary. This reverence is both religious and cultural, just as evident in the poor widow's offering – to give all – even though some in society have exploited such generosity and faithful service. As such, the issue of financial hardship in the EFKS context is always fraught with many complexities. We, the stakeholders in the EFKS – leaders, *faifeau*, women committees, the youths, and various groups within, ought to come together to find practical solutions to address and alleviate such obstacles to our proclamation of God's good news entrusted upon us to continue.

[52] The narrative order of Mark's Chapter 12 supports this perspective.

Firstly, as ministers (current and future) of the EFKS congregations, it is crucial to be aware of the individual family's circumstances (within our *aulotu*), their financial capabilities, and limitations regarding church contributions. Not everyone enjoys the same financial abilities, so it is essential to incorporate such understanding during church fundraising events and private offerings. The Markan Jesus has offered us another perspective that emphasises inward feeling rather than outward expectation by giving freely what a person can afford. Such sacrifice is favourable to God.

Secondly, serving God through the church (EFKS or otherwise) has a costly biblical foundation, as evident in the poor widow's offering. In addition, adhering to communal and cultural expectations challenge us to be faithful, loyal servants, despite life's difficulties. Thus, experiencing hardship is sharing our current experiences with the Markan Jesus, who embodied the essence of suffering in serving God's will and good news. For us, the contemporary readers of Mark's story about Jesus' ministry, the poor widow's reality encourages us to endure financial hardship, knowing that our reward in our servanthood roles awaits us in God's kingdom.

Thirdly, to address financial obligations within the church, particularly the EFKS, all offerings must have a purpose. From the biblical analysis discussed in this study, the temple offerings served the priests and maintained temple activities. Such purpose ought to guide EFKS *faifeau* and *aulotu* in their financial giving to the church for specific purposes, such as the *faifeau* and his family's wellbeing, maintenance of church facilities and developments, and support the 'mother church' in its missional role. This purpose encompasses our devoted worshipping and glorification of God but should never be about pride and promotion of luxurious church buildings. Such abuses can lead to financial difficulties for all involved, who are too afraid to speak up and suffer financial hardship in silence.

Another possible solution that can alleviate financial hardship for the *faifeau* and his family and EFKS adherents involves Malua Theological College (MTC). Maybe MTC can offer courses that teach microeconomics, financial planning, budgeting, basic accounting skills, social and mental challenges, and so forth that examine such issues. This could be part of MTC's curriculum to prepare future *faifeau* in their future ministries, considering the different contexts EFKS serves (Samoa, New Zealand, Australia, USA, Fiji).

For the EFKS churches in New Zealand, some are taking out extravagant loans to make significant renovations or build new churches and halls. In turn, church families (*matafale*) will have to contribute money to finance such borrowings, some of which have taken years to repay. But this church obligation is wrapped with cultural pride, which affords many EFKS *faifeau* a comfortable lifestyle with maybe expensive cars and numerous gifts (monetary and kind). This is an area where the *faifeau* can initiate a solution and allow church families to prioritise their finances and improve their own lives first. When the church families prosper, so does the *faifeau*, but not the other way around.

The Samoan culture can also help by lessening its cultural expectation of the people. Likewise, the EFKS church's religious commitments contradict the teachings of the Bible, as evident in the poor widow's offering in Mark's narrative. This is not to say that our faithful devotion supersedes everything else in our lives. It is setting our priorities right where loving God through our servanthood, and offering of varying degrees is exemplified by our relationships within our families, villages, churches, and neighbours – those in need by alleviating their suffering, financial or otherwise.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barclay, William. *The Gospel of Mark*. Revised edition. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1975.

Black, Clifton. *Mark, New Interpreter's Bible One Volume Commentary*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010.

Cambridge Dictionaries online, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/hardship.

Edwards, James R. *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Mark.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

Evans, Craig A. *Word Biblical Commentary: Mark 8:27–16:20,* vol. 34B. Nashville, Tennessee:Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2001.

Fish, Stanley. *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities*. Harvard: Harvard University, 1982.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method.* Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Seabury Press, 1975.

Gowler, David. B. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament 33(2): Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation: Textures of a Text and its Reception.* Emory University, 2010

Guelich, Robert. *Mark 1–8:26, World Biblical Commentary Series.* Dallas: Word Press, 1989.

Hanson, K.C. *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts, Second Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

Hengel, Martin. *Literary, Theological, and Historical Problems in the Gospel of Mark.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.

Hughes, R. Kent. *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior, New edition (Preaching the Word).* Illinois: Crossway, 2015.

Jasper, David. *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004.

Jauss, Hans Robert. *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception.* Translated by Timothy Bahti. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.

Jeanrond, Werner. *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* .London: SCM Press, 2002.

Kennedy George A. *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism (Chapel Hill*. London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

Lane, William. *The Gospel According to Mark: The International Commentary of the New Testament Series.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984.

Mack, Burton. L. *Rhetoric and the New Testament*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

Malina, Bruce J. "Understanding New Testament Persons." In *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation.* Edited by Richard Rohrbaugh. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996.

Matera, Frank J. *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.

Moore, Stephen D. "A Modest Manifesto for New Testament Literary Criticism: How to Interface with a Literary Studies Field That Is Postliterary, Posttheoretical, and Postmethodological." In Stephen D. Moore, *The Bible in Theory: Critical and Postcritical Essays*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010.

Nofoaiga, Vaitusi. *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew.* Atlanta: SBL Press, 2021.

Nofoaiga, Vaitusi. Moleli, Samasoni. *Samoa Journal of Theology*. Malua Theological College, 2022.

Rawlinson, A.E.J. *The Gospel of St. Mark: Westminster Commentaries Series.* 5th edition. London: Methuen Press, 1995.

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

Robbins, Vernon K. *Welcoming the Nations: International Sociorhetorical Explorations*. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020.

----------. *The Invention of Christian Discourse.* Vol. 1. Blandform Forum: Deo, 2009.

----------. *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology.* New York: Routledge, 1996.

Rousseau, John J. and Rami Arav. *Jesus and His World: An Archaeological and Cultural Dictionary*. Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1995.

Schnabel, Eckhard J. “The Persecution of Christians in the First Century.” *JETS* 61.3 (2018): 543.

Schroter, Jens. “The Gospel of Mark.” In *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*. Edited by David E. Aune. West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2010.

Thiselton, Anthony C. *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutical Philosophical Description with special references to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer and Wittgenstein.* Exeter: Paternoster, 1980.

Van Iersel, B.M.F. “Concentric Structures in Mark 1:14–3:35 (4:1) With Some Observations on Method.” *Biblical Interpretation.*

Wainwright, Elaine M. “Reading Matthew 3–4: Jesus – Sage, Seer, Sophia, Son of God.” *JSNT* 77 (2000): 28–29.

Wolfgang, Iser. *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett.* Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1978.