

**The Reinterpretation of the Law in Matthew's Sermon on  
the Mount: Exploring its Contextual Interpretation among  
the Ewes of Ghana**



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## **Declaration**

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## **Abstract**

Many scholars believe that the Sermon on the Mount (SOM) in Matthew's gospel deals with the reinterpretation of the Mosaic Law and its applicability to disciples of Jesus. Most Patristic scholars focused on how the ethics of the SOM might apply to believers. The dominant medieval view was that the SOM was a higher ethic reserved for the clergy. Reformation and modern era scholarship on the SOM was/is intense. Luther thought it was an impossible demand just like the Law; Anabaptists applied it literally; Liberalists derived their Social Gospel from it and existentialists claimed the SOM was a challenge to decision. Weiss and Schweitzer said it was an interim ethic of Jesus' mistaken notion of imminent eschatology; Dispensationalists viewed it as ethics of the millennial kingdom. Other scholars think it is ideal ethics to aspire to. Most of these scholars studied the text using the historical critical method (HCM). Is the SOM simply "difficult ethics"?

From the 1970s, many scholars applied narrative criticism (NC) to study the SOM. Others used social-scientific methods (SSMs). An attempt to merge the benefits of NC and SSM, led to Vernon K. Robbins' socio-rhetorical interpretation (SRI). Using Robbins' SRI, this dissertation explored the contextual application of the SOM among the Ghana-Ewe, and concluded that the SOM can be viewed as Jesus' new Kingdom Gospel, which is his reinterpretation of the Mosaic Law. Viewed this way, the SOM teaches not just ethics, but above all, kingdom-appropriate righteousness for theological and ethical renewal. This righteousness is natured through daily beneficial exchanges with God, leading to habitual forgiveness and subsequent divine perfection of love for God, and one's enemies. Kingdom-appropriate righteousness offers an antidote to the monster which this dissertation calls "compulsory-wealth Christianity" being promoted in Ghanaian Christianity today.

## Opsomming

Baie geleerdes glo dat die bergpredikasia (SOM) in die Matteus evangelie handel oor die herinterpretasie van die Mosaïese wet en die toepaslikheid daarvan op Jesus se dissipels. Die meeste patristiese geleerdes het gefokus op hoe die etiek van die SOM op gelowiges van toepassing kan wees. Die oorheersende siening in die Middeleeue was dat die SOM 'n hoër etiek vir die geestelikes was. Hervorming- en moderne era-studie op die SOM was intens. Luther het gedink dit was 'n onmoontlike uitdaging, net soos die Wet; Anabaptiste het dit letterlik toegepas; Liberaliste het hul sosiale evangelie daaruit afgelei en eksistensialiste beweer die SOM was 'n uitdaging om besluite te neem. Weiss en Schweitzer het gesê dit was 'n tussentydse etiek van Jesus se verkeerde idee van naderende eskatologie; Dispensasionaliste beskou dit as etiek van die duisendjarige koninkryk. Ander geleerdes dink dit is geïdealiseerde etiek om te streef. Die meeste van hierdie geleerdes het die teks bestudeer aan die hand van die historiese kritiese metode (HKM). Is die SOM eenvoudig "moeilike etiek"?

Vanaf die 1970's het baie geleerdes narratiewe kritiek (NK) begin toepas om die SOM te studeer. Ander weer het sosiaal-wetenskaplike metodes (SSMs) gebruik. 'n Poging om die voordele van NK en SSM saam te voeg, het gelei tot Vernon K. Robbins se sosio-retoriese interpretasie (SRI). Met behulp van Robbins se SRI het hierdie proefskrif die kontekstuele toepassing van die SOM onder die Ghana-Ewe ondersoek, en tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat die SOM as Jesus se nuwe Koninkryk evangelie beskou kan word, wat sy herinterpretasie van die Mosaïese wet is. Op hierdie manier leer die SOM nie net etiek nie, maar bowenal, koninkryk-gepaste geregtigheid vir teologiese en etiese vernuwing. Hierdie geregtigheid word deur die daaglikse voordelige uitwisseling met God bepaal, wat lei tot gewone vergifnis en die daaropvolgende goddelike volmaaktheid van liefde vir God en die vyande. Koninkryk-gepaste geregtigheid is die beste

oplossing vir die monster wat hierdie verhandeling noem "verpligte rykdom-Christendom" wat vandag in die Ghanese Christendom bevorder word.

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God bless you all. Amen.

## **Dedication**

This study is dedicated to the memory of my late parents Dada Frieda Konglo and Papa SY Parku (aka Dzekedji), for being the channel through which God brought me into the world. May you both rest in perfect peace.

## **List of abbreviations and some definitions of terms**

**BCE:** Before common era

**CE:** Common era

**CWC:** Compulsory-wealth Christianity

**HCM:** Historical critical method

**NT:** New Testament

**OT:** Old Testament

**Matt.** Matthew

**v.** verse

**vv.** verses

**cf:** confer

**EPCG:** Evangelical Presbyterian church of Ghana.

**PCG:** Presbyterian church of Ghana

**SOM:** Sermon on the Mount

**SOP:** Sermon of the Plain

**SSM:** Social-scientific method

**SRI:** Socio-rhetorical interpretation



**NC:** Narrative criticism

**NRSV:** New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible

**Christianity:** The religion of ongoing commitment to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

**Christian:** A converted and committed contemporary disciple of Jesus Christ, who through faith in Jesus has become a member of God's present Kingdom.

**Kingdom of God:** The reign of God, sovereign rule of God over the lives of Christians, the climax of which will be the decisive and ultimate defeat of sin and evil when Jesus Christ returns to consummate the eschatological Kingdom.

**Ewe:** A West African ethnic group of about six million people who live mainly in Ghana, Togo and Benin, and to a lesser extent southern Nigeria. The Ewe, like other ethnic groups, also live in the diaspora.

**Ewe diaspora:** Ewe-speaking people who live outside Togo, Benin, Ghana and southern Nigeria.

**The Law:** A complex biblical notion which integrates its meaning in the Hebrew Bible with its interpretation in the New Testament. When used in contrast with the Gospel in this study, "the Law" refers specifically to the Mosaic Law.

**The Gospel:** The message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, which he brought at the breaking of the new Kingdom.

**Compulsory-wealth Christianity:** An expression of Ghanaian Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity, which claims that the Holy Spirit empowers every "born again" Christian to become

wealthy, and that limited faith and the work of the devil are the only obstacles to Christian material prosperity.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

# **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE LAW IN MATHEW'S SERMON ON THE MOUNT**

### 1.0 Introduction

Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (SOM) is a theological enigma that has never ceased to puzzle scholars, students and popular interpreters alike. The SOM has been studied for more than two millennia, so the resulting literature on the text is overwhelming to the point where one wonders whether a new study of the text would have anything to offer at all. The most contentious aspect of the investigations is the intense debate associated with the SOM, regarding its connection with the Mosaic Law and the Gospel of Jesus. Jesus' gospel is his Kingdom message. Jesus, in Matthew's gospel, teaches a certain kingdom-appropriate righteousness that his audience and the eavesdropping crowds needed to nurture, if they were to be members of his new Kingdom. The Kingdom of God, a dramatically subtle, dynamic reality was already breaking in (Matt. 10: 7) because of Jesus' ministry (Holladay 2017:218-219). Jesus had come to create a new community with a new identity formed through a new understanding of God's call to them, and a new relationship with God's will taught in the SOM. Jesus himself is the community's sole sovereign expositor, who interprets the Torah (Matt. 23: 8-10) to reveal the will of God to them (Holladay 2017:219). As the sole Rabbi invested with the consummate authority to teach the will of God, Jesus emphasises kingdom-righteousness that leads to genuine love for, and obedience to God. Love for God also results in love for neighbour and enemy as well.



For J. Daryl Charles (2011:6) and Charles (2002:1ff), the righteousness that Jesus teaches in the SOM, upholds the ethical validity of the Law, since both legalism and lawlessness are rejected in the SOM. F. P. Viljoen goes even one step further to argue that Matthew's teaching on righteousness, which is considerably concentrated in the SOM, is the key factor in identity formation in the gospel and its central focus is commitment to Jesus (Viljoen 2013:1ff). Commitment to Jesus was the hall mark of a member of the Matthean community. Yet community cohesion of the Matthean church was threatened at the time Jesus gave the SOM, because of disagreements over the meaning of the Mosaic Law, and how its interpretation applied to people's practical lives. Antagonism with Judaism, specifically emerging rabbinic Judaism marked the recent history of Matthew's community at the breaking in of the message of the SOM (Wilson 2007:303). This new orientation was the basis of the formation of a new identity based on commitment to Jesus. Yet as Clarke (2003:13ff) has noted, there are some scholars who attempt to reject Matthew's gospel altogether based on controversies over matters such as the validity of the Law. It is better to engage the controversies as a means by which to understand the message of Jesus by which he inaugurated his new Kingdom of God.

Jesus cites examples from the Law to clarify his consummate reinterpretation to his contemporaries, to help his disciples and would be followers (Matt. 5: 1-2; 7: 28) to learn to be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5: 48). In other words, Jesus taught the Torah to his followers and would-be disciples in the SOM. He was Torah-compliant, to this extent, but not in the same way that the Jewish authorities of his day understood compliance to the Torah. For Viljoen, the purpose of Jesus' teaching was to emphasise for disciples, their need to do the will of God as evidence of righteousness. Viljoen writes, "An individual who wants to be part of the Matthean community needs to be loyal to the teaching of Jesus about the *Torah* [his emphasis] and

earnestly and continuously yearn towards what is regarded as true righteousness (Mt 5:6)” (Viljoen 2011:22). This view underscores a strong connection between the Torah and Jesus’ gospel.

The examples Jesus took from the Law to explain his Kingdom message are in the so-called antitheses (Matt 5: 21-48), and exposed further, elsewhere in Matthew’s gospel. They show, that by saying he had come not to abolish the Law, Jesus was not suggesting that he wanted his disciples to obey every minute detail of the Law in a legalistic sense. Quite to the contrary, Jesus was showing that through a good understanding of God’s intent for giving the Mosaic Law, one will be able to relate appropriately to the Torah as God pleases.

Though juxtaposing the antitheses with the continual validity of the Law is often deemed controversial, the study of the antitheses holds the key to one’s understanding of the Law in Matthew’s gospel. For instance, the Law on adultery which Jesus cited was strongly connected with the divorce Law, and Matthew reports Jesus’ comments on the adultery law in both Matt. 5 and Matt. 19. The Torah permitted divorce without commanding it, but the precondition to divorce that Matthew’s Jesus gave is not mentioned in the Torah. Jesus, however tied the sin of lust with adultery and divorce. According to Brower (2004:291ff), if we place the “lustful eye” of Matt 5: 28 in its proper literary context, we will appreciate that Jesus reinterpreted the Law in the SOM to intensify the Torah but refrains from adding further restrictions to it. The link between the SOM and the Torah which this lust-divorce-adultery pericope establishes, specifically addresses one cause of adultery, which Jesus condemned, rather than suggest that lust, itself is adultery. From this example, we see that the question of the practical application of the Mosaic Law to a new community was in contention.

Many scholars, including J. Daniel Hays, acknowledge that certain aspects of the Mosaic Law do not apply to contemporary Christians. Hays criticises a common approach to the interpretation of the OT Law that identifies moral, civil and ceremonial laws, as arbitrary and lacking in textual support (Hays 2001:21ff). In supporting *principlism* as a way to interpret the Mosaic Law for contemporary Christians, Hays sees a connection between the Law and the Gospel. *Principlism* recognises a universal, timely principle in every OT Law, which could be identified, modified and applied to contemporary Christians. This does not amount to asking contemporary Christians to follow the letter of the Law, however. In other words, using the method of *principlism* enables the interpreter to identify and apply the underlying principles in every law, without being compelled to pitch the Law against the Gospel. What did Jesus teach regarding the Law's applicability in his new community?

For Charles (2002:47ff), Jesus' attitude towards the Law was one of affirmation. Jesus did not set it aside because, "The law, as Israel's standard for good works and the object of constant re-affirmation by the prophets, was accepted by the Christian community as binding, even when it needed re-contextualization in Jesus' day" (Charles 2002:47ff). This understanding rejects a reference to Jesus as the teacher of a new Torah or a new Lawgiver. Rather it considers Jesus as having established the significance of the Torah for the new community by his reinterpretation of the Law. The new community was however, required to appropriate the meaning of the Law differently from the approach adopted by established religion of their time. Jesus categorically establishes the validity of the Torah in Matt 5:17-20, and his reinterpretation in Matt 5:21-48. Matt. 5:21-48 is a unit that is often understood as a set of theses and antitheses.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Jesus' attitude

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<sup>1</sup> Crossley is not excited about the label "antitheses"; he refers to it at the "so-called antitheses" (Crossley 2010: 67). Stanton (1992) has also argued that the label is a misnomer. Stanton does not see any opposing (anti) development that should give rise to such a label. The form of antithesis is widely used in rhetoric, however, and Matthew's characteristic arrangement of texts in threes, sevens and fourteens, as well the favourite "you have heard... but I say

towards the Sabbath, purification rites, and fasting seem to contradict his own affirmation (Viljoen 2006:135ff). In Viljoen's view, Jesus' teaching means that the Torah which is the subject of full treatment in the SOM is irrevocable but its applicability changes, and because of the change, Jesus gave a new Law. Jesus' interpretation of the Law in the SOM, is thus, the "new Law" that he gives. If this "new Law" is understood as Jesus' Kingdom message, the Gospel, then it cannot be pitched against the Mosaic Law as if the two are in competition. The "new Law" should rather be conceived as a new and better way to be faithful to the "old Law", based on Jesus' guidance. The correct understanding and impact of this "new Law" is comprehensive and holistic because it embodies the whole person. It is its contextual interpretation that can achieve this wholesome impact on its recipient.

Thus, when interpreted from social and cultural perspectives, the SOM "stimulates emotionally, biologically, culturally habituated, evolutionarily preconditioned, and socially sanctioned characteristics of humans" (Hardison 2010:40). In other words, a contextual application of the Law in the SOM has relevance for every new community in a holistic sense, in that when obeyed fully, it builds up the whole person unto divine perfection. Bridging the social and cultural gap between us in the twenty first century and its Mediterranean hearers is important for the understanding and applicability of the SOM. Once the historical gap is bridged, it becomes clear that the SOM, rather than merely evoke controversy over ethics, connects the Mosaic Law and its

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to you"...formula, are clearly rhetorical. If for nothing at all, Matthew intended them to be memory aids to his audience's benefit. The themes discussed are murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation and love for enemies. About sixteen out of the 28 verses in Matt. 5:21-48, representing 60%, are additions to the central idea. The form of these theses and antitheses informs the interpretation of the text. Though the formula of the antitheses is not precise, it is the same in all the six cases. There are six antitheses and only four theses, sandwiched between the beatitudes (or opening of the SOM) and the Lord's illustration of the kingdom-appropriate righteousness that follows the proper understanding and application of the Law to a person's life (Matt. 6:1-18). Exhortations to obedience and applications of the law follow (Matt. 6:19-7:21) and then the conclusion of the SOM (Matt. 7:24-27) and the reaction of the crowds as a fraction of the audience ends the unit (Matt. 7: 28-29).

fulfilment in a new righteousness that comes from faith in Jesus. This faith is the result of obedience to Jesus' word. In effect, the Law is central, not antagonistic to the understanding and applicability of kingdom-appropriate righteousness.

Topical progression of the key terms *νόμος*, *πληρώω* and *δικαιοσύνη* function to show the centrality of the Law's interpretation as the subject of the kingdom-appropriate righteousness that is in contention already in Matt. 5: 20. To give effect and force to his argument, debate, teaching and practice of the Law, apart from what he would do and say later in the gospel, Jesus selects and comments on topical issues from the Mosaic Law. It is observed that his selection and comments focus on human relationships. Condemnation of murder, lust, adultery, divorce, false swearing and retaliation, are intended to promote "holiness, justice, and love for the neighbour" (Mekonnen 2017:124). Moreover, Jesus' teaching replaces the Law's role as a measure of judgment, since, as the passage shows, a breach of the Law's true intent leads to judgment. For Jesus, then, judgment depends not only on one's action but also on one's thought and attitude towards a neighbour. Therefore, a positive response to Jesus' authoritative teaching demands reconciliation with neighbour, perpetuity of marriage, and overcoming adultery. Jesus demonstrated that when the Law's relevance is properly established then it is fulfilled. Does a positive response to Jesus' teaching in the SOM contribute to Jesus fulfilment of the Law, or is the Law fulfilled through Jesus' teaching and actions only?

The question of the Law's fulfilment is a thorny one. It has theological, historical, ethical and exegetical nuances (Stanton 1992:296). We learn from Matt. 5:18 (NRSV) that the Law remains valid until all is accomplished. If this "accomplishment" refers to the incarnation and ministry of Jesus as Stanton presumes, then, as he points out, the warning in Matt. 5:19 must refer to Jesus' own interpretation of the Law using love as a hermeneutical key (Stanton 1992:300).

This view finds support in Jesus' response to the lawyer (Pharisee) who asked about the greatest commandment (Matt. 22:34-40). Jesus told him that the Law and the Prophets hang on the love commandment. Snodgrass (1997:38-48) extended the hermeneutical key to include mercy. But mercy is part of love, therefore there is no contradiction between love as the hermeneutical key that Jesus used to reinterpret the Law in the SOM, and love and mercy as hermeneutical keys. If the warning in Matt. 5:19 does not refer to Jesus' reinterpretation of the Law which had been, and was still being interpreted legalistically by the scribes and the Pharisees and their antecedent Jewish religious leaders, then the demand in Matt. 5:20 falls out of tune with the entire pericope (Matt. 5:17-20). Subsequently, Jesus fulfils the Law by reinterpreting it in the SOM as the gospel message for the Kingdom, which he also exemplifies in his attitude and conduct of ministry. Perhaps it may be added that getting his followers to understand his message and living by it also contributes to the nature of the fulfilment of the Law as Jesus hinted. If Jesus' new community members become as perfect as the heavenly Father, then the Law is completely fulfilled.

Beyond the SOM, fulfilment of the Law could be construed as Jesus "defending its authority against the tradition of the fathers" (Mekonnen 2017:124) and invoking and abiding by God's original intent for giving the Law. When the scope of the Law is examined in Matthew, we find that "purity, vows and tithes are part of the topical progression" (Mekonnen 2017:124). Though the controversy over the Law in Matthew's gospel centres around Jesus' teaching of, and attitude towards it, those who accepted his message and followed Jesus also became part of the controversy when they sided with Jesus. As noted earlier, scholarly inquiry into the meaning of the SOM started right from the time of the fathers. It has resulted in many nuanced understandings as well.

Prior to the 1970s, the SOM was studied using the historical critical method, as was done with other gospel texts. Much of it has been by way of redaction criticism. In more recent times, interest in the Bible as literature has been strong, therefore many scholars now study the SOM (and other gospel texts) using various literary critical approaches. Social-scientific approaches (SSAs) have also been utilised. Some scholars have tried to blend the benefits of the historical critical method with literary critical approaches. One such scholar is Vernon K. Robbins who introduced Socio-rhetorical interpretation (SRI) to study ancient texts as “tapestry” of many “threads” and proposed that examining (interpreting) an ancient text from the various angles of the “many threads” of the tapestry enriches understanding of the text far more than a single method of interpretation can reveal. SRI, as Robbins noted, does not have to exhibit all textures in a single study.

This research uses SRI to study the SOM in order to show as many perspectives of the text as possible, and to help clarify the relationship between the reinterpretation of the Law in the SOM, and the Gospel of Jesus’ new Kingdom. With the SRI focus, the main investigation of a given text explores the strategy (rhetoric) and situation (context) of the text to clarify the intended communication of the text as “a social force and social product” (van Eck 2001:1230ff). The “strategy and situation”, or “rhetoric and context” approach also corresponds with text and context (In-Cheol 2004:38) analysis of the SOM. So, a combination of textual and contextual analysis is what this dissertation has done with the SOM, using SRI.

As a result, the main argument of the study is that a contextual interpretation of the SOM, using Jesus’ authoritative reinterpretation as hermeneutical key, clarifies the relationship between the Mosaic Law and the Gospel for the Ghana-Ewe, the same way that Jesus reinterprets the Mosaic Law for a new Jewish audience as his message of the new Kingdom of God. Jesus thereby carries out his vision of fulfilling the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 5:17), by his reinterpreted,

fulfilled Law which is the gospel of the Kingdom. The central concern of Christ's gospel is a new kind of righteousness (Matt. 5:20) that mimics God's character and conduct, in which God loves human persons, so much as to be benevolent to both the righteous and the unrighteous. This indiscriminate love was a lofty reality that had dawned on Jesus' audience and subsequent disciples of contemporary times. The reaction of the crowd to the content of the SOM shows that "a higher reality, co-existent with the Person of Jesus, became apparent in His teaching" (Ridderbos 1978:28). This understanding is evident in the crowd's astonishment on hearing the message (Matt. 7:28). The audience was overwhelmed because they understood that something new was happening to their knowledge of the Mosaic Law in Jesus' teaching. Moreover, it is clear from Matt. 7: 21-23 that the SOM "is only to be understood when there is a full recognition of the frame in which it appears, namely, the gospel of the Kingdom of God and of His mighty deeds in His Son Jesus Christ" (Ridderbos 1978:28). Rather than remain legalists striving to keep the Law, the audience was being called upon to be faithful disciples of Jesus in his new Kingdom.

SRI of the SOM has shown that Jesus' discourse about discipleship (Holladay 2017:225) in the Kingdom of God is a complex speech that can be analysed from the perspective of ancient Mediterranean rhetoric. The speech exhibits repetition, progression and narration, as well as the opening-middle-closing (OMC) texture, argumentative texture and sensory-aesthetic texture. Each of these inner texture aspects of the SOM has been shown in Matt. 5, to display what happens when one "gets inside the text". Turning to the interactive world of the SOM, it is evident that the SOM functions also as a reworked or rewritten text of many traditions, such as oral-scribal, cultural, social and historical antecedents that have been referenced, recontextualised, echoed or reconfigured, amplified topically, or amplified from narrative perspective. The traditions were



taken both from the Hebrew Bible and certain social, cultural and historical traditions and reworked in various ways.

### **1.1. Statement and background of the Problem**

Many scholars and students of the SOM view the text as a reinterpretation of the Mosaic Law and how it applies to disciples of Jesus. Craig S. Keener (1999) summarised views on the sermon as follows: (1) Most scholars of medieval times considered the SOM a higher ethic reserved for the clergy; (2) Luther thought it is an impossible demand just like the Law; (3) Anabaptists believed it is applicable literally in the civic sphere; (4) traditional liberal theologians viewed the SOM as a basis for their Social Gospel; (5) existentialists claim the SOM's moral demands are a general challenge to decision; (6) Johannes Weiss, and Albert Schweitzer after him thought the SOM is at best an interim ethic rooted in Jesus' mistaken expectation of an imminent eschatology; (7) traditional dispensationalists consider the Sermon to be ethic for the future millennial Kingdom; (8) Blomberg's and others mention an 'inaugurated eschatology', 'in which the sermon's ethic remains the ideal or goal...but which will never be fully realised until the consummation of the eschatological Kingdom...' (Keener 1999:160).

Most of these views are based on the belief that the Sermon's primary concern is ethics. The fact that not everything in the SOM is about ethics and that there are other ethical teachings of Matthew's Jesus found elsewhere in the gospel, is not always emphasised. Grindheim (2008:313-331) who argues that Matt 25:31-46 constitutes an appropriate conclusion to the teaching on discipleship in Matt 7:21-23, and its main demand is righteousness, supports the view that the SOM goes beyond ethical instructions. Jesus' commission to the disciples in Matt. 28:16-20 further shows that mission was a crucial aspect the discipleship. The commission was a task that could be carried in three ways: going, baptising and teaching (Keener 2009b:3). Moreover,

the task that the discipleship mandates includes both evangelisation and training (Keener 2009b:14). Thus, it is mistaken to consider the Sermon as only teaching Jesus' ethics (Stanton 1992:735-744). It is better to engage the SOM from the perspective of the Law then (Mosaic) and Law now (Jesus' followers), because the Law embodies the ethic but the ethic does not necessarily embody the Law. Yet, whether seen as law or ethics or both, scholarly, student and popular views on the SOM are varied and diverse.

By the end of the fourth century Chrysostom and Augustine had regarded the SOM as God's plan that teaches a perfect pattern of life for all Christians (Stanton 1992:737). While this view may be judged to impute an idealist character to the SOM, it can be accepted if the SOM is a standard for regenerated disciples, who are enabled by the grace of the gospel to rise to its ethical challenge. Thomas Aquinas (13<sup>th</sup> century), Luther, Zwingli and Calvin agreed that the SOM represents the true interpretation of the Mosaic Law, which had been obscured in Judaism (Stanton 1992:738). In this regard, the SOM is a challenge to the popular interpretations of the Law in Jesus' day. Calvin further observed that the Sermon is a short summary of the doctrine of Christ (Stanton 1992:738) and Luther claimed the SOM is both law and gospel, while Joachim Jeremias, a follower of Luther argued that the Gospel preceded the Law (Jeremias 1963:34ff). There are many more views of the Sermon apart from the ones mentioned here, with different permutations besides. Twentieth century scholarship on the SOM has focussed on redaction critical reading of the SOM and the extent to which the SOM reflects Matthew's or Jesus' views on eschatology. Does the SOM establish a clear link between the Mosaic Law and the Gospel of Christ? If it does, can it be said that the SOM helps clarify the relevance and applicability of the Law to contemporary Christians?

## 1.2. Main Research Question

How does Jesus' authoritative reinterpretation of the Law in the SOM shed light on its contextual interpretation among the Ghana-Ewe? Further to this, does a contextualised interpretation of the SOM among the Ghana-Ewe function to clarify the relationship between the Mosaic Law and the Gospel? The context in mind is the religious, cultural, social and political circumstances within which the Ghana-Ewe live, which determine their apprehension of the SOM. Matthew's gospel is a story which has been interpreted. As interpreted story, the gospel has characters who help communicate the story to readers and hearers. Jesus is the central character of the gospel of Matthew. As a Jewish story interpreted by a Jew for Jews (Wilson 2007:303), and possibly non-Jews, the reinterpretation of the Mosaic Law, which Jesus embarks upon in the SOM to introduce his Kingdom gospel, has direct implications for both Jews and Gentiles. The roles of the characters of the gospel are best understood when explained in relation to the role of Jesus in the story. How does Jesus' authoritative reinterpretation of the Law in the SOM provide a paradigm for application of the Law for Ghana-Ewe Christians?

Specifically, the Ghana-Ewe context is important for the thesis of this dissertation because *Mawuga's* (God's) Law is at the centre of Ghana-Ewe indigenous religion. In other words, the Ghana-Ewe indigenous worshipper understands that human relationship with *Mawuga* is regulated by *Mawuga's* Law. Moreover, since *Mawuga* is also *Se* (Law), observing the prohibitive prescriptions of *Mawuga's* Law amounts to doing the will of *Mawuga*. *Mawuga* as Law, imposes limits on human behaviour among the Ghana-Ewe. Against this background, contextualising the Law in the SOM among the Ghana-Ewe begs the question of legalism in Ewe religion viz a vis the kind of legalistic righteousness that Jesus reinterpreted the Law in the SOM to correct. Finding a satisfactory answer to this question requires the examination of the role, function and purpose of

*Se* (Law) in Ewe religion, as against the role, function and purpose of the reinterpreted Law of the Kingdom in the SOM.

The meaning, significance and relevance of *Mawuga's Se* (Law) in Ewe religion as the observation of dos and don'ts could be compared with the role and function of the Mosaic Law in the legalistic righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. Jesus' reinterpretation, then, reorients both the legalistic Jewish and indigenous Ewe worshipper to know that the Law took on new significance with the coming of Jesus. Therefore, both the legalistic Jewish and indigenous Ghana-Ewe worshipper are called upon to understand God's Law in a new light as the Gospel of God's Kingdom, which Jesus has provided in the SOM.

### **1.2.1. Additional Questions**

To some extent the SOM functions as a contextual reinterpretation of the Mosaic Law for a new community of God's people (Jesus' followers). If a link can be made between the SOM and the Mosaic Law, does the SOM provide a helpful reinterpretation of the Mosaic Law for a new day and age, for Jesus' followers? Does it mean that the SOM helps to clarify the meaning and application of the Law for contemporary Christians? Since the meaning and application of the Mosaic Law for contemporary Christians is a subject of debate among scholars, how does one's understanding of the SOM inform one's interpretation of the Law in a contemporary Christian community? Do we discover new theological insights regarding the Law and the Gospel, when we compare different exegetical methods applied by scholars to the SOM, which are intended to investigate the scholars' understanding of the SOM? Can the results of such exegetical investigation be applied in a contextual reading of the SOM among Ewes in Ghana? If so, what are the hermeneutical implications of these understandings specifically for Ghana-Ewe Christians? This latest question is important because it helps to connect the legalistic Jewish righteousness that

Jesus corrects in his interpretation of the Law in the SOM, with the religion that the indigenous Ghana-Ewe knew before the arrival of Christianity to Eweland. If so, then, Christ's coming with the new Gospel message introduces to the Ewe, a new and better way of approaching and worshipping the God (Mawuga) that they have always known.

### **1.3. Hypothesis of the research**

This dissertation explores the relationship between the Mosaic Law and the Gospel of Jesus, and their application among the Ghana-Ewe, using Jesus' authoritative reinterpretation of the Law in the SOM as a paradigm. The hypothesis for the dissertation is that a proper contextualisation of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount offers a paradigm for theological renewal and rejuvenation of ethical life among Ghana-Ewe Christians.

### **1.4. Method for the Study**

The approach to this research is a combination of literature and exegetical study of the SOM. The research does this in two ways. First, a survey of different exegetical investigations of the SOM, by scholars, to identify how various scholars have explained the text of the SOM, and construed its relation to the Mosaic Law is undertaken. Second, the research applies Vernon K. Robbins' socio-rhetorical interpretation (SRI) to explain the SOM. SRI views a text as a "tapestry" that can be seen from different perspectives. The aim of SRI is to understand first century Palestinian narratives, speeches and discourses in relation to the social, cultural, ideological and religious contexts of the first century Mediterranean world. SRI identifies five textures of texts, namely, inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, ideological texture and sacred texture by which to interpret a given ancient text (Robbins 1996b:96). Further developments in SRI applies six major rhetorolects as analytical tools for socio-rhetorical interpretation (Robbins

et al 2016:17). A rhetorolect is a distinct, speech, discourse or form of language which can be identified because of its typical configuration of interest topics, themes, logic and argumentations (Robbins 2010:197). Wisdom, prophetic, apocalyptic and to some extent precreation rhetorolects have been identified in this study as part of speech analysis, using SRI.

Using the two approaches of exegetical survey and SRI, the dissertation explores the relationship between the Law and the Gospel as the SOM presents it. From the results of the combined approach, hermeneutical implications have been drawn for contextual Ghana-Ewe practice, to ensure more integration between biblical texts and people's lives. This is done with the understanding that the purpose for which God's revelation is studied is to know God's will and live by it, so that believers in God may experience transformation in their lives and relationships from God's perspective.

In the exegesis undertaken in chapter four of the dissertation, social and cultural texture of the SOM shows that the SOM may be viewed contextually from the perspective of first-century Mediterranean patronage and clientele metaphor. Patronage-clientelle highlights the social and cultural context of the SOM as characterised by honour and shame, challenge and riposte, wealth and poverty, purity and pollution, and a perception of limited goods, among other features. This context enables the study to shed light on aspects of the SOM that reflect specific responses to the world of Jesus and his audience, and to identify the cultural location of the responses within the prevailing dominant culture. Social and cultural intertexture of the SOM will probably show the reader of the SOM that Jesus' reinterpretation of the Law was countercultural because it was based on bitter conflict between Jesus and his adversaries over how the meaning and application of the Law, shaped Jewish identity in Jesus' time. Jesus' teaching moreover, reflects conversionist, reformist, thaumaturgical and gnostic-manipulationist responses to the world of his day.

Ideological texture of the SOM demonstrates a complex combination of biases, perceptions, preferences, belief systems and other dimensions of people's preunderstanding, that tend to affect the communication of the SOM from author to text to reader (e.g. me as interpreter). Subsequently, reading the SOM, my inclination has been to identify with both Jesus, as the protagonist, and those characters, who the antagonists had consigned to the fringes of society. My predisposition is due to my location in life, my relation to various groups, the nature and mode of my intellectual arguments, and how these indicators shape my scope of ideology.

Finally, sacred texture of the SOM has shown that God, the heavenly Father, through Jesus, his divine Son, has invaded human history to fulfil his promise of a new Kingdom, which God gave earlier, through his holy servants, the prophets. In acting decisively, thus, to further his Father's divine programme for salvation of human persons, Jesus came to inaugurate the Kingdom of God, which he said he would return to consummate. His teaching shows that the Kingdom is already here but is not yet fully revealed or established. It is subtle, non-obtrusive and non-flamboyant in the present. It will be fully visible and glorious in the future. Jesus' message of the Kingdom is the reinterpreted Law, the Gospel of love by which righteous believers live and serve God. When read in context, the reinterpreted Law of the SOM applies to the Ghana-Ewe as a new approach to serving and worshipping *Mawuga* as divine Father, which his Son has revealed.

### **1.5. Motivation for the Research**

The desire to establish the right connection between the Law and the Gospel and a strong determination to contribute to the ongoing discourse on discipleship among Ewe Christians, constitute the main motivations for this research. Besides, as a curious Christian, investigating key aspects of Ghana's new Christianity (compulsory-wealth Christianity) and how it links the relationship between the Law and the Gospel is of deep concern to my study. Studying the SOM

in detail, in its intertextual relationship with the Mosaic Law, and with attention to its contextual appropriation, provides the opportunity to analyse Ghana's "compulsory-wealth Christianity" and its impact on the lives of people too.

### **Significance of the study**

This study is justified and important, because the SOM calls on disciples of Jesus to be different from other religious adherents (Matt. 5:20), both in ethical behaviour and in piety (Matt. 6:1ff). As a new people of Israel, Jesus' disciples were required to break clean from the spirituality and deficient righteousness of certain Jewish religious leaders on one hand, and the conduct of unbelieving Gentiles on the other. Unlike certain Jewish leaders, the disciples were to be genuine in religious devotion (Matt. 6:1), to love their enemies (Matt. 5: 43-48) and to shun materialism (Matt. 6:24) as well as to let love control their relationships and ambitions. Being disciples of Jesus too, Ghana-Ewe Christians are daily confronted with ethical choices and spiritual dilemmas regarding their identity. To be faithful to Jesus Christ and remain his committed disciples, therefore they must live by Jesus' teaching and example. Since Jesus presented the Gospel of his Kingdom as a reinterpretation of the Mosaic Law in the SOM, a proper contextualisation of the Law could help the Ewe live theologically-renewed and ethically-rejuvenated lives to remain faithful disciples in the face of the attractions that "compulsory-wealth Christianity" proposes to them.

### **1.6. Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

The study covers Matthew's Sermon on the Mount only, and a two-fold approach was used as explained above. But for time constraints, the whole of Matthew's gospel could have been studied in detail. We know from source criticism, suggestions that the SOM, like Luke's Sermon on the Plain (SOP) is a Q document. It was not the aim of this study to examine the SOM and the SOP



comparatively. That can be done in another study. However, where a compelling reason exists, reference is made to portions of the SOP to clarify a point in the study. While the use of SRI has the advantage of explaining an ancient text from many angles, it also has the potential to generate enormous data that can bury a reader's argument in SRI terminologies.

## **1.7. Organisation of the study**

The study is organised into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the study. It also presents the background of the study, states the problem discussed and indicates the significance of the study. Besides, it also states the method for the study, the research hypothesis, and gives the definitions of key terms and acronyms used in the study. Chapter two is a discussion of the religious, social, cultural and political contexts of the study. The aim is to place the study in an historical context. Relevant religious and cultural developments of Ewes from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries are surveyed. Chapter two of the study is to the purpose of showing that the indigenous Ghana-Ewe, in terms of their worship life, related to God by observing *Mawuga's* dos and don'ts, which *Mawuga's Se* (Law) prescribes. This relationship of prescribing and prohibiting action in the interaction with deity among the Ewe could be compared with the religion of the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day. Subsequently, Jesus' redefinition of the role, function and purpose of the Mosaic Law in his authoritative reinterpretation, becomes his recommendation for both the Jews of scribal and Pharisaic religion and the Ghana-Ewe.

Attention has therefore, been given to the introduction of Christianity to Eweland and the developments associated with it, as well as how Christianity among the Ewe has been changing and adapting to new situations since then. The role of African indigenous religion and how it has impacted African Christianity in general, and Ewe Christianity specifically, will also be examined. The third chapter surveys the history of exegesis of the SOM, drawing on paradigms developed at

scholarly and ‘popular’ levels. Chapter four is an interpretation of the SOM from the perspective of SRI. Attempts are made to highlight the uniqueness of the SRI in the study and understanding of the SOM. Finally, chapter five outlines the hermeneutical implications of a contextual interpretation of the SOM among the Ewe. Discussed in this final chapter as well are major issues evolving out of the study and how the findings affirm or challenge the main hypothesis of the study.

## **1.8. Conclusion**

This first chapter has introduced the study and pointed out its desired context, by stating the problem, its background, the question (s) to be investigated and the hypothesis for the study. The study attempts to investigate the relationship between the Mosaic Law and the Gospel of the Kingdom. It integrates two approaches of literature study and an interpretation of the SOM, using SRI. The main motivation for this study is to foster a stronger connection between the biblical texts and the lives of Ghana-Ewe Christians. Key terms used in the study have been defined as part of the efforts to appropriately delimit the study.

It is argued in section 4.7.3.2 that the main value that pervaded first century Mediterranean society and strongly shaped social intercourse and cultural interaction was honour. The SOM exhibits many characteristics of an honour and shame, patronage and clientele, purity and pollution culture. Theologically and ethically, the Mosaic Law and its interpretation, functions to highlight the most important issues in human relationships in this culture. The most significant of the issues in the SOM, is how one’s understanding of the Law shapes the nature of one’s righteousness. This became the bone of contention between Jesus and the Jewish authorities of his day.

The study proceeds in the next chapter by examining the historical, social, cultural and religious contexts of the Ewe of West Africa, of which the Ghana-Ewe form a significant part. This helps to situate the study in its proper context.

## CHAPTER TWO

# THE EWES OF WEST AFRICA: RELIGIOUS, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS

### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter attempts to place the study in an historical context. It presents some aspects of the religious, social and cultural developments among the Ghana-Ewe.<sup>2</sup> It also summarises the history of Christianity among the Ghana and Togo Ewe from 1847 to the present. The chapter further identifies themes in the pre-Christian Ewe religion and the culture of the Ewe, and discusses them under the rubric of Ewe law, religion and political organisation.

### 2.1. A brief history, religion and culture of the Ewe

The Ewe-speaking people form a large linguistic group in West Africa. The Ewe settled at their current locations in the 17<sup>th</sup> century CE, when they migrated from Oyo in southwestern Nigeria (Nukunya 1969:1ff), making their way through Ketu (Benin) and Notsie (Togo). The Ewe are closely related to the Adja and the Fon, even though they are different from the Adja and the Fon. Because of this closeness, some scholars refer to the Ewe as “Adja”, or “Adja-Ewe” or “Gbe”<sup>3</sup> (Laumann 2005:15). The three groups, Ewe, Adja and Fon have common cultural practices and their languages belong to the Kwa subgroup of the Niger-Congo languages (Ekem 2011:116).

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<sup>2</sup> The people call themselves *Eveawo*, their language is *Evegbe* and the country is *Eveduko*. In this dissertation, however, we shall simply refer to them as Ewe, since this is the more regular way they are presented in Anglophone literature.

<sup>3</sup> *Gbe*, is the Ewe word meaning “language” or “voice”. When it is used to describe the Ewe, it is particularly to point to the Ewe language, which is called Ewegbe (*Evegbe*).

They also share a collective history of eastward migrations from Nigeria. The Ewe are thus, connected to the Yoruba of present-day Nigeria and Benin.

The modern Ewe live mainly in Ghana, Togo and Benin, and to a lesser extent, southeast Nigeria. The Ewe and their related groups migrated to Ketu in South-Eastern Benin from Oyo in Nigeria (Ansre 1997:2-3). At Ketu, a wicked king named Agorkoli (*Agɔkɔli*)<sup>4</sup> ruled over them. In reaction to his tyranny, the people migrated in two groups to Tado and Notsie (or *Glimè*) after many earlier settlements. The Tado settlers are now the Adja group, while the Notsie (*Glimè*) settlers are now the Ewe. From among the Notsie settlers emerged other subgroups, including the *Aɲɔ*, Be and Fon. When they migrated from Notsie in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Ewe later split into three major subgroups and then moved to their present settlements in Ghana, Benin and Togo (Amenumey 1989:1).

In Ghana, the Ewe live between the Mono and Volta Rivers, between Togo and Benin. The Ghana-Ewe constitute about 14%<sup>5</sup> of Ghana's population and they are the third largest ethnic

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<sup>4</sup> Even though the *Agorkoli* legend is almost a trump card for the recall of the history of the Ewe, some scholars dismiss it as a missionary fable. To prove that the missionaries created it, Paul Nugent, for instance has argued, along with Sandra Greene (2002) before him that it is doubtful if the linguistic group known today as the Ewe have a common origin and history. Nugent (2005:34, 38) gives two reasons for his position. First, in his view, most scholars rely on linguistic affinity (without any concrete proof) to assume that the Ewe have a common history. Nugent goes as far as to suggest that using linguistic affinity to ascribe a common origin to the Ewe is unscientific because other groups generally accepted to be non-Ewe today, also have close linguistic affinities with the Ewe. Second, Nugent accuses the North German missionaries of selectively elevating Notsie as the origin of the Ewe and teaching this version of Ewe history in the mission schools they established. To Nugent, this has given rise to a situation where the older generation give their oral history without any mention of the Notsie settlement, while the young Ewe makes the Notsie settlement the starting point of Ewe history. Nugent's argument is not entirely convincing, however for three reasons. In the first place, whatever accounts North German missionaries wrote about the history of the Ewe, they relied on their Ewe informants to collect. Second, considering that missionaries such as Speith and Wiegand conducted their field research among the Ewe as far back as the 17<sup>th</sup> century makes it difficult to attribute deliberate bias to them. Third, the fact that linguistic affinity does not necessarily imply a common origin does not mean that it cannot imply a common origin. Nor does the lack of linguistic affinity imply the lack of a common origin. For instance, Speith (1906) found in his research that the Akwamu of present day Ghana (an Akan people) had a common origin with the Matse Ewe group. Speith (1906:750) refers to the Matse and the Akwamu as "paternal brothers"

<sup>5</sup> This data was collected from the Year 2000 Population and Housing Census Published by the Ghana Statistical Service.

group in Ghana. In Togo, the Ewe form about 32%<sup>6</sup> of the population and they are the largest ethnic group in Togo. The Benin-Ewe are a less significant minority group (compared with Ghana-Ewe and Togo-Ewe), with a population of just about 200,000.<sup>7</sup>

After their 17<sup>th</sup> century CE settlement, other migrants from Akan, Ga and Guan language groups joined the Ewe (Lawrence 2005:17). These new migrants built Anecho (*Anexɔ*) and Glidji towns, and intermingled with the autochthons, the Watchi (or Ouatchi) Ewe to create a new subgroup called Guin (or Ge) Ewe. The Guin-Ewe are also called Mina, because oral tradition claims they originated from El Mina in Fanti (Akan), Gold Coast in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Sometimes they are called Guin-Mina (Lovell 2005:95).

The apparent combination of ethnic groups that make up the Ewe people is evident from this brief historical account. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as many as 120 Ewe subgroups could be identified (Amenumey 1989:1). Amenumey refers to these groups as “subtribes” but it is more convenient to label them as subgroups (Lawrence 2005:17), since it could be misleading to consider those small groups as ethnic groups, distinct from the rest of the Ewe. For instance, the Vakpo-Ewe of Ghana are a small group of Ewe-speaking people in the North Dayi District of Ghana’s Volta Region. They live very closely to the Anfoega-Ewe but these two groups are each distinct and autonomous, having different dialects of the Ewe language in which they communicate among themselves with varying levels of mutual intelligibility.

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<sup>6</sup> Those who separate the Guin/Mina and Watchi from the Ewe tend to report a far smaller figure. For instance, the Encyclopedia Britannica considers the Guin/Mina and Watchi to be different from the Ewe and puts the Togo-Ewe population as 22%.

<sup>7</sup> This figure is based on estimates put out by the online version of Encyclopedia Britannica on <http://www.britannica.com/place/Benin> accessed 1/02/2018. This source estimates the Fon, the largest ethnic group to be 39.2%. As has been indicated, these people are closely related to the Ewe but they are different. The Benin-Ewe belong to the Adja-Ewe group and they constitute 15.2% of the population.

Though united by their language and common customary and religious practices, the Ewe are a diverse and often disunited people. During the numerous wars that the Ewe fought for territorial gains on their way to their present locations, the people completely routed their enemies, if they could. For instance, one of the most powerful kingdoms of present-day Ghana, and the pre-colonial and colonial times is the Ashanti. They sought to annex as many territories as possible. In the process, they fought several wars with different groups of the Ewe with varying fortunes. In one instance, the Ewe armies took cover on the Gemi mountain at *Amedzɔfe* and when the Ashanti soldiers attempted to climb one of the highest mountains in Ghana to attack the Ewe, rocks were hurled at them, crushing many of them as a result. However, political disunity among the Ewe caused a lot of upheavals among the people, who virtually became enemies among themselves in several respects. Different Ewe communities formed alliances with non-Ewe peoples, to fight and annex the territories of other Ewe communities. For instance, the *Aɲlɔ* formed an alliance with the Akan-speaking Akwamus (Lauman 2005:21) to fight the Guin-Ewe over trading rights, to mention just one instance. With this brief history setting the stage for our discussion, we shall next turn to some religious beliefs of the Ewe.

## 2.2. Some religious beliefs of the Ewe

The Ewe believe in a Supreme God, known as *Mawuga* (or *Mawu*) who created the universe and everything in it. The entire universe and its inhabitants owe their existence and lives to this deity. The people also believe in *trɔwo* (lesser gods/deities), ancestral spirits, which include *tɔgbuiwo* (male ancestors)/*mamawo*<sup>8</sup> (female ancestors) and *dzokawo* (other spirits). God, in Ewe

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<sup>8</sup> The inclusion of *mamawo* (female ancestors) in the hierarchy is a matter of debate because the Ewe, like many Ghanaian and other African people, are highly patriarchal in their social ordering. Yet one hears the mention of *tɔgbewo* (male ancestors), *mamawo* (female ancestors) in invocations at both traditional festivals and state ceremonies. Besides, some Ewe people are matrilineal and for them, the *fome* (womb) from which a person comes

thought, is a hierarchy of deities, even though the Ewe are monotheistic. *Mawuga* is the head deity to whom all the others are subject, because the others are *Mawuga*'s children. The Ewe, thus profess an eccentric kind of monotheism.

### 2.2.1. The Supreme God (*Mawuga*)

The name *Mawuga* is from two words, *Mawu* (God) and *ga* (big/great), therefore *Mawuga* means “the great God” or “the big God”. Some scholars claim that *Mawu* was originally one of the many deities of the Ewe and that the north German (Bremen) missionaries elevated *Mawu* to the status of the Christian God (Nugent 2005:30; see Greene 2002). Other scholars such as Nukunya (2016:70) argue that the concept of a “High God” was a common belief among all Ghanaians (including the Ewe) before the arrival of the missionaries. In his monumental work, *The Ewe People*, published in 1906, Jakob Spieth, the earliest missionary anthropologist to conduct a comprehensive ethnographic research among the Ewe, corroborates the view that *Mawuga* was the Supreme Being of the Ewe, long before the arrival of the missionaries (Spieth 1901:48).

If the name *Mawu* itself is taken to constitute two linguistic units, it can be observed that two words come together to constitute the name. The words are *ma* and *wu*. These two words mean different things in different contexts. *Ma* can mean “share” or “get used to” depending on its contextual usage. *Wu* could mean two or more different things. For instance, while *wu* means “spread”, it also means “surpass”. In effect, different people tend to make different analyses at different times regarding the etymology of *Mawu*. *Mawu* can thus refer to “the one who shares more than any other, or the one who spreads (blessings) more than all

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into the world defines that person. Therefore, female ancestry is vital to such Ewe communities. For a further discussion of this idea see (Lovell. 2005:90-114).



others.” Again, *Mawu* can also mean, “the one who is the greatest.” Whatever the correct explanation may be, *Mawu*, or *Mawuga* is for the Ewe people the high God they know.

In a study of the *Trəkosi* system among the southern Ghana-Ewe, Ohrt (2011) discovered a “Mawu shrine”, *Mawu* priest (“*Mawu Ngəgbia*”) or *Mawu Ngəgbea* and a *Mawusrɔ*<sup>9</sup> (wife of Mawu) among the Battor and Anlo of Ghana (Ohrt 2011:31). This shrine is not dedicated to *Mawuga* but rather it is dedicated to *mawu* as *trɔ*, in the same way that the shrine priest is not a priest of *Mawuga* but priest of the *mawu* who is a *trɔ*. The fact that the same name is used for both the supreme God and lesser deities, underscores why it is necessary to refer to the Supreme Being as *Mawuga* consistently in this dissertation. With such common use of the name *Mawu* either as *trɔ* or the Supreme Being among the Ewe it is probably untenable to attribute the invention of the name to the Bremen missionaries.

Lovell (2005:112) seems to admit that the concept of the Supreme Being in Ewe thought is not a Christian invention. Nonetheless, he argues that, while *Mawu*, in indigenous Ewe thought is both male and female at the same time, the Christian conception of the deity seems to understand *Mawu* as decisively male.<sup>10</sup> Despite this observation, it can be argued that the God of Christianity does not necessarily possess a gender, though Jesus presented God as the “Father” (see for instance Matt. 6:9b). It is true that Jesus taught his disciples that he was incarnated of his Father (God) who had become the Father of the disciples (cf John 17). Moreover, the Hebrew Bible frequently presents God as the Father, and the “husband” to ethnic Israel (for instance, in Isaiah). Nevertheless, the fact that the use of Father, husband and such labels for God in the Bible are

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<sup>9</sup> *Mawusrɔ* is the local name for a female virgin in servitude in the shrine to atone for the wrongdoings of a family member. *Mawusrɔ* is known more formally as *Trəkosi*.

<sup>10</sup> McGrath (1994:206) argues that “To speak of God as father is to say that the role of the father in ancient Israel allows us insights into the nature of God. It is not to say that God is a male human being.” Biblical authors use different metaphors to describe and explain God’s nature to their audiences.

metaphors, is a good guide to our theologising, so that we do not insist that God is exactly “a male person.” For instance, in addition to his frequent reference to God as “Father”, Jesus told the Samaritan woman in John 4 that God is spirit. It is probably valid then, to propose that the Christian God is presented frequently (but not always) in male metaphor to facilitate first century Mediterranean understandings of God. The Bible frequently describes God using anthropomorphic language, including gender labels.

For the Ewe (and the Gas of Ghana), God is both male and female in the sense that both Gas and Ewes employ male and female attributes to describe the Supreme Being. The attributes the Ewe assign to *Mawuga*, therefore, underscore Ewe attempts to theologise about God in their own context. Among the Ewe, the male or female attributes of *Mawuga* are replete in proverbs, prayers and other forms of speech. *Mawuga* worship is a source of controversy as well. Some Ewe scholars claim that *Mawuga* is not worshiped directly (Ansre 1997:10ff), others insist that anyone could appeal directly to *Mawuga* for help in times of need. It is further argued that this possibility of “direct appeal” to *Mawuga* in one’s moment of need is the reason there is no specific shrine dedicated to organised *Mawuga* worship (Nukunya 2016:70). However, the making of libation, giving offering, saying prayers and making sacrifices, which are all central activities of Ewe indigenous worship, give a clue. When an indigenous Ewe priest prays or performs a libation, the first reference is always to *Mawuga*. Often a call on *Mawuga* is accompanied by appellations exalting *Mawuga*’s majestic attributes. A call on *Mawuga* in this manner can hardly be rejected as worship. In any event, the fact that the lesser deities receive worship and veneration is enough to suggest that *Mawuga* worship, if for nothing, is at least, implicit in the people’s interaction with the ancestors and the other deities.

As far as the understanding of the indigenous Ewe goes, ancestors, lesser gods and other spirits are *Mawuga's* children. To them, *Mawuga* has delegated authority to run the affairs of the world. Among *Mawuga's* children are the divine pair *Mawu*<sup>11</sup>-*Sogble* (male) and *Mawu-Sodza* (female), who are gods of thunder and lightning respectively. The male deity is often judgmental, while the female exhibits the qualities of peace, rescue and restoration. Probably, it is this delegation of divine authority and functions by *Mawuga* to the other deities, that has given rise to the claim that *Mawuga* is not worshipped directly. It has similarly created the impression that indigenous religion is polytheistic. As has been stated above, collaboration exists among the various deities among the Ewe but the people believe that all other divine authorities and powers are subsumed under *Mawuga's* sovereignty. Though the Ewe God is supreme and sovereign people still have access to *Mawuga*.

A common myth among the Ewe is that *Mawuga* used to live very closely to the people. Following incessant demands on *Mawuga* and frequent disturbances<sup>12</sup> from the people, *Mawuga* decided to relocate to the highest heavens to prevent human disturbance. This has made direct access to *Mawuga* “impossible” for some interpreters. Despite the persistence of this argument, *Mawuga's* attributes, being discernible from proverbs and wise sayings, suggest the contrary. The Ewe say, for instance, *Wole nya gblɔm na Mawuga kuraa wole esem de?* Or *wogblɔa nya na*

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<sup>11</sup> The same word, *Mawu* is used for both the Supreme God and the “lesser gods” (children of the Supreme God). This is one reason why there is controversy over the identity of *Mawuga/Mawu* among anthropologists and other researchers of Ewe ethnography.

<sup>12</sup> According to some Ewe groups, the women, especially were notorious in disturbing *Mawuga* with their *fufu* pounding, known to be a noisy activity. Incidentally, *fufu* is a Ghanaian staple food that is more commonly associated with the Akans of Ghana than other groups but Speith's 17<sup>th</sup> century research among some Ewe communities mentions *fufu* as a staple food among the Ewe. This is not applicable to the *Aɲlɔ* Ewe, whose staple food is *Akple*. Other Ewe groups also take *Akple* in its two varieties (*ewɔkple* and *amɔkple*). *Fufu* is made from cassava and a variety of combinations. The most common combination is cassava and unripe plantain pounded together with a pestle in a mortar but it is also possible to combine cassava and cocoyam or pound *fufu* entirely from a desirable variety of yam. *Fufu* is often served with spicy, light meat-soup or light fish-soup, or palm nut soup, or groundnuts (peanuts) soup with meat or fish.

*Mawuga kuraa wosene de?* (Even God gives ear to people when they plead). This means that human access to *Mawuga* is still possible even after *Mawuga*'s relocation. This proverb indicates that *Mawuga* is still in contact with, even if distanced from the people. *Mawuga* is the creator of the earth and its inhabitants, therefore one appellation goes: *Mawuga adanjuto wo asi, wo afɔ* (*Mawuga*, the skilful creator made the hand and made the leg). *Mawuga* made the earth for the benefit of the world's living inhabitants.

The earth (*anyigba*) is a female deity for some Ewe communities. She is known as *Mianɔ-zɔdzi* (our Mother on who we walk) in some Ewe communities. Other Ewe groups refer to the earth as *Mianɔ-Gbe* (Speith 1901:812). Among the ancient Matse people, the earth was worshipped during the annual Yam Festival in September, maize harvest in November and during land preparation in February (Speith 1901:813). She had a shrine to which the people went to pray to Her. There are taboos and rituals associated with the earth among Ewe, even if a subgroup does not consider the earth to be a deity. Among the Aveme-Ewe, land is left to fallow on Thursdays, therefore people are not permitted to work on their farms on Thursdays, lest they disturb Her (the earth). A Thursday (*Yawoɔagbe*) is thus known as *Afenɔegbe* (the day to stay at home) or *Agbleamigbe* (Kludze 2012: xxxi). Kludze, himself a Hohoe-Ewe, points to this belief among his people. Reverence for *Anyigba* also means that nothing should be done to defile the earth. For this reason, having sex with someone on the bare ground is abominable, because it defiles the earth.

Despite the apparent respect for the earth among these communities, it is not a universal belief among the Ewe that the earth is a deity. Kludze's (Kludze 2012:129) research found out that belief in the earth as deity is found among the Awudome-Avenui-Ewe, who, however, do not appear to share this belief with other Ewe-communities. As we have indicated, Speith pointed to a similar belief among the Matse-Ewe (Speith 1906:812-814). What is not in dispute, is the fact that

the Ewe generally have limitations for people regarding what they could or could not do to the earth. Among the Matse, who were originally together with the Aveme-Ewe and the Wusuta-Ewe, hitting the surface of the earth with one's palm in an act of oath-taking is considered a serious vow that led to death if the swearer later broke the vow. Perhaps it is intended to promote truthfulness and avoid unnecessary litigation as well. However, the fact that the taboo operates in relation to one's attitude towards the earth does show the reverence that is to be accorded the earth as *Mawuga's* gift for the people's reverent enjoyment.

### 2.2.2. Ancestral Spirits (*Tɔgbewo/Mamawo*)

Next to *Mawuga*, according to Ewe religious hierarchy, are the *Tɔgbewo* (or *Tɔgbuiwo* or *Tɔgbɛɛɔliwo*<sup>13</sup>/*Mamawo* who live in the other world (*Tsiefe* or *Avlime*). They are believed to be part of the human community on earth. They are constantly consulted, when crucial family decisions are to be made. They are also invited during festivals and other celebrations. Ancestors are venerated<sup>14</sup> in the chieftaincy domain and are also prayed to in other traditional religious practices. Through the performance of libation, messages are communicated to these ancestral spirits. They could be petitioned for blessings (human terms), thanked for good harvests or appealed to in order to avert disasters and calamities.

Among the Ewe, ancestral spirits are highly respected. Spirits of the ancestors are believed to have great influence over the living. The Ewe believe that the ancestors see everything the living

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<sup>13</sup> Nukunya (2016:305) refers to them as *Tɔgbɛɛɔliwo* (*Tɔgbuiɛɛɔliwo*), from the two words *Tɔgbɛ* (male elder) and *ɛɛɔliwo* (ghosts/spirits), to capture the sense of "ancestral spirits." Nukunya's label is not so attractive because the Ewe also believe that people who die and are not promoted to the status of ancestors, become troublesome ghosts. Since, they are called by the same name *ɛɛɔliwo* (ghosts), it is inelegant to apply the same label to ancestors who are viewed in a positive light. Perhaps it will be better to refer to them as *Tɔgbɛgbɔgbɔwo* (spirits of the ancestors), if our intention is to emphasise that they are spirits and not physical living creatures.

<sup>14</sup> There is no word for "worship" in the Ewe language, only "service" or "serve", therefore the word "subɔsubɔ" (serve serve) was coined as equivalent to the English word "venerate". This probably gives credence to the suggestion that the Ewe venerate, rather than worship their ancestors.

do and can facilitate or frustrate their progress. No one in his or her right mind ever wants to incur the displeasure of the ancestors, because that would compromise the cosmic harmony that everyone needs to make the most of his or her life. Ancestors are believed to often appear to people in dreams. They also have the power to punish people. People serve (*subɔ*) ancestors with drink and food when they make libation. These are special offerings that are brought to ancestors to honour the relationship between the people and the ancestors (dead but alive).

The Ewe believe ancestors are alive in the world of the dead because, for the Ewe, time and history move in cycles, not in a continuum. Life leads to death and death to life (Gbolonyo 2009:262). This is a never-ending cycle as far as the indigenous Ewe is concerned. What this means is that people do not actually die, they only undergo transformation and change their form from physical beings to spirits. Once they die physically, they change their dwelling from the land of physical existence to the life of spiritual existence.

The dead remain members of the earthly families they belonged to while they were physically present on earth. They become custodians and benefactors of these families. The dead, thus, possess powers to intervene in the history of the living and reward good conduct or punish wrongdoing. In making libation to the ancestral spirits therefore, the Ewe are engaged in a very high form of service, which is intended to honour the ancestors and bring good fortune to the physically living. Alcoholic drinks, water mixed with corn flour or palm wine could be used for libation. Libation petitions address many needs, including the desire for bumper harvests, good health and procreation. Curses and misfortune are also invoked upon perceived enemies, especially those who may want to thwart the progress of the people or cause their women to be barren or visit any other mishap upon the people.

Taboos and ritual purity rites are associated with ancestral veneration. For example, *Trəkosi*, is a system of religious and cultural practice of shrine servitude. In this system, a family gives a virgin female (often given to the deity as a special child), to the priest of the *trək* as a servant, to atone for the wrongdoings of a family member. There is another variety where a family gives the virgin female (*kosi*) as thanksgiving to the deity for some benefit the family has enjoyed from the deity (Ohrt 2011:10). Some scholars have wrongly labelled the practice as cult slavery (see e.g. Acheampong 2001), as part of a campaign for its abolition. Concerns over human rights violations in the shrine gave the basis for the campaign for its abolition. That serious abuses have been reported in this practice is not in doubt. It is common knowledge that many of the girls in servitude at the shrines remain there against their wish. Besides, though no *kosi* is taken by force to serve at the shrine, as a victim of the cultural practice, she never has a say whether she wants to be taken there or not. Most of the girls are somehow lured into the cult by their mothers or other elderly female family members under the pretext of seeking some gain for the girl.

In a different rhetoric about the system, other scholars, such as Abotchie (1997), see opportunities of dialogue that could transform the practice into an effective social control mechanism for crime prevention, without supporting the current abusive practice. Ohrt (2011) recognizes a clash of ideologies in the debate, between universalist and cultural relativist notions of human rights. On the one hand, universalists argue that human rights issues are the same everywhere and there can be no peculiarities that make *trəkosi* a non-violation. On the other hand, some scholars argue that the current international definitions of human rights as spelt out in UN documents, were formulated without the involvement of Africa, therefore it is imperialistic to assume that such definitions can apply as a one-size-fits-all concept in every region of the world.

The practice is in fulfilment of promises made to the *trɔ* by congregation members. In effect, the priest or his servants cannot just meet a virgin girl and forcibly take her into their custody to serve at the shrine. This is not to say that the debate for its abolition is out of place. It is to make the point that the practice stems from religious worship and has complex cultural beliefs associated with it. If anything, one can call for reform of the practice to exclude constant human right abuses that are often reported in the print and electronic media. Even though the practice is known among the Togo and Benin Ewe, in Ghana, it is the southern-Ewe who practice the *Trɔkosi* system.

The *Trɔkosi* system and its associated practices clearly shows how ancestral veneration among the Ewe is closely associated with *trɔ* worship. In fact, most Ewe groups consider all the children of *Mawuga*, including the earth, ancestors, the *trɔwo* and other spirits and powers to be *mawuwo* (gods). The people relate to these deities and divinities in practices such as prayers, sacrifice and worship which are typical *trɔ* activities as have been indicated below.

### **2.2.3. *Trɔwo*, Other Spirits and Powers**

Next to the ancestors in the hierarchy are *trɔwo*, also known as *voduwo* or *vuduwo* (singular: *trɔ/vodu/vudu*). They are *Mawuga*'s children and servants. *Trɔwo* derive their power from *Mawuga* because *Mawuga* created them (Ansre 1997:12). There are localized cults for the worship of *trɔwo* and they perform varied roles. As has been explained above, the practice of *Trɔkosi* is an example of *trɔ* worship. Some, *trɔwo* such as *Aqabatram* and *Nyigbla* are powerful war gods while others control fertility and harvest. *Nyigbla* is revered among the *Aɲlɔ* Ewe as the deity of war, who gave divine help to the people in their migration to overcome their enemies in battle and take territories for themselves. In this understanding, then, *Nyigbla* is the *trɔ* who gives wisdom, strategy, courage and safety to the *Aɲlɔ* in fighting all their battles to win. Because of



their useful help to the people, the Ewe are careful in their indigenous religion to relate appropriately to the *trɔwo*.

The Ewe perform elaborate rituals at various times of the year to honour their *trɔwo*. *Trɔwo* act on *Mawuga*'s behalf to assist human beings in times of "...droughts, epidemic, barrenness and warfare" (Ansre 1997:12), therefore to address modern problems such as hunger, poverty, terrorism, unemployment, political upheaval, corruption and moral decadence to them is legitimate. This does not mean that *trɔwo* are entirely benevolent to the people. Some of them are known to be extremely merciless when it comes to punishing wrongdoing. When a congregation member, out of anger invokes a particular *trɔ* upon someone perceived to have offended the worshipper, the alleged offender is immediately summoned to appear before the *trɔ* priest to pay a fine for the impending punishment of the deity (often death) to be prevented. There is no opportunity for the accused person to explain the matter, let alone to be vindicated and set free altogether.

As Rosenthal (2005:185ff) has observed, there are many different types of *trɔwo* (singular *trɔ*) among the Ewe. *Nyigbla*, and *Yeve* are two examples of *trɔ* among the *Aɲlɔ*-Ewe. Many Ewe groups recognise *Hevieso* as the *trɔ* of thunder and *Agbui* (water goddess) as his wife. *Avleketete* (or *Avle*) and *Eda* or *Da* (snake god) are other examples of *trɔwo*. *Legba* is a special *trɔ* which has oversight over a household (*Afelegba*), clan (*Fomelegba*) or town (*Dulegba*) to ensure peace, security and community harmony (Gbolonyo 2009:76). A *legba* can, thus, be construed as a territorial *trɔ* in constant spiritual surveillance over its jurisdiction.

The practice of medicine, charm, witchcraft, necromancy, casting of spells and sorcery, and many other activities, are at the bottom of the hierarchy of deities in Ewe indigenous religion.

These deities are invoked for both social and antisocial purposes. People may invoke them for protection or to harm an enemy, depending on the circumstances. The more individualistic deities are called *dzo* (fire) or *bo* (string) or simply *dzoka* (literally, a thread of fire). Most people receive these powers on request from indigenous priests, who perform sacrifices on behalf of deities. They can be compared with how modern people purchase and licence pistols (guns) to protect themselves from harm by unforeseen assailants.

Another form of *dzoka* is known as *gbesa* (power of fortification). There are different variations for varied purposes. For instance, *akpo* is a *gbesa* which prevents accidents, while *zidoka* (power to disappear) and *asiyɔ* (power to attract customers/clients) help a *dzotɔ* (sorcerer) navigate the vicissitudes of life (Aforkpa, Gbeasor & Avegnon 2005:244). *Afa* is a divination deity that specializes in the interpretation of events, omens and other phenomena. The *afa* priest is called *afakala* (the one who searches the *Afa*). The *afakala* is endowed with great power of prediction and interpretation. *Bokɔ* (soothsayer) is the technical name of the *Afa* priest, who divines and gives foresight to adherents (Gbolonyo 2009:76).

According to Ansre (1997:14), Ewe religion, before the arrival of the missionaries included belief in *adziakpoe* (*adiekpoe*) or *aziza* (cult dwarf). Those who invoked them received magical and healing powers to manipulate phenomena. According to oral tradition, when the *adziakpoe* (plural: *adziakpoewo*) take someone to their kingdom, they feed their captive on bananas only, sometimes for months and the captive returns to the village with special powers. Subsequently, former *adziakpoe* captives can heal incurable diseases. These empowered persons might also receive the ability to solve community puzzles, particularly relating to the relationship of the people to the gods.

*Adze* (witchcraft) is another spirit in the hierarchy. It is a dreaded spirit because those who are possessed of it have power to visit misfortune upon those they hate. *Adze* operates mainly in the night and it is associated with numerous rituals by the adherents. The person who possesses *adze* is the *adzeto* (lit. father of *adze*, i.e., owner of *adze*). Both men and women can be *adzeto*. Another spirit is *aka*, a deity of investigation often employed in judicial proceedings to determine who is guilty or innocent, given a set of facts. For instance, when a person dies under mysterious circumstances, the family goes to the *aka* priest to determine the cause of death. If the priest confirms the family's suspicion that the death was "unnatural", and tells the family who the suspect is, the family would go to formally accuse (*to aka*) the person. If the accused person denies the allegation then he (because it is most often a male) would be taken to the *akato* (the owner of *aka*, i.e., *Aka* priest) to prove his innocence. Speith (1906:211ff) claims that he found from his research that the *aka* divinity is full of tricks which unsuspecting victims are made to fall for.

Another practice is *ama*, which refers to herbs. The one who practices *ama* is known as *amatsiwola* (literally: maker of herb water). This is mainly for the healing of sick persons but can also be employed to purify a town or give protection to a patron against enemy attacks. *Amatsi* is also the usual Ewe name for medicine, because until the introduction of European medicine, the people used *amatsi* to deal with their ailments. Many poor Ewe communities still rely on traditional *amatsi* to deal with their ailments. The *amatsiwola*, which some researchers have labelled as "medicine man", is revered among the Ewe. This is because of the healing benefits people receive from them and the fact that the *amatsiwola* does not use his knowledge and/or powers to hurt people. Another Ewe name for medicine is *atike* (lit. the root of a tree). The name stems from the fact that indigenous Ewe groups often rely on various parts of common trees in their environment, especially the roots, to heal many ailments.

Because of the many divinities in Ewe religion (like other African religions), some foreign researchers label it as polytheistic (see Lovell 2005:104). The deities of a polytheistic pantheon are of equal rank and status. This is not so in Ewe indigenous religion. As we have seen, *Mawuga* has no equal in Ewe indigenous religion. The other divinities are mere intermediaries (servants of *Mawuga*) between human beings and the *Mawuga*. Ultimately, Ewe indigenous religion professes belief in one God (monotheism) and many intermediaries. Perhaps the way to account for the hierarchy of deities is to describe the Ewe belief as “diffused monotheism” (Quarcoopome, 1987:23). Therefore, it was mentioned above that Ewe indigenous religion exhibits eccentric monotheism.

### **2.3. The question of *Mawuga* as “trinity”**

Some Ewe scholars go as far as to claim that *Mawuga* is a trinitarian God. This is debatable as Gbolonyo (2009:72) acknowledges. That *Mawuga* exists in more than one form is not in dispute. *Mawuga*, as we have noted, is understood as male and female, *Mawu-Sogle* and *Mawu-Sodza*, respectively. Moreover, the Ewe often describe *Mawuga* as *Se*, especially in conversations and proverbs. The proverb, *Se do ame da ametɔ, ametɔ* (*Se* created and sent people into the world with different destinies; literally, Law [God] sent people “person by person”) illustrates the point. The Ewe, therefore, conceive of *Se* as the unifying or animating principle of the different manifestations of *Mawuga*. *Se*, is also the Ewe word for law.

*Se* (law) refers to “limit”. *Sedofe* for instance, means “place of limit”. It can equally mean “where limit is laid”. What we deduce from this is that *Se* is the limit beyond which nothing is permitted. If a person, escorting another, gets to a point and says *mese fi* or *me se afi* (literally, “I limit here”), it means that this escort would not go beyond that point (Spieth 1906:168). Spieth’s seminal work refers to *Se*, (law) as “the boundary of a recognisable object, beyond which that

object does not continue to exist” (Spieth 1906:168). He goes as far as to explain that *Se*, as boundary, regulates human behaviour to ensure societal harmony.

Gbolonyo (2009:72) notes that *Se* or *Segbo* is the “impersonal law” which unites *Sogble* (the male manifestation of *Mawuga*) and *Míanɔ-zɔdzi* or *Sodza* (*Mawuga*’s female principle). In Ewe, *Se* refers also to destiny, therefore *Dzɔgbese* (destiny) literally means “law of the day of birth” or “birthday law”. Thus, the saying referred to above, is sometimes rendered *Dzɔgbese dɔ ame dɔ ametɔ, ametɔ* (Law/Destiny sent people-into the world- differently). Based on this reasoning, *Mawuga*, distinct from the lower divinities, manifests as *Sogble*, *Sodza* and *Se*, a trinity. This has nothing to do with the Christian doctrine of Trinity, however, because these beliefs existed long before the arrival of the missionaries as missionary anthropologists such as Spieth have shown. Moreover, these beliefs are also evident among the Watchi-Ewe of present-day Togo and Benin, who are so attached to the traditional belief systems that less than 2% of them are Christians today (Lovell 2005:98).

Not all Ewe scholars subscribe to the suggestion that *Mawuga* is a trinitarian God, however. As Speith (1906) found out from his research among the Ho-Ewe, *Mawu* is far more frequently mentioned than ever described. There are conflicting explanations about the nature of *Mawu* if ever explained at all. Among some Ewe communities, *Mawu-Sogble* and *Mawu-Sodza* who are both *Mawuga*’s children are respectively female and male. For those groups, *Sogble* is the daughter and *Sodza*, the son of *Mawuga*. For such groups, *Se* is not brought into the picture as having anything to do with *Mawuga*. This point contradicts the claim that *Mawuga* is trinitarian, and demonstrates scholarly controversy over the issue. Dzobo (1989:53) claims that the “name for the Ewe High God is *Se* or *Mawu*”, heightening the controversy even further. In this regard, Dzobo puts *Se* and *Mawu* (without *ga* added), on the same footing. This study is inclined to adopt the

position that *Mawuga* is trinitarian because the three distinct references to *Mawuga* as male principle, female principle and the destiny principle is not in dispute. It is based on the conviction that *Mawuga*, is *Sogle* (male), *Sodza* (female) and *Se* or *Segbo* (uniting life-source). The Ewe apply all the three titles (*Sogle*, *Sodza* and *Se*) for *Mawuga* as appellations, especially when giving libation prayers. Moreover, the three titles are also presented as distinct labels, even though the Ewe affirm only one *Mawuga*. Besides, it is common to find Ewe proverbs and personal names that express the three names, titles or appellations as distinct from one another.

## 2.4. Ewe anthropology and gender constructions

Ewe people are found in at least three modern states, probably in four. As noted earlier, the Ewe can be found mainly in Benin, Togo and Ghana. There are, probably, other Ewe groups in Southern Nigeria around Badagry<sup>15</sup> (or *Gbadagli*<sup>16</sup>). Despite this, the Ewe do not form a single political unit. Political organisation among the Ewe revolves around the chieftaincy institution. The Ewe chief is known as *fi*. There is usually a *fiaga* (head chief), who is the political overlord over the *du* or *dukɔ*. He is the one to whom all others are subject. Next after the *fiaga* is the *dufia*, who is the *fi* of the *duta*. Every *duta* is further divided into *sãawo* and each *sãa* has a *sãamefia*. The chief wields legislative, judicial and executive powers. The chieftaincy subdivisions indicate hierarchical lines of authority that are strictly adhered to. The significance of these chieftaincy subdivisions is mainly to enhance grassroots participation in decision-taking and to promote the

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<sup>15</sup> As has been indicated earlier, scholars discuss Ewe presence in Southeast Nigeria, especially in the town called Badagry. If this point is taken to be valid, then the fourth African country in which the Ewe live in, is a huge country not only in Africa but also in the rest of the world. It does not, however have any significant advantage over the other countries in which the Ewe live, in terms of development. The Nigeria-Ewe are insignificant in the face of Nigeria's massive population.

<sup>16</sup> According to Kludze (2012:3), *Gbadagli* is the corrupted form of the Ewe phrase *Gbadagbawo glife* (the place where the *gbadagbawo* [soldiers] fell). These were Yoruba *Gbadagbawo* (soldiers), who were defeated in a fierce war with a unified Ewe army. The soldiers fought at the location of the town in Nigeria known as Badagry. For a summarized version of the story see (Kludze 2012:3ff).

involvement of all relevant section heads in the administration of the *sāawo* and *dutawo*. Even though chieftaincy authority among the Ewe is hierarchical, it is not autocratic.

According to Kludze (2012:38ff) the Ewe family, known as *dzotinu* or *tɔgbevime* or *avadzidzi* or *afedo* is the basic unit of the society. From *Dzoti* (literally, burning firewood) and *nu* (entrance), *dzotinu* refers to “the entrance of a glowing firewood”. This symbolism points to a beginning of a family tree that glows *ad infinitum* since the *dzoti* does not cease to burn (Kludze 2012:41). *Tɔgbevime* (grandfather’s children), *afedo* (home of origin) and *avadzidzi*<sup>17</sup> (descendants of the same male ancestor), are each an appropriate word for “family” among the Ewe. This already betrays a patrilineal system of social ordering, because family ancestry is traced through the male lineage only. It is known that some southern Ghana-Ewe groups trace ancestry through the female line as well.

The Ewe believe that human beings come from *bome* (inside the farm, i.e. God’s farm) or *amedzɔfe*<sup>18</sup> (the place of human origin). Every individual is believed to make a spoken declaration (*gbetsi*), indicating to the *Bomenɔ* (the mother of *Bome*) the kind of life he or she would live before they come into *kodzogbe* (the physical world). *Gbetsi* can thus be understood as a spoken *dzɔgbese* (uttered destiny or fate). If someone repeatedly experiences life’s struggles beyond their control, it is often attributed to the person’s *gbetsi*. Rituals could be performed to change this bad *gbetsi* into a good one. When a person dies he or she either goes to *tsiefe* (the world of the spirits) to become an ancestor or hovers around the earth as *ɲoli* (a ghost), a bad spirit.

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<sup>17</sup> Kludze (2012:41) notes that *avadzidzi* is the more precise word but has the limitation of being a bit unpolished for public consumption. Kludze could have avoided the word altogether but since he wrote on Ewe law of inheritance, he wanted to be precise regarding the right to property inheritance among the Ewe.

<sup>18</sup> One of the closest neighbours of the Ewe is the Avatime people. One of their towns has adopted the name *Amedzɔfe*. The people of Avatime are Guans but most of them speak Ewe with varying degrees of accuracy.

In traditional society, Ewe communities are highly patriarchal. The Ewe female is a mere helper to complement the Ewe male. Even in the realm of divinity, the male principle represents power, control, activity and achievement, while the female god *Sodza* exhibits calmness, patience and understanding, creativity and joy (Gbolonyo 2009:74). Traditionally, there is no limit to the number of wives that an Ewe male can take. The only condition is the man's ability to take care of the wives he takes because he is expected to take care of his wives along with their children. Nukunya (2016:56) notes further that the most common form of polygyny in Ghana is a husband with two wives. He further argues that the most daring Ghanaian men hardly marry more than five wives. For Ewe Christians, this "freedom" may be curtailed, unless they belong to some African instituted/initiated/indigenous church (AIC) which does not insist on monogamy. In traditional Ewe communities, the husband is required to construct a hut for each of his wives, where they would live with their children, born to the man (Gbolonyo 2009:83, Nukunya 2016:56).

## **2.5. Political traditions of the indigenous Ewe**

Political traditions of the Ewe are not homogenous. During the historical developments of the Ewe people, various wars were fought against enemies of the Ewe. There have been political alliances against common enemies to defend the Ewe people, but no centralised state or kingdom like Ashanti (Kludze 2012:16) or Yoruba has ever existed among the Ewe. The Ewe have been labelled as "a fragmented group composed of numerous tribes and sub-tribes ...of varying sizes, power, and autonomy" (UMUNA Report 2015:8). Among the Ghana-Ewe, the Anlo-Ewe appear to be the largest political unit with the Awomefia as the *Fiaga* of the Anlo state. All citizens of Anlo owe allegiance to the *Awomefia*. The capital town of the Anlo state is Anloga. Most Ewe communities are, however, organised into smaller chiefdoms and their paramountcy. Each of these chiefdoms, therefore has a paramount (head) chief as the head of the unit. Some of these political



units are creatures of colonial administrators (Kludze 2012:17) and because of the perceived dwindling importance of the chiefdoms as traditional authorities, modern democratic governments of Africa are apathetic to the development of the chieftaincy institution in their countries. In Ghana, the government has attempted to incorporate the institution of chieftaincy into the country's democratic dispensation. Though the Constitution of Ghana forbids Ghanaian chiefs from participating actively in partisan politics, there are the Judicial Committees of the National and Regional Houses of Chiefs which wield significant political and judicial powers to adjudicate. The Ghana-Ewe, being part of the political structure of the Volta Region of Ghana, have their chiefs represented at these two levels of traditional leader involvement in the governance of the modern democratic state of Ghana.

There are also female chiefs, *nyɔɔnufiawo* (singular: *nyɔɔnufia*), who operate in much the same way as the male chiefs, but do not 'sit' on stools (traditional seats) for a symbol of office and do not exercise the same powers as the male chiefs. There is a traditional authority to organise the women. Every *nyɔɔnufia* exercises authority over all the women in her jurisdiction, as their representative. The *nyɔɔnufia* is, therefore, not equal in status and influence, to the male chief whose role is parallel to hers. For instance, she is under a male chief even if they both have authority over the same jurisdiction. Her authority is over the women in that jurisdiction, while the male chief's authority extends over both men and women of the jurisdiction, as well as the *nyɔɔnufia*.

In exercising his legislative authority, every male chief has the power to make and change the law (*se*). Therefore, the human *se* is not static. There are processes by which the *se* gets changed, reinterpreted or revised. Kludze (2012:33) has observed that the judicial and legislative powers of the chief come into play usually through the tribunal sessions that are often held to

adjudicate matters. As a result, legal precedent, rather than direct promulgation (Kludze 2012:34) plays a crucial role in the making of laws. Speith's report on the process of making laws in a chiefdom, points to another dimension that Kludze did not mention. According to Speith (1906:168), if the chief wants to change the law of a given chiefdom, he starts by consulting with his elders in council. If the elders support his proposal, the chief will bring the decision (of the chief and his elders) to the attention of the *sɔhefia* (the chief of the youth). The *sɔhefia* also discusses the matter with the youth and then gives a report to the chief. It is only when there is agreement between the elders and the youth that the law eventually gets changed. It is then communicated through the announcer (*kpódola*) to the entire community. Once the announcement of the new law is made, it is duly promulgated (Speith 1906:169). This approach of promulgating laws is attributed to the 17<sup>th</sup> century Ho-Ewe. Yet it may be valid in other Ewe communities.

In the other case where Kludze mentions that case law is expanded through the record of the proceedings of the chief's tribunal, the chief holds tribunal sessions, which any citizen can attend and is free to listen to. The *dufia* consults with his elders/councillors/advisors who help him administer justice wisely. If a matter is adjudicated to the satisfaction of the council and there are aspects of the decision that need to be communicated to the entire community, the *kpódola* (announcer) is instructed to publish the law and spell out the applicable sanctions in the event of a breach. People accused of breaching the law have the right to prove their innocence if they so wish. The main remedy is the right of appeal. They could invoke *trɔ* to judge the matter. An appeal procedure could begin from a lower court of the chiefdom to a higher court. The *trɔ* exercises the power of a court of appeal because it is *Mawuga's* child; it is divine.

*Trɔ*, such as *Hevieso* (the god of thunder) is often invoked when a person feels compelled to exact judgment upon someone who has wronged him or her. If the accused persons believe they are innocent of the breach, they could invoke *Hevieso* against their accusers. In that event, the worshipper or believer in *Hevieso*, will go to the *trɔ* priest to express his or her desire. The priest would recommend the presentation of several items for sacrifice to the *trɔ*. The items presented to the deities to enhance the relationship, typically includes a fowl or sheep to be slaughtered as sacrifice to the god. The god would, in turn grant the wish of the worshipper to satisfy him or her. Despite the “misbehaviour” of some of *Mawuga*’s “wayward” children at certain times, there is no tension between *Mawuga* and any of these deities or divinities. In the thinking of the indigenous Ewe, therefore, there is complete harmony among all Ewe deities and the divinities. People could, however appeal directly to *Mawuga* for assistance, when they feel threatened by an infliction by an unjust deity.

## **2.6. Ewe law and religion**

Ewe indigenous law is inseparable from Ewe religion. It has been noted that the Ewe word for “law” is also used for deity, and law with its many prohibitions is central to Ewe indigenous religion. Given this important connection, a contextual interpretation of Ewe indigenous law, using Ewe religion clarifies the relationship among law, religion and ethical conduct for the Ewe. Religion is most effectively interpreted by means of the language in which it is “experienced and expressed” (Bediako 2000:210). This is undoubtedly true of Ewe also. Language, as a subset of culture reveals much of the beliefs and practices of the people. Language identifies a people and their wisdom as revealed in their cultural products. Knowledge of a language gives access to the wider indigenous knowledge systems of the language group. These ideas are not any less true for

the Ewe as for other people and groups. The complex relationship among culture, religion and language is exemplified in the use of the Ewe word *se*.

*Se* is “law” in Ewe as noted earlier. It refers to a boundary or limit beyond which human movement, activity or action is prohibited (Spieth 1906:168). Thus, in Ewe, the law is that which prohibits action. It is different from other regulatory frameworks such as *gbedede* (command) or *doḍowo* (ordinances, rules, regulations, etc) and *konyinyiwo* (rituals). Sometimes, in both spoken and written Ewe, rules, rituals, ordinances, and prohibitions are, often, grouped under the broad theme of *se*. In Ewe traditional religion and worship, there are many laws, rules and guidelines that regulate the conduct of cultic devotees who come seeking blessings from deities or to curtail dangerous curses from enemies or malevolent deities. Since this dissertation is exploring the relationship between law and the gospel in an Ewe context, knowing how the Ewe understand “law” in the traditional sense, and how this understanding clarifies Ewe relationship with God helps to contextualise the Christian gospel among the Ewe. To demonstrate this, we shall next discuss the encounter between Christianity and indigenous Ewe religion.

## **2.7. Christianity in dialogue with Ewe indigenous religion**

Christianity among the Ewe started in 1847. In May 1847, four missionaries from the North German Mission of Bremen, Germany, Luer Bultman, Karl Flato, James Graff, and Lorenz Wolf arrived in Cape Coast in the Gold Coast. They met with their counterparts from Basel, who had arrived earlier in 1828 and had been evangelising the then Gold Coast. After consultations, the North German missionaries agreed to go to Gabon to do mission. This attempt was, however, unsuccessful, as the Gabon mission could not survive. The four missionaries returned to the Gold Coast. When they arrived in Accra, they met Prince Nyangomango, son of the *Tɔgbe* Kodzo Dei,

*Fiaga* of the Peki chiefdom. Nyangomango directed them to his father's kingdom at Peki in the Volta Region of present-day Ghana. They decided to go and see the head chief.

### **2.7.1. Early Ewe Christian origins**

The four missionaries arrived at Peki on 14th November 1847. On arrival, Lorenz Wolf preached a sermon to mark the beginning of the Ewe mission. A new station was established at Keta, in 1852 and then at Adaklu, Anyako, Wegbe, Agu (Togo), and Lome (Togo), all major Ewe towns still existing today. Lorenz Wolf was the only one among the original four who could survive for about six months. With the help of the local people, Wolf built a manse in 1848, where he also held a school for thirteen pupils. The harsh tropical weather and mosquito bites killed the other three missionaries very early into the mission. Wolf himself died on his way home in 1851 after he had been taken ill. So difficult was the mission initially that after seven years of toil, the mission had lost seven missionaries and won only seven converts.

The efforts of these early missionaries resulted in the formation of two churches. The missionaries had intended to form just one church but the circumstances made this impossible. For instance, the two world wars and the partition of Africa split the Ewe (and the Ewe church) into more than one nation state. Thus, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana (EPCG) and *the Eglise Evangélique Presbytérienne du Togo* (EEPT), belong together because they share a common origin and destiny. The two sister churches have since written different histories for themselves, especially because of the disruption of the mission by the two world wars and the partition of Africa by European explorers and colonial administrators.

Fortunately, the mission body had an elaborate mission strategy which it started implementing before the wars disrupted its programme. The process continued after the war. One

distinguished missiologist, who supervised the implementation of the mission policy was Franz Michael Zahn (Grau 1968:168). According to Grau, with the appointment of Zahn, the North German Mission Society was supporting the miracle of God with human devotion, in terms of its effective mission policies. Zahn, who represented the face of this mission plan, made agriculture, education, health, skills training and language development integral parts of the mission strategy. This helped to quickly create an independent indigenous church. Pre-secondary school education was held in Ewe, the mother tongue of the pupils (Grau 1968:69). This was a remarkable policy because prior to the work of Zahn, attempts had been made to make German, and then French, and English the medium of instruction in the Ewe schools the Germans established.

After World War II, therefore, post basic education in Eweland fell into a severe politics of language (Lawrence 2005:215ff). While the Germans wanted instruction to be in German, English and French colonisers, with their new interest in the Ewe, tried to influence school education with their own mother tongues as the basis of instruction. Among the present-day Ghana-Ewe, English eventually prevailed and the final classes of middle school were held in English. French prevailed in the modern state of Togo. Thus, the initial good intention of the North German missionaries to promote Ewe mother tongue education and theologising fell into difficulty because of the politics that followed the partition of Africa.

The establishment of a seminary in 1864 further advanced the mission goal of education expansion, however (Grau 1968:61). Catechists were trained to take charge of the congregations of the churches planted in various Ewe towns. Sometime later, the church trained teachers and catechists at Akropong in the Gold Coast, where a renowned teacher training college had been established by missionaries. The EPCG seminary re-opened in 1929, following the introduction of a 1925 Gold Coast government policy for 4-year teacher training. The EPCG added one year to

the teacher training period, for the training of teachers in her own seminary, because of “the lack of preaching practice in Ewe at Akropong” (Grau 1968:63). This shows how valuably the Ewe community regarded the initial language policy that Zahn tried to promote on behalf of the North German mission (NGM).

### **2.7.2. The Independent Ewe Church**

The NGM from Bremen recalled its missionaries during the First World War, so indigenous leadership had to assume responsibility of managing the church unprepared. The new leaders held a synod and decided to keep the two sections of the church in Togo and Ghana together, despite the activities of the German, British and French colonisers. In 1954 the church, which had previously called itself the Ewe Presbyterian Church, changed its name to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, because many people of other tribes had become members (Grau 1968: 62). This further helped its expansion beyond Eweland. The church opened a mission station at Yendi in the north with agriculture at the centre of its activities in 1958. From here it launched its mission into the Northern Region of Ghana. Having revised their language policy for the Ewe territory to ensure the continuation of the mission to Eweland, the Germans tolerated the teaching of English in their schools (Lawrence 2005:217). They attempted to reverse this when interest in the study of German waned among the Ewe. When the Scottish came to assist to make the mission of the Germans to progress, the Scottish became the first to teach the German-speaking teachers of early Ewe schools to become English speakers. The Scottish built a teacher training college at *Amedzɔfe* in 1946.

Missionary religious instruction was Bible-based. The missionaries presented a holy high Christian God with holy servants (angels), as superior, and in opposition to the devil, and his wicked servants (demons). This was a strange teaching to the Ewe. To make matters worse, the

missionary campaign labelled Ewe religion as belonging to the devil and his demons (Meryer 1999). This attitude gave rise to mutual suspicion, and sometimes hostility between the missionaries and the Ewe.

With the coming of Christianity, however, this type of activity has been labelled as Abosam (devil) worship, so that both the priest and the client would be called *Abosamtɔwo* (*Abosam* people), a term synonymous with non-believers' idol worship. According to Meyer (1999:73), *Abosam* was originally an Akan word. It comes from the Akan word *sasabosam*, who the Akans regard as a forest monster who visits untold suffering on people whom he hates. *Abosam* in Ewe, therefore refers to the devil. Sometimes the word *satana* (a loan word from the Bible) is used to refer to the devil. While the Ewe do not list *abosam* among the hierarchy of deities which the people consider to be servants and children of God, *abosam* is classified among malevolent forces in general. *Mawuga's* own children, especially *trɔwo* sometimes embark upon malevolent activities that compromise the integrity of their victims' lives. Often, they kill people altogether, apart from making some of them insane. The NGM researchers were quite thorough in their investigation as reflected in the people's warm reception of their research findings. Speith's work, for instance became the monumental document that helped the Ewe to settle most of their land disputes for several centuries.

Moreover, the missionaries studied the Ewe language and began to produce Christian literature in it. The New Testament was published in 1877 (Ekem 2011:125) and revised in 1898 (Ekem 2011:127). Politics over dialects delayed the effort to complete a full Bible, until it was finally resolved in 1913 (Ekem 2011:137). The first full Ewe Bible arrived at Keta in February 1916 (Ansre 1997:52). The new Bible changed the mission in at least two basic ways. First, it



made the Christian gospel gain more acceptance among the people than before. Second, the Ewe could now read<sup>19</sup> God's word in their own language. There are at least 5 standard translations of the Bible into Ewe available today. The 1913 Ewe Missionary Bible was revised in 1939 and again in 2010. BIBLICA Ghana published a different translation in 2005 which is also being revised (2018).

The arrival of the Bible also meant that some Ewe Christians could now engage in deep theologising in their own mother tongue. Rev. Samuel Quist, a German trained Ewe pastor, who became one of the leaders of the church when the world wars forced the foreign missionaries to withdraw, wrote a commentary on the gospel of Matthew in Ewe in 1936. This was intended to facilitate theologising in the Ewe mother tongue and to clarify themes that were not readily meaningful to the reader of the new Ewe Bible. Unfortunately, the promotion of mother tongue theologising also contributed to later schisms within the church. The schisms in the EPCG have resulted in the Ewe now scattered into various Christian denominations, including the PCG. There were six major schisms in EPCG within a space of 5 decades or so. In each case, there were issues of indigenisation in contention, bordering mainly on biblical interpretation.

### **2.7.2.1. Schisms in the EPCG and the scattering of members into different churches**

The EPCG has experienced six major schisms since its inception. In 1942 a group of EPCG members led by C. N. K. Wovenu broke away from the church and formed a new one called Apostles Revelation Society (ARS). The White Cross Society/Mission/Church (WCS/M/C, 1959), the Lord's Pentecostal Church (TLPC), the Christ Evangelical Mission (CEM), 1964 and the

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<sup>19</sup> Bible-reading in Ewe eventually gave birth Ewe-initiated churches, the first of which was the *Apostolowo fe Deɖefia Habɔbɔ* (Apostles Revelation Society) which was led by *Mawu fe Ame* (Man of God) Charles Kobla *Nutɔɣuti*, a former catechist of the church. Other schisms were to follow. By 1992, EPCG had experienced six major schisms.

Peaceful Healing Church (PHC) followed in 1971. The biggest, most dramatic and the most recent of the schisms was in 1991, when a group of members claiming to be as many as 89,000 left the church to form the Global Evangelical Church (GEC). Complicated and varied reasons lay behind as the EPCG schisms, but the main impulses were constitutional, doctrinal, financial and ecclesiastical (Amevenku 2016:83). For the purposes of this dissertation, however, it suffices to say that each of the breaks or splits have something to do with how certain members interpreted the Bible. There are some important themes in traditional Ewe religion that show similarities in the SOM. Some of these themes will be discussed next because they help clarify how and why the Ewe ought to practice their Christianity in specific ways, when they seek to live by the principles that Jesus teaches in the SOM.

### **2.7.3. Blessings and curses, wealth and poverty in traditional Ewe society**

Blessings and curses in traditional Ewe society relate to worship and respect for *Mawuga's* Law. Those who worship *Mawuga* and take *Mawuga's* Law (Se) seriously, are better placed to be blessed to become wealthy more than those who do not worship God by obeying *Mawuga's* Law. The Ewe believe that *Mawuga* blesses people, and that it is malevolent deities, wayward servants of *Mawuga* who bring curses upon Ewe people out of hatred and dislike, or when commissioned by their jealous servants to hurt other people. Ewe proverbs, songs, and riddles are among the various means by which virtues and vices are freely spoken about among the people. Such folklore practices also attribute blessings or curses to the entities the people believe are the sources of the blessings or the curses. Ewe folklore practices and speech often attribute poverty and wealth to curses and blessings as well. Moreover, the people further realise that poverty is the result of laziness. Yet most lazy people are often judged to be under attack from evil forces, because poverty is not a virtue; additionally, the people believe, there is a supernatural antecedent to every physical

event. Apart from wealth being rooted in God's favour which leads to blessings, there is also, among the Ewe, the material culture aspect of wealth-creation, which is based on hard work.

Being West Africans and for that matter belonging to one of the poorest sub-regions of the world, the Ewe are familiar with the human problems of poverty, hunger, economic impoverishment and general underdevelopment. For the Ewe, these matters are not just economic issues because for them, whether a person becomes poor or rich depends, not only on hard work but also the blessing of *Mawuga*. The Ewe God's blessings are not automatic, however, because even if a person worships *Mawuga* appropriately and becomes deserving of blessings, that person could still be frustrated by the activities of wayward children of *Mawuga*. To this end, the Ewe take steps to overcome any threats posed by malevolent spirits who can frustrate a person's drive towards success, and thereby keeping that person in poverty. This is a critical issue because the Ewe find themselves among tiny, struggling "developing countries" in West Africa, where poverty is pervasive. If a person blessed by *Mawuga*, successfully "outwits" the malevolent, wayward children of *Mawuga*, his or her blessings will include favour from the ancestors as well, because ancestors are good children of *Mawuga* who bless the living and punish only the taboo breakers.

Thus, one of the reasons why the Ewe honour ancestors is the desire to enjoy ancestral blessings, such as good harvests and business success. Thousands of Ewe farmers today still rely on rainfed agriculture, subject to the vagaries of the weather. The people are mindful that if their crops fail, they might starve, since poverty would overtake them. Thus, some *trɔwo* (deities) are responsible for blessing their devotees with good harvest. This point refers only partially to the Ewe of today because much of Ghana Eweland has become largely Christian. For instance, in 2014, the North Dayi District Assembly in Ghana (Eweland), reported that though the population

in the district largely practised traditional religion, it had been influenced by Christianity because 95.9% of the people claimed to be Christian (Ghana Statistical Service 2014).<sup>20</sup> As has been mentioned earlier, *trɔ* worship is organised religion, with a shrine, a congregation and priests. “Sacrifices, libations and prayers offered” (Lovell 2005:105) to the *trɔwo* are expected to bring benefits to the members of the congregation, or else the *trɔ* risks being abandoned altogether (Lovell 2005:105). The blessing of exceptional harvests is one such benefit. It also guarantees success in business, as the Ewe are mainly farmers (especially northern-Ewe) but also fishers and weavers. Basket and cloth (*kente*) weaving are the most common ones.

The Ewe of the southeast coast of Ghana and the southwest coast of Togo and Benin are those known especially to be fishers. Their men often go to sea along with the male children, while the women and girls take upon themselves the duty of selling the fish to customers, who come to the sea shore to buy fish. Other fish, which is taken home, often gets smoked, salted or refrigerated for sale later. The fishers, weavers, traders and hunters, also rely on God’s blessings, mediated by the gods and the ancestors for success in their various fields of endeavour. These are done to ensure that the Ewe person enjoys life to the full.

Life in its fullness, according to traditional Ewe religion, is reflected in a state of equilibrium. People who live in a state of total equilibrium have peace with themselves, with the ancestors, with *Mawuga*, and the entire cosmos. They have full life because, having been blessed by *Mawuga*, they have in addition, successfully outwitted the evil attacks of the wayward children of *Mawuga*. Yet for the Ewe, life whether lived to the full or not, leads to death and death to life.

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<sup>20</sup> The interpretation of the report presents at least two problems. First, the 2014 district analysis was based on a 2010 census, which the Statistical Service of Ghana (SSG) conducted. Second, the report does not say at what point the people who “largely practiced the traditional religion” gave up their religion in favour of Christianity. Only 1.3% still practice indigenous Ewe religion and about 0.8% profess to be Muslim (GSS 2014:30).

Thus, the Ewe cosmos is cyclical in nature and belief in reincarnation is rife. The Ewe believe that ancestors who are reincarnated, come into the world in new human bodies to live even more fruitful lives than their previous lives. The Ewe also believe that those who live worthy lives during their sojourn on earth, stand a good chance of being reincarnated several times. The idea of family as *dzotinu*, discussed earlier in section 2.4, shows that this cycle, of life moving into death and death moving into life is endless. Therefore, when death, the inevitable occurs, funerals involving elaborate mourning rituals are organised towards the smooth transition of the dead into the “spirit world”, so that those who die, might also become ancestors and begin to bless those who are still living in the physical world. Therefore, funeral and mourning rituals are taken very seriously among the people.

#### **2.6.1.1. Funeral and mourning rituals among the Ewe**

The Ewe regard life to be the highest good and so anything that devalues life is greatly feared. The things that devalue life (*agbe*) are classified into two categories, *nuvɔ* and *busu*. *Nuvɔ* (evil thing) and *busu* (calamity), collectively define the forces of negation of human life which can lead to death (Dzobo 2004:39). Yet the Ewe are aware that human beings are mortal and that there is nothing that can change this situation, therefore the Ewe say, *Amegbetɔ dzɔ na ku, dzɔ na agbe* (the human person is born both to live and to die). Yet they further believe that human beings have no end as such, because when one dies, one goes to join the living dead in the spirit world either as an ancestor with full honours or as a *ɲɔli* (ghost) who poses danger to the living, and never really dies. Thus, for the Ewe, death itself is neither *nuvɔ* nor *busu* because death is inevitable.

Yet, death is feared because it is associated with the dangers that come with daily living. Therefore, while the Ewe do not live under the illusion that they can avoid death, they appreciate

that *nuvo* and *busu* are dangers to one's physical life on earth. *Nuvo* and *busu* are not direct results of human rebellion against *Mawuga*, which leads to sinfulness. They are necessary evils that a living human being encounters because of human tendencies to break *Mawuga*-sanctioned norms and Law. There are metaphysical dimensions to *nuvo* and *busu*, which are beyond ordinary human comprehension. Therefore, divination, such as *afa* is important to deal with these dangers in indigenous Ewe religion. Not only does divination ensure safe and peaceful living for adherents, it also helps a person to prepare for death which is sure to come sometime.

Constantly reminded of their mortality, the Ewe prepare for death throughout their sojourn on earth. The Ewe know that death is a mystery they cannot unravel, so when death occurs, weeping follows and then mourning, mostly for days on end. Funerals are very important to usher the dead into the next life and help them to become ancestors. Even though in Ewe belief, death does not bring an end to a person's existence, the potential danger with death lies in one's failure to become an ancestor. To qualify to be an ancestor, several factors may be involved but these factors must always include dying a "natural death" at a ripe old age, leaving (a) spouse(s) and children behind (if they are alive). One misses out if one dies in a plane crash, a motor accident or falls from a height, while on duty or dies of snakebite, among other undesirable deaths. Such people are referred to as *ametsiava* (a person who died in battle). In other words, this is not a desirable death, as it was untimely.

For those who are fortunate not to die in such tragic manner, elaborate funerals are organised for them when they die, to see them off into the next life. It is believed that the journey to the land of the ancestors could take up to one year, therefore family members perform special rituals associated with the first anniversary of a person's death. These are all aimed at helping the dead relative become an ancestor, and thus become a blessing, not a curse to the community.

Mourning rituals are also organised for the *ametsiavawo* in the belief that they could become *ɲɔliwo* (ghosts) to trouble the living, if they are hastily buried, because their untimely and painful deaths “hurt” them. Therefore, funeral rituals bid a departed, peacefully-dead family member a safe journey to *tsiefe* (abode of the dead).

While they have no chance of becoming ancestors, the *ametsiavawo* will also rest peacefully so that the community would be at peace. It is also believed that once the funeral is handled in this manner, the chances of similar deaths occurring among the people again is highly unlikely. In many Ewe communities, relatives put money in the coffin, and some tuck white handkerchiefs into the palm of the dead. It is believed that the peacefully dead person will cross a river before reaching *tsiefe*. He or she would need the money to pay to be ferried across the river. The dead relative will use the handkerchief to wipe his or her face when exhausted or gets sweaty on the journey.

The proverb<sup>21</sup> *Nu nyui wɔla fe ta metsia ba me o* (Lit., the righteous person’s head does not remain buried in the mud; i.e. righteousness [or goodness] is a virtue that cannot be hidden), betrays a general principle that guides the living to good conduct but also applies to the dead because the proverb, when spoken in praise of dead Ewe persons who transition peacefully into the spirit world to become ancestors, points to the kind of life they lived while still on earth. These are people who lived their lives well by doing the will of *Mawuga* and avoiding crime and immorality. The Ewe strongly detest crime, immorality and other forms of wrongdoing. The gods severely punish these misbehaviours with the cooperation of the shrine priests. For instance, the *Trɔkosi* practice, *Afa* divination and worship of *Hevieso* (god of thunder) are all social control

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<sup>21</sup> Ewe proverbs are often heard in daily conversations among the people and many of the proverbs have no literary sources at present.

mechanisms, aimed at promoting justice and righteousness among the people, even if abuses are now commonplace. Political management of crimes and other breaches are quite elaborate among the Ewe. Chieftaincy is the main avenue by which these breaches are addressed, and, as we have seen, law, religion and chieftaincy are intertwined among the Ewe. Moral uprightness in human relationships is the main concern of *Mawuga's Law*.

#### **2.7.4. Aspects of family law of inheritance among the Ewe**

Like other communities the world over, marriage among the Ghana-Ewe imposes certain rights, duties and obligations on the couple and their kin groups (Nukunya 2016:57). A woman in traditional Ewe society is always under a male guardian, who is often her father, lineage head, elder brother or husband, depending on the status of the woman at a given time (Nukunya 2016: 57). This arrangement is not as strict as we find in Arab or some other societies around the world, but a married Ewe woman has limited rights not only against her husband, but also her own younger brothers born to the same father. For instance, she has limited rights to inheritance both in her father's and husband's family. Indigenous marriage confers on her the right to become a member of her husband's family but not the right to inherit her husband if he died intestate. Similarly, though she is independent in many matters, when it comes to certain traditions and cultural practices she is considered a minor. If she loses a member of her father's family and the funeral is being planned, her opinion could be sought, but unlike male members of that same family she cannot contribute to the discussion unless she is invited to do so.

The Ewe plan their funerals according to certain cultural norms. In the norms, it is only recognised heads of the various clans that are called upon to contribute to the planning discussions. This type of practice is also associated with the celebration of marriage among the Ewe. When the



bride's and the groom's family assemble for the payment of the dowry, no woman is permitted to assume direct leadership in contracting the marriage. The people only speak of the traditional fathers of the bride and the groom as the parties contracting on behalf of the extended family that the marriage unites. Regarding the devolution of family inheritance rights from father to children, patriarchal-Ewe communities make inheritance rights always go to the first-born male child, who is then authorised to take care of all younger siblings born to the same father. If the first-born child is a woman, she forfeits this right and the first male that comes after her, takes it.

Most Ewe communities practise patrilineal inheritance and the society is considerably patriarchal. For instance, an Ewe husband has complete authority over his wife's sexual services. Therefore, if she commits adultery, the act will amount to a serious breach of the bond of marriage (Nukunya 2016: 57). Such a misconduct may lead to divorce. On the other hand, the wife is merely entitled to sexual satisfaction from her husband, apart from the privilege of being maintained by the husband. She cannot object to her husband's unilateral decision to take an additional wife, because Ewe traditional marriage is potentially polygynous (Nukunya 2016: 58). The husband is however, required to consult with his wife or wives before taking an additional wife. These traditional prescriptions regulating the relationship between an Ewe husband and an Ewe wife are part of Ewe family law. They relate to Ewe cultural practices and social norms and form part of Ewe indigenous religion. Moreover, they indicate a relationship between Ewe indigenous religion and Ewe traditional law represented by Ewe chieftaincy as the unique political organisation of the traditional Ewe. As noted above, both spouses have rights when breaches occur; therefore, either of them may call for a divorce if he or she so desires, being the offended party.

### **2.7.5. Divorce among the Ewe**

Divorce is available to both the husband and the wife but this option is not so frequently exercised because of other considerations, such as the welfare of the children born in the marriage and public opinion. Some husbands may decide to beat up their wives if the women commit adultery or if they do not prepare food on time, and this is by no means rare among Ghanaians in general (Nukunya 2016: 59). If a woman feels that she is hurt because her husband has continually breached his obligations to her and treated her with cruelty, she might call it quits after several attempts of a traditional family tribunal to resolve the difference fails (Nukunya 2016: 59). The tribunal fines the man and delegates the family head or another elder of the family to seriously reprimand the husband, if he is found guilty under the circumstances.

In terms of marital roles, a wife manages the home. Apart from homemaking, this wife may be involved in the production and provision of food for the family. It is the duty of a husband to love his wife, be kind to her and show understanding (Nukunya 2016: 58). He is also expected to provide resources for the upkeep of the family and satisfy his wife's sexual needs so that she does not become frustrated and jealous. This brief description of the management of marital disharmony among the Ewe shows that like the audience of the SOM the Ewe are confronted with threats to the security and peace of marriages, and their leaders, representing *Mawuga*, prescribe solutions to the problem after scrutinising the matter in a tribunal.

### **2.7.6. Oath-taking among the indigenous Ewe**

As part of judgment practices at a family, clan or chiefdom tribunal, oath-taking is not foreign to the Ghana-Ewe. Usually, an oath is regarded as the uttering of forbidden words that often threaten the peace of the community, when the oath-taker is accused of something he or she

denies. For instance, when someone is accused of adultery or theft (Nukunya 2016: 107), he or she might want to swear an oath to protect his or her integrity. Even though adultery and theft are considered among the Ewe to be private matters regulated by civil law, these wrongs tend to assume public importance, when an oath is sworn to prove one's innocence (Nukunya 2016: 107). Once this happens, the matter is no longer handled at the family tribunal level. If the oath-taker invoked the name of a deity, the disputing parties would be summoned to appear before the priest of the deity. If the oath invoked the sacred name of a deity, then, because it has assumed public importance, the matter would now be heard at the tribunal of the chief. Modernity has drastically altered this arrangement and Ghana-Ewe customary law is now part of Ghana's national law.

Customary Ghana-Ewe law conflicts with the common law tradition that Ghana inherited from Britain because of modern changes to the political structures of Ghana. For instance, theft is treated under criminal law in line with the common law tradition to which Ghana subscribes, while adultery is treated as part of family law, which itself is part of the law of succession, even though customary Ewe law in indigenous Ghana-Ewe communities had its own prescriptions for the redress of theft cases. Under the Ghanaian law of divorce (part of the Matrimonial Causes Act 1971, Act 367), the sole ground for divorce is when "the marriage has broken down beyond reconciliation" (S. 41 of MCA, Act 367, 1971). The disputing parties have several issues to deal with before a divorce decree is granted. The petitioner, being the party alleging wrongdoing, carries the burden of proof. The respondent is obliged to enter a defence once the petitioner has brought an action against him or her. Compared with the audience of the SOM to which Jesus reinterpreted the law, we find that the Ghana-Ewe also relate truth claims with oath-taking, especially where a person's integrity (honour) is deeply threatened. Moreover, just as it was among the SOM audience, oath-taking among the Ghana-Ewe is often abused.

### 2.7.7. Almsgiving among the Ewe

Among the Ewe, almsgiving is a kind gesture that could bring divine blessings from *Mawuga* (God). Being kind to people who are disadvantaged, is generally a virtue. If someone helps the elderly, especially, the latter would normally pronounce blessings upon the younger person. Such blessing, the Ewe believe, goes a long way to make the younger person successful in other endeavours of life. People often seek out such blessings because they believe that success in life goes beyond physical, economic forces of interaction to include spiritual antecedents. If a person is cursed, then, he or she does not have the spiritual cover needed for full realisation of his or her life's potential. If, however, this person is blessed by those to whom he or she gives alms, then his or her life will be positively impacted and the person would become successful. Thus, the Ewe often pray for the wisdom to decide how best to relate to neighbours and ancestors to avoid trouble.

### 2.7.8. Prayer as a source of reciprocal beneficial exchange

Prayer is a well-known cultic activity among indigenous Ewe communities. The people pray directly to *Mawuga* or to the *trɔwo* or to the ancestors, depending on the circumstances confronting them. Both Ewe oral and written history connect the Ewe to many ancient kingdoms of various people, including Jewish, Egyptian, Sudanese, Ethiopian, Nigerian, Beninoen, Togolese and Ghanaian (ancient). The Ewe learnt different social, cultural and religious practices from these various peoples. For instance, the Ewe learnt *afa* divination, mentioned above, from the Yoruba of Nigeria, who are noted for their *ifa* divination. It has been observed that the famous *Ɔkɔmfo* Anokye of Ashanti got his name from the corrupted form of *Ɔkɔmfo* of Notsie (a *trɔ* priest of Notsie), suggesting that this *Ɔkɔmfo* (a diviner) was originally an Ewe person who went to the

Ashanti Kingdom from Notsie (Kudzordzi 1994:30). This claim finds a basis especially in the numerous interactions among the Ashanti and many Ghana-Ewe groups through war and trade as has been mentioned already.

There exists, among the indigenous Ewe, a symbiotic relationship between *trɔwo* and their worshippers, for instance, in the same way a vassal seeks the honour of an overlord, or a servant his benefactor. Prayer, sacrifices and priestly rituals given to *trɔ* deities are partly to bring special blessings of protection, extra-large harvests and fertility to their adherents. This explains why a deity could be abandoned if its adherents do not find him or her potent enough to provide the benefits they require. If the *trɔ* cannot protect its worshippers in judicial proceedings with their adversaries or make them more successful than their rivals in farming or business, for instance, then the deity could be abandoned. A *trɔ* that can find no worshippers or adherents eventually loses its spiritual potency and would be forgotten sooner than later.

## **2.8. Conclusion**

To sum up, the Ewe of West Africa can be found in Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria. They relate to the Aja and Fon people. Historically, the Ewe migrated from Oyo in Nigeria, settled at Ketu and Notsie before breaking into subgroups that eventually settled at their present locations in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Throughout their history, the Ewe never coalesced into a single political state with a common head. Rather, they have lived, all this while, in independent, sovereign states, with varying populations and influence.

The Ewe, like other Africans are deeply religious. The Ewe have a consciousness for both the spiritual and physical and they strive, through interaction with their ancestors, deities and spirits, to achieve harmony and peaceful coexistence with the living and the dead, as well as the

immaterial. At the head of Ewe indigenous religion is a Supreme Being, *Mawuga*, who is the creator of the universe, who gives life and sustains all things. *Mawuga* has servant-children, who are at the lower levels of the Ewe indigenous spiritual hierarchy. Even though *Mawuga* is a benevolent deity, some of his children become malevolent at times, visiting untold evil upon their victims. Yet, unlike the Christian God who is opposed to the devil and his demons, *Mawuga* lives at peace and in harmony with all servant-children.

*Mawuga* manifests in three different ways as *Sogbo* (Male), *Sodza* (Female) and *Se* (Uniting Principle). Sometimes, the God of indigenous Ewe is referred to as *Se*, to show that this deity is the owner of destiny. By his own Law (*Se*), the Ewe God creates and sends people into the world from Bome (a large farm) or *Amedzofe* (the place of human origin). People make destiny declarations before the Ewe God prior to their coming into the world. If, while they are here in the world, they are haunted by their own declarations because they said certain things that make life difficult for them, they consult with the *gbetsi* divinity to have their destiny statement (*gbetsi*) reversed or altered.

The Ewe political organisation is hierarchical, involving several participants who contribute to the running of the state. The Ewe are led by chiefs who control various chiefdoms. There are both male chiefs and female chiefs, of divisions and subdivisions. The male chiefs wield executive, legislative, judicial and religious powers over their jurisdictions. Female chiefs are chiefs for the women in the jurisdictions that they oversee. The male chiefs hold regular tribunal sessions, which are open to citizens under their jurisdiction. Because the legislative process is most often determined by the nature of the case brought to the chief's tribunal, precedent is taken very seriously. Some Ewe groups also make laws through legislative promulgations by the chief in consultation with a council of elders and representatives of the youth.

Among the issues associated with Ewe social interaction are kinship and marriage, worship, prayer and sacrifice, almsgiving, oath-taking and the invoking of curses upon perceived and real enemies. Many aspects of Ewe culture, religion and anthropology, have been influenced by Christianity since the arrival of the North German missionaries from Bremen, whose toil established the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana and the *Eglise Evangelique Presbyterienne du Togo*. The NGM, which arrived at Peki in November 1847 found the two churches, so these Christian denominations have a common origin and destiny but their histories begun to assume territory-specific details because of colonisation and the partition of Africa by Europeans. The history of the two churches, EPCG and EEPT are intertwined with the process of the encounter of Ewe indigenous religion with European missionary Christianity in Ghana. Different aspects of the associated cultures of European Christianity and Ewe religion have given rise to certain attitudes towards biblical law from the Ewe perspective. This has affected the contextualisation of biblical law in Ewe Christianity.

One reason for including a brief history, culture and religion of the Ewe in this study is to ensure that the reader understands the context within which the Ewe became Christians and how their indigenous cultural, religious and historical circumstances have affected their understanding of the role of law in Christianity. Among the Ghana-Ewe, God's Law imposes dos and don'ts on worshippers to ensure good conduct and peaceful human coexistence. Ghana-Ewe Christians, undoubtedly, carried this cultural baggage into Christianity. When the Ewe turned to Christ, the Mosaic Law was introduced to them. It therefore, became a matter of course for Ewe Christians to assume that worshipping God means observing rules and regulations the same way that *Mawuga* is worshipped. Like other people, the collective pre-Christian experiences of the Ewe have

contributed to the presuppositions and preunderstandings with which they interpret the Law as Bible students.

The next chapter surveys the exegetical history of the interpretation of the Law in the SOM in the Christian tradition prior to the rise of the “new literary criticism”.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **A SURVEY OF EXEGESIS OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT**

#### **3.0. Introduction**

This chapter surveys the history of the exegesis of Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount (SOM), outlining paradigms developed at scholarly and ‘popular’ levels for its reading and application among various Christian communities. The history of interpretation of the SOM presents several views of its content with different permutations. Blomberg (2009:285-287) identifies at least eight views of the SOM. These include Traditional Catholic, Lutheran, Anabaptist, Liberal-postmillennial and Interim ethicist views. He also notes the Existentialist, Classical Dispensationalist and Kingdom theology approaches. Another classification of the SOM interpretation identifies six broad views, namely the Catholic, Utopian, Lutheran, Liberal, Existentialist and the Interim Ethic views (Helyer 2008:181-189). These classifications are all based on the interpretation of the SOM’s ethics. The “Utopian” view embodies the dispensationalist and Anabaptist understandings of the SOM. It also anticipates a general utopian response to the world regarding God’s will for humanity. These various approaches to the SOM also underscore the critical importance of the historical critical method by which the gospels have been studied in the course of Christian history.



Form criticism, source criticism and redaction criticism are three major critical gospel study approaches that predated the rise of the new literary criticism in the mid-1970s (Blomberg 2009:91).<sup>22</sup> These three have been applied to the study of the SOM at various times. Source critical approaches focus on the order of composition and an investigation of who took what material from where and for what purpose, especially of the synoptic gospels. Form critics, with primary interest in determining the factors that affected the oral transmission of the Jesus tradition, proposed a hypothetical source (Q) which Matthew and Luke share (Carson, Moo and Morris 1992:39). The SOM is a combination of Q<sup>23</sup> and exclusive Matthean material. Redaction critics emphasise the unique theological emphases and editorial skills of evangelists as theologians and editors. These different methods obviously lead to different focusses in the study of the gospels. Source, form and redaction critical studies of the SOM often focus on the Sermon's ethics and how it is to be understood and lived by today.

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<sup>22</sup> Blomberg (2009:87-91) summarises the main approaches to the study of the gospels from patristic time to redaction criticism. He notes that during the first seventeen centuries of Christian history, scholars generally studied the gospels by producing a "harmony" if them. Tatian's *Diatessaron* (lit. 'through four', c170C.E.) is a point in case. Augustine and Calvin, like other early notable theologians were among those who wrote commentaries based on a "harmony" of the gospels, assuming that Matthew was the first to be written. A major shift occurred in the 1700s following the rise of the rationalistic philosophy of the Enlightenment. Rationalists such as Samuel Reimarus and H. E. G. Paulus questioned the historicity of the gospels, specifically their miracle stories, which these scholars explained away in naturalist ways. David Friedrich Strauss, rejecting the "harmony" approach to the gospels, in the 1830s judged the miracle stories to be "myths". Then, F. C. Baur, introduced Hegelian Philosophy into gospel study also in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, arguing that Christian history can be conceived of in term of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, corresponding to Christianity as traditional Jewish conservative religion, liberal gentile reconfiguration and medial blending of conservative and liberalist views respectively. Eighteenth and nineteenth century scholars focussed on the gospels as the product of "fact and fiction". They understood Jesus in secular philosophical terms as revolutionary, pacifist, romanticist, mystic, etc. Twentieth century scholars, building on previous scholarship, introduced several critical tools such as textual, source, form and redaction critical approaches.

<sup>23</sup> Coming from the German word for "source", *Quelle* (Q) is hypothetical material theorized by scholars to enhance the study of the gospels (Brown 2007:116). By means of analyses of Q, scholars seek to explain agreement between Matthew and Luke against Mark. The Lukan parallel of the SOM has similar teachings as Matthew's account but there are distinct differences too.

The high ethic of the SOM has been interpreted in a variety of ways by a wide range of scholars and students from varied backgrounds. Yet the SOM goes beyond the delineation of ethical principles. It is specifically, reinterpreted, fulfilled Law. It gives rise to deep concerns relating to the application of the biblical law for contemporary living. The history of SOM interpretation has shown how controversial the application of the Mosaic Law has proven to be for subsequent generations of the Jesus movement over the years.

### **3.1. Patristic interpretations of the SOM (c 100-451)**

In this dissertation, the patristic era is taken to be the period in Christian history from the completion of the New Testament (c100 C.E.) to the time of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 (McGrath 1994:7). Patristic gospel exegesis was generally based on a harmony of the gospels. The study has chosen the views of Justin Martyr, Chrysostom and Augustine for comment because they represent views of most patristic interpreters of the SOM. For Chrysostom and Augustine, the SOM constitutes a perfect pattern of life for all Christians (Stanton 1992:737). While this view may be idealistic, it can be commended as a standard for regenerated disciples, who are given gospel grace to keep the demands of the SOM. When the Law in the SOM is understood this way, it somehow explains the relationship between the Law and the Gospel. SOM law relates to righteousness. The *Didache* portrays the SOM as a prescription of genuine righteousness which is associated with the ideal Christian life (Lightfoot 1967:121-125). This prescription is based on the Law as the revealed will of God for God's people. The difficulty of meeting the ethical ideals of the SOM were not lost on patristic interpreters.

Noting that full obedience to the Law was a difficult challenge, patristic apologetics sought to show Christianity to be superior to all other faith commitments, including Judaism. For instance, Justin Martyr (100-165), in his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, argued that Christians believe in

the same God as the Jews, but Christian salvation is not wrought through faith in Moses (or through faith in obedience to the Law), but through faith in Jesus Christ (chapter 11). For Justin, the Law which was promulgated at Horeb (the Mosaic Law) is obsolete for the contemporary follower of Jesus because it applied to ethnic Israel alone, but the Law of Christ has universal appeal and applicability, therefore it abides in the Christian era (Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* chapter 11). By the Law of Christ, Justin meant the Gospel of Jesus the Christ. While Trypho taught that Christians were antinomian and could not please God by the way they believed and worshipped, Justin Martyr argued that Trypho misunderstood the Gospel and Jesus' role as the only Lawgiver (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 12). Justin Martyr noted further that the Gospel of Jesus ushered in a new holy covenant which Jeremiah predicted (Jer. 31:31-33), a new covenant that did not require the observance of the Jewish Sabbath or the law of circumcision in a physical sense (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* chapter 12). It seems clear that for Justin, the new covenant with its new law requires obedience to God but not in the sense of mere law-keeping. Commenting on the 'salt of the earth' metaphor of Matt. 5:12 much later in the twenty-first century, Garlington (2011:715ff), argues that the SOM should be understood from the covenant perspective. Specifically, for him, Matt. 5:12, ought to be read from the covenant perspective because salt is a covenant metaphor in the Hebrew Bible, and since the unity of scripture and the validity of Biblical Theology can be upheld, the intertextual connection between the Torah and the SOM can be established in Jesus' use of salt to describe genuine disciples. This covenantal sense, according to Garlington provides the hermeneutical framework for interpreting the text. By his interpretation, Garlington seems to connect with the view of most patristic exegetes of the SOM.

Patristic SOM scholars believed that full obedience to the SOM was possible and necessary by God's transforming grace (Quarles 2001:4), while acknowledging that this was a tall order.

From this position proceeded arguments that Matthew designed the SOM to help believers appreciate their need of grace, to stop attempting to rely on their own capacities to obey the Law. The view persisted in patristic writings that the SOM was for all Christians to obey, through the kind grace and enablement of God. For instance, Justin argued that God imputes true righteousness to many people who have believed in Jesus Christ, even though they have not trusted in their abilities to observe the legal ceremonies of the old covenant (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* chapter 30). For Justin, every genuine believer in Christ has been enabled to obey God through baptism of the Holy Spirit. Each believer in Christ, therefore, needs to strive to attain the SOM's lofty ideals with the help of the Holy Spirit.

In his homilies on Matthew's gospel, John Chrysostom<sup>24</sup> considered the SOM as an oral genius which exhibits the rich rhetoric of Jesus' time. This view already prefigures, albeit unintentionally, present literary approaches to the gospels. Chrysostom was convinced that the SOM was meant to be obeyed by all Christians (Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew XVI*). He underscored what he found to be the connection between the SOM and Pauline theology. For him, the Gospel fulfils the Law in the sense that the law directed the OT worshipper's conscience and conduct until Christ. Since Christ, then, the holy, good and righteous (Rom. 7:12-14) law of Christ guides the conscience and conduct of believers through love, which the Holy Spirit gives.

Chrysostom employed the SOM as an apologetic tool against heretics as well (Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew, XVI*). When Jesus told the SOM audience that he had come not to destroy the Law or the Prophets but to fulfil them,<sup>25</sup> Chrysostom reasoned that Jesus gave this assurance to pave the way for what he intended to say next, so "that the strangeness thereof might not disturb

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<sup>24</sup> N. R. Needham (2004:231-232) notes that John Chrysostom of Antioch (344-407) was an early Christian exegete and preacher, a monk and a presbyter.

the souls of the hearers, nor dispose them quite to mutiny against what He said.” (Chrysostom *Homilies on Matthew 5:17 XVI*, paragraph 2). For Chrysostom, Jesus knew that he would introduce the six antitheses that might make the SOM audience to think that he intended to abrogate an established ancient tradition, therefore, here and elsewhere, Jesus addressed the possible suspicion before anyone could voice it. If Jesus did not do that, in Chrysostom’s view, the Pharisees would mock him for being Torah non-compliant. The Pharisees, indeed made the accusation elsewhere because Jesus did not keep the Sabbath the way they did. Nor did Jesus’ disciples keep the traditions of the elders (Matt. 15:1-20).

Chrysostom noted further that Jesus fulfilled the Prophets by his teaching and action in specific ways to confirm everything that had been prophesied about him (cf Matt. 2:17). Jesus’ birth and his triumphant entry fulfilled this. For Chrysostom, Jesus fulfilled the Law in three specific ways. First, he kept the Law totally, to “fulfil all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). Second, Jesus granted the fulfilment of the Law also to his followers, therefore Paul could write, “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” (Rom. 10:4). Jesus’ death atoned for the sins of potential believers, to make righteousness of the Law fulfilled in those who do no longer walk according to the desires of their flesh. Thus, by bringing the way of righteousness through faith as Paul observes, Christ fulfilled the Law. Before then, the Law had laboured to institute God’s righteousness but had no power to do it, since it was powerless to deal with the fact that people broke the Law habitually. By bringing the new way of righteousness through faith, Jesus established the Law and thereby fulfilled it. Third, far from repealing the Law by his saying, Jesus drew out injunctions from the stipulations of the Law and filled them up (Chrysostom *Homilies on Matthew 5:17*, Line 4). In examining the role of the Law, Augustine of Hippo reflected on the Law’s role in salvation.

Augustine wrote a commentary<sup>25</sup> on the SOM in which he noted that the seven gifts<sup>26</sup> attributed to the spirit of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2-4), correspond to the seven virtues of Matthew's Beatitudes—poor in spirit, the mourning, meek, the hungry and thirsty after righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers and the persecuted (Augustine on *Matt. 5-7, SOM 4.11*). Augustine noted, rather curiously, that Isaiah's prophecy was prefiguring a peaceful Kingdom under the reign of God's spirit, and that in the SOM, Jesus' inauguration of the Kingdom of heaven marked the fulfilment of God's promise of a peaceful Kingdom. For Augustine, Jesus fulfilled the Law in two specific ways (Augustine on *Matthew 5-7, SOM 8.20*). First, Jesus fulfilled the Law by obeying it. Second, he fulfilled it by supplying what was missing in it. Mindful, as he taught, that those who obey the Law and teach others to obey it shall be called great in the Kingdom of heaven, Jesus taught the Law to his disciples. He exposed the Law's true meaning and intent thereby bringing the messianic promise into reality. Augustine noted further, that Jesus, in the SOM, separated the meaning of the Law from its rituals, and bound and loosed the Law by correcting its wayward, rabbinic interpretations. Augustine went as far as to say that the SOM was not merely a masterpiece of a Galilean prophet and sage exhibiting superior oration of his time, but also a divine exposition of the highest ethical and moral norms, meant for mature worshippers, not children. In other words, for Augustine, while the Law, as espoused in the SOM is God's will for all children of God, those who are novice Christians do not have the wherewithal to obey it completely. This view divides Christians into two levels which is not evident in the text of the SOM. Augustine's approach to the SOM as a set of ethical rules applicable to certain Christians prevailed until the middle ages.

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<sup>25</sup> Saint Augustine on Matthew 5-7: Sermon on the Mount, *Patristic Bible commentary*. <https://booksites.google.com.gh>. Accessed 25-06.2018.

<sup>26</sup> The gifts are wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, fear of the Lord and righteousness.

### 3.2. Medieval (c 1050-c 1500) and Renaissance interpretations of the SOM

Great instability followed the patristic period when Rome was invaded (McGrath 1994: 26), so not much significant developments in learning were recorded. Scholars, therefore refer to the period between the patristic era and the onset of the middle ages (c 1050-c 1500) as the “Dark Ages” (410-1000). During the medieval period varied attempts were made to resolve the ostensible theological tension between Law and Gospel in the SOM. St. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274), in his celebrated *Summa Theologiae*<sup>27</sup> outlined difficulties in reading the SOM and noted that Christ’s doctrine fulfilled the precepts of the Law in three ways: Christ explained the true sense of the Law, prescribed a new and safest way to comply with the statutes of the old Law, and offered some additional “counsels of perfection” to the Law. Aquinas suggested that the high ethic of the SOM contains mandates for all Christians but also directions to those called into specialised vocations within the Christian community. His view became the traditional and dominated view of the SOM in medieval times. This view trumps Augustine’s in the sense that it does not seem to distinguish the ethic of the SOM as applicable only to “mature” Christians, but sees the ethics as applicable to all Christians, with more challenge, besides, for those called into specialised Christian ministries.

Aquinas, moreover observed that one way to understand Christ’s explanation of the Law is to appreciate how he clarifies the laws on murder and divorce by showing that internal acts besides external ones, cause divorce and murder. Similarly, Christ prescribes the safest way to comply with the Law by noting that the most effective way to avoid the forbidden act of perjury, is not to take an oath at all, except in urgent situations. Jesus also gave a counsel of perfection to the young rich enquirer in Matt. 19:21; Jesus advised him to dispose of his wealth and then to

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<sup>27</sup> Aquinas, T. 1947. *The Summa theologiae*. Benziger Bros. edition, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican province. This is contained in the treatise on law (questions 90-108).

come and follow him (Jesus). This was after the young man claimed he had fully obeyed the Law's commands. Furthermore, Aquinas noted that those things which Jesus did, that gave the impression that he broke the Law (such as touching a leper, healing on the Sabbath or permitting his disciples to pick ears of corn on the Sabbath), were, in fact, consistent with the intention of the Law. Aquinas, therefore, averred that the old Law (Mosaic Law) was imperfect and the new Law (Law of Christ) was perfect, and that the new Law fulfils the legal ceremonies of the old Law.

Pressing further the point that some aspects of the SOM are meant especially for mature Christians in specialised service, Aquinas argued, "As a father of a family issues different commands to the children and to adults, so also the one King, God, in His one kingdom, gave one law to [hu]man[s], while they were yet imperfect, and another more perfect law, when, by the preceding law, they had been led to a greater capacity for Divine things."<sup>28</sup> Aquinas further sees this "capacity for divine things" as belonging to people, especially the clergy who are called specially for service in the ministry of the Lord. For Aquinas, therefore, the SOM does not apply to all Christians the same way but there is "something for everyone", in that while the SOM contains general instructions for the obedience of all Christians, it does contain as well, some lofty standards that only the clergy and other Christian leaders may aspire to attain.

Based on Aquinas' observations, Medieval Catholicism interpreted the SOM as a higher ethic for the clergy, especially those called to monastic orders, arguing that it is not meant for every Christian (Blomberg 2009:285-287; Keener 2009a:160). Both Blomberg and Keener reject the traditional Catholic proposed solution to the ostensible difficulty in abiding by the demands of the SOM. Blomberg notes that the perceived traditional Catholic division between Christians in this

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted from Thomas Aquinas, 1947, the *Summa theologiae: Treatise on law (questions 90-108)*. Matthew 5: 20. Benziger bros edition, translated by fathers of the English Dominican province.



manner, is forced because the canonical text of the SOM gives no such indication (Blomberg 2009:285). The SOM was addressed to both disciples (Matt. 5:1-2) and the larger crowds (Matt. 7:28). For his part, Keener posits that the SOM constitutes an ideal Kingdom ethic for members of the Kingdom of heaven (Keener 2009a:161). Aquinas' view, not surprisingly has been heavily criticized<sup>29</sup>, especially by Protestants, who accused him of creating two different groups of Christians, segregated by varied aspects of scripture that apply in differentiated ways to their lives. Yet for Aquinas, while there is no contradiction between the old Law (Mosaic) and the new Law (Jesus' point of view of the Law in the SOM), the new perfected the old (Lawrence 2017:23).

### **3.3. Reformation (c 1500- c 1700) understandings of the SOM**

Scholars of the reformation era continued with attempts to resolve the tension between the Law and the Gospel, based on their interpretations of the SOM. Luther, Zwingli and Calvin agreed with Aquinas' view that the SOM represents the true interpretation of the Law which had been obscured in Judaism, but they rejected Aquinas', and for that matter the traditional Catholic view that the ethics of the Law in the SOM applies specifically to clergy and monastic orders. One passage that has generated much of the debate, among others, is Matt. 5:17-20. Do people need the Law for their salvation in the Gospel era? Do they need the Law to enter the Kingdom of heaven? If they do, which "law" might that be? Is it the Mosaic Law or is it the "Law of Christ" or some other "Law"?

Luther claimed that the SOM is Law<sup>30</sup> but not Gospel, and that its radical demands are meant to lead believers to the grace of the Gospel. For him, the SOM's demands are as impossible

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<sup>29</sup> This criticism is evident in much of the subsequent writings on the SOM and this dissertation mentions some of them in the reformation, post reformation and modern eras of SOM interpretation.

<sup>30</sup> Law here means "a call to repentance and preparation for the gospel" (Blomberg 1992:74).

as the demands of the Mosaic Law. Luther argued that those who fail to trust fully in God's grace, revealed in Christ, and seek to purchase the grace of God through their own wearied obedience to the commandments of God, trust in "sand and water" to give foundation to their buildings which are bound to fall as Jesus taught in Matthew 7 (Luther, *Treatise on Good Works VIII* 1520). This is in apparent reference to Jesus' illustration of the two kinds of builders to underscore the need for his audience to obey his teaching (Matt. 7:24-27). For Luther, then, those who obey the teaching of Jesus, as mentioned in the SOM and elsewhere (cf Matt. 19), trust in divine favour. Those who do not obey Jesus' teaching are, therefore, comparable to unwise builders, who trust in a foundation made with sand and water.

Luther thinks such people seek God's favour through observance of rites and ceremonies to "buy" God to their sides. In other words, they try to do works to please God, not realising that to please God is based on divine favour. Luther's point is clear enough but the tension between the Law and the Gospel remains, because some aspects of the NT give the impression that the OT Law no longer applies in the gospel era. For instance, we read from Mark 7:18-19 that Jesus declared all foods clean in apparent contradiction to Jewish dietary laws that forbade biblical Israel to eat certain foods (e.g., Lev. 11ff). Luther noted that the fulfilment of the Law is not so much a matter of obeying commands (law) as acceptance of the gracious gospel (doctrine) of Christ. Therefore, for him, the eight beatitudes, for example, are fruits of good works which true Christians produce. Commenting on Matthew 5 & 16, Luther argues that good deeds are the fruits of practicing the teaching of Jesus and suffering for doing so, and still reflecting God's glory while doing so. This is a matter of faith (Luther 2005:39). He avers further that righteousness based on faith, in contrast to works-based righteousness, is effectual and effective, "efficient and active through good works" (Luther 2005:122).

To resolve the works-grace controversy, Luther distinguished between the SOM's application at the personal level in the private sphere from its social, secular application in the public domain. Luther interpreted the text, "Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God" (Matt. 5: 9) in part as follows:

...when the sin is public, and becomes too widely spread, or does public injury (as the Pope's teaching), then it is no longer right to be silent, but to protest and rebuke, especially for me and others, who are in public office, whose duty it is to teach and warn everybody. For the command and duty has been laid upon me, as a preacher...it becomes me to rebuke those who sin publicly, that they may do better, just as a judge must publicly convict and punish the evil-doers by virtue of his office. For we have said it often enough that Christ is not speaking here of a public office, but of all Christians in general, according as we are all alike before God (Luther 2005:26).

The problem, however is that the distinction between public sphere and private sphere of application is not evident or implied in the SOM text itself, therefore that interpretation cannot be said to depend directly on the SOM. Through his private-public sphere of application approach, Luther attempted to resolve, for instance, the difficulty of using the SOM to promote Christian non-resistance in all spheres of life. He would separate Christian practice of non-resistance and non-retaliation from the duty of a Christian law enforcement or military officer to actively fight evil to preserve the peace in the public domain (Luther, on Matt. 5:38-42). Luther, thereby, rejected the prevailing notions about the meaning and application of the SOM during the medieval era. He disagreed with both the works righteousness which Aquinas implied and the enthusiastic, strict, literal Anabaptist application in the reformation era.

Many students of Luther have since followed suit. Joachim Jeremias, a Lutheran, posits that the grace (gospel) preceded the obedience (law), therefore those who have the grace of the Gospel are enabled to obey the Law. Without this they are helpless in the face of the Law (Jeremias 1963:8ff). Commenting on this, Carson was succinct when he wrote, "At stake are the relations between the testaments, the place of law in the context of the gospel, and the relation of this

pericope to other NT passages that unambiguously affirm that certain parts of the OT law have been abrogated as obsolete” (Carson 1995:141). In other words, if we argue out the relationship between the Law and the Gospel as if nothing happened to the Law when Jesus incarnated, we blur the relationship further because, evidently, in the New Testament era, aspects of the Old Testament Law no longer apply.

Obviously, going by the Lutheran position creates two levels of ethics, one for the individual in private and another for the execution of public duties. Moreover, by extension, there is, for the individual, one kind of morality for the spiritual sphere and another for the civic sphere. This means further that one must conduct oneself differently when dealing with matters eternal from when confronted with matters temporary. Jesus’ reinterpretation of the Law in the SOM does not warrant this. Besides, this approach complicates the problem of understanding the relationship between the Law and the Gospel, as one might have to apply law sometimes in private and gospel in public with other permutations besides.

Calvin shares Luther’s view that the matter of the fulfilment of the Law is not “life” but “teaching” (Calvin 1972:178). He means to say that the SOM is a summary of the doctrine of Christ (Stanton 2002:739). Arguing from gospel harmony perspective, Calvin observes that pious worshippers would have rejected the Gospel of the Kingdom if it had defected from the Law (Calvin 1972:179). His *analogia fidei* (analogy from faith) method gives effect to his harmony of the gospel approach because, by it, he exposed the meaning and significance of the SOM by letting scripture shed light on scripture. In this approach, the whole of scripture provides the context for the interpretation of a given text. Therefore, the unified, total teaching of scripture on a given theme or subject is crucial for the understanding and application of any text.

Thus, for instance, Jesus did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfil them (Matt. 5:17), yet at the same time he said that the “children are free” (Matt. 17:18b) from the payment of the temple tax, which was a requirement for all Jews under the Law (Ex. 30:13-16). Declaring the children to be free did not prevent Jesus from encouraging Peter to pay the tax on behalf of the two of them in order not to cause offense to the authorities. Similarly, while insisting that not a jot, title or iota of the Law shall pass away until everything is accomplished, Matthew’s Jesus still taught that divorce could be permitted (not commanded, though) because of *πονηρός*.<sup>31</sup>

Calvin’s interpretation of the SOM probably points to both continuity and discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament. While the two covenants are from the self-revelation of the same God, they are given under different circumstances, and therefore the clear meaning of each covenant should precede an attempt to understand the connection of the covenants to each other. Calvin could, however, not fully resolve the tension, despite using a helpful method. The application of *analogia fidei* to certain parts of the SOM, obviously, dismisses the text’s relevance for a contemporary audience. This is because, while scripture is its own interpreter, and many an obscure passage is clarified when the light of a plain text shines on it, the method has not worked for every part of scripture throughout Christian history. For instance, many apocalyptic texts of both the OT and the NT remain obscure in the face of profuse biblical criticism.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The diverse and wide possibilities of rendering *πονηρός* such as sexual immorality (Orthodox study Bible; ESV), unchastity (NRSV), marital unfaithfulness (NIV), unfaithful/ness (NLT study Bible; GNB), infidelity, fornication, adultery, indecency, etc has, no doubt, expanded the debate and made a decisive conclusion on the meaning of the text more elusive.

<sup>32</sup> Roman Catholics, Liberals, Protestants and Evangelicals, among many other blocks of Christians continue to debate several issues related to the meaning and application of the SOM, despite the analogy from faith proposal, and indeed, any other approach to the text in Christian history. Controversy still abounds whether the ethics of the SOM is for contemporary or eschatological application or on the SOM’s relation to Pauline doctrine of justification by grace through faith.

In furtherance to the analogy from faith approach to biblical interpretation, Calvin (1509-1564) and Zwingli (1484-1531) tried to promote Christian, theocratic states in Zurich and Geneva, by developing the reformed worldview, which attempted to bring all aspects of Christian life, including life in the state and civil rule, under the Christian domain. In Ghana, the replication of the Christian, theocratic state idea reflected in what came to be known as *Salem* (Christian village) in PCG and *Kpodzi* (Christian community) in EPCG. The theocratic, Christian state movement has not been entirely successful. If the criticism, that this view attributes to Matthew's Jesus, a completely new, law independent of the Mosaic Law and its ethics can be sustained, the *analogia fidei* approach becomes unconvincing. However, the assumption that the Bible is a unit that teaches one general morality has the merit of taking the canon seriously as the word of God. Nonetheless, it can hardly be denied that sharp diversity is evident in the Bible itself despite the unity.<sup>33</sup> The division of biblical law into moral, civil and ceremonial laws, while helpful has also promoted further diversity in the understanding of the message of biblical law.

Ulrich Zwingli believed that observation of the civil law promoted peace (Blackburn 1968:125-126) but like Calvin, Zwingli rejected both the two-kingdom ethic of Luther and the isolationist approach of radical Anabaptists.<sup>34</sup> Yet Zwingli went further than Luther to propose a social ethic that distinguished external realms of application from internal realms, arguing that the SOM, was directed at the internal dimensions of the human person. Going by this approach, the

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<sup>33</sup> While most scholars accept the Bible to be unity, the fact that it is also affirmed as the Judeo-Christian scriptures, already demonstrates its diversity. Specifically, moreover, the New Testament betrays a unity in diversity that is apparent even within specific genres upon inspection. For instance, the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) exhibit both striking similarities and remarkable differences, though they all present the story of the life and ministry of Jesus in generally similar ways in the three gospels, and in even the fourth gospel, different though it.

<sup>34</sup> The Anabaptist view, known for being extremely radical and literalist is also referred to as the absolutist view of the text. Herrick summarizes twelve approaches to the SOM, including the absolutist (Anabaptist), Modification, Hyperbolic, General principles, Attitudes-not-Acts views. Herrick (1997:8) further mentions the Double standard, Two realms, Analogy of scripture, Interim ethic, Modern dispensationalist, Repentance, and Unconditional divine will approaches.

radical demands of the SOM whose observation relate to the public sphere, could be taken to be a difficult law which people struggle in vain to obey to the full. If so, then could the call to repentance (Matt. 4:17) that supplies the context to the Kingdom message of the SOM be an alternative to law obedience, though debatable (Herrick 1997:8)? The interpretation of the Law appears to be the central concern of the SOM, but there are also admonitions unto morality that those not under the Law (old or new) exhibit, which Matthew's Jesus judges to be commendable.<sup>35</sup> Apart from Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli along with other reformers, the Anabaptists also interpreted the SOM in a significant way.

The main Anabaptist view (radical reformation) was that the SOM is literally applicable in the civic sphere. For them, the SOM teaches both individuals and the communities of believers how to behave as disciples of Jesus. From this perspective, a negatively stated imperative such as "do not resist the evil doer" (Matt. 5:39) must be obeyed in full. Subsequently, if a follower of Jesus is assaulted, he or she is not expected to retaliate. Reading the SOM in this way, proposes that it teaches human relations, submission to governing authorities, personal growth and the value of law, to name only some of them.

Since Anabaptists claimed to be citizens of the new Kingdom of God, they withdrew from participation in civil government and rejected all notions of a state church. They did not only apply every element of the SOM to all Christians but they also used it as grounds to justify pacifism and their withdrawal from secular society. Russian Anabaptist giant, Leo Tolstoy is reported to have died trying to obey fully the imperative found in Matthew 5:39, "do not resist an evil doer" (Herrick

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<sup>35</sup> The golden rule ('In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the Law and the prophets', Matthew 7:12) buttresses this point. Explaining the love command, Matthew's Jesus pointed out that even tax collectors love those who love them (Matt. 5:46), therefore believers who love only those who love them, have not yet exceeded the morality of the heathen. Those who would be members of God's kingdom and be counted as children of the heavenly Father, need to go beyond this basic standard unto perfection (Matthew 5:48).

1997:7). With this attitude to the SOM, radical Anabaptists concluded that Jesus criticised the Law and substituted it with a higher moral standard.<sup>36</sup> This view has been profusely debated considering Matthew's Jesus' "ambivalent" attitude towards the Law (cf Matt. 5:17-18 with Matt. 15:1-8 & Matt. 17:26). Jesus' attitude towards the Mosaic Law has been discussed in conversations about the SOM since the rise of biblical criticism as well.

### **3.4. The rise of biblical criticism in the post reformation era**

The post-reformation era can be conceived of in different ways but in all its forms it was a long period of numerous developments in the field of biblical interpretation, not least the interpretations of the SOM. Biblical criticism as a method of scholarly Bible study, started with the historical-critical method. Its attendant tools, such as textual criticism, source criticism, form criticism and redaction criticism, give biblical criticism specificity. Each of these approaches to the study of the New Testament asks different questions about the gospels. Textual criticism investigates the authenticity of text manuscripts, in order to determine the oldest, which is then taken to be the original. Source criticism explores the various sources from which a biblical author took the materials that are reorganised in a biblical book. Applied to the gospels, source criticism is interested also in interrelationships among parallel accounts of the stories. Form criticism focuses on factors that influenced the oral tradition behind the gospels, prior to their composition.

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<sup>36</sup> A view attributed to Thomas Aquinas which John Calvin also taught is to the effect that when Jesus said he had come not to abolish the Law but to fulfil it (Matt. 5:17) he meant the moral law, not the ceremonial and civil laws (Helyer 2008:170). It is further argued that Jesus meant he had come to validate the Law by perfectly obeying it. However, many scholars object to this understanding with the explanation that Jesus made the statement with respect to his teaching in Matthew 5-7, not his actions (Carson 1995:142; Helyer 2008:170). These scholars contend that if indeed, Jesus intended to be understood as fulfilling the Law through his own perfect obedience, then the earthly church, by its interpretations of the gospel grossly misunderstood Jesus.



Redaction criticism examines mainly the role, skills and theological agenda of the biblical authors as final editors of the canonised books of the Bible.

The order of development was from textual criticism, to source criticism, to form criticism and then redaction criticism. Textual critics of the SOM frequently debated over which of the two sermons (SOM or SOP) is the older text. Source critics raised the question of how authentic the sources from which the evangelists composed their gospels were. The related questions concerned the written sources that the evangelists might have used (Keener 2009a:8-10). In Matthean studies, the investigation of Matthew's sources in relation to Mark and Luke attracted much research. Though, for many years, Matthew was taken to be the first gospel to be composed, most scholars now accept the theory of the priority of Mark, which suggests that Matthew and Luke both used Mark in composing their gospels. Sources which Matthew and Luke shared against Mark have been labelled Q, a hypothetical source whose content and nature scholars continue to discuss. The Q source is identified to mostly contain sayings and teachings of Jesus. Both the SOM and the SOP are based on Q, but there is no evidence of interdependence between the former and the latter.

Form critics consider that the gospel stories coalesced into different pericopes, because of their special uses in the early church, such as in the training of catechumen (e.g., Matthew's discourses, including the SOM), or the passion story for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Blomberg avers that Luke 1:1-4 appears to anticipate the interests of form, source and redaction criticism, judging from the sort of information the Evangelist provides in that text (Blomberg 2009:91).<sup>37</sup> Redaction critics emphasise the Evangelists' theological and editorial skills as authors, who made creative use of the traditions. Applied to the SOM, redaction criticism focuses on how

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<sup>37</sup> Luke notes that many had undertaken to set down orderly accounts (probably written sources) of the event that had been fulfilled, as handed down (oral tradition) by the eyewitnesses and that after carefully investigating these from the very first, it seemed good to him (Luke), to also produce a version (Lukan redaction), so that readers may know the truth of these matters in which they had been instructed.

Matthew edits and uses the Q source he shares with Luke, to present Jesus as the consummate Jewish Teacher-Messiah.

The debate over tradition and redaction in Matthew has been long standing and profuse (Bloomberg 2009:105ff). The SOM for instance, has been discussed extensively in this regard. Many scholars view the seeming continuity between Matt. 5:17-20 and the Mosaic Law as the result of a special Matthean redaction. The fact that this text is unique to Matthew even though he shares large portions of the SOM with Luke from the Q, has led some to believe that Matt. 5:17-20 is a clear example of a Matthean aside.

From this brief analysis, we see that historical criticism with its tools of textual, source, form and redaction-critical approaches, places lopsided emphasis on diachronic aspects of the SOM. Historical questions, at the expense of literary ones have dominated much of the interpretation of the SOM in the post reformation era as a result. In other words, critics have noted that instead of focusing on the message or significance of the canonised text, the historical critic often spent a great deal of energy investigating historical concerns such as the identity of the author or the audience or provenance or sources and form of the text and its transmission. Redaction critics of the period, however, with their emphasis on the theological skills of the Evangelists came closer to literary concerns than source and form critics. To this extent when literary criticism began to emerge, there was much to focus on.<sup>38</sup> Liberal, existentialist and dispensationalist approaches also emerged as methods of biblical criticism in the post reformation era.

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<sup>38</sup> Contemporary literary criticism started in the 1970s when scholars began to revive interest in the Bible as literature. Literary criticism means different things to different scholars of different periods. When used in contemporary biblical criticism however, literary/composition criticism refers to methods of biblical interpretation which focus only on the canonical text. This includes “genre criticism” (Klein, Blomberg & Hubbard 1993: 428). Some scholars prefer, under genre criticism to isolate and analyse the rhetoric of the author, that is, the unique way (s) in which the author has sought to persuade his audience, and they refer to this as rhetorical criticism (Klein, Blomberg & Hubbard 1993). Keener (2009a:14) refers to one aspect as “compositional criticism”, a response to the increasingly obvious weaknesses of redaction criticism. Compositional criticism examines various themes identifiable in the gospels and raises the question, what meaning can one get from a given gospel (Keener 2009a:14ff)? Deep questions such as the

### 3.4.1. Traditional liberal understanding of the SOM

Traditional liberal theologians generally viewed the SOM as a basis for the Social Gospel. The Social Gospel movement was a nineteenth century ideology. It cultivated an extreme, postmillennial hope, believing that the entire world would be Christianised (Blomberg 2009:285) through mission and discipleship. In other words, the Social Gospel movement hoped that God would use believers to establish Christian states across the world, where Christian laws, such as those Jesus taught in the SOM would regulate affairs of nations and individuals. Many liberalists believe that the Kingdom would come just before Jesus returns, then it would be possible to implement the ethics of the SOM fully as Jesus intended. This revolutionist response to the world proved elusive in the face of many 20<sup>th</sup> century conflicts and acts of terrorism (Blomberg

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meaning of “meaning”, implications, understanding, author, reader, interpreter and context, among other key concepts are involved. Further developments in the field of literary criticism introduced structuralism and reader-response criticism, which have examined texts from their “transcultural literary themes or to examine how current readers in various interpretive communities interpret texts” (Keener 2009a:15). Structuralism caused a paradigm shift in biblical studies because it shifted the locus of meaning from the author’s intent to what the reader can draw from the text. Deconstruction and reader-response criticism are considered as post-structuralist approaches to biblical interpretation, which attempt to deal with the weaknesses of structuralism. Structuralism emphasized synchronic aspects of the interpretation task in contrast to historical critical method’s diachronic emphasis, but complex analyses and technical vocabulary, among other concerns made many shy away from the structuralist approach to texts. For current modern methods, the way one reads a text determines to a large extent, what one “sees” or the meaning one derives from it. Each of these methods trumps the “layers of tradition behind the texts” (belonging to the historical critical reading of texts), to point to either the content of the text itself or the various ways in which the reading communities understand the text or develop interpretive contexts (Keener 2009a:15). The question whether texts or readers produce meaning, has been profusely explored and scholars continue to raise related questions. The various literary critical approaches, have, no doubt, affected the way the SOM has been interpreted over the last few centuries. For instance, while a source critic may be concerned with where Matthew took Jesus’ programmatic statement on the Law from, considering that the text is exclusively Matthean, literary critics might be interested in examining how effectively the text functions as the thesis statement of the SOM. Since the source critic would ask a different question from what the literary critic seeks to deal with, it is obvious that the study of the text from the two different perspectives will yield different outcomes.

2009:286). The liberalist, postmillennial theologians had hoped that their “transforming impact on the world” (Hagner 2012:753) would facilitate the return of Christ.

### **3.4.2. Existentialist reading of the SOM**

Existentialism was a sceptical, twentieth century movement, which considered the supernatural events of the gospels as myths, thereby explaining away all the gospel miracle stories in a naturalist way. The main proponent of this viewpoint was Rudolph Bultmann, who doubted the historical value of the gospel story. Existentialists taught that the SOM’s moral demands are a challenge to decision because they bring personal transformation to the individual who has accepted to live authentically (Bloomberg 2009:286). For them, the ethics of the SOM can, however, not be applicable to contemporary living in any absolute sense. Martin Dibelius (1935:249) argued against the ethics of the SOM being taken as normative in ancient or modern times. In his view, no one could obey the ethical demands of the Sermon because its requirements are absolute and radical. To him, worldly activities, are inconsistent with principles of the Kingdom, which the Sermon teaches. Therefore, human beings are not in the position to found the Kingdom. It is God’s own prerogative. The responsibilities of individuals, churches and communities, and nations are to pursue their respective tasks, obeying the SOM, relative to their own lives and circumstances.

Since, for the existentialist, truth is relative to the one whose seeks it, this understanding of the SOM amounts to obeying aspects of the Sermon which one conceives to be applicable to one’s own situation. This selective application of the teaching of the SOM does not amount to a consistent exegetical approach, therefore, it is unconvincing. The SOM, like any literary material betrays evidence of literary skills, consistent with the language and genre of the text. The genre and language already impose certain rules on the interpreter, such as making sure that legal

material is read as such, and hyperbole is recognised as figurative. Moreover, the evangelist's background as a Jew contributes to the specific meaning of the text. For example, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (cf Matt. 5:38) is a legal material gleaned from the OT Law to make a point. If it is treated literally in a new context without recourse to the original meaning, misunderstanding would result. Similarly, "turning the other cheek" (cf Matt. 5:39ff), would be misunderstood, unless the interpreter first investigates and takes into consideration the idiomatic sense intended by the author.

Many followers of Jesus, in the past made frantic efforts at different times to obey fully the demands of the SOM but failed. That there are aspects of the teaching of the SOM, which, taken alone and separately might lead to absurdity is not in dispute. For instance, in the SOM, Jesus told his audience, that when they give to the needy, they should not let their left hand know what their right hand is doing (Matt. 6:3). Jesus' audience are also not to resist an evil person (Matt. 5:39).

### **3.4.3. Johannes Weiss' and Albert Schweitzer' interim ethic**

Albert Schweitzer, who had been influenced by Weiss, argued that the ethics of the SOM is interim, in the sense that it provides a code of conduct for the short period between the time it was delivered and the imminent end of the world. Since in his estimation, the end did not come immediately, as Jesus purportedly declared, Schweitzer claimed that the radical demands of the ethics of the SOM are rooted in Jesus' mistaken expectation that the eschatological Kingdom would be established in his own life time. Both Weiss and Schweitzer were convinced that the ethics of the SOM has no continued validity for contemporary times, because the urgency with which Jesus proclaimed his message of the Kingdom, no longer exists. Thus, for them, the requirements of the SOM are impossible to attain. Indeed, the SOM, according to this view, has no contemporary relevance because the period for which it was intended is now long past.

However, Schweitzer's judgment was based on his unique reading of some gospel texts including Matt. 10:23, Mark 9:1 and Mark 13:30, which many scholars judge to be wrongly conceived.<sup>39</sup>

By the turn of the twentieth century scholars had rejected Weiss' and Schweitzer's scepticism. Helyer (2008:190) has argued that because ethics and eschatology are inextricably linked in the SOM, consigning the entire SOM to the category of eschatology is untenable. This explains, among other issues, why the interim ethic view was discarded and scholars began to seek more fruitful ways of finding the relevance of the SOM. Scholars affirm that the Kingdom which Jesus proclaimed was both 'already and not yet'. In other words, the Kingdom has the two aspects: it has come but it is yet to come. Therefore, the Kingdom remains a mystery even though it is also real in the lives of people. It is evident in the lives of those who have submitted their lives, will and action to the reign of God in their lives. This understanding of the nature of God's Kingdom as inaugurated by Jesus, subsequently shapes the interpretation of the ethics of the SOM. If so, then the lofty ethics of the SOM, rooted in the reinterpretation of the Law, may be taken as a standard to which Christians should aspire, as they seek the Kingdom of God and its righteousness (Matt. 6:33), while mindful that the kingdom is already present (Matt. 12:28) but not completely revealed. This means that believers in Jesus could continue to strive for full membership of the Kingdom, which still comes in an eschatological sense, when God's reign over all creation is fully established.

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<sup>39</sup> See for example Ladd (1980), Blomberg (2009:285-287) and Hagner (2012:68ff). If Schweitzer had given sufficient thought to Jesus' notion of the kingdom as both inaugurated and expected, already but still not yet, he would probably have come to a different conclusion.

### 3.4.5. Traditional dispensationalists' millennial kingdom view

Traditional dispensationalists argued that the SOM's ethics is intended to regulate life in the future millennial Kingdom. Scofield (1909:999-1000) demonstrates the dispensational reading of the SOM in the *Scofield Reference Bible* which he edited. Dividing history into dispensations in which God tested human obedience anew, dispensationalism, proposed a chronological outline for the understanding of the Bible. In that framework, God's dealings with humankind in the age past, the age present and the age to come, differ from one another. Scofield (1909:1000) argued that the SOM is God's divine constitution for the government of the whole world. In other words, the SOM is the constitution God will use to rule the world when the Lord fully establishes the promised eschatological Kingdom in the world.

Because of the dispensational idea, Scofield insisted that the SOM is strictly a Jewish document, because when God establishes the Kingdom, it will be a Jewish kingdom. The SOM is thus, pure Jewish law for Jewish people of the eschatological Kingdom. The obvious conclusion is that the SOM has no relevance now for Gentile Christians. If at all, it will apply to the Jewish Christian in the foreseeable future, when the Kingdom is fully established and operational. This is a difficult view to admit since it seeks to divide God's people into two major blocks—Jews and the Church—with different divine standards applying to them. There are many passages, especially in Isaiah, which the dispensationalists rely upon to advance their arguments (eg Isaiah 62), but other biblical texts such as Eph. 2, seem to contradict the dispensationalist view. Eph. 2 imports that God had intended to unite the whole of humanity through the mediating work of Christ. God fulfilled that purpose through the incarnation, therefore, in his incarnation, Christ became the “unifying bridge” that healed all barriers of division between the Jews and the Gentiles. The two groups of people have since then, become one united humanity. Subsequently, therefore, there is

now no basis for claiming that God's eschatological Kingdom will still uphold a previous hostility which has now been mended.

Moreover, to consign the whole teaching of the SOM to the eschatological realm because one identifies eschatological features in it, is problematical because it contradicts the meaning of the Kingdom as taught in the Gospels. Kingdom, according to the Gospels is both a present reality and an eschatological hope for the future. Besides, if we judge the entire application of the teaching of the SOM to belong to the future, we take responsibility away from today's worshipper. Jesus rather gave instructions and guidelines to his disciples and the eavesdropping crowds by which they might live in their contemporary lives to please God as their heavenly Father. Furthermore, we need to affirm the eschatological aspects of the SOM, while, at the same time recognising and acknowledging that a literal contemporary application of the ethics of the SOM could lead to the propagation of a works-based righteousness, which scripture rejects (Carson 1995:140ff). Granting the view that one of the strongest points of dispensationalism is the fact that God offered the Davidic Kingdom to biblical Israel which Israel rejected, and God, through Christ turned to the Gentiles (Herrick 1997:11), we can admit both Jews and Gentile into the scope of the Lord's eschatological judgment. If so, then the fact that the SOM admits of eschatological application does not free anyone from being subject to its contemporary relevance. As has been indicated earlier, approaches to the interpretation of biblical texts have been various in Christian history depending on different scholarly understandings of the nature of human communication. These investigations have persisted into the modern era, despite a general hermeneutical shift in biblical criticism since the 1970s.



### 3.5. Modern Era (c 1700-to the present)

The period from 1700 to the present, when Christianity has become globalised, is often termed the “modern” (McGrath 1994:76) era. Modernism is the culture that humankind created for itself since the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment ushered in the so-called age of reason and since then most people around the world have relied on human reason and science<sup>40</sup> to address life’s concerns. Since the modern era is a vast period, theological developments over the period are equally varied and diverse. Some scholars restrict the use of the term “modern” to the era before the rise of “literary critical methodologies” (Aune 2010:6).

Yet scholars also speak of the “new literary criticism”. It is helpful to mention that two great paradigm shifts have occurred in New Testament interpretation (Thiselton 1995:10). The first shift was in the eighteenth century and it ushered in the historical critical method, and the second, a twentieth century development introduced what has been called “a methodological pluralism” (Thiselton 1995:10). The latter shift currently persists in the modern era. The classification of the modern era in this study, from circa 1700 to the present, is for convenience because both historical criticism and methodological pluralist criticism are continually being mingled in NT interpretation. Gospel criticism, specifically Matthean interpretation has no doubt benefited from the new pluralist approaches. This is evident especially in narrative critical approaches to Matthew’s gospel. Currently, the two most prominent methods of gospel study are “literary and sociological in nature” (Kingsbury 1997:1). Sociological approaches have enabled

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<sup>40</sup> Science, in this context is a systematized body of knowledge, accumulated through careful observations, experiments and reasoning to address the problems of life.

scholars to investigate and better appreciate the social and cultural worlds that produced the gospels. Literarily, scholars are increasingly studying the gospels as story.

For Stanton (2002:36), story and significance are intertwined in the gospels. Paying attention to both story and significance makes room to take care of the concerns of the new literary approaches to the gospels, without ignoring the critical historical questions (associated with historical criticism) that help our understanding of the message the evangelists communicated to their first audiences. As Aune (2010) has observed about modern Matthean studies:

Some modern literary analysts shift the focus to the final form of the story, stressing matters such as plot, characters, and point of view, or, if they are interested in ancient forms, to genre. Historical questions have been given impetus by the discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts and the Dead Sea Scrolls, sources that offer rich comparative material for a variety of Matthean passages, especially Jesus' interpretation of the Torah. Recent social - historical, social-scientific, and feminist interpretations also open up many new avenues of interpretation. (Aune 2010: 296-297).

Reflecting on the diversity noted by Aune above, it is observed that scholars such as Kingsbury (1997<sup>41</sup> & 2002)<sup>42</sup>, Powell<sup>43</sup> (1997), Bauer<sup>44</sup> (1997) have applied the narrative critical and social scientific approaches to interpret Matthew's gospel. Specific tools<sup>45</sup> for this application are diverse.

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<sup>41</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury, 1997. The plot of Matthew's story, in J. D. Kingsbury (ed), *Gospel interpretation. Narrative & Social-Scientific approaches*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity: 16-26.

<sup>42</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury, 2002. The birth narrative of Matthew, in David E. Aune (ed.), *The gospel of Matthew in current study. Studies in memory of William G. Thompson, S. J.* Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans publishing company, pp. 154-165.

<sup>43</sup> Mark Allan Powell. 1997. Towards a narrative-critical understanding of Matthew, in Jack Dean Kingsbury (ed.), *Gospel interpretation. Narrative & Social-Scientific approaches*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity press international, pp. 1-15.

<sup>44</sup>David R. Bauer, 1997. The major characters of Matthew's story: Their function and their significance, in J. D. Kingsbury (ed.), *Gospel interpretation*, pp. 27-37.

Structuralism takes its name from its approach to text analyses, which involves examining entrenched "structures" integral to human cultures and language, which remain unalterable despite massive variety in superficial structures (Klein et al 1993:428). These entrenched (deep) structures are the "underlying functions, motives and interaction among the main characters and objects in a narrative" (Klein et al 1993: 428), including rather prominently deep conflicts which arise and how they are resolved as the story or narrative unfolds. The surface (superficial) structures are the features of the narrative such as plot (usually conflict and its resolution), characterization, theme, motifs, or if we are dealing with poetry, the meter, rhyme, and parallelism, among other features (Klein et al 1993: 428). Often the analyses of a given text achieves for structuralists universal characteristics that make the meaning of a text reside in the text itself and not influenced by external layers of tradition. This means, further, for the structuralist that the historical author "gave independence" to the text, therefore, through the tradition of reception (like reader-response criticism), the authorial intent does no longer determine the meaning of the text. The meaning resides in the reader's

Traditional historical, social-historical, and social-scientific critics look through the text as a window to the past [“the world behind the text”]; new literary critics and narrative critics shift to the text itself [“the world within the text”]; reader-response critics shift to what the reader [or hearer] brings to the text [the world “in front of the text”] (Aune 2010: 309). Various individual

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approach to text as it stands. The two most common methods of structuralist analyses of biblical texts are “actantial” analysis and “paradigmatic” analysis (Klein, Blomberg & Hubbard 1993:429). Six main actants are recognised in a complete plot of a story. Sometimes these characters or objects are assisted by “helpers”, thus, a story unfolds as a sender communicates an object to a receiver through a subject, who could be assisted by a helper or frustrated by an opponent. Paradigmatic analysis proceeds on the conviction that the central message of narrative moves in pairs of “opposites and the ways, if at all, in which they are resolved” (Klein et al 1993:431). Paradigmatic structuralists’ view of Mathew’s gospel, is one of a presentation of Jesus as a divine human being, who makes it possible for humankind to obey God. Growing realisation that structuralism itself can discuss only how a text communicates meaning, not what or why it does so, and the lack of a rigorous methodology led to the introduction of poststructuralism and one of the earliest attempts has been to wed poststructuralist concerns and phenomenology, primarily aligned with the work of Paul Ricoeur (Osborne 2006:474-5). A poststructuralist reading of the SOM calls attention to the need to blend historical analyses of the text with its contextual application in a fruitful manner. With poststructuralism, both the isolationist reading of a text, which is exclusively concerned with the history behind the text only, and the lonely application of the text to a contemporary situation without recourse to the role of the historical dimension in the text’s understanding, are both rejected. Reader-response criticism tries a blend of the two seemingly opposing approaches. Reader-response criticism works on the assumption that every reader independently creates meaning and that multiple meanings to the same text are possible because of different reader perspectives (Stein 2011:10). Osborne (2006:478) observes that reader-response criticism concentrates on “interpretive communities and reading strategies” rather than on the text or the layers of tradition behind it. However, both the text and the interpreter are united in such a way that in finding meaning it is impossible to separate the text from the reader. Applied to the SOM, reader-response criticism, as Osborne criticises, could go out of hand if we say that the meaning of the text depends on what a person is willing to ‘see’ in the text. In that case, any interpretation of the SOM is valid, provided it is relevant to the reader. If so, we cannot speak of the meaning of a text, only what it means to an individual interpreter. Osborne (2006:481) thinks that author, text and reader are connected as a trilogy to produce meaning. For him, a reader’s preunderstanding gives a standpoint to a text such as the SOM but the reader’s perspective can still be challenged or even changed by the text during the reading process.

There is no doubt that the issue of pre-understanding presents a formidable challenge to “objective” reading of the Bible like any other ancient text, “since there is no value-free interpretation” (Soon-Im Lee, 2002:2). The pre-understanding of a given interpreter, his/her socialisation and gender, among other features, influence his or her method of exegesis. While scholars are aware of, and admit this reality, many exegetes still claim to offer completely objective interpretations of the text, yet whether one’s pre-understanding functions as a help or hindrance to the discovery of meaning or not is a matter of massive debate that is yet to be determined. The fact, that scholars cannot agree on this, points to the need for humility and less confidence in putting forward research findings, as a challenge to the efforts of other researchers. Concerns for more accuracy in determining meaning have further led to deconstructionist approaches. Deconstruction is a subset of western epistemology which presents a perspective of discourse and communication. Its main proponent is Jacques Derrida (Klein et al 1993:441). Deconstruction seeks to demonstrate that human communication ultimately “undermines itself” (Klein et al 1993:441), so that inconsistencies cannot be eliminated. If so, then interpreters cannot claim that the meaning of a text is fixed. With this premise, deconstructionists seek to “deconstruct” both the original authorial intent and the history of exegetical meaning as interpreters of the text have proposed, to “construct” their own meaning of the text. Deconstruction is more radical than reader-response criticism (Klein et al 1993: 438), because deconstructionists tend to dismantle “a text by showing its inconsistencies and implicit agendas” (Hagner 2012:127). This often leads to a rending of the canon of scripture and doubts are created respecting the inerrancy of scripture.

factors – the reader’s family, place of origin, experiences, gender, race, ethnicity, and the like – affect how one interprets the text. Some would even say that a text lies dormant until a reader picks it up and reads it; thus, the reader “creates” meaning in the process of reading. The process of reading is thus, an “interaction” between reader and text (Aune 2010:310). In applying the various tools of modern biblical criticism, scholars often fall into one of three categories. First, there are those approaches that make historical questions the main concern in gospel interpretation. Second, there are others who make literary concerns the main point of investigation. Third, some scholars take a mediating role by attempting to blend historical concerns with literary apprehension in gospel interpretation.

It is impossible to ignore historical concerns in NT interpretation since both the text being investigated and its meaning are intertwined with the history of its composition and interpretation. Nor can we dispense with literary concerns when we seek to understand the meaning of a text. Both the historical meaning of the SOM for its original audience as Evangelist Matthew intended, and current literary understandings of the text based on research into the nature of human speeches are important concerns to engage the attention of modern interpreters of the SOM. In later modernism (from the twentieth century onwards) many scholars have adopted the Kingdom theology approach (Blomberg 2009:286) to the interpretation of the SOM as part of efforts to put the text in its proper context and at the same time find its contemporary relevance for Christian communities.

### **3.5.1. Blomberg and others’ views of the SOM as ideal ethics**

According to Blomberg (2009:285ff) there are many scholars of the twentieth and twenty-first century who see the SOM as ideal ethics or goal for an inaugurated eschatological period. This view of the SOM, Blomberg notes, derives from Ladd’s Kingdom theology idea (Blomberg

1992:73). According to Ladd (1959:79), “The Sermon on the Mount outlines conditions of entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven.” Matthew emphasises righteousness in a manner that is not comparable to Mark, referring to “righteousness” seven times in his gospel and five times in the SOM alone (Holladay 2017:225). It is evident that the notion of righteousness according to Matthew is concentrated in the SOM because righteousness is at the centre of piety in the new Kingdom that Jesus brings. Jesus describes the importance of this righteousness in Matt. 5:20 when he says, “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (NRSV). For Ladd, it is this verse that links the present and future dimensions of the Kingdom.

In examining the claims of dispensationalists on the meaning of the Kingdom of God, Ladd pointed out that the dispensationalists suggest that the SOM “is the law of the Kingdom of Heaven—the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament Theocratic Kingdom, interpreted by Christ, destined to be the governing code of the earthly Kingdom. The Kingdom of Heaven, rejected by Israel, would be realized at the reign of Christ when Israel would be converted and the Old Testament promises of the restoration of David's Kingdom literally fulfilled” (Ladd 1993:57). As Ladd poignantly noted, this meaning cannot apply to the present Kingdom, therefore it is inadequate.

The requirements for entry into the future Kingdom, for Ladd, is a present Kingdom-appropriate righteousness. The present Kingdom is inextricably linked with the future Kingdom. We have already pointed out how redaction critical reading of the SOM have raised concerns of the extent to which the SOM reflects Matthew's or Jesus' views on eschatology. It should be said, now in support of Ladd's and subsequent inaugurated eschatology views that present choices of worshippers of the heavenly Father, determine to a large extent their status in both the present and

the future Kingdom of heaven. Thus, while the SOM does teach ethics in the eschatological context deriving from Jesus' reinterpretation of the Law for a new community at the brink of breaking free from current institutional Judaism, the ethical teaching of the text also has implications for the membership of the eschatological Kingdom.

Moreover, while the SOM, no doubt teaches ethics, there are other ethical teachings of Jesus in Matthew's gospel, and the SOM itself addresses other concerns different from ethics. For instance, apart from the SOM's discipleship teaching, Matt 25:31-46 also teaches discipleship (Grindheim 2008:313-331), thereby linking together true discipleship according to the Jesus of Matthew's gospel, and participation in both the present and the future Kingdom of heaven. The SOM further teaches worship (including almsgiving, prayer and fasting) as well as righteousness. Righteousness is the preferred way of life (Holladay 2017:225) of members of this Kingdom (Matt. 6:33). In Matthew, discipleship and obedience are inseparable, therefore "actions are decisive indicators of true discipleship" (Holladay 2017:225). Doing and hearing go hand in hand in the Kingdom but it is not every act done in the name of Jesus that counts as genuine obedience to the Lord. It is possible to prophesy, cast out demons and perform miracles in Jesus' name without being genuinely obedient to him (Matt. 7:21-23). It is genuine Kingdom fruitfulness that shows that one is genuinely obedient to Jesus (Matt. 21:43), because good trees bear good fruit, and bad trees bear bad fruit (Matt. 7:15-20).

Understood this way, the type of discipleship the SOM teaches, with its demand for kingdom-appropriate righteousness, does not have to drive a wedge between the present and the future Kingdom. In other words, interpreters of Jesus' reinterpretation of the Law in the SOM, if they acknowledge the view of the SOM as ethics of an inaugurated eschatology, do not have to wrestle with the concern whether the ethics applies to the present Kingdom or the future Kingdom.

It applies to both, in the sense that the Kingdom has already broken in and will remain provisionally operational in a subtle, non-obtrusive sense until it is fully and physically consummated in the eschatological Kingdom at the end of the age. This said, there remains one last aspect of our survey of the exegetical tradition of the interpretation of the law in the SOM to be dealt with. This final section for chapter three analyses paradigms developed at the popular level to interpret the SOM.

### **3.5.2. Paradigms developed at popular levels to interpret the SOM**

By “paradigms developed at the popular level” is meant those readings of the SOM, which are especially interpretations of the Law and the Gospel based on the SOM, which claim to have ministerial and devotional applicability in church and daily Christian practice rather than claim to be academic engagements. At the popular level, too, there have been attempts made to associate the message of the SOM to principles for Kingdom living. Kingdom living here refers to living in accordance with the principles of God that Jesus teaches in the SOM.

The populist concern often determines people’s understanding of the relationship between the Law and the Gospel as well. What is the link between the ethics of the SOM and the Kingdom of heaven that Jesus inaugurated? Does the SOM teach Kingdom principles that focus on conversion of individual persons in a social sense, or does it teach a new moral and religious standard for Christlike living? Or, are the commands to be understood as qualifications for entry into the eschatological Kingdom? Or, do the radical demands of the SOM suggest that one cannot enter the Kingdom based on personal righteousness? All these questions have been raised during our survey of exegesis of the SOM in various Christian epochs. What remains to be mentioned is how some of these approaches have metamorphosed into popular paradigms for making sense of the ethics of the SOM.

One popular interpretation of Matt. 5:3-5 suggests that the lesson to be learnt from this text is that believers must dare to be different, to stand out (Robbins & Robbins 1991:71). In this sense the poor in spirit, the mourning and the meek stand out because they are different from the “normal” majority of people. They are children of God, and God will give them the earth as inheritance. The two authors address this interpretation specifically to the youth, who they seek to train in godliness by means of “object lessons” (using everyday objects to teach spiritual lessons). Another author, having the purpose of helping individual Christians to know when God is speaking to them, links Matt. 6:26 with general revelation. Yeboah (2017:28) argues that God makes divine language plain to human beings by taking examples from nature to teach people. Subsequently, when Jesus urged his SOM audience not to worry because they are worth more than birds of the air and lilies of the field, he was revealing his will to them through nature. This view is interesting, considering that the Bible itself is special, not general revelation to humankind. The attitude does show, however, how popular readings of the SOM draw paradigms for what their interpreters consider to be of concern to their audience.

On the Law’s fulfilment, Servant (2005:125), commenting at the popular level, claimed that what Jesus meant in Matt. 5:17-20 was that his disciples are required to keep the Law and the Prophets better than the scribes and the Pharisees. The scribes and the Pharisees, he noted, kept the letter of the Law. Jesus expects his followers to keep the spirit of the Law. In this regard, the righteousness which supersedes that of the scribes and the Pharisees, is the kind of piety that does not separate righteousness from practical holiness. This view, points somehow to works righteousness, because in the SOM, Jesus does not teach law-keeping as the basis for kingdom-appropriate righteousness.



To address the apparent tension that emerges from Servant's claim (if his view does not connect with Paul's Law of Christ), that Jesus expected his disciples to obey the commandments, one must interpret Jesus' allusion to the *lex talionis*, especially in Matt. 5:38-42. Are disciples permitted to take revenge? Are they to resort to pacifism as evidence of their greater righteousness? Servant (2005:130) claims that in addressing the question of revenge, Jesus only rejected personal revenge for minor breaches and that he did not reject formal proceedings in a law court, against people who try to take advantage of believers. For him, Jesus was asking his disciples to show greater tolerance for selfish people than the scribes and Pharisees could do. This view somewhat re-echoes the traditional Catholic interpretation of the SOM from medieval times.

When Jesus quoted provisions of the ancient laws and set them aside (Matt. 5:21-22), he made staggering claims about his authority (Ford 1991:134). For Ford (1991:55), both Jesus' radical new teaching and the events of his life fulfilled the old prophecies. On Matt. 5:44 & 48, Ford (1991:16) observed that "True faith and devotion according to Jesus, lies not merely in following certain prescribed rules, but in being Godlike." In Ford's opinion, Jesus meant to teach this when he told his audience to go beyond the practices of publicans to love and pray for their enemies and those who persecute them. In Matt. 6:13 it is claimed that Jesus offers protection to children of the Kingdom when he teaches them to pray to the heavenly Father, 'do not lead us to a time of trial' (Robbins & Robbins 1999:15). Similarly, in Matt. 6:19-34, according to Robbins & Robbins (1999:65), Jesus teaches them to be careful not to lose grip on their relationship with God when they begin to cling to other things that crowd people out.

Robbins & Robbins (1999) further note that Matt. 6:19-21 establishes the principle that material possessions have eternal significance because "investing in something bigger than your own toys and giving your life to something more lasting than earthly riches" (Robbins & Robbins

1999:108-109) is what the Bible regards as Christ-centred living. We have already noted that Robbins and Robbins wrote from the perspective of “object lessons” for Christian children. In a related teaching, Arn & Arn (1998:155) have interpreted Matt. 6:21 (your heart will be where your treasure is), to support regular tithing for those they refer to as “incorporated members” of the church. This, they consider to be one of the ways to advance the Kingdom of heaven through disciple-making. However, granting the claim that the SOM teaches discipleship, it is difficult to see how this text, read in context, teaches regular tithing. Jesus’ instruction on worship supplies the context for Matt. 6:21. He commented on three regular worship acts: almsgiving, prayer and fasting. He warns against hypocritical worship and advises the audience not to make a show of the spiritual disciplines of alms, prayer and fasts. He then advises the audience to store up their treasures in heaven rather than on earth because their hearts would focus on where their treasure is. Tithing is neither mentioned or implied in the text.

For Piper (Piper 2007:52), Matt. 6:21 is a warning against the lure of money, which he judges to be a grave danger to the believer’s singleness of purpose, as a person, called to seek first the Kingdom of heaven and its righteousness. In striving to enter the Kingdom through the narrow path, according to Piper, one must be careful how to relate to money because it is a mortal danger for those who would respond to the Lord’s invitation. Piper (Piper 2007:53) goes as far as to suggest that “striving to enter the kingdom of God through the narrow door is largely a battle about how we relate to money.” In similar vein, it has been argued that Mat. 6:24 shows that materialism is one of the greatest competitors with God for human allegiance. It “is the most direct channel for self-assertion, the establishment of security, the acquisition of a sense of superiority over other mortals, and thus the presumed removal of the curse of mortality...it has a power outliving the one who accumulated it and thus functions as “surrogate immortality” (Bloomberg 1992a:84).

Commenting on Matt. 6:22-23, John Piper (Piper 2007:53-54) admits the presence of enigma in the text and argues that Jesus used the “bad eye” to point to people’s attitudes towards money as the context suggests. For Piper, Jesus meant that one’s attitude towards money determines whether one walks in darkness or in light, and in effect, Jesus was urging the audience to “desire God, not money” (Piper 2007:54). This ties in quite well with the call to serve God, not Mammon as the Master of one’s life. This is a call that regulates the life of every member of the already inaugurated but still-to-be-fulfilled Kingdom of heaven.

Jesus teaches members of his Kingdom not to judge others so that they are not judged (Matt. 7:1-5). This, in the view of Robbins & Robbins (1999:85), is an instruction to the child of God to get rid of the critical spirit. The critical spirit, they argue, compares with watermelon seeds that get in the way of the one who desires to enjoy the fruit, because the judgmental spirit gets in the way of those who wish to enjoy the company or sweetness of spirit of the critic. The evidence of a critical spirit is like seeds in one’s personality (watermelon) which show in conversations when one belittles ideas that one did not initiate, or when one dominates a conversation and tries to win every argument. Judging others and trying to change them, then, is like trying, in the wrong ways, to get rid of their watermelon seeds, the authors explain (Robbins & Robbins 1999:85). This figurative interpretation obviously strengthens the object lesson for the child but does not necessarily address the controversial issues that the text has often instigated.

One popular interpretation of Matt. 7:7-11 suggests that prayer, “the locator of your most wanted list of hidden promises” (McKnight 2008:32), “is the key to heaven’s storage” (McKnight 2008:33), because it ensures one’s prosperity. In this reasoning, prayer is a unifier because it connects heaven with earth as a “power chain” (McKnight 2008:38). Judging Jesus’ imperatives (ask, seek, knock) to be a tool to connect heaven and earth in prayer is interesting. The

interpretation advertises a dramatic image to help readers envision the power of prayer. Robbins & Robbins (1999:44), note that in the next pericope after the golden rule, Jesus teaches in Matthew 7:15-20 the deceptiveness of outward appearances. This interpretation is given within the context of teaching the youth to carefully avoid wrong choices that could bring them down. The authors draw attention to the fact that the youth are often drawn to the deception of the false prophets, in many ways as Jesus warned. For the authors, the influences of the false prophets come through friends, music, movies, TV, family, magazines or sometimes through teachers (Robbins & Robbins 1999:45). The authors, however, do not comment on how the nature of a person's spiritual fruit shows whether the person's life is Godlike or un-Godlike.

### **3.6. Conclusion**

This survey has shown that the history of interpretation of the SOM, up to the turn of the modern period had applied the historical-critical method, with its tools of source-critical, form-critical and redaction critical questions. The central issue in all is the contemporary applicability of the ethics of the SOM. Many points of disagreements exist among scholars on this. The disagreement raises issues about people's ability or inability to fully obey the demands of the SOM to the neglect of other concerns of the Law, particularly its role in clarifying the relationship between the Law and the Gospel. The most common 21<sup>st</sup> century approach to the interpretation of the SOM is the kingdom theology view, attributed to the writings of George Ladd and forcefully propounded further by Blomberg and other scholars.

Does the SOM establish a clear link between the Law and the Gospel? If it does, can it be said that the SOM helps to clarify the relevance and applicability of the Law to contemporary Christians? Does viewing the SOM as reinterpreted, fulfilled law, the Law then (Mosaic) and the Law now (Gospel), shed light on the law-gospel dichotomy, since the Law accommodates the ethic

but the ethic does not necessarily embody the Law? In chapter four, the study will attempt to respond to these questions. The chapter will use Robbins' socio-rhetorical method to examine Jesus' reinterpretation of the law in the SOM and investigate how Jesus' meaning clarifies the relationship between the Law and the Gospel. Thus, in chapter four, the central chapter of this dissertation, we shall explore the interpretation of the Law as found in the SOM, using SRI, to show the many dimensions and angles from which the text could be studied.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A SOCIO-RHETORICAL INTERPRETATION OF MATTHEW'S SERMON ON THE MOUNT

#### 4.0. Introduction

The previous chapter gave the historical and literary background of the SOM and surveyed the history of exegesis of the text. This chapter attempts a socio-rhetorical interpretation (SRI) of the SOM. Robbins' (1996b:11) SRI integrates narrative criticism (narratology) and social-scientific criticism into "interpretive analytics", to explore meaning in a responsible and accountable way. SRI's unique advantage is that it blends textual and contextual analyses at the same time to investigate the meaning of an ancient text. SRI thus, brings out new, renewed and neglected aspects of a text's meaning. In SRI, an interpreter can examine texts from five different textures (perspectives) namely the inner texture, the intertexture, the social and cultural texture, the ideological texture, and the sacred texture.

Further developments in SRI now identify "rhetorolects" (Robbins 1996c) or different discourse patterns in ancient Mediterranean texts. Robbins (2014:188) identified six rhetorolects, namely, "wisdom, prophetic, apocalyptic, precreation, miracle and priestly"<sup>46</sup> rhetorolects. Rhetorolects create interaction between rhetography (rhetoric of mental pictures and images) and

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<sup>46</sup> This classification is based on the recognition that the various modes of discourse identified in ancient texts are different from one another. Wisdom discourse (rhetorolect) is different from prophetic rhetorolect, for instance. Wisdom rhetorolect interprets the physical world by blending social, cultural and other anthropological experiences with human beliefs about God. This is often done through family care and nurture by way of parental upbringing. Prophetic rhetorolect blends the activities of an earthly political kingdom (first space) with God's sovereign rule (second space) reconciled with the belief that God communicates with God's people through the words and actions of prophets to confront religious and political leaders who, driven by greed, selfishness and a craving for power, rather than the justice and righteousness of God, make choices and take decisions that violate God's will for the people they lead.

rhetology (rhetoric of word-based argumentation) to facilitate understanding between rhetorolects and their blending of concepts. Conceptual blending of rhetorolects shows that each rhetorolect contains various concepts that merge with others to elucidate contextual meaning of ancient Mediterranean texts. Using SRI to interpret the Law in the SOM exhibits each of the five textures of SRI, with its subdivisions, showing that a text can be studied from different angles. The approach ensures a more comprehensive investigation of the text than when it is studied from a single or a few angles only. It also proves challenging because it involves the analyses of huge data.

SRI, thus, addresses the worlds of the text, author and readers.<sup>47</sup> In the world of first century Palestine which produced the NT and its audience, social characteristics such as honour and shame, patronage and clientele, challenge and riposte, wealth and poverty, purity and pollution, dominated social intercourse among the rich and the poor.<sup>48</sup> The controversies that these values and social systems evoked, mostly centred around the Mosaic Law and its interpretation, since the Law was the main identity marker that determined most of the other issues associated with the shaping of

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<sup>47</sup> In Culpepper's view, Robbins' inner texture will achieve its purpose more fully if its "territory" is enlarged to cover "the world within the text" (Culpepper 1998:3) which, embodies the "narrator, plot, character, settings and the other aspects of narrative discourse" (Culpepper, 1998:3). Regarding intertexture, Culpepper observed, the interpreter engages the text as "work" of an author, which means that he or she examines scripture between the author and the text, so that the reader as such is not involved (Culpepper, 1998:3). Culpepper (1998:3) went as far as to suggest that it is restrictive to exclude the reader who may be privy to relevant reading traditions or later texts and historical and cultural features, that were unknown to the author. Besides, it is relevant to include genre analyses in the composition and transmission of texts because it is foundational to a text's inner texture. The social and cultural texture borrows insights from anthropology and sociology. Ideological texture assumes that ideology controls texts, layers of tradition, intellectual discourse and individual and group views. Sacred (theological) texture investigates how theologies are created out of the text.

<sup>48</sup> It was a world and culture that featured about 90% poor and about 3% very rich people with a perception of limited material resources that one needed to scramble for in competition with others, to better one's lot economically and socially.<sup>48</sup> Many people in first century Palestine lived on the fringes of society and struggled, therefore to live comfortably.

identity among the Jews. Jesus became part of the controversy because of the Gospels' portrayal of his unique interpretation of the Law.

#### **4.1. Jesus and the Law (and the Prophets)**

The main reason why the SOM is a theological puzzle is its connection with the Mosaic Law and its application. The SOM is part of a story and if its context is ignored, misunderstanding results (Guelich 1999:54). Allison (1999:9) hits the nail right on the head when he noted that if the context of the SOM is taken seriously, “the informed reader of the Sermon will not make any dichotomy between task and gift, law and grace, demand and benefit.” The SOM is a discourse (speech) which exhibits many aspects of SRI as will be discussed presently. Ernst Baasland's (2015:605ff) monumental work on the SOM proposes the use of parabolic and metaphorical lenses to interpret the SOM, arguing that SOM research largely ignores parables in the speech while research on parables, in most cases neglects the SOM. He accounts for the rhetorical structure of the SOM mainly from the perspective of Greek rhetoric. However, considering that both Jesus and the author of Matthew's gospel were Jews, it is difficult to determine the extent to which Greek rhetoric might have influenced the SOM. Like Keener (2009a:65), Baasland (2015:32) has observed that the SOM is deliberative rhetoric. For Keener, this is because the SOM occurs in a public assembly, debates the Law, appeals to the self-interests of the audience and encourages them to adopt kingdom-appropriate righteousness as a better course of action than what the scribes and Pharisees taught and practiced. The Law proposes a desired kind of inner-Israelite social intercourse (relationships and interrelationships) consistent with, and honouring to the character and attributes of Israel's covenant God.

The significance of the SOM for the overall argument of the Gospel of Matthew seems clear upon inspection of the author's rhetorical structure. Betz (1995:42) has argued that the



SOM is a presynoptic material which Matthew adopted without any amendment and that the material goes back to early Jewish sources. He avers further that in the SOM Jesus adopted an attitude towards the Torah that united early Christians. In this regard, as Betz (1995:217) notes further, Jesus' comments on the Law in Matt. 5:17-20 did not set him in competition with the Mosaic Law. In this regard, what Jesus did with the Law was in keeping with Jewish aspirations.

By clarifying the meanings of key cultural terms such as praise, honour and glory, Jerome Neyrey (1998) makes the point that examining the social, historical and cultural contexts of the SOM reveals that the location of the SOM within an honour and shame culture, further sheds light on the nature of Jesus' arguments in the SOM. Once the argument of Jesus is clarified, we are able to explore further how his Kingdom message in the SOM connects with the Mosaic Law and its application in the Jewish context of Jesus' day, and for that matter its appropriation in a contemporary context.

The beatitudes introduce the SOM (Matt. 5:2-12). Matthew 5:17-20 presents Jesus' programmatic statement about his mission as the reason for the incarnation. Jesus said he had come to fulfil the Law (*τὸν νόμον*) and the prophets (*ἢ τοὺς προφήτας*) (Matt. 5:17<sup>49</sup>). Moreover, he notes that the Law is still valid (v. 18), therefore anyone who violates the Law and teaches others to do so will be least in the Kingdom. Those who keep and teach it will be great in the Kingdom (v. 19). Ultimately, only kingdom-appropriate righteousness qualifies a person to enter the Kingdom (v. 20). The great importance of the Law as a major identity marker was known to the Jewish

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<sup>49</sup> The expression "the Law and the Prophets" is used here to refer to the Hebrew Bible as is evident also in the gospel of Luke (cf Luke 24:44), where the author mentions the "the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (NRSV). The three divisions correspond with the Law, the Prophets and the Writings respectively. However, the examples Jesus cites from the Law (Matt. 5:21-48) to explain his point, show that his focus was on the Law, the first division of the Hebrew Bible. He reinterprets the Law to explain the nature of kingdom-appropriate righteousness. Jesus' reinterpretation of the Law would guide the new messianic community of which his followers are the members.

community<sup>50</sup>, thus, Jesus' reinterpretation of the Law shows that there is theological, historical and ethical continuity between the Mosaic Law and its application within his new Kingdom (Charles 2002:6). His reinterpretation gives principles for living in the present Kingdom, while preparing for the eschatological Kingdom (Ladd 1993:57). Understood this way, the fulfilment of the Law is not limited to Jesus' teaching and action alone per se, but to his entire project of inaugurating the Kingdom and announcing, in the present, the future consummation of the Law's purpose in the eschatological Kingdom as love (cf I Cor. 13: 8-13), as God had long planned to accomplish.

## 4.2. SRI of Matthew 5

Not much scholarly consensus exists on the rhetorical structure of the SOM, and for that matter the gospel of Matthew but most scholars agree that the arrangement of the material in the gospel has clear rhetorical value, even if scholars cannot agree on the nature of the structure. Any proposed outline of Matthew's gospel is "imposed by the interpreter" (France 2007:2) since the author does not give any comprehensive structure by which the text should be interpreted. The SOM is the first of five major discourses in Matthew's gospel. It is an elaboration on Jesus' call on his audience to repentance in Matt. 4:17 (Allison 1999:9 & 82). Many of the themes in the

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<sup>50</sup> Choel (2004:26) has noted Jesus' baptism and inclusive ministry as identity markers connected to the Law. Jesus' baptism commissioned him as a minister of inclusiveness to redefine purity and pollution and to reconfigure Israelite community. Thus, Jesus addressed his ministry to everyone, including social and religious outcasts. The conflict between him and the other leaders, then, was based on his attitude towards, and interpretation of the Law, to which his opponents took offense. There were frequent, and sometimes violent debates over the Mosaic Law as object of Jewish identity (Crossley 2010:116). Jesus' teaching points to the importance of this debate. Specifically, Jesus argues with them over the traditions of the elders (Matt. 15:1-20), over Sabbath-keeping/observation (Matt. 12:1-8), over divorce (Matt. 19:1-9), over payment of taxes (Matt. 22:15-22) and over which commandment is the greatest (Matt. 22:34-40). In the end, Jesus is the victor as his resurrection shows, though at his crucifixion victory appeared to have gone to his opponents. Matthew 5:17 shows that Jesus was aware of the prevailing Jewish perceptions about his mission that he had come to destroy the Law (Stanton 1992:300). Mindful that this concern could make his audience misunderstand him, Jesus makes it clear that he did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfil it.

SOM are further elaborated in other parts of the gospel (e.g. cf 5:31-23 & 19:3-9), therefore keeping the context in mind facilitates good understanding of the SOM in Matt. 5-7. A narrative session follows in chapters 8 & 9 and then the discourse on mission in chapter 10. Chapters 11 & 12 form another narrative session. Chapter 13 is the next discourse, which presents seven parables on the Kingdom.

The next four chapters (14, 15, 16 and 17) form another narrative session interspersed with teaching sessions. The next discourse is on relationships in the Kingdom (chapter 18). The next narrative session covers chapters 19-22 and the final discourse on the end times follows in 23-25. The final three chapters bring the gospel to a close in chapter 28. The structure described above forms a chiasmic pattern (see Bacon 1930, Kingsbury 1987, Bauer 1988, France 1989 etc) with discourse alternating with narrative throughout the gospel. Yet, Leon Morris (1992:7) was right to caution interpreters that to see Jesus' SOM speech merely in terms of five discourses is probably "a trifle too confident". It is enough to admit that the gospel is not haphazardly ordered but carefully arranged for rhetorical effect.

Applying SRI to the SOM, highlights various dimensions of the text<sup>51</sup> but this study of the SOM cannot discuss the entire range of SRI textures.<sup>52</sup> To examine in detail, all the textures of SRI in the SOM in a single study with limited time (such as the present dissertation) is too formidable a task. Therefore, a survey of the inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, ideological texture and sacred texture is given in Matthew chapter five. Moreover, conceptual blending of prophetic, apocalyptic, wisdom and precreation rhetorolects have been applied to the interpretation of the Law in Matthew chapter five. This approach has the advantage of concentrating the study on the specific portrayal of the Law in the SOM.

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<sup>51</sup> Literature on the interpretation of the SOM is vast and overwhelming. The massive amount of literature shows how scholars have recognised diverse hermeneutical possibilities upon their reading of the text. Often, the method of interpretation determines the logic of the conclusions reached (Oei 2012: xii). Oei (2012) examines the nature and scope of the “moral demands” of the antitheses, which for him, are at the centre of the SOM and concludes that the antitheses are binding moral lessons with universal, timeless applicability for individuals, not states. He acknowledges that some scholars think the antitheses apply to societies as well (Oei 2012: xii).

<sup>52</sup> Additional textures have been identified but their exhibition depends on the nature of the text being investigated. For instance, narrational texture highlights and examines the storyline of a textual unit. In examining this texture attention is often given to the voices through which the text communicates. The texture and its voices presuppose that an implied narrator of the text carries along or brings into the story various characters into different “scenes” of the text (narrative) at different times. In this regard, whatever the author of the text desires to communicate about characters or themes, the interpreter follows through with. The narrator, therefore, becomes the one who guides an interpreter to locate the narrational boundaries of the beginning, middle and end of a unit (Robbins 1994). Argumentative texture examines the nature of argument in a unit. Rhetorical argumentation rests upon (social) logical reasoning. Logical arguments tend to have unstated premises in the discourse which need to be discovered and articulated. A discovered and articulated argument reveals “aspects of the argumentative texture in its social and cultural environment that the narrator may never state” (Robbins 1996a: 59). Rhetorical arguments are either deductive or inductive, since human beings reason either deductively or inductively (Copi & Cohen 2009: 26-27). Deductive arguments proceed from a premise to a conclusion, and the truthfulness of the premise (s) determine (s) the truthfulness of the conclusion. Therefore, the conclusion of a deductive argument cannot be false when the premise (s) is/are true. If the premises support the conclusion fully then the argument is valid. An inductive argument claims its conclusion to be true from the premises based on probability. In other words, the conclusion of an inductive argument can still be false even if all the premises are true. So, the premises of an inductive argument support the conclusion only in a probable manner, not decisively or totally (Copi & Cohen 2009:28). Apart from argumentative texture, there is also the sensory-aesthetic texture. Sensory-aesthetic texture shows how the language of the text arouses the human senses and emotion, such as smell, touch, sound and thought patterns (Robbins 1996a:66). The critical question in this texture, therefore, is ‘how does the Bible text evoke the reader’s senses and thought patterns?’ Subsequently, this texture focuses on how a given text embodies the reader’s imagination, reason, humour, or intuition etc. Different texts evoke and embody different emotions and thoughts. In investigating these, the interpreter needs to focus on the literary genre and the form of the literary unit to succeed. Sensory-aesthetic texture also locates and classifies portions of a text that refer to human body elements such as the ears, eyes, hands, feet, and mind (Robbins 1996a:89).

### 4.2.1. Inner texture of Matthew 5

Inner texture includes how a text employs language to communicate its message to the reader, therefore, it “refers to phenomena like repetition, progression, opening, closure, analogies, giving reasons, disagreeing, contradicting, praising, blaming, accusing, commanding, and the like” (Robbins 1995:131). This embodies linguistic patterns, voices, movements, argumentations, and structural elements of a text; the specific ways it persuades its audiences, and the ways its language evokes feelings, emotions, or senses that are in various parts of the body. SRI recognizes repetitive, progressive, narrational, opening-middle-closing, argumentative and sensory-aesthetic inner textures. Inner texture enables interpreters to get inside the text to see what is happening in it.

#### 4.2.1.1. Repetitive and progressive inner texture of Matt. 5:3-12

The expression *μακάριοι οἱ ... ὅτι* (v.3) opens the SOM and is repeated in verse 4-11 with the same formula. The beatitudes, as they are popularly referred to, introduce the discussion of the Mosaic Law in the SOM. Since the Mosaic Law is God’s, unilateral, gracious gift, God’s children are blessed, fortunate and happy (*μακάριος*) if they obey the Law. *Μακάριος* is repeated probably to show a progression from the pronouncement of Kingdom in Matt. 4:17 to the nature of its consummation in Matt. 25:37. Thus, repeated use of *μακάριος* is a strategy to make the message attractive and easy to memorize. The Kingdom, whose message the interpretation of the Law is, in the SOM context, is characterised by changing fortunes from human perspective, but the resurrection of God’s Son proves that at the end of things, God has the final word.

The table below shows Matthew’s use of νόμος, πληρώω and δικαιοσύνη in his gospel to communicate with force, the nature of Jesus’s Kingdom message and how it relates to the Mosaic Law.

### Topical progression νόμος, πληρώω and δικαιοσύνη

νόμος	πληρώω	δικαιοσύνη
5:17 νόμον	1:22 πληρωθῆ	3:15 δικαιοσύνην
5:18 νόμου	2.15 ἐνεπαίχθη	5:6 δικαιοσύνην
7:12 νόμος	2.17 ἐπληρώθη	5:10 δικαιοσύνης
11:13 νόμος	2.23; πληρωθῆ	5:20 δικαιοσύνη
12:4 μόνοις	3:15 πληρῶσαι	5:45 δικαίους
12:5 νόμω	4.14 πληρωθῆ	5:45 ἀδίκους
22:35 νομικός	5:17 πληρῶσαι	6:1 δικαιοσύνην
22:26 νόμω	8.17 πληρωθῆ	6:33 δικαιοσύνην
22:40 νόμος	12.17 πληρωθῆ	9:13 δικαίους
23:23 νόμου	13:14 ἀναπληροῦται	10:41 δίκαιον, δικαίου (2x)
24:12 ἀνομίαν	13.35 πληρωθῆ	13:17 δίκαιοι,
	21.4 πληρωθῆ	13: 43 δίκαιοι
	26:54 πληρωθῶσιν	13: 49 δικαίων
	26:56 πληρωθῶσιν	21:32 δικαιοσύνης
	27.9 ἐπληρώθη	25:37 δίκαιοι
		25: 46 δίκαιοι

#### 4.2.2. Use of νόμος and its cognates

Evangelist Matthew uses νόμος and its cognates 11 times, from Matt. 5:17 to 24:12. Starting with Jesus' programmatic statement in Matt. 5:17 that he had come to fulfil *τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφῆτας*, Jesus emphasizes in Matt. 5:18 the continued validity of the Law. He asserts in Matt. 7:12 that the

Golden Rule (love rule) is the summary of *ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται*. In Matt. 11:13 Jesus responded to John's inquiry, saying that all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and thereby Jesus showed that there has since been a transition. In Matt. 12:4-5, Jesus defended his disciples, who the Pharisees had accused of breaking the Sabbath law. He entered Jerusalem in his final week and cleansed the temple, thereby provoking the wrath of the authorities. In response to a scribe's question about the first and the greatest commandment of the Law, he said *ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται* rest entirely on love. After he had silenced the antagonists, Jesus chastised the Pharisees for neglecting justice, mercy and faith (weightier matters) of the Law (Matt. 23:23) and holding onto trivialities. The narrative progression of *νόμος* ends at Matt. 24:12 where Jesus predicts that lawlessness (*τὴν ἀνομίαν*) will increase when God's *τέλος* approaches, and many people will lose their love.

Elsewhere in the gospel, Matthew uses *ἔξεστιν* (lawful) in 11:13, 12:2, 19:3, 22:17 and 27:6; and then he uses *ἔξωθεν* (lawlessness) in 23:28 to depict further disagreements over the Law. Three points are noteworthy from Matthew's use of *νόμος* and its cognates. First, with the coming of Jesus, a new era had dawn for the Law. Second, Jesus' reinterpretation fills the Law with its divine meaning. Third, love is the most consistent attitude that validates the relevance of the Law for the Kingdom community. From *νόμος* we move to the use of *πληρόω* and its cognates.

#### **4.2.3. Use of *πληρόω* and its cognates**

As the table above reveals, Matthew uses *πληρόω* (to fulfil) 10 times. This way he indicates that Jesus is the promised Jewish Messiah. For Matthew, the birth story (Matt. 1:22), the escape to, and return from Egypt (Matt. 2:15, 17, 23), the baptism (Matt. 3:15) and the ministry (Matt. 4:14), including the explanation of the Law (Matt. 5:17), healing (Matt. 8:17), attitude towards the

Sabbath (Matt. 12:17), parables of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:14, 35), and triumphant entry (Matt. 21:4), as well as the betrayal and arrest of Jesus (Matt. 26: 54, 56; 27: 9) progressively show that the Messiah had come to fulfil God's prophecy to Israel. The Law cannot be fulfilled apart from the reign of God's righteousness; therefore, we turn next to use of *δικαιοσύνη* (righteousness) and its cognates in the gospel.

#### 4.2.4. Matthew's use of *δικαιοσύνη* and its cognates

In Matt. 3:15, Jesus' baptism is to fulfil *πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην* (all righteousness). His ministry will fill those who hunger and thirst (Matt. 5:6) for *δικαιοσύνη*. Unless one possesses kingdom-appropriate *δικαιοσύνη*, one cannot enter his Kingdom (Matt. 5:20), because the Father who sent him is so righteous that he allows both the *δικαίους* (Matt. 5:45) and the *ἀδίκους* (Matt. 5:45) to enjoy his gifts. To unite with the Father, those who desire kingdom-appropriate *δικαιοσύνη* should not practice their piety to be seen by others (Matt. 6:1), and rather than being greedy and anxious about material things, they ought to trust God, and seek first his Kingdom and its *δικαιοσύνη* (Matt. 6:33), and then all their other needs will be supplied. Yet, Jesus' ministry is not for the *δικαίους* but sinners (Matt. 9:13). Jesus will make the *ἀδίκους* (Matt. 5:45) *δίκαιον* (Matt. 10:41) and deserving of *μισθὸν δίκαιον* (Matt. 10:41), if they become his credible disciples. They are privileged to be taught the mystery of the Kingdom, something even some *προφηῆται καὶ δίκαιοι* were not privy to (Matt. 13:17). At the end of the age, *τῶν δικαίων* (Matt. 13:49) will reflect the Father's glory in the eschatological Kingdom. Jesus noted as well that John's ministry prefigured Kingdom righteousness because he came *ἐν ὁδοῦ δικαιοσύνης* (Matt. 21:32) and prostitutes and tax collected believed, and benefited from his ministry as sinners. Finally, when the world is judged, it is *οἱ δίκαιοι* (Matt. 25:37, 46) alone who will inherit the eschatological Kingdom.



The inner texture of Matt. 5:17-20 exhibits a movement of the key terms *νόμος*, *πληρώω* and *δικαιοσύνη*, to show that the disputations over the meaning of the Law caused the intense conflict between Jesus and the Jewish religious authorities from the start to finish. Since Matthew 5:21-48 develops the thesis of Matthew 5:17-20, the study next explores the thematic progression of the topics of the antitheses from anger to perfection, to show how these selected topics connect the Law, its fulfilment and the issue of righteousness. The climax is kingdom-appropriate righteousness (Matt. 5:18-20) which is attained when disciples become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect (5:48). We will do this, first using the opening-middle-closing (OMC) texture because it intensifies the evangelist's argument following the repetition, progression and narration that preceded the strategy of the OMC.

### **4.3. Opening-middle-closing (OMC) texture**

Being a discourse (speech) Matthew's SOM exhibits many SRI features that cannot be fully explored in a limited study such as this. As a unit, however the SOM opens with the beatitudes and the injunction to be salt and light of the world. Jesus' statement on, and explanation of the Law in Matt. 5:17-48 and Matt. 6:1-7:23 constitute the middle. The closing is the injunction to act upon Jesus' teaching (Matt. 7:24-29). Thus, OMC of the SOM shows that disciples with the inner disposition (Matt. 5:3-12) to kingdom-appropriate righteousness (Matt. 5:20), receive strength from the Father in heaven through almsgiving, fasting and prayer to imitate the Father's perfection (Matt. 6:1ff) because the Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48), so that they can practice forgiveness to the point of forgiving their enemies and those who persecute them (Matt. 5:43-47; 6:14), because they obey and act upon Jesus' teaching (Matt. 7:24-27). Each chapter and pericope of the SOM further displays OMC but these will be discussed under the SRI of the individual chapters below. Since

argumentative texture normally follows progression, repetition, narration and OMC, the study next applies the argumentative texture to the antitheses.

#### **4.4. Argumentative texture of Matt. 5:21-48**

The argumentative texture of Matt. 5:21-48 displays six theses and antitheses that constitute six selected topical discussions of the Law, as it ought to operate, from Jesus' perspective, in human relationships in the Kingdom. This texture uses the thesis-antithesis-synthesis type of argument to validate the Law, reinterpreted as the message of the new Kingdom. In the unit, Jesus states his premises, supports them with arguments from analogy and example, and gives conclusions. If the ancients were told not to commit murder or else they will be judged (Matt. 5:21), Jesus tells his audience that being angry with, and insulting to others, or failing to reconcile with someone, equally deserves judgment (Matt. 5:22-26). If the ancients were commanded not to commit adultery (Matt. 5:27), Jesus says lust is idolatrous (Matt. 5:28-30) as well. If the people of old were commanded to give a bill of divorcement to their wives before sending them away (Matt. 5:31), Jesus says whoever divorces his wife except for sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery (Matt. 5:32).

The ancients were told not to swear falsely but to redeem their vows. Jesus teaches people to be truthful always to eliminate the need for swearing (Matt. 5:34-37). The ancients were told to retaliate commensurately (Matt. 5:38) but Jesus asks that the cycle of violence be broken in love (Matt. 5:39-42). If the ancients have learnt to love those who love them and hate those who hate them (Matt. 43), Jesus encourages his audience to love their enemies and pray for them (Matt. 5:44-48). Further beyond the SOM the injunction persists in both his teaching and conduct of ministry. This brief analysis shows that in each pericope there is a thorny theme; Jesus states the

popular thesis associated with the theme, and then counters the logic with his antithesis. In conclusion, he synthesises the two rival claims, thereby stating his authoritative declaration on the theme. Sensory-aesthetic texture is the last leg of the inner texture analysis of SRI. It is applied next to the antitheses.

#### **4.5. Sensory-aesthetic texture of Matt. 5:21-48**

This texture explores a range of senses that tend to evoke varied emotions in readers. Matt. 5:27-30 refers to the human heart as an object of lust (v. 28), and the eye as the possible cause of sin (v. 29). The parallelism connecting “one of your members” (v. 29b) and “your whole body” (v. 29b), also evokes unique human emotions in its “commissive” language use. The impression is created that the right hand, for instance, is a possible source of sin that might lead a person to hell (v. 30). In the next pericope (Matt. 5:33-37), casuistry is discouraged as one is warned not to swear by the head (v. 36). The pericope on *lex talionis* mentions the eye, the tooth, the right cheek, coat and cloak, to help check “members” of the human body so as to avoid retaliation. In the final pericope (Matt. 5:43-48), love and hate for other human beings are markers of righteousness or unrighteousness respectively. In effect, the sensory-aesthetic texture of Matt. 5:21-48, underscores the need for believers in Jesus to immerse themselves totally in the practice of righteousness with all their human faculties, including their senses. With this brief discussion of the sensory-aesthetic texture, we turn next to intertexture analyses of the Law in the SOM. Intertexture follows inner texture logically, as one moves from examination of features within the text, to the discussion of phenomena taken from outside the text, to shape the current text.

#### 4.6. Intertexture of Matt. 5:21-48

Intertexture demonstrates how a text represents, refers to and uses “phenomena in the ‘world’ outside the text, including a text’s citations, allusions and reconfigurations of specific texts, events, language, objects, institutions and other specific extra-textual contexts with which the text interacts” (Gowler 2010:195). It is “a rewriting of other texts” (Robbins 1996a:30). Its focus is on the author as the producer of the text rather than the reader as the one who constructs the meaning of the text. The interpreter examines the process of text production by comparing the verbal signs of text with verbal signs of other texts (Robbins 1996a:32). Intertexture analysis, therefore, “appropriates and refigures source, form and redaction criticism in biblical studies. Source and redaction criticism become environments for investigation of the dialogue between structures, codes and genres in a particular configuration” (Robbins 1996a:32).

SRI recognizes four types of intertexture: oral-scribal, cultural, social and historical intertexture (Robbins 1996a:96). The NT’s use of the OT is an intertexture phenomenon because the Bible is a merger of Jewish and Christian scriptures (see Combrink 1996:193-200). If other cultures are embodied, cultural intertexture is present. When the text under discussion evokes social intercourse, roles, codes and institutions, then social intertexture is present. Historical intertexture displays historical events and places (Robbins 1996b:40ff). Oral scribal intertexture explores recitation, recontextualization and reconfiguration (Robbins 1996a:102). The examination of the oral-scribal intertexture of the Law in the SOM, will start with Matt. 5:1-2, because the author introduces Jesus, in that text as preparing to deliver the SOM. Here the study emphasises oral-scribal and cultural intertextures without neglecting social and historical intertextures. Social intertexture and historical intertexture are discussed more directly under social

and cultural intertexture in 4.7 below. However, cultural intertexture of Matt. 5:17-30 will also be discussed under section 4.6.3.

#### **4.6.1. Oral-scribal intertexture of Matt. 5:1-2**

Recitation, recontextualization and reconfiguration are the strategies that characterise oral-scribal intertexture. In recitation, speech or narrative or both is presented from oral or written tradition in identical or different words from the source from which it is taken (Robbins 1996a:103). In recontextualization, wording from the Bible is presented in a new context without making specific reference to a written text from which it is taken (Robbins 1996a:106). Recontextualization may range from direct word-for word quotes, to creative allusions to a biblical text, to address a new audience. Reconfiguration is the restructuring of antecedent tradition (Robbins 1996a:107) for a new context, and often customary imagery and stock terminology (Stein 2011:141) are used. Both the author and the audience are familiar with such imagery and terminology.

Intertexture of Matt. 5:1-2 shows how Jesus climbed a mountain (Matt. 5:1), a locus of revelation to deliver the SOM. He sat down (like a rabbi), his disciples came to him (probably sat at his feet) and he “opened his mouth” (Matt. 5:2) and taught authoritatively. Here, Matthew reconfigures Jesus as the New Prophet (cf Moses, cf Deut. 18:9ff). Like Moses who climbed mount Sinai to receive the revelation of the Law, so Jesus climbed the mount of Olives to reinterpret the Law in the SOM. Jesus followed a well-known tradition. Beyond being a prophet, Jesus is the one who fulfils God’s promise for Israel. Next, we discuss oral-scribal intertexture of Matt. 5:21-48.

#### **4.6.2. Oral-scribal intertexture of Matt. 5:21-48**

As already noted, intertexture examines how phenomenon outside the text is configured and reconfigured in the text (Combrink 2003:28), recited or recontextualised in a text. Jesus recites

Exodus 20:13 to comment on the Law on murder in Matt. 5:21-26. Recontextualization alludes to a biblical text without explicitly stating the text as having been used in a new context. Recontextualization, includes a range of “extended word-for-word replication of a biblical text to the poignant use of a word, phrase or clause from scripture in a new context” (Robbins 1996a: 107). Jesus recontextualizes the extended murder law (cf Exodus 20:13 & Lev. 19:17a) in Matt. 5:21 to deal with internal dispositions also, beyond the problem of the physical act of murder (Beale and Carson 2007:21). He thereby showed that not only unlawful killing will be judged, but also innuendos and insults, since they are possible causes of murder. Jesus does not suggest, however, that anger or insults or innuendos would necessarily lead to murder. Cultural intertexture follows oral-scribal intertexture if we do a logical progression of texture. Therefore, we discuss cultural intertexture next.

#### **4.6.3. Cultural intertexture of Matt. 5:17-30**

Cultural intertexture employs reference and echo (Robbins 1996a:102) to reconstruct antecedent tradition into a current text. Reference “is the occurrence of a word, phrase or clause that refers to a personage or tradition known to people in a culture” (Robbins 1996a:110). “Echo occurs when a word or phrase evokes, or potentially evokes, a cultural tradition” (Robbins 1996a:110). The cultural intertexture of Matt. 5:17-30 shows that on adultery, Jesus alludes to the commandment in Exodus 20:14 (re-echoed in Deut. 5:18) and again challenges the popular notion before clarifying the Law’s meaning. On the question of lusting after a woman (wife?<sup>53</sup>), Jesus

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<sup>53</sup> The root *γυν* is the same for *γυνή* (wife), suggesting that scribal and pharisaic interpretation of the adultery law probably focused on the physical act of adultery because it violated the commandment on covetousness (Exodus 20: 17b). In any event, the focus of the text on a woman (or wife) as the object of lust is ideological, the same way in which the reference to God as ‘Father’ is. Men could commit adultery, and God has female attributes even though God may not be subject to anthropomorphic gender constructions. Jesus, according to John 4 taught the Samaritan woman that God (the Father, v.21, 23) is spirit (v. 24).

uses a hyperbole in Matt. 5:29-30 (cf Mark 9:43-48) to strengthen the force of his argument. People who are overcome by lust violate their internal purity (praised in the beatitudes), and become opponents of the heavenly Father. Those who oppose the Father will be punished eternally along with other wicked people.

The intertexture of Matt. 5:17-20 exhibits thematic elaboration of kingdom-appropriate righteousness, as well. The elaboration of the theme of righteousness is further expatiated in Matt. 6:1-18. The interpretation of the Law is the central issue in the pursuit of righteousness in this pericope and its elaboration. It is noteworthy, that “whenever the Law is mentioned, it is a subject of teaching, defence, debate, test, interpretation, and recommendation” (Mekonnen 2017:123) in Matthew’s gospel. It is in this regard, that the issue of the fulfilment of the Law opens the programmatic statement on the Law. Thus, “...fulfilling the Law for Jesus means to interpret and to defend the Law. Jesus...spoke about relaxing (5:19a), teaching (5:19b and 5:19c) and practising (5:19c) the Law... Therefore, Jesus’ claim that he came not to abolish but to fulfil the Law, is related to his teaching, defending, and practising the Law and such fulfilment is demonstrated in the teaching of Jesus in the progression of the story” (Mekonnen 2017:123). His teaching, defence, debate and practice of the Law, with righteousness at the centre develops throughout the Gospel, starting in Matt. 5:20 and coming to climax in Matt. 25:37 as we have seen in 4.2.1.1 above.

The three ritual acts of prayer, alms and fasting (cf Matt. 6:1ff) done away from the public eye and directed towards the heavenly Father to invoke his mercy, will help disciples to develop the spiritual virtues praised in the beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12). The Father rewards in public, almsgiving done in private. Correct ritual prayer offered in private will invoke the Father’s forgiveness in public (Matt. 6:14-15). The Father will reward appropriate, ritualistic fasting. All who have a correct understanding of the Law’s application to their lives (Matt. 5:21-48) will

voluntarily practice these rituals to invoke the Father's beneficence so that they can develop inner spiritual virtues that will make them perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48). The ultimate of this "beneficial exchange" (Robbins 2014:203) is the judgment of the nations, where those who please the Father will be accepted into his eternal bliss because they gave food, drink, clothing and shelter to others who needed such things, and visited the incarcerated and the hospitalised (Matt. 25: 37-39). It is only through these ritualised acts of piety in exchange with the Father in heaven that the spiritual virtues listed in the beatitudes might be nurtured. From Jesus' perspective, then, judgement is based on one's inner thought pattern and life, therefore people need to change their thinking and conduct in response to his teaching (Mekonnen 2017:118). The theme of righteousness, goes through the entire gospel to the end.

The social intertexture of Matt. 5:17-20 and the historical intertexture of Matt. 5:17-20 are discussed next. The social intertexture and the historical intertexture of Matt. 5:17-20 together account for the socio-historical aspects of the SOM. The social intertexture encompasses a text's reference to elements in the society such as social roles, codes, mores and conducts that are not limited to any specific culture within the society. In Matt. 5-7 we notice that Jesus emphasises in a deliberative manner actions that would be beneficial to the future performance of his audience (Black 1995:261). These actions make people live worthy lives in the present as well.

Matt. 5:17-20 gives the thesis statement to the entire SOM unit. In it, Jesus stated emphatically that the Mosaic Law was still valid and then he goes on to reinterpret the Law to merge internal motivation with external actions (Levison & Pope-Levison 1995:343). In Matt. 5:17-20, Jesus introduced to his audience his intention to espouse the Mosaic Law to a fragmented society that was undergoing social construction (Viljoen 2016:4). Jesus' exposition of the Law



constitutes part of this social construction being markedly different from other interpretations that the society had to contend with, and directed at merging motives with action.

The historical intertexture “textualises past experiences into a particular event or a particular period of time” (Robbins 1995a:118). The statement, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets...” presupposes that the audience of Jesus recognised the authority of the Law or the prophets, and now Jesus is linking his own authority with antecedent Jewish authority. Therefore, the historical intertexture of Matt. 5:17-20 shows that Jesus’ authority to act and speak for God is comparable to God’s authority previously revealed through the Law and the Prophets (cf Luke 24:44ff). This way, the thesis statement in Matt. 5:17-20 connects not only with Jesus’ authoritative reinterpretation of the Law in the rest of the SOM, but also with God’s total activity up to the point of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God that Jesus was inaugurating (Matt. 5:18-19). This Kingdom can only be inhabited by those with kingdom-appropriate righteousness (Matt. 5:20). We shall discuss the social and cultural texture next.

#### **4. 7. Social and cultural texture of the SOM**

Social and cultural texture explores social responses to the world, social systems and institutions, and cultural alliances and conflicts (Robbins 1995:138). Since the social intertexture and the historical intertexture can hardly be separated from the social and cultural texture, we will merge these labels in this section where it is convenient. According to SRI, social response to the world is either conversionist, thaumaturgical, gnostic-manipulationst, utopian, revolutionist, or reformist. Social systems and institutions of first century Palestine included patronage and clientele, challenge and riposte, honour and shame and purity and pollution, wealth and poverty. Cultural alliances and conflicts embody matters concerning community and identity. The social intertexture goes beyond mere cultural belief, conventions or idea, or insider attitudes towards a

specific phenomenon. And the cultural intertexture embodies how people live in relationship to God and fellow humans.

In terms of cultural alliances and conflicts, the social and the cultural intertexture of Matthew's gospel shows that the religious authorities interpreted the Mosaic Law from a symbolic universe that resulted in very specific social arrangements which made them categorize people in terms of purity and pollution. They "classified persons, times, days and things as pure or impure. According to some Jewish leaders, impure (polluted) people could not experience God's presence. In the SOM, Jesus, rather than the Law is the symbolic centre, the Kingdom of God, instead of observation of the Sabbath, and other festivals, the sanctity of temple worship, and the payment of tithes and offerings". The SOM also condemns the Jewish authorities for being out of tune with God's will. This attitude of Jesus runs through the rest of the gospel as well. By eating with sinners and tax collectors, for example, Jesus challenged the religious authorities' interpretation of the Law. From narrative critical perspective, this understanding of the conflict between Jesus and his adversaries, shows that the plot of the gospel is far more nuanced than Kingsbury (1997) was willing to admit (van Eck 2001:1250). Kingsbury zeroed in on conflict, evident in the dialogues between the two parties, but the conflict entails more than hostile dialogues between Jesus and the antagonists.

In Matt. 5: 13-16, Jesus tells his disciples that they are the salt of the earth and light to the world. He was calling for a conversionist response from them. Since people are evil, they have corrupted the world and so God's people are called upon to transform the world by shining in it and "arresting" its corruptibility with their unique identity. If they shine as light, people will see their good deeds and honour their divine Father. The author, here uses the honour and shame categories to make his point. He shows by the salt and light metaphors, that disciples are to honour

God as divine Patron through words and deeds. As clients of the Patron, if their lives of goodness are seen openly, others will see the good works, and glorify (honour) their heavenly Patron, that is their Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16). Since gratitude, of works or words was an honourable response, it also guaranteed future generosity from the Patron, as will be shown in the discussion of Matthew chapter six later.

The social and cultural texture of Matt. 5:38-42 shows that the clients (disciples of Jesus) of the Patron (God), who relate appropriately to everyone cannot repay evil for evil. The Patron's Broker's (Jesus') stated imperatives, "Do not resist an evildoer...turn the other cheek...give your cloak also...go the second mile...give to everyone who begs from you..." (Matt. 5:39-42) are countercultural commands, showing that the Broker wants the clients to be different from the other members of the community, since they are specially related to the Patron through the Broker. God, the Patron is also a Father and King (Matt. 5: 34-35, 48) under whose rule the earthly clients live.

#### **4.7.1. God the divine Father-King (Matt. 5: 34-35, 48)**

The divine Father-King is the heavenly Father (v. 48), the Patron who sent his divine Son-Broker, as spokesman to bring earthly children-clients into a special relationship with the Father-Patron. The Son-Broker carries the Father-Patron's authority to speak and act authoritatively (v. 2) on behalf of the Father-Patron. Therefore, the Broker says, "I have not come to abolish but fulfil" (v. 17b) the Law or the Prophets (v. 17a). The divine Father-Patron gave both the promise (through Abraham) and the Law (through Moses). The same Father-Patron has now sent his Son-Broker to consummate the Father-Patron's purpose for giving both the Promise and the Law as Kingdom (Gospel) message. Thus, the Son-Broker will not violate or frustrate the divine Father-Patron's purposes. Moreover, the Kingdom message that the Son-Broker presents, is the valid

reinterpretation of the Patron's will. Subsequently, those who accept the Father-Patron's new Kingdom message (v.19) will be great in the Kingdom and those who reject it will be least in the Kingdom (v.19). People however, must have kingdom-appropriate righteousness to enter the Kingdom (v.20).

#### **4.7.2. God's Kingdom (Matt. 5:33)**

Rooted in OT theocracy (Ladd 1993:58ff), the Kingdom of God in the synoptic gospels, is the same as Mathew's "Kingdom of heaven". God's Kingdom is the reign of God. In the OT, worshippers experienced the Kingdom as physical, visible rule of God over ethnic Israel. Jesus' use of the term Kingdom varies in meaning from the prevailing OT notion because his Kingdom had both come and was still to come; it was both "present and future" (Ladd 1993:58). Jesus told his disciples to pray for the Kingdom to come (Matt. 6:10), though he also noted that the Kingdom would come with power during the lifetime of some witnesses to his ministry (cf Mark 9:1). Moreover, Jesus taught that casting out demons by the power of the Holy Spirit was evidence that the Kingdom had come (Matt. 12:28). The Kingdom is present in the lives of followers of Jesus who obey and live for him. This is a subtle Kingdom; it is not fully revealed yet (cf Matt. 13: 24-30). Under the present Kingdom the devil still deceives many and leads them astray because the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:24-30) both subsist for the time being. When the Kingdom is fully consummated, it will be physically evident (cf Matt. 25:31-46) and at that time a final, decisive blow will be dealt to sin and evil once and for all. Thus, the Kingdom is "already but not yet".

#### **4.7.3. The Law of the Kingdom**

As noted in the second chapter of the study, some dispensationalists, driven by the desire to separate Israel from the Church, and to posit separate divine programmes for Israel and the

Church, claim that the SOM is the Law (ethics) for the future millennial Kingdom. However, if we account for the total meaning of the Kingdom in the gospels as both present and future, then it can be argued that Jesus' reinterpretation of the Law in the SOM, is the Gospel of the Kingdom (present and future). The reinterpreted Law (the Gospel) applies already in the present Kingdom and it will apply in the future Kingdom as one of "love". The application of the reinterpreted Law in the future Kingdom in terms of love has been espoused by Paul in I Cor. 13: 4-10, especially v. 10). In Matthew, Jesus illustrates the reinterpretation of the Law as Kingdom gospel in Matt. 5: 21-48, by citing examples from the Mosaic Law on various topics to which we now turn.

#### **4.7.3.1. Anger (Matt. 5:21-26)**

Jesus' reinterpretation of the Law on anger merged Exodus 20:13 & Lev. 19:17a. The combined effect of the two passages along with Jesus' reinterpretation taught the people that it is not only visible unlawful killing that makes one liable for judgment, but also anyone who is angry with or hates another person is liable for judgment as a murderer. Likewise, the one who insults or name calls another is liable to the council (heavenly court) and hell fire (eschatological judgment) respectively (v. 22). Jesus next gives two examples of how to deal with one's anger to prevent it from festering. He notes that lingering anger will ruin personal worship and so must be dealt with (vv. 23-24). If someone is angry with you and wants to take legal action against you, it will be wise to settle the dispute amicably to avoid the terrible effects of lingering anger (vv. 25-26). Subsequently, the reconciliation must come before worship. Jesus' reference to lawsuit features a social phenomenon. Mention of hell fire and judgment reflect cultural notions.

The cultural intertexture of Matt. 5:21-26 shows that though all that Israel was expected to do in respect of the Law on murder was to avoid the physical act of murder, to obey God under covenant and enjoy the gracious blessings of God, those who cast innuendos at others and still

others who are angry with their fellow Israelites will equally be judged. Jesus' teaching was countercultural (Brower 2004:309). His teaching on adultery, which is next, follows the same countercultural line of thought.

#### **4.7.3.2. Adultery (Matt. 5:27-30) and divorce (Matt. 5: 31-32)**

The intertexture of Matt. 5:27-30 and Matt. 5:31-32 show that Jesus invokes and reinterprets the Law that forbids adultery (Exodus 20:14 & Deut. 22:22) and divorce (Deut. 24:1-4). Jesus notes that kingdom-appropriate righteousness (Matt. 5:20) does not only help to avoid adultery (Matt. 5:27-30) but also empowers its possessor to shun divorce (Matt. 5:31-32), because divorce leads to further adultery (Matt. 5:32) and compromises the integrity of marriage, though the Father instituted marriage for human comfort. "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorcement" (Matt. 5:31), recalls Deut. 24:1ff, where a man who finds "something objectionable" (v. 1, NRSV) with his wife because she does not please him, is permitted to write her a bill of divorcement before sending her away (v. 1). Jesus warned that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality (*πορνειρός*<sup>54</sup>), causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Jesus addressed the divorce question in detail in Matt. 19. In Matt. 19:2, he alluded to Gen. 2:24 and 5:2 to clarify God's original intent for creating people male and female (Matt. 19:4-6).

Jesus further explained that Moses permitted conditional divorce as a concession, not an ideal (Matt. 19:7-8). If Matt. 5:31-32 is a Matthean elaboration of Mark 10:12, then the cultural intertexture sheds light on it. For Jesus, therefore, while traditional Jewish piety considered

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<sup>54</sup> *Πορνειρός* in this text virtually defies precise translation in English, as different Bible versions translate it differently. For instance, while the TNIV renders it "sexual immorality" the NIV translates it as "marital unfaithfulness" while the NRSV prefers "unchastity". Others prefer adultery, fornication, sexual sin, etc.

“properly divorced persons” as eligible to remarry, in the new Kingdom of superior righteousness, divorce is not an option. The social and the cultural intertexture of Matt. 5:27-32, indicates that Jesus adopts a countercultural approach to the subject by making men, rather than women to take responsibility for adultery (Beale and Carson 2007:23), since men were the perpetrators, not women. The lust that causes divorce sits right in the heart of a sinful man, in this context. In effect, Jesus extends the contextual meaning of the adultery proscription to include a wide diversity of personal and even imaginary interpersonal relationships. Therefore, for humble children-clients to relate beneficently to the divine Father-Patron as members of his divine Kingdom in the world, they must have kingdom-appropriate righteousness that makes them adopt a countercultural attitude towards, legalistic, Pharisaic interpretations of the Law.

The historical intertexture of the fifth antithesis (Matt. 5:38-42) shows that Jesus addressed the problem of violence and retaliation to people who lived in a culture full of violence.<sup>55</sup> The prevailing violence created an ambivalent situation for the Jews. The Jewish dilemma provoked different understandings of the OT messianic promise (see Deut. 18:15; Isa. 61; Jer. 23; Ezek. 34, etc). Most Jews expected a political messiah with military might to oust the much-hated Roman

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<sup>55</sup> Both his disciples and the crowds were familiar with the Jewish resentment of Roman dominance. God promised peace and security to Israel but the Jews were experiencing the exact opposite under Roman colonial rule. Varied groups with distinct ideologies had thus emerged to deal with the predicament (Powell 2009:34). The dualistic segregation between heaven and earth, light and darkness, the Kingdom of heaven and earthly kingdoms, good and evil, to mention a few, had been shaping Jewish life and choice before Jesus came. Roman mystics, pagans and Hellenists, as well as Stoics, Cynics and Epicureans had all shaped people’s lives at that time.

administrators and their collaborators. Nevertheless, Jesus presented himself as a religious Messiah, the Son of God, who had come to die for, and save sinners (Ermatinger 2008:58).

Jesus, therefore appears to teach nonviolence and nonretaliation in his reinterpretation of Matt. 5:39a. In Matt. 5:38, Jesus alludes to the *lex talionis*<sup>56</sup>, the Law of retaliation. Jesus told his audience not to resist the evil doer but to “turn the other cheek”, acquiesce to “give their cloak to the one who wants to take the tunic”, “go the extra mile with someone who forces them to go one mile” and to “give to everyone who wants to borrow” from them (Matt. 5:39-42). They were to leave justice to God (Keener 2009a:197), who will avenge because vengeance is God’s. Disciples must “break the cycle of violence” (Brennan and Praem 2017:2) rather than breed further violence. To suggest that Jesus taught pacifism in this pericope, as some have argued, is to press the point too far because “turning the other cheek” for instance, does not imply physical violence. Keener (2009a:197) has explained that striking someone on the right cheek, in this context means an insult, not physical violence. It was an affront to the victim’s honour in an honour and shame culture, therefore the best remedy would be to avenge one’s honour. The social intertexture of this pericope calls for the pursuit of social justice and dignity in a peaceful manner. Jesus knew the value of

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<sup>56</sup> The legal principle of the *lex talionis* is that punishment should be commensurate with the offence. It is based on the jurisprudence of retributive justice and aimed, in Israel, basically at avenging a person’s honour (Keener 2009a:196). Honour, being an important social concern, made this principle of the Law crucial. Inherited from family or acquired through excellence, honour was too important to lose. Later reformers of Jewish Law saw the difficulty and weakness of the *lex talionis* and began to explore alternative ways of punishing offenders, contrary to maiming them (Keener 2009a:196). Fines were thus allowed as compensation because, as the Jewish sages taught, fighting evil with evil amounted to bringing oneself down to the level of the undignified offender.



honour in this context, therefore he provokes his hearers to shame by comparing their ability to obey the love commandment with those of the tax collectors and Gentiles.

Embedded in the social and cultural texture of SRI, are specific social topics, common social and cultural topics, and final cultural categories. The study will next briefly identify each of these three sub-textures in the interpretation of the Law in the SOM.

#### **4.7.4. Specific social, and common social and cultural topics of Matt. 5:21-48**

The specific social topics in SRI invoke different ways in which characters in a text respond to the world. The common social and cultural topics outlines the context in which people live and function in the world (Robbins 1996b:71). Because of the close connection between the former and the latter, it is expedient to discuss them together. A gnostic-manipulationist tone opens the debate over the interpretation of the Law in Matt. 5:20 and is further developed in the subsequent pericopes (i. e Matt. 5:21-48). Matt. 5:21-48 opens in verses 21-26 with a strong conversionist tone as the SOM audience is urged to do everything possible to reconcile with their adversaries and live at peace (Matt. 5:21-26). Instead of going to court to avenge their honour, the audience was urged to seek reconciliation (vv. 25-26). In short, they were to adopt a conversionist, countercultural approach to the problem of revenge.

The conversionist tone of the passage continues in the next pericope where the divorce question is addressed (Matt. 5:27-31). If male members of the audience subject themselves to personal transformation, they will not only shun adultery and divorce, they will also eagerly overcome the lust that breeds the desire for adultery and divorce as well. If Jesus' male audience defeat lust by eliminating everything that causes it, they will also overcome the temptation to divorce and thereby avoid committing adultery and helping to prevent adultery on the part of their

wives. Personal transformation of inner dispositions, then, is the solution to the problem of divorce and adultery, according to Jesus' reinterpretation of the Law.

The next pericope (Matt. 5:33-36) deals with oaths and casuistry. Schreiner (2008:554, 629) has argued that Jesus' teaching here is not against oath-taking per se but casuistry (Matt. 23:16-22), which the scribes and Pharisees engaged in, to avoid keeping the oaths they took in God's name. Schreiner notes that Jesus, when he appeared before Caiaphas responded to the high priest under oath (Matt. 26:63-64) and therefore could not have outlawed oath-taking altogether. Exod. 20:7 forbade the misuse of God's name (presumably in swearing or at least false oath-taking). Was Jesus alluding to this commandment in Matt. 5:34? If we reject Schreiner's view that Jesus did not forbid oaths altogether, then the pericope exhibits a gnostic-manipulationist response, which calls on the SOM audience to learn the right way to deal with the danger of blasphemy by not swearing at all. However, if we accept Schreiner's view, then the pericope assumes a reformist tone. In that case, the audience is called upon to be different from the scribes and Pharisees by avoiding casuistry and simply be truthful. Considering that during the trial Jesus did not make a vow or take an oath, and that he simply responded to a question posed to him, Schreiner's view, though interesting and exciting, is not entirely convincing.

The pericope on retaliation (Matt. 5:38-42) is the next in line. "An eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" (Matt. 5:38; NRSV) recalls Exo. 21: 24 and Lev. 24:20. The categorical imperatives, "Do not resist an evil doer...turn the other [cheek]...give your cloak as well...go the second mile...Give to everyone who begs from you...do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you...(Matt. 5:39-42), have the tone of pacifism. At the very least they suggest nonviolence and perhaps non-resistance. They start on a conversionist tone and move into the next pericope with a

utopian tone, since it is the imitation of the Father's perfection (cf Matt. 5:43-48) that motivates the desire to break the cycle of violence in Matt. 5:38-42.

Ultimately, the utopian tendency of the pericope of loving one's enemy (Matt. 5:43-48) climaxes the selection of various topics from the Law for illustration of acceptable conduct in the new Kingdom of the divine Father-Patron. The countercultural, positively stated imperatives: Love your enemies...pray for those who persecute you...Be perfect...as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:44-48) summarise the progression of the desired responses to the prevailing world structures, from conversionist to gnostic manipulationist, to utopian response, that is, from initial change, to personal transformation, and then to perfection. Here is the climax of the proposal in Matt. 5:20, which introduces a gnostic-manipulationist tone, suggesting that Jesus's audience needs a kingdom-appropriate righteousness to be able to enter the Kingdom, and live as perfect members.

#### **4.7.5. Final cultural categories of Matt. 5:21-48**

The final cultural categories, identifies how communicators "present their propositions, reasons, and arguments both to themselves and to people" (Robbins 1999a:86), thereby indicating who belongs to either the dominant culture or subgroup or counterculture. Jesus adopts a countercultural stance in the SOM, as he invokes tension between the current kingdom and an emerging Kingdom (Tryon 2006:36). The current kingdom is physical only, and it is a kingdom mediated by the other Jewish leaders and their kingpins in Rome and Jerusalem. The emerging Kingdom is both physical and non-physical, and Jesus mediates it on behalf of the heavenly Father, in collaboration with the Father's earthly children. The emerging Kingdom will be fully established in future, as the eschatological Kingdom. To this end, the two kingdoms are inextricably linked.

With this understanding behind his words, Matthew suggests that though God's offer of salvation is available to Israel through the Abrahamic covenant that the Mosaic Law followed, merely avoiding murder does not get one into the new Kingdom (Matt. 5:21-26). Similarly, just because one has obeyed the command not to commit physical adultery (Matt. 5:27-30), has not divorced (Matt. 5:31-32) or sworn falsely (Matt. 5:33-42) does not mean that one is qualified to enter and stay in the Kingdom (Matt. 5:20). If people, do to others what they would have done to them, it does not mean that they are qualified to enter the Kingdom, because their righteousness is not kingdom-appropriate yet. Kingdom-appropriate righteousness requires better choices than that. Kingdom righteousness moves from outward observation of covenant laws to inward renewal of life that makes it possible for people to love even their enemies and pray for them just as the heavenly Father loves people (Matt. 5:43-48). This point, concludes the discussion of the final cultural categories of intertexture. Two more textures remain to be discussed in Matthew chapter five: ideological texture and sacred texture.

#### **4.8. Ideological texture of Matt. 5:21-48**

According to Robbins (1996b:95), the ideological texture explores biases, opinions, preferences and stereotypes of specific authors and interpreters. In the ideological texture, a text's language and the written communication of the interpreted language of the text, tend to evoke and nurture certain alliances and conflicts, as well as points of view, which facilitate the desires of interpreters of the text to position themselves in relation to other individuals and groups within the text (Gowler 2010:195). Therefore, interpreters tend to identify with certain characters, or points of view expressed in the text. Ideology reveals a certain philosophy of life, and a given philosophical viewpoint leads to specific attitudes to life. Ideology represents relations between people and systems of beliefs and values, reflecting the need of people to understand and even to

control their own place in the world. Power relations and how they affect a text form part of ideology. The ideological texture analysis of a text demands attention to the social and cultural location of the implied author, the philosophy of power in the text and the thought patterns of the mode of discourse in a text (Combrink 2002:116). The ideological texture of a first century Mediterranean text such as the SOM is greatly clarified by an understanding of the honour and shame culture in which the text is situated. Since the individual's social location is an integral part of ideology, the next section will discuss my own social location.

#### **4.8.1. My social location**

My social location is one of a black Ghana-Ewe man living in a tiny West African country which is struggling to improve its economy. My location as a scholar is a faculty member of a tiny, West African Seminary, which is confronted with limited, almost non-existent funding to complete a doctoral dissertation in a foreign country. My decision to study the SOM from SRI perspective is ideological even if subtle, because there are other approaches to the study of the SOM. As someone from one of the poorest regions of the world, it is easy for me to identify with a countercultural view in the debate over the meaning and application of the Law in the SOM. Watching unsuspecting Ghanaians being milked by insensitive Christian leaders, who fleece their flock with strange interpretations of God's Law to enrich themselves is disgusting to me. Since Jesus is the founder and head of the Church, his reinterpretation of the Law, as we find in the SOM offers the best response to my concern for the correct interpretation of the Law among my own people. In doing this, my identification with certain characters in the text is inevitable.

The main characters of the discourse are Jesus and his audience (disciples and the crowds). The scribes and the Pharisees are addressed in absentia. Perceiving the scribes and Pharisees as

privileged Jewish leaders, makes me hesitate to identify with them, because my experience is contrary. This political situation of my life already identifies with a certain ideology of life.

#### **4.8.2. My relation to other groups**

As indicated in chapter two of this study, as an Ewe man living in Ghana, my experience is one of a member of a minority group with a complex political history. Some Ghanaians think that the Ghana-Ewe are foreigners from Togo, and therefore, they seek to treat the Ewe as such, as it was argued in chapter two. At the Seminary, my membership of the faculty represents a church whose membership is predominantly Ewe (Ghana). This fact also makes some members of the Seminary community, including faculty members despise me without saying it or acting it out explicitly.

Worse of all, my church, the EPCG, with a bruised image, has historically experienced six major schisms in about 52 years. Each of the schisms had something significant to do with the interpretation of the Law. Some have judged the fact of persistent schisms in the church to mean that the EPCG is a very intolerant church. Others say it is a very disciplined church that rejects waywardness decisively. Coupled with this is the fact that there are two Presbyterian churches in Ghana, PCG and EPCG, the EPCG is the younger, smaller, less privileged one, and the experience is one of mutilated identity. The foregoing experiences define my mode of discourse and shape my ideology of life as well. Undoubtedly, my reading and understanding of the SOM is strongly influenced by the situation described above. Therefore, the preparation of this dissertation, is not just an attempt to obtain a PhD-qualification but is also a conscious or unconscious effort to address my own social and cultural location, and engage my ideology.

Consequently, the ideological texture of the SOM involves an analysis of myself (as reader and writer), as well as the author and implied reader of the text (Pillay 2008:35), and since none of the previous textures discussed is free from ideological orientation (Robbins 2002:49), the ideological texture can be taken to be a configuration and interweaving of the inner texture, the intertexture and the social and cultural texture (Pillay 2008:35).

The ideological texture of Matt. 5:21-48, suggests and develops alliances among a divine Father-Patron, his incarnate Son-Broker and the Father-Patron's earthly children-clients. The Son-Broker inaugurates the Father-Patron's Kingdom, which brings a crisis and calls for decision in the receptor community. The Son-Broker advises people to accept the new Kingdom to become children-clients of the Father-Patron. This means that the children-clients will forsake their relationships with earthly patrons, who seek to usurp the Father-Patron's honour. Compared to their new magnanimous, credible, heavenly Father-Patron, the earthly patrons are wicked, mean and miserly, and have nothing to offer their clients. These earthly patrons teach disobedience and disloyalty to the heavenly Father-Patron, while pretending to be his servants through their false interpretation of the Father-Patron's Law (Matt. 5:21-48).

It is evident in Matt. 5:20 that the call to kingdom-appropriate righteousness is the central concern for Matthew. Jesus evokes the nature of this righteousness to help his audience to take a decision that could transform their lives from being opponents of the Father-Patron, to his children-clients. With the ideological texture discussed, the study turns to the last main texture of SRI, the sacred texture, to examine the meaning of the Law in the SOM.

## **4.9. Sacred texture of the Law in the SOM**

The sacred texture systematically probes the relationship between human beings and the divine (Pillay 2008:65). It addresses redemption, commitment, worship, devotion, community, ethics, holy living, spirituality, and spiritual formation” (Robbins et al 2016: xxiii). Put differently, the sacred texture explains how a text communicates the relationship between God or (the gods) and human beings, through the examination of the role of deity, saints and demons in redemption, as well as God’s divine plan of salvation and the role of divine Law in human salvation.

### **4.9.1. Sacred texture of Matt. 5: 3-12 & 13-16**

The beatitudes are prophetic blessings uttered by the divine Son-Broker on behalf of the Father-Patron to obedient and worthy children-clients (disciples of Jesus). The beatitudes are antithetical to the woes of chapter 23, which are divine curses of the Son-Broker directed at disobedient children-clients (the scribes and Pharisees). The Son-Broker promises the Father-Patron’s comfort for suffering (poor, mourning, hungry and persecuted) children-clients (vv. 3-4, 6 & 10), since they are meek, righteous, merciful, pure-hearted peacemakers (vv. 5, 6, 7-9). Their Kingdom-righteousness runs counter to the character of the counterfeit, evil kingdom of greedy, hypocritical patrons of Rome and Jerusalem, therefore the Kingdom of the sovereign, divine Father-Patron belongs to them (v.10). The sacred texture of the next pericope shows that the children-clients will influence and impact the world positively because they act as salt and light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16). They are the Father’s envoys on earth.

### **4.9.2. Sacred texture of Matt. 5:21-48**

Gowler (2000:456; 2010:195) views the sacred texture as a subset of ideological texture, thereby connecting politics of a text with its religion. Matt. 5: 21-48 links the human and the divine



to explain the nature of redemption and the role of obedience to the deity in it. The sacred texture of Matt. 5: 43-48 shows that the Son-Broker explains the Law (Matt. 5:17-20 & 5:21-47) in the SOM to help children-clients to love, as the heavenly Father loves, so that the Father's perfection might be replicated in them (Matt. 5:48). Both Jews and non-Jews are given the chance to come into the Kingdom, since entering the Kingdom no longer depends on Abrahamic ancestry. Anyone could accept the message of the Kingdom and enter it (Matt. 5:19). Though the Mosaic Law does not require Israel to love their enemies, kingdom-appropriate righteousness of the inbreaking earthly, and the future Kingdom, makes children-clients of the Father-Patron capable of showing love to, and praying for their enemies and persecutors. The Father loves even tax collectors (v. 46b) and Gentiles (v. 47b). Children-clients who exhibit the Father-Patron's attributes show that they belong to the Kingdom.

#### **4.9.3. Deity: God, the Lord is the perfect heavenly Father**

Three references to the Kingdom (v. 19 & 20) as the domain of deity is evident in Matt 5:17-20. The pericope on oath-taking (Matt. 5: 33-37), alludes to people who swear falsely to the Lord (v. 33). Some could swear by heaven, the throne of God or the earth as God's footstool (v. 34) and still neglect to carry out their oath or vow. God, who lives in the Kingdom of heaven whose footstool (v. 35) is the earth, is also the Father in heaven (v. 45), whose sun shines on the evil and the good. God sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous, because he is the perfect heavenly Father (v. 48). He gives mercy even to those who take false oaths and and make ungodly vows.

#### **4.9.4. Holy person: Jesus is the authoritative Spokesperson of the Father**

Jesus came to fulfil the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 5:17). His authority to say and do what he said and did is evident in the words, "I tell you..." (v. 18), "For I tell you..." (v. 20), and the

contrasting expression, “You have heard...But I say to you... (v. 21, v. 27, v. 32, v. 34, vv. 38-39, vv. 43-44). These authoritative statements are different from the conventional prophetic formula, “This is what the LORD says”, because Jesus is the divine Son-Broker, who the Father-Patron sent into the world to show people how to be children-clients of the Father-Patron. To succeed, the children-clients of the Father-Patron ought to have kingdom-appropriate righteousness which the scribes and the Pharisees do not have (Matt. 5:20), and cannot teach because they are blind guides (Matt. 23:16). Jesus therefore, authoritatively tells his audience to strive to exceed the prevailing righteousness if they are to be members of the Kingdom.

#### **4.9.5. Divine history and human redemption**

God chose ethnic/biblical/ancient Israel as covenant people (cf Gen. 12, 15, 17) and gave them the Law to guide them. Redemption is the goal of the covenant. Though God made many covenants with Israel, it is the Abrahamic covenant that directly connects with the New covenant. Stein (2011:99) observed that God renewed the covenant with Isaac (Gen. 26:1–5) and Jacob (Gen. 28:10–17; 35:9–15), and remembered (Exod. 2:23–25), and renewed it (Exod. 19:1–9; Deut. 7:6–11) in the wilderness. The Abrahamic covenant was again renewed with Joshua (Josh. 24:14–27). Under the Abrahamic covenant, ethnic Israel enjoyed blessings (cf Deut. 28:1-14) as rewards for obedience to Yahweh’s covenant stipulations. Israel was sanctioned (cf Deut. 28:15ff) when they rebelled against God by disobeying the Law.

Jesus and his audience knew, as God’s covenant people, that they were descendants of Abraham and Sarah, through whom God wanted to reveal himself, and that to Israel, God frequently spoke through the prophets (Wierzbicka 2001:58). As a divine person, Jesus mediates the New covenant which he offers to sinners and social outcasts, as well as the socially acceptable, while noting, rather curiously that those who are well do not need a physician (Matt. 9:12). In other

words, those who are sinless, do not need Jesus, since he is a physician for those who are spiritually sick. At the same time Jesus did not discriminate against people; he accepted everyone who would come to him.

#### **4.9.6. Religious community and ethics**

Ethics is a science of morality. Christian ethics deals with human moral decision-making, which places responsibility on people to think and act in ways that depict commitment to God (Pillay 2008:64). The ethics of the SOM suggests that a new religious community was being ushered in, which people with kingdom-appropriate righteousness will be members of. This righteousness is shaped by the correct understanding of, and obedience to the Law of God (Matt. 5:21-48). Members of this righteous Kingdom seek honour through unconventional, countercultural ways because they replicate and imitate God's perfection (Matt. 5:48). To conclude the SRI interpretation of the Law in Matt. 5, we shall finally examine rhetorolects and conceptual blending.

#### **4.10. Rhetorolects and conceptual blending in SRI**

Cognitive theory and cultural geography theory are increasingly being used to understand ancient Christian literature. Rhetography (pictorial narration) and/or rhetoric (enthymemic/syllogistic elaboration and argumentation) merge, based on the topics that are exhibited in an ancient discourse. Conceptual blending of precreation, wisdom, prophetic, priestly and apocalyptic rhetorolects are increasingly being applied to study the meaning of ancient Mediterranean texts. A rhetorolect is a mode of discourse which is identified because of its distinctive thematic configuration, images, topics, reasonings, and argumentations, and each

rhetorolect exhibits argumentation based on specific social, cultural and ideological topics” (Pillay 2008:71).

#### **4.10. 1. Prophetic rhetorolect of Matthew 5**

The prophetic rhetorolect of the beatitudes shows Jesus as the Prophet who has brought God’s Kingdom message to people, through the blessing statements that he utters in the name of God, a message in which he urges people to imitate God. It is therefore, not surprising that much of his message often met with grave “resistance, and often explicit rejection and persecution. In the space of blending, God functions as heavenly king over his righteous kingdom on earth” (Robbins 2010:201). Prophetic rhetorolect is a challenge to religious and political leaders whose actions are motivated by “greed, pride, and power rather than God’s justice, righteousness, and mercy for all people in God’s kingdom on the earth” (Robbins 2010:201). Thus, early prophetic discourse configures God’s promise to Israel to give them a land flowing with milk and honey. This is now enacted in the New covenant era.

The net effect of early prophetic rhetorolect in Matt. 5 is that God is dealing simultaneously with two groups of people: God chose a people to provide leadership in the world, towards God’s plan of salvation. They can do this through the promotion of a righteousness that is suitable for the Kingdom. If they succeed, God will bless them abundantly as their divine Patron. If they fail God, they constitute themselves into God’s opponents and they will be punished along all evildoers who reject the will of God. God’s offer is meant also for those outside his chosen group, who might accept to become children-clients of God the divine Father-Patron. If they do, they will be blessed

(transformed) but if they reject the Son-Broker's offer, they will be condemned, consigned to the selfish control and domination of the greedy, cruel earthly clients of the Roman Empire.

#### **4.10.2. Apocalyptic rhetorolect of Matt. 5:3-12**

“Early Christian apocalyptic rhetorolect was a localization of Mediterranean visual mantic discourse that blends human experiences of the emperor and his imperial army with God's heavenly temple city, which can only be occupied by holy, undefiled people” (Robbins 2010:201). Put differently, ancient apocalyptic discourse featured how God transforms unique people like Jesus, believers and unbelievers, the world and time itself (Pillay 2008:71), to carry out God's will on earth. The pocalyptic rhetorolect of the SOM shows that God commissioned and transformed Jesus at the latter's baptism (cf Matt. 3:13-17) to become a minister of God's salvation y(transformation) of inclusiveness. Jesus, transformed the meaning of the Law, the purity code and other identity markers, such as Abrahamic ancestry, to offer his message to tax collectors and sinners, prostitutes, lepers and other outcasts (cf Matt. 15:9-13), who only needed to respond positively to Jesus' offer of salvation, to join the Kingdom. When Jesus returns at his Second Coming, he will create a new world, just as he brought a new beginning at his incarnation.

#### **4.10.3. Wisdom rhetorolect of Matt. 5:13-16 and Matt. 5:21-48**

Wisdom rhetorolect is a discourse which interprets the physical world by amalgamating human experiences of social, cultural, geophysical, and institutional practices with beliefs about God as a parent who heads a family in which people are children (Robbins 1999:14). As mediator of divine wisdom, Jesus bears wisdom of God that establishes relationships among God and creation, God and humans and humans and humans (Pillay 2008:72). In the SOM, the beatitudes form a teaching unit that uses the wisdom rhetorolect (Robbins 2014:198) to mediate the wisdom

story from creation to Abraham and Moses to Jesus. In the beatitudes, Jesus pronounces blessings on the poor as fortunate in God's eyes, not because they are poor but because they possess the inner disposition that enables people live by God's standards. The beatitudes both depict the conduct of members of the new Kingdom with the appropriate righteousness and portray eschatological blessings reserved for those who remain children and clients of the Father-Patron.

Wisdom promotes good deeds and faithful living which is both ethical and fruitful. Wisdom rhetorolect helps interpreters of the Bible to theorise about how people of early Mediterranean cultures lived in households as teaching and learning environments with people, places and spaces. In this culture, people's experiences of the household and the geophysical world (*firstspace*) merge with God's cosmos (*secondspace*) as a cultural space. In the resultant blending of concepts (*thirdspace*), people acquire new identities by becoming children-clients of the heavenly Father-Patron. They are brought into the relationship with the Father-Patron through the Son-Broker, who is a Patron in his own right, but who also acts on behalf of his Father, the Patron. In the new space (Kingdom of heaven), God's wisdom, the reinterpreted Law, gives clients the grace to serve as light and salt in the world. The pursuit of the Father-Patron's benevolence is the priority of the children-clients in this new Kingdom. They thus, become fruitful and productive clients. Since the Patron's Broker reveals the Father-Patron's hidden righteousness, wisdom rhetorolect of the Son-Broker's Kingdom, connects apocalyptic rhetorolect and precreation rhetorolect with wisdom rhetorolect in Matt. 5:21-48.

#### **4.10.4. Precreation rhetorolect of Matt. 5:21-48**

The precreation rhetorolect focuses on what God, through Jesus, is currently doing in the world (Combrink 2002:112). Precreation rhetorolect aligns God's attributes and actions with Jesus' attributes and actions, to clarify the intimate relationship between God and Jesus, prior to

creation of the world (Pillay 2008:76). Precreation rhetorolect functions to intensify Christological reasoning in the other rhetorolects, such as wisdom and prophetic discourse. Moreover, it blends human experiences and perceptions of an emperor's household (*firstspace*) with God's cosmos (*secondspace*). God's precreation household exhibits a love-driven, utopian, intimacy between God and Jesus. In the space of blending (*thirdspace*), people become children of a loving God, and express their faith through worship of God and his only Son. The goal of the blending in precreation belief is to guide people towards community, which is formed through God's love, that reflects the eternal intimacy present in God's precreation household and community. Priestly rhetorolect will be discussed in Matthew 6. Miracle rhetorolect will not be discussed because it is not appropriate for analysing the SOM. But we will begin with the inner texture (as previously) as we start examining the textures of Matt. 6.

## **4.11. Matthew chapter 6**

### **4.11.1. Inner texture of Matthew 6**

The inner texture focuses on features inside the text itself such as repetition of words, dialogue, and sequencing of new terms carefully to make a strong conclusion. The inner texture searches for knowledge of words, patterns of words, voices, structures, devices and modes in the texts, which supply the context of the communication. There are six types: repetitive, progressive, narrational, opening-middle-closing (OMC), argumentative and sensory aesthetic texture (Robbins 1996b:7). We shall not discuss repetition, progression and narration textures in this chapter, because they have been exemplified in Matt. 5 above. Since the foregoing three textures relate to the social and cultural texture and the conceptual blending of rhetorolects, we shall rather turn attention to the OMC texture first, before turning to the social and cultural texture of Matt. 6.

#### 4.11.1.1. Opening-middle-closing (OMC) texture of Matthew 6

The OMC-texture discusses a text as a triad that exhibits an introduction, a main body and a conclusion as a rhetorical strategy. In Matt. 6, after the opening in verse 1, verses 2-4 explain how the Lord expects his disciples to give alms: they are to do it away from the public eye so that their heavenly Father who sees in secret might bless them openly (v. 4). This first pericope (Matt. 6:1-4), has an opening (v. 2), a middle (v. 3) and a closing (v. 4). It teaches that almsgiving is a duty to take up but should not be exhibited or advertised for a show (v. 2, opening), since it is hypocrites who give alms to impress other people (v. 3, middle). To the contrary, a potential member of the new Kingdom must give alms in private so that the heavenly Father might give the reward openly (v. 4, closing).

Verse 1 further exhibits the opening and closing texture but with no middle. The two *topoi*<sup>57</sup> (thematic topics) evoked are almsgiving and reward. Verses 2-4, constituting the middle of the almsgiving pericope, also exhibits OMC as follows:

**O:** So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets (v.2a),

**M:** so that they may be praised (δοξασθῶσιν) by others (τῶν ἀνθρώπων, v. 2b).

**C:** Truly I tell you, they have received their reward (v.2c).

The closing section of the almsgiving pericope similarly exhibits the OMC as follows:

**O:** But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

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<sup>57</sup> Robbins (2014:188) explains that *topos* (singular) is a locus of social, ideological, cultural and religious reasoning that falls within groups and patterns of meanings and meaning effects, and functions in the network of meanings and meaning effects that society, culture, ideology and religion together evoke.



**M:** so that your alms may be done in secret;

**C:** and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

The OMC of Matt. 6:1-4, shows that human beings ready to enter the new Kingdom are required to observe some do's and don'ts in the practice of ritual piety to promote beneficial exchange between them and the divine Father-Patron. This does not mean that life in the new Kingdom is about observing rules and regulations to be perfect. Rather, it shows that the community is automatically motivated and guided by divine principles that give rise to inner purity that is evident in daily ritual acts of spirituality.

#### **4.11.1.2. Wisdom and prophetic rhetorolect of Matt. 6: 1-4**

Christian ideological use of *topoi* in the context of society and culture gave rise to the nomenclature of “rhetorolects” (Robbins 2014:189), which are forms of discourse distinguishable on the bases of their “topics, reasonings and argumentations” (Robbins 2014:189) as revealed in the themes and images they evoke. Among the first century followers of Jesus, the blending of various concepts gave rise to miracle, wisdom, priestly, precreation, prophetic and apocalyptic rhetorolects. In teaching his audience, about spiritual disciplines in Matt. 6, Jesus exhibits the wisdom-prophetic rhetorolect with which he teaches his audience. In Matt. 6:1-4 Jesus proposes to his audience as follows:

*Μὴ σαλπίσσης ἔμπροσθέν σου* (Do not do your alms) like *οἱ ὑποκριταὶ* (the hypocrites) do;

Do not sound a trumpet in the synagogues and the streets like *οἱ ὑποκριταὶ* (the hypocrites) do;

Do not seek *δοξασθῶσιν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων* (the praise of others) as *οἱ ὑποκριταὶ* (the hypocrites) do;

*Μὴ γνώτω ἡ ἀριστερά σου τί ποιεῖ ἡ δεξιὰ σου* (Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing)

Rather,

*ὅπως ἦ σου ἡ ἐλεημοσύνη* (Do your alms) *ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ* (away from the public eye) *καὶ ὁ πατήρ σου ὁ βλέπων ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ ἀποδώσει σοι.* (and your Father in heaven will reward you openly).

#### **4.11.1.3. The OMC-texture of Matt. 6: 5-15**

Matt. 6: 5-15 teaches how the audience ought to pray to evoke the blessings of their heavenly Father. This pericope itself demonstrates the OMC texture. The opening, middle and closing sessions are in verses 5-6, 7-13 and 14-15 respectively. Not only does the opening (vv. 5-6) again exhibit the OMC-texture like the middle and the closing, but it also uses *topoi*, like the other sections of the teaching about prayer.

Verse 5 shows the OMC-texture as follows:

**O:** And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites (v. 5a);

**M:** for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be seen (*φανῶσιν*) by others (*τοῖς ἀνθρώποις*), v. 5b

**C.** Truly I tell you, they have received their reward (v. 5c).

The middle section advances the progression in verse 6 as follows:

**O:** But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door (v. 6a & 6b)

**M:** and pray to your Father who is in secret (v. 6c)

**C:** and your Father who sees in secret will reward you (v. 6d).

The closing session concludes the trend in verses 7 & 8 as follows:

**O:** When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do (v. 7a);

**M:** for they think that they will be heard because of their many words (v. 7b).

**C:** Do not be like them, for your Father in heaven knows what you need before you ask him (v. 8).

Verses 5-8 constitutes a long preamble to the Lord's prayer in Matthew. When contrasted to show the distinctiveness of the Matthean version, we see that Luke (11:1-13) takes a different approach by using the skill of elaboration after the prayer (Luke 11:5-13) the Lord gave.

The OMC structure in the whole introduction and in the various sections of Matt. 6, moves the *topoi* in a progression towards the ultimate of disciples knowing what do's and don'ts in prayer ritual evoke "beneficial exchange between humans and the divine" (Robbins 2014: 2013). Since the prayer in Matthew is partly addressed to the disciples (Matt. 5:1-2; cf 7:28) and since prayer is central to priestly rhetorlect, and prophetic rhetorlect features direct address that confronts and challenges disciples to observe certain do's and don'ts in ritual activity, it is evident that Matthew's introduction to the Lord's prayer exhibits the wisdom-priestly-prophetic rhetorlect. In the environment created, Jesus teaches divine wisdom of how worthy disciples ought to pray. He did this to help his audience know how to conduct themselves in ritual action as children-clients of the heavenly Father-Patron to enjoy benevolent charity.

#### **4.11.1.4. The OMC-texture of Matthew 6:9-13**

Matt. 6: 5 presumes that prayer is a duty for members of the new Kingdom (whenever you pray) but it should not be practiced as hypocrites do. Moreover, it teaches that hypocrites pray for

a show like they do other acts of piety, therefore their reward does not go beyond the show people see them advertise. True disciples and potential members of the new Kingdom, however, must pray privately to their heavenly Father, who sees what happens outside the public eye but rewards appropriate piety openly. The OMC texture is laid out as follows:

**O:** And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites (v. 5a);

**M:** for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others (v. 5b);

**C:** But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret (v. 6)

The prayer in Matt. 6 is given in verses 7-15. Verses 7-8, 9-13 and 14-15 respectively constitute the OMC of the prayer. The opening moves from verse 9 to 10 with “significant repetitive texture” (Robbins 2014:195). The repetition features *σου* (your) three times as in: *τὸ ὄνομά σου, ἡ βασιλεία σου* and *τὸ θέλημά σου*. The progression demonstrates a movement from the sanctification of the name of God the Father, to the coming of the Father’s Kingdom and then to the establishment of the Father’s will on earth, thereby creating an environment in which the will of the Father is enacted on earth among people (Robbins 2014:195). Doing the will of the heavenly Father on earth exhibits the current presence (already) of the Kingdom among human persons and the perfection that members of the Kingdom will attain at the Second Coming of Jesus coheres with the eschatological (not yet) dimension of the Kingdom. Thus, the well-known tension between the “already” and “not yet” in eschatological Kingdom discourse is once again enacted in the SOM.

The middle of the prayer (vv. 11-12) does not exhibit such a progression. Here, three petitions from disciples (we/us) who would learn the lesson on prayer and apply it to their worship lives, are given. The petition urges the heavenly Father to give daily bread to the petitioners and forgive their debts because they have already done their bit in forgiving their debtors. According to Robbins (2014:190), the *topoi* used in the Matthean Jesus' prayer include Father, heaven, your will, earth, daily bread, give, debts and this day. The others are: sanctify, your name, forgive, sins, trespasses, Kingdom, come, rescue, time of testing and evil one. Eighteen *topoi* are noted. Two *topoi* are used in the middle of the prayer: giving bread and reciprocal forgiveness. These are done in the context of asking and receiving daily supplies of food and forgiveness.

The prayer closes with a petition to God not to bring humans to the time of trial but to rescue them from the evil one (v.13). Compared with Matthew, the closing of Luke's prayer has OMC, suggesting that Matthew elaborates the closing (Robbins 2014: 196). The petition to God not to bring humans to the time of trial but to deliver them from the evil one, presumes that the devil is a personified evil constituting a present and clear danger to disciples (and potential disciples). They need the heavenly Father's protection to be safe. Envisaging the devil as an imminent personified evil in the context of the heavenly Father's reign on earth is an exhibition of "additional prophetic-apocalyptic rhetorlect" (Robbins 2014:196) underscoring the heavenly Father's charity to Jesus' disciples (and potential disciples) on earth as a divine Father-Patron. This is because in SRI, prayer is a fundamental *topos* in prophetic rhetorlect, while the revelation of something which belongs to the end times, which was hidden previously, features apocalyptic rhetorlect.

SRI of rhetorlects operate on the assumption that "places and spaces are related to conceptual blending in multiple ways" (Robbins 2010: 200). In the blending of concepts, people

experience and interpret places as in culture, ideology and religion (Robbins 2010: 200). The most significant places in NT studies are “household, village, city, synagogue, kingdom, temple, geophysical world, and cosmos. Desert, road, sea and mountain are four of the most prominent geophysical spaces in early Christian memory” (Robbins 2010:200). The Matthean version of the Lord’s prayer embodies the wisdom, priestly, prophetic and apocalyptic rhetorolects. A rhetorolect is a rhetorical dialect, therefore wisdom rhetorolect is a discourse that interprets the visible world (*firstspace*) by blending human experiences with beliefs about God, especially as a parent of the cosmos (*secondspace*), the head of a household to which humans belong. In the resultant conceptual blending (*thirdspace*), people become children-clients of God the divine Father-Patron who is in heaven. The Father’s wisdom teaches humans ethical goodness and fruitfulness.

The Matthean prayer has a priestly emphasis in which private prayer of a disciple invokes divine forgiveness of debts (Matt. 6:13-14). Priestly rhetorolect is ritual discourse that blends human experiences of sacrificial and mystery temples (*firstspace*) with a concept of God’s cosmos and temple city (*secondspace*). In the resultant space of blending (*thirdspace*), people undertake rituals, such as giving up their comfort, food, honour, money or indeed, their very lives in favour of special benefits from God to them. In the teaching on almsgiving, Kingdom-bound followers of Jesus are instructed to give alms in secret without any desire to advertise the activity, in order to invoke divine benevolence (reward) from their Father in heaven (divine Father-Patron) openly. One way of giving these things to God is to give them to other people or allow aggressive people to take them from the worshipper without protest.

Prophetic rhetorolect is the result of the localization of Mediterranean divine discourse or communication (oracular mantic), in which people blend their experiences in an earthly political kingdom (*firstspace*) with God’s cosmos (*secondspace*) with the presupposition that by divine

arrangement, God's will gets transmitted into the speech and action of prophets. With this special duty, God's prophets enforce God's covenant with God's people by calling for justice and righteousness from kings (or politicians) who lead God's people. As a covenant-enforcing mediator (Fee & Stuart 2003:184), the prophet is often resisted, rejected or persecuted because of this role. In the resultant space of blending (*thirdspace*), people establish various identities by their relationship with God as their heavenly King in God's righteous earthly Kingdom.

Apocalyptic rhetorlect localizes Mediterranean visual mantic (divine communication) by blending human experiences of the emperor and his army (*firstspace*) with God's heavenly temple city (*secondspace*) which only holy people dwell in. God is the Emperor of heaven who commands emissaries to destroy evil in the universe to create a holy community full of comfort, for God's people. The space of blending (*thirdspace*) is a call on people to order their lives through holy thoughts and actions so that they can experience a community of God's holy and righteous presence eternally. They can do these through regular almsgiving and prayer.

#### 4.11.1.5. The OMC-texture of Matt. 6: 16-18

The teaching about fasting (Matt. 6:16-18) embodies one "don't" and two "dos". Jesus told his audience, "Whenever you fast do not look dismal..." "But put oil on your face..., wash your face" (vv. 16-18). The pattern revealed is as follows:

**O:** *Οταν δὲ νηστεύητε* (And whenever you fast), *μὴ γίνεσθε ὡς οἱ ὑποκριταὶ σκυθρωποὶ* (do not look dismal, like the hypocrites) (v. 16a),

**M:** *γὰρ τὰ πρόσωπα αὐτῶν ὅπως φανῶσιν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις* (for they disfigure their faces to show others that they are fasting) (v. 16b).

**C:** ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ἀπέχουσιν τὸν μισθὸν αὐτῶν. (truly I tell you, they have received their reward) (v. 16c).

**O:** Σὺ δὲ νηστεύων ἄλειψαί σου τὴν κεφαλὴν (But when you fast, put oil on your head [emphasis added] v. 17) καὶ τὸ πρόσωπόν σου νίψαι and wash your face (v. 17), [emphasis added]

**M:** so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by ὁ πατήρ σου (your Father) who is in secret (v. 18);

**C:** Καὶ ὁ πατήρ σου (and your Father) who sees in secret ἀποδώσει σοι. (will reward you) (v. 18b). Like the teaching about prayer and the instruction on almsgiving, the practice of private fasting promotes beneficial exchange between the heavenly Father and humans. The beatitudes at the opening of the SOM provide the context for the priestly exchanges revealed in the teaching about prayer, almsgiving and fasting. The exhortation to give alms, pray and fast according to God's will supplies the immediate context for the next passage in Matt. 6:19-34.

#### **4.11.1.6. The OMC-texture of Matt. 6:19-34.**

The pericopes Matt. 6:19-21, Matt. 6:22-24 and Matt. 6:25-34 display OMC. Additionally, each of the three divisions display the OMC-texture. Starting with Matt. 6:19-21, it is noted that Jesus gives further illustrations regarding kingdom-righteousness that result from exchanges with the heavenly Father. It shows that people who are ready for the Kingdom would do their acts of piety in such a way as to store up their treasures in heaven, not on earth because their cherished



treasures (which in that culture included clothing) are perishable and insecure (thieves could enter the storehouse to steal them). So, Jesus admonishes them:

**O:** Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal (v. 19)

**M:** but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth or rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal (v. 20)

**C:** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (v. 21).

We see that the OMC-texture of Matt. 6:19-21 begins with the prohibitive imperative: *Μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς* (Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth) and alternates with the positively stated imperative in v. 20: *θησαυρίζετε δὲ ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐν οὐρανῷ* (But store up store up for yourselves treasures in heaven). The rationale is then stated (Matt. 6:21) in the proverb: *ὅπου γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ θησαυρός σου, ἐκεῖ ἔσται καὶ ἡ καρδιά σου* (For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also).

It is noteworthy that Matthew states the first negative imperative (Do not store...) having the whole audience (disciples and crowds) in mind (for yourselves...); He follows with the alternative (positive) imperative (But store up...) again with the entire audience in mind (for yourselves...), yet when he gives the rationale (For where your treasure is *ἡ καρδιά σου* [your heart] will be also), he focuses on the individual in the audience (*ἡ καρδιά σου*). The pattern from general instruction to individual application is evident. This shows that Jesus was not just giving general instructions to his audience for the sake of it, he also wanted each member of the audience to give serious thought and consideration to what they have heard, and endeavour to live by it.

#### 4.11.1.7. The OMC-texture of Matt. 6:22-24

The middle section of the passage on material ethics of Jesus as presented in Matt. 6:22-24 further displays the OMC-texture, starting with the enigmatic statement:

**O:** The eye is the light of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light (v. 22).

**M:** But if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness (v. 23a)

**C:** If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness (v. 23b)!

Verse 24 exhibits two categorical, prohibitive imperatives which are negatively stated: *Οὐδεὶς δύναται δυοὶ κυρίοις δουλεύειν* (No one can serve two masters) *and οὐ δύνασθε θεῷ δουλεύειν καὶ μαμωνᾷ* (You cannot serve God and Mammon). Here, like as in vv. 22-23, the author focuses on the individual in the audience. The word *ἀπλοῦς* (healthy; NRSV) is also translated “single” or “good” (Hardison 2010:24ff) and as Hardison (2010) further explains, in rabbinic literature, the *ἀπλοῦς* eye is an idiom for generosity because the *πονηρὸς* (bad/evil) eye is a proverb for greed and envy. With this understanding, the location of the healthy/unhealthy eye saying between the command to store up treasures in heaven in the middle section of the teaching on materialism, is consistent with the tone and force of Matthew’s argument. The closing section of the teaching on materialism (i. e Matt. 6:25-34) also exhibits the OMC-texture.

#### 4.11.1.8. The OMC-texture of Matt. 6:25-34

*Διὰ τοῦτο* (therefore) at the opening of this closing section indicates that Matthew's Jesus is drawing from the preceding argument to give a conclusion to the discussion. In Matt. 6:25-34, the OMC corresponds with v. 25, vv. 26-30 and vv. 31-34 respectively as follows:

O: *Μὴ μεριμνᾶτε τῇ ψυχῇ ὑμῶν τί φάγητε* (do not worry about your life, v. 25b)

M: *ἐμβλέψατε εἰς τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ* (Look at the birds of the air; v. 26a) and *καταμάθετε τὰ κρίνα τοῦ ἀγροῦ* (Consider the lilies of the field; v. 28b)

C: *Μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε λέγοντες* (Do not worry saying...; v. 31a), *ζητεῖτε δὲ πρῶτον τὴν βασιλείαν [τοῦ θεοῦ] καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ* (But strive first for the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, v. 33b) and *μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε εἰς τὴν αὔριον* (So do not worry about tomorrow, v. 34a).

These lines suggest that if a person trusts God to supply him/her with food, drink and clothing rather than worry about these supplies, God would preserve their body and whole life. This is so because God knows the needs of *ψυχή καὶ σῶμα* and supplies them by providence as the illustration from creation (birds and lilies) indicate. The OMC-texture of the closing section begins with “do not worry” (v. 25b) and then proceeds with “Look at the birds (v. 26a) and Consider the lilies...” (v. 28a). It closes with “Do not worry saying (v. 31a)...But strive...(v. 33b) “So do not worry...” (v. 34). It is evident that this closing section, like the opening, alternates positively stated commands with negatively stated imperatives. Moreover, the closing section targets the individual in the audience, rather than address the general population.

Thus, the passage opens the discussion on Jesus's material ethics in a context of perceived limited goods, reciprocal beneficial exchange between patrons and willing clients, and prevalence of a high poverty rate. In the context that existed, it was normal, for struggling, poor people to align themselves with, and serve earthly patrons, so that they may be supplied with their material needs such as food, drink and clothing. With Jesus' countercultural call to an amendment of the prevailing material ethic, people were confronted with a choice of their lives. The negatively stated imperative, "Do not store up treasures for yourself on earth where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal" (Matt. 6: 19; cf 19:21), is evidently contrary to traditional Jewish piety and societal norm. In Matt. 19:21, Jesus told a rich man to go sell his possession, give to the poor and to come follow him (Jesus), if he wishes to be perfect. The man went away sad because he was wealthy. Jesus calls on the individual to avoid disloyalty to the heavenly Father, by being different from this rich man, and rather give absolute devotion to God to continue to promote the beneficial exchange (Matt. 6:24).

The next inner texture to be analysed is the argumentative texture of Matt. 6:25-34. The pericope was chosen for illustration because it is impossible within the space and time available to this study, to examine every text in SRI detail in the entire SOM. Besides, argumentative texture follows the OMC-texture logically, therefore it will be discussed next.

#### **4.11.1.9. Argumentative texture in Matt. 6: 25-34**

Matt. 6:25-34 presents an example of a complete ancient argument. It has an introduction (v. 25a), thesis (v. 25b), rationale, confirmation of rationale [a, b, c, d, etc; v. 26], restatement of the thesis (v. 27), argument from analogy v. (28), argument from antiquity (v. 29), argument from contrary (v. 30), conclusion (v. 31), reiteration (v. 31a, b; Tryon 2006:26-27). The overall force of

the argumentative texture of this pericope is, that for those who serve God and unrighteous Mammon simultaneously, moth and rust will attack and destroy their wealth, then they will learn how useless it is to store up their treasure on earth. It is better for people, therefore, to serve God alone. They can do so if they strive first for the Kingdom and its righteousness (Matt. 6:34). The sensory-aesthetic texture of Matt. 6:19-34 is examined next to highlight the emotive aspects of the communication about material ethics. The pericope is chosen for illustration because it presents the argument in a very dramatic and rhetorically colourful manner.

#### **4.11.1.10. Sensory-aesthetic texture of Matt. 6:19-34**

The sensory-aesthetic texture concerns thought, emotion, sight, touch, smell, among others, which a text evokes, and how it does so. “Eye”, “lamp”, “body” are employed in this text to teach the importance of trust in God rather than in Mammon. The present imperative, “Look” (Matt. 6:26), shows that if Jesus’ audience use their eyes profitably as the lamp of the body, they will see that birds do not sow or reap nor gather into barns, and yet God feeds them. Moreover, they can see lilies of the field do not toil nor spin but grow gracefully in beautiful splendour, more than the glory Solomon radiated in his resplendent clothing, because God clothes lilies, whose lifespan is brief (Matt. 6:28-30).

With overwhelming evidence of God’s providence revealed in God’s creation, it is only people of little faith who will not trust God’s track record and magnanimity to supply all human provisions (Matt. 6:30-31). If their vision is blurred, they will fall into ethical confusion (Moss 2011:758ff) and would not know how to navigate their way in life to shun the dangers of materialism, and to serve and please God alone. The emotive imagery metaphor and syntactical arrangements in the text intensify the communication power of the argument. Since in SRI logic,

the sensory-aesthetic texture moves the discussion into intertexture analysis, we shall discuss the intertexture of Matt. 6 next.

## **4.12. Intertexture of Matthew 6**

The intertexture investigates the interactive world of a text. Since we have already treated the oral-scribal intertexture in the discussion of the Law, we shall here rather focus on the cultural intertexture and the social intertexture. Our focus is on the material ethics of Matthew's Jesus because alms, prayer and fasting have already been presented and discussed above.

### **4.12.1. Cultural intertexture in Matt. 6:19-34**

The cultural intertexture of Matt. 6:19-34 suggests that money (the cause of materialism) as an entity bears no specific moral connotation but its use determines the worth one places on it. When personified (to strengthen argument) and "elevated to the status of deity" (Tryon 2006:38), it becomes a master that demands service, loyalty and devotion, if not honour. This master (materialism), is however evil and counterfeit (Tryon 2006:38). Children-clients would do well to heed the Son-Broker's advice not to give the place of the Father-Patron to materialism (money). The recommended relationship between the Son-Broker and his Father-Patron on one hand, and willing children-clients, on the other hand is "cast in a cultural texture" (Tryon 2006:39). If the present earthly kingdom in which the people live is causing them anxiety, they will not be anxious as God's children when their needs are supernaturally supplied. Unlike the evil, covetous, ignorant and anxious patrons of the present earthly kingdom (Mammon servers), the divine Father-Patron is generous, gracious, benevolent and magnanimous, sovereign and all knowing.

#### **4.12.1. Social intertexture of Matthew chapter 6:19-34**

The social intertexture concerns a text's reference to societal elements that are not specific to any specific culture, such as social roles, codes and conduct, common to everyone in society. In Matthew 6:19-34, the social intertexture revolves around a series of attitudes and behaviours relating to material wealth as it was viewed and handled in late 2<sup>nd</sup> temple Palestine (c 537 BCE-70 CE and beyond). Wealth storage is a habitual human practice and the insecurity of earthly treasure is a universal human truth. Wealth storage in ancient Israel took the form of valuables such as gold coins and clothing (Blomberg 1992b:122). Moths threatened clothing and illegal appropriation, such as digging (cf Matt. 13:44) and stealing (Matt. 6:20), threatened gold. These facts made storage of wealth on earth a fruitless activity to embark upon.

#### **4.13. Social and cultural texture of Matthew chapter 6**

In the social and cultural texture, a text interacts with society and culture by exhibiting “attitudes, norms and modes of interaction that are known by everyone in a society, and by establishing itself in relationship with the dominant cultural system as either sharing, rejecting or transforming those attitudes, values and dispositions” (Gowler 2010:194).

Matt. 6 opens with a reformist tone as disciples are urged to seek individual transformation through exchanges with the heavenly Father in almsgiving, prayer and fasting (Matt. 6: 1-18). Six positive imperatives are stated negatively (vv. 2b, 3b, 5b, 7b, 8a & 16b) to teach the importance of private piety. Five commands are positively stated to make the same point (v. 6b, 6c, 6d, 17b & 17b). In the negatively stated commands: Do not sound a trumpet... do not let your left hand know...do not be like the hypocrites...do not heap up empty phrases...do not be like them...do not look dismal..., all but the fifth one is stated in the second part of their respective verses. This may have rhetorical value. The negatively stated positive commands focus on almsgiving and

prayer. The positively stated imperatives are: Go into your room...shut the door...pray to your Father...put oil on your face...wash your face... They focus on prayer and fasting. The alternating nature of the imperatives show that prayer is at the centre of the three spiritual disciplines of almsgiving, fasting and prayer.

According to Robbins (1995:138-139) the prayer Jesus taught offers a thaumaturgical response to the world because it demonstrates that people can experience divine intervention in their lives by petitioning God to grant them forgiveness, and supply their needs. There is also a revolutionist perspective to the prayer since it presumes that things are so bad in the world that either God or the children of God need to change the situation. Praying for God's rule in the opening amounts to a revolutionist response. The prayer assumes that God will punish his enemies when God's rule prevails on earth but God's people will live in safety. There is also a conversionist element of the prayer which assumes that the world is corrupt because people are evil. Thus, the worshipper promises to forgive others their debts as God forgives him or her (Matt. 6:12).

#### **4.13.1. Specific social topics and final cultural categories of Matthew 6**

The specific social topics reveal religious responses made to the world by the speaker or of characters portrayed in the text. The social and cultural texture of Matt. 6:19-34 (second part of Matthew 6) begins on a countercultural (final cultural category) note. Matt. 6:19-23 begins with a reformist tone (Tryon 2006:45) and ends on a thaumatological note in Matt. 6:25-34 (Tryon 2006:170). The controlling theme of Jesus' material ethics is that since greed is idolatrous (Matt. 6: 24), therefore anyone who accumulates material things beyond what they need (Tryon 2006:45), is depriving others. The observation that one's attitude determines whether one loses or keeps



wealth is dramatically thaumaturgical, because it focuses on a very personal individual response to the problem of materialism. We shall now turn to the ideological texture of Matt. 6:19-34.

#### **4.14. Ideological texture of Matthew 6:19-34**

The ideological texture of a text focuses on the biases, opinions, preferences, stereotypes of a writers and interpreters (Robbins 1996:95), as mentioned above (section 4.8). Since my location as an individual, relation to other groups, modes of intellectual discourse and spheres of ideology were discussed in Matthew chapter five, there is no need to repeat those aspects here. Suffice it to recall that my ideology of life tilts my interpretation in such a way as to desire to identify with less privileged characters in a text. This means that my ideology affects my interpretation and subsequently my view of Matt. 6:19-34. Therefore, it is easier for me to be on the side of Jesus and the unprivileged audience, than to identify with the Jewish authorities of Rome and Jerusalem.

#### **4.15. Sacred texture of Matthew 6:19-34**

How this pericope articulates views about God (or the gods) and about human beings' relationship with God/the gods falls in the domain of the sacred texture. In Matt. 6:19-34, Jesus the holy Son of God comes to mediate divine wisdom to potential children of God. God, through Jesus offers salvation to human persons, who, misguided by the appeal of unrighteous Mammon (personified materialism), are on the verge of missing out altogether. If they accept the Son's message to trust the heavenly Father for their daily supply of food, drink and clothing, they will not lack anything. Their commitment to the Father as children will make them serve God as their Master and not Mammon, the counterfeit master who competes with God for their loyalty and

devotion. Wisdom, precreation and apocalyptic rhetorolects are also implied in the sacred texture of Matt. 6:19-34.

Wisdom, precreation and apocalyptic rhetorolects of Matt. 6:19-34 blend to show that God's Kingdom (*secondspace*) is on offer to earthly children who are subject to an earthly, physical kingdom over which Mammon reigns (*firstspace*). In the space of blending, if the children accept the Son's offer to trust God rather than Mammon for their supplies, they will become members of God's new Kingdom (*thirdspace*) ruled by divine love. This divine love mimics the loving precreation relationship between the divine Father and the divine Son before the incarnation. The discussion now moves to the final chapter of the SOM (Matthew chapter seven).

#### **4.16. SRI of Matthew chapter 7**

In examining Matt. 7, we shall deal with the inner texture, the intertexture, the social and the cultural texture, the ideological texture and the sacred texture. Though these textures of Matt. 7 are not discussed in as much detail as the study did those textures of Matt. 5, the analyses of the textures in chapter seven do exhibit important trends that need to be highlighted to support the objectives of the study. Moreover, the discussion of textures in Matt. 5 is the most comprehensive in this study because Matthew's Jesus' topical discussion of the Law is concentrated there.

#### 4.16.1. Inner texture of Matthew chapter 7

The inner texture of Matthew 7 exhibits a mixture of repetitive, progressive, narrational and the OMC-textures<sup>58</sup>. The chapter opens with the negatively stated positive imperative: *Μὴ κρίνετε* (Do not judge), *ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε* (So that you may not be judged), which is followed by the rationale: “For with the judgment you make you will be judged” (v. 2). Matt. 7:1-2 exhibits repetitive progressive texture: “Do not judge (emphasis added, active voice), so that you may not be judged (emphasis added, passive voice). For with the judgment (emphasis added, noun) you make you will be judged (emphasis added, passive voice), and the measure (emphasis added, noun) you give will be the measure (emphasis added) you get. A play on the words judge/judgment and measure create a progression through reaffirmation. The purpose is to attain a dramatic conclusion (Robbins 1996a:46-48) that teaches the folly of self-righteousness and hypocrisy.

The OMC-texture of Matt. 7:1-2 shows that Jesus here uses a hyperbole to “disarm his audience and communicate his message with intensity” (Keener 2009a:239) as follows:

**O:** *Μὴ κρίνετε*, (Do not judge) (verse 1a),

**M:** *ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε* (so that you may not be judged) (verse 1b).

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<sup>58</sup> The narrational texture of Matthew views the gospel as a single story (Piotrowski 2016:22) and the plot, characters, settings and conflict and resolution are identified. It has been argued in Matthew chapter five that Matthew’s plot turns on conflict over the Mosaic Law, Abrahamic ancestry, purity and pollution codes and other Jewish identity markers. Similarly, we identified Jesus as the protagonist frequently challenged by other Jewish leaders (antagonists). The conflict seemingly gets resolved, when Jesus is killed but then he resurrects from the dead and the victory ultimately goes to him, not his opponents. The narrative tenor of the gospel, closely connected with Matthew’s intertexture is critical to Matthew’s meaning, since OT quotes, allusions, echoes and attributions contribute immensely to the narrative world of the story (Piotrowski 2016:23). Since the ideological texture examines the capacity of a text to participate in social and cultural developments in the historical world of the text, and helps a community to “position themselves in relation to other individuals and groups”, its use helps to focus on a text’s cohesion and meaning (Piotrowski 2016:22-23). The ideological texture thereby connects the narrational texture of Matthew’s gospel.

C: ἐν ᾧ γὰρ κρίματι κρίνετε κριθήσεσθε (For with the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get) (verse 2). Here, Jesus' use of rhythm as a characteristic of Hebrew poetry, and specifically synonymous parallelism is evident. Furthermore, hyperbole use is evident in Matt. 7:3-4 (Stein 2011:176). The illustration (vv.3-5) which follows, shows the folly and hypocrisy of trying to put others right while one has not put one's own house in order. Jesus uses the speck and log in the eye to explain this. Intertextural analysis of Matthew chapter seven follows in the next section.

#### **4.16.2. Intertexture in Matthew 7**

The communication of the author to the reader sometimes involves the rewriting of other texts (Robbins 1996a:30), which are drawn from outside the text being interpreted. The external data taken into the text includes other texts (oral-scribal intertexture), other cultures (cultural intertexture), social roles, institutions, codes, and relationships (social intertexture), and historical events or places (historical intertexture). Intertexture analysis in SRI therefore assumes and reflects diachronic interpretation (Robbins 1996a:32) because it investigates and interprets the nuances of “recitation, recontextualization and reconfiguration when different sources, traditions, redaction and amplification” (Robbins 1996a:33) relate among one another.

##### **4.16.2.1. Oral-scribal intertexture and prophetic rhetorlect in Matthew 7**

The prohibitive imperative, “Do not judge” (v. 1) which is further strengthened by the positively stated imperative, “take the log out of your own eye” (v. 5b), is supported in verse 1 by the rationale, “so that you may not be judged”. Verse 1 opens the pericope Matt. 7:1-6. Verse 2 exhibits prophetic rhetorlect in which Jesus, the Prophet, has brought a divine message to the audience, warning them not to arrogate to themselves the power of judging others. If they fail to

heed the prophetic call and rather mete out judgment to others, the audience would be judged by the same measure (v. 2a) they judged others; they would get the same measure they give to others (v. 2b). The prophetic imagery metaphor that follows, “why see the speck in your neighbour’s eye but fail to notice the log in your own eye” (v. 3), gives further force to the argument. It will be easier to take out the speck in their neighbour’s eye if the individuals in the audience first remove the log from their own eyes to see better (v. 4-5). To do this, is to avoid hypocrisy. From a redactional perspective, Matthew reconfigures and rewrites the Q material to read, “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged” (Matt. 7:1; cf Luke 6:37-42)<sup>59</sup>.

Like the opening verse of chapter 7, Matt. 7:6 begins with two prohibitive imperatives which are negatively stated: “Do not give what is holy to the dogs...do not throw your pearls before swine...” (v. 6). From SRI, “holy”, “dogs”, “pearls” and “swine” are *topoi* used to clarify this argument. *Topoi* are milestones in the mental geography of thought which give rise to networks of social, ideological and cultural meanings (Robbins 1999:21ff). Not only do we find here, in Matthew, wisdom sayings and teachings of Jesus as reconfigurations of other gospel traditions,

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<sup>59</sup> Apart from “judging”, Luke has, “Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven, give and it will be given to you” (Luke 6:37-38a). Luke further reworks his source to place the text within the context of giving, by adding, “A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure, you give will be the measure you get back” (Luke 6:38b). Luke then follows this with a parable Jesus told to warn his audience against hypocrisy (Luke 6:39-42). Matthew accounts for this in the first part of his judgment/non-judgment pericope but does not include Luke’s additional information that a disciple is not above the teacher (cf Luke 6:40a). Just like Matthew, Luke presents a prophetic rhetorolect in which Jesus the Prophet has brought a divine message to his human audience to warn them against hypocrisy. Jesus here addresses and confronts his audience about their conduct in interpersonal relationships which he knows is characterized by frantic pursuits to increase one’s honour rating. Challenge and riposte was a common feature, so Jesus challenges his audience to repent and to change their actions towards one another to please God rather than honour human patrons, or raise their own honour rating.

but also the use of *topoi* is reminiscent of a reworking of certain texts from the Hebrew Bible. For instance, “dogs” is an obvious, derogatory reference to non-Jews.

Jesus shows, from intertexture and wisdom rhetorolect (Keener 2009a:239) perspective, that just as flamboyant, showy righteousness can be misleading, assessing external features of others (Matt. 7:1-5) should have no place in the Kingdom of God. Conversely, keen self-assessment must be promoted (Matt. 7:4-5), bearing in mind that the unbeliever will make light even of honest, genuine, constructive criticism (Matt. 7:6). Jesus’ admonitions (Matt. 7:6), “Do not give what is *holy* to **dogs**; and do not throw your *pearls* before **swine**, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you”, combines both Hebrew parallelism and SRI’s OMC-texture. True believers who practice kingdom-appropriate righteousness will pray fervently to their Father (Matt. 7:7-8) to receive good things (Matt. 7:9-11). In calling the righteous disciple to importunate prayer, Jesus employed synonymous parallelism in Matt. 7:7-8 to help his audience memorize his message, as he comments on asking, searching and knocking as follows:

**Ask** and it will be given to you;

**search**, and you will find;

**knock**, and the door will be opened for you.

For everyone who **asks** receives,

and everyone who **searches** finds,

and for everyone who **knocks**, the door will be opened.

As righteous disciples interact with others they would do what they would have others do to them because they understand that the Kingdom message hangs on the correct meaning of the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 7:12).

The oral-scribal intertexture of Matthew's gospel shows that the golden rule of Matt. 7:12 is a reworking of textual phenomenon outside Matthew 7. Matt. 23:23 reconfigures Mic. 6:8, and Matt. 23:23 itself is a narrative amplification of Matt. 7:12, which is also intensified in Matt. 22:34-40 (Combrink 2003:29). Matt. 7:13-14 suggests that righteous disciples strive to enter the narrow gate that leads to life (accept the gospel and enter the Kingdom), rather than take the easy path leading to destruction (Matt. 7:13-14), because they know that not all claims to religion are trustworthy (Matt. 7:15-23). Disciples with kingdom-appropriate righteousness may not be able to stop false prophets, fake messiahs and phony miracle workers, but they can identify these false practitioners by the fruit of religion they bear, and stay away from them (Matt. 7:16-20).

To illustrate the surpassing worth of fruitfulness, Jesus employs antithetical parallelism and the repetitive, progressive inner texture to make his point. "Every good tree bears [good fruit], but the bad tree bears [bad fruit]," he says in verse 17. Then in verse 18-19 he says, "A good tree cannot bear [bad fruit], nor can a bad tree bear [good fruit]. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

The study has skipped the narrational, the OMC, the argumentative and the sensory aesthetic textures of the inner texture of Matthew 7, to limit the size of the dissertation. Moreover, Matthew chapter 7, being the concluding section of the SOM does not introduce new ideas about the meaning and application of the Law, but rather strengthens the rhetoric of the Law's illustration to intensify the message of the Kingdom (discussed in Matthew chapter five). Much of the inner

texture features of the SOM have already been discussed in the previous two chapters of Matthew's gospel. The study, therefore examines social and cultural texture of Matthew 7 next.

#### **4.16.3. Social and cultural texture of Matthew chapter 7**

Since the cultural, the social and the historical intertexture are strongly interwoven in the social and cultural texture in SRI, we shall discuss all of them together in Matthew chapter 7. The social and cultural context of the SOM has shown that the bitter conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities over the interpretation of the Law in the SOM is fundamentally a competition for honour.<sup>60</sup> In Matthew chapter 7, as in the rest of the SOM, Jesus teaches his disciples and the crowds, thereby attacking the Jewish authorities in absentia.

Matthew chapter 7 exhibits a blend of the specific social topics, the common social and cultural topics, and the final cultural categories. The language of a given text is configured in such a way as to evoke specific view (s) of the world for the characters in the text. Jesus presents a countercultural teaching on how the meaning of the Law affects personal relationships, in a context full of honour competition. Matt. 7 opens with a reformist tone (Matt. 7:1-5), as righteous disciples are admonished not to judge others so that they may not be judged. This response presumes that the world structures regulating people's lives are corrupt, and that the situation can change if people change or amend their ways based on God's influence over their lives.

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<sup>60</sup> Each time the Jewish authorities threw a challenge to Jesus over his or his disciples' attitude or interpretation of the Law, Jesus' riposte often called them to a closer reading of Scripture (Combrink 2003:32). Later in the gospel, the trend changes, because in Matt. 21-23, it is Jesus who threw the challenge to the Jewish authorities and since no one could answer him correctly, Jesus' honour increased and no one dared to ask him any further questions (Matt. 22:46). The multitudes honoured God and Jesus at certain periods in the narrative (cf Matt. 7:28-29; 22: 22, 33; 9:8; 15:29-31). Subsequently, Matthew's strategy to present Jesus as an honourable, consummate interpreter of the Law compared to the dishonoured Jewish interpreters exposes the rhetorical strategy of the gospel author (Combrink 2003:33).



The fact that the pericope uses the singular  $\sigma\upsilon\upsilon$  (you) 8 times shows that the imperatives are directed at individuals. Subsequently, the genitive singular  $\tau\omicron\upsilon$  (your) is also used 7 times to strengthen the force of the rhetoric. The entire pericope has a personal tone, therefore a thaumaturgical response is also evident. The appeal goes to individuals to accept the divine message of salvation (Kingdom message) mediated by God's own Son, so that they may be saved (become members of God's Kingdom). Jesus employs a blend of the wisdom, prophetic, precreation and apocalyptic rhetorolects to convey his message to the audience. Here, Jesus is the divine Son who incarnated to mediate God's divine will to earthly persons, living in a physical, corrupt human kingdom. If people heed the Son's call and live by the Father's message, they will become his children, members of his Kingdom. When God finally invades human history to consummate his Kingdom, his righteous children will live in love in the new Kingdom reminiscent of the love that existed between the Father and the Son before the world was created.

#### **4.16.4. Ideological texture of Matthew chapter 7**

My "conscious or unconscious enactment of presuppositions, dispositions, and values held in common with other people" (Robbins 1996a:95) shapes my ideology, as indicated in 4.8.2 above. According to Robbins (1996a:95), the ideological texture of a text "concerns the biases, opinions, preferences, and stereotypes of a particular writer and a particular reader." Analysing the ideological texture of my own presuppositions, dispositions, and values as a black Ewe man from poverty-stricken West Africa, affects my reading of the SOM.

Brought up in a strongly Christian home and mainly in rural Ghana in the countryside, my initial orientation was a conversionist response to the word, believing that if individuals in Ghana and elsewhere change their hearts and do the right things at the right time, life would be better for all. This inclination persisted until my university days and beyond, when my dwelling changed to

the city. My university education has since made me a city dweller. My current job in a seminary, has exposed me to a reformist response to the world, among others. As a Presbyterian Minister, a mixture of the conversionist and the reformist attitudes towards God's world and its problems guides me.

My individual location described above also controls my group orientation and ideological modes of discourse. As mentioned above, my experience and interpretation reflects my understanding of conceptual blending in SRI. As a male Ghana-Ewe Christian man living in Ghana, West Africa, my experience in terms of orientation around the role, function and significance of the Law in indigenous religion was one of observing dos and don'ts in order to live at peace with God, in harmony with other human beings towards cosmic equilibrium. The culture, ideology and religion that shaped Matt. 7 leads to a conceptual blending that depicts God's sphere of influence as the Kingdom (*thirdspace*) which God's holy Son introduces (*secondspace*) in contrast to the prevailing notions of kingdom (*firstspace*).

#### **4.16.5. Sacred texture and conceptual blending of Matthew chapter 7**

The sacred texture of the Matt. 7 shows that God the heavenly Father sent his divine Son Jesus, to God's people in the world to teach them the divine way to redemption. This is because, though God, through his prophets of old, entered a gracious covenant with his chosen children, Israel, the people were not faithful to the covenant, so God promised a new covenant Kingdom, which he now acts decisively to inaugurate. With the in-breaking of God's promised Kingdom, the Father, through the Son had begun to consummate the purpose of the history of salvation, and something dramatic was happening.

The precreation rhetorolect of Matt. 7 shows that the divine love that the Father shared with the Son in the divine realm before the creation of the universe, has now been revealed to

earthly human beings, to guide their lives in God's new Kingdom (*secondspace*). Since this new love-driven Kingdom is different in character, membership and focus, from the physical, earthly and evil kingdoms of the world (*firstspace*), one needs a righteousness that is appropriate for living in the Kingdom. This kingdom-appropriate righteousness does not judge others (Matt. 7:1-5) because it is not self-righteous. It perseveres in prayer and supplication (Matt. 7:7-11), because it requires constant exchanges with the divine Father to remain functional. Moreover, it is a righteousness that enables its possessor to enter the Kingdom through the narrow path that leads to life (Matt. 7:13-14); it is not distracted by professors of false religion.

Knowing that false professors constitute a potential danger even to the elect and could frustrate, if not prevent a Kingdom-member's entrance into, and participation in the eschatological Kingdom (*thirdspace*), reminds children of the Father to identify and shun false prophets (Matt. 7:15-20). Even if the phony devotees prophesy, exorcise demons and do other miraculous deeds in the name of the divine Son, their profession is fake, therefore genuine children will recognise them by their counterfeit profession, and avoid them.

The wisdom and the prophetic rhetorolect of Matt. 7:24-27 show that the only way the righteous children of the Father can avoid falling victim to the trickery of the false prophets, is to act on the Kingdom message they have heard from the Son, so that they may be like wise builders whose houses are built on solid rock that rain, floods and winds cannot destroy. In effect, the wisdom and the prophetic rhetorolect of Matt. 7 reveal that the relationship that obedient children have with the heavenly Father, strengthens their faith against the threat of deception and trickery which the devil, through his agents, unleashes against genuine believers who are striving to inherit the eschatological Kingdom of God when Jesus returns.

#### 4.17. Conclusion

Jesus announced his programme in the SOM when he said he had come not to abolish but to fulfil the Law and the Prophets. To clarify his point, he argued that the prevailing righteousness which the ancients had been taught was sub-standard, therefore those who wanted to enter his new Kingdom needed a better righteousness (Matt. 5:18-20). He illustrated kingdom-appropriate righteousness by appealing to, and reinterpreting the Law on anger, adultery and lust, divorce, oaths, retaliation and love for enemies (Matt 5:21-47). He noted that the goal of kingdom-appropriate righteousness is divine perfection (Matt. 5:48). Jesus further explains his new righteousness with examples taken from the spiritual disciplines of almsgiving, prayer and fasting (Matt. 6:1-18). He said alms, prayer and fasting promote beneficial exchange between the heavenly Father (divine Patron) and disciples who are righteous (obedient earthly clients). He taught a prayer that emphasises forgiveness as part of the daily growth towards sufficient Kingdom righteousness.

Using SRI to interpret the Law in the SOM has shown that Jesus employs numerous rhetorical devices, including parallelism and rhythm from Hebrew poetry to make his arguments. He also used different textures and *topoi* characteristic of first century Mediterranean speech patterns (rhetorolects) and Jewish sage rhetoric in many wisdom sayings. Jesus ended by urging his audience to go beyond being mere listeners and hearers, to obey and apply in daily acts, what they had heard. Not surprisingly, even the crowds, probably, mere eavesdroppers on his teaching, were astounded by the authority of his teaching (7:28-29).

The final chapter of the study, in keeping with the aims and objectives of the study, draws some important hermeneutical implications of the investigation for contemporary Ghana-Ewe Christian living. The implications drawn will help clarify the relationship between the Law and the Gospel.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# HERMENEUTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF A CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT AMONG EWE CHRISTIANS

### 5.0. Introduction

The focus of this study has been the interpretation of the Law in the SOM from an Ewe perspective, using Jesus' authoritative reinterpretation of the Mosaic Law in the SOM as the paradigm. The method used for the current study is SRI. This final chapter draws out some important hermeneutical implications of the study for Ghana-Ewe Christians. Formulating implications of a Bible text for a contemporary audience is a product of Biblical Hermeneutics (BH). BH, the science and art of biblical interpretation, is also a spiritual exercise. BH involves exegesis and contextualisation.<sup>61</sup> To get to the point of contextualisation, an interpreter needs further literary analyses of the text to complement his or her knowledge of the historical context. The investigation of the historical context of a text is part of the historical critical method of Bible study, although other hermeneutical approaches also value historical context. Interpreters have applied the historical critical method to the study of the Bible for many years.

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<sup>61</sup> By means of exegesis we seek the meaning of a text, and through contextualisation we apply the meaning found, by drawing its implications for contemporary living. To interpret a text correctly, the interpreter needs to learn several things, including an understanding of the historical cultural background of the authors and recipients of the text. The historical cultural background embodies the perspective and mind-set of the author and the first recipients, which together give rise to the need for contemporary contextualisation of the text (Klein, Bloomberg and Hubbard 1993:172-173).

A new paradigm shift occurred in the 1970s when scholars began to introduce literary criticism,<sup>62</sup> which focuses mainly on the text, studied as a literary composition. Both historical criticism and literary criticism have strengths and weaknesses, therefore some scholars try to maximise the benefits of each method, to enrich our understanding of ancient texts. Vernon K. Robbins' socio-rhetorical interpretation (SRI) is a good example of a hermeneutical approach that tries to bridge the gap between biblical cultures and contemporary ones in the interest of, and to the benefit of exegesis and contextualisation of biblical texts for today's audiences.<sup>63</sup>

Using Robbins' SRI, we find that analyses of the implications of the inner texture (specifically argumentative texture), the wisdom and the prophetic rhetoricals, and the social and cultural texture of the SOM show that the reinterpreted, fulfilled Law of the SOM, properly construed is the Gospel of the Kingdom<sup>64</sup> which Jesus offered to his audience. To accept this Kingdom message (the Gospel) and unite with the divine King (Patron) of the kingdom is to accept the King's offer, made through the Broker, one must nurture kingdom-appropriate righteousness. This means that henceforth, all clients have a mutual beneficial relationship with the heavenly Patron. This amounts to theological and ethical renewal for the new entrant into the Kingdom.

The Ghana-Ewe Christian, who has accepted Jesus as his or her Saviour and Lord, has accepted the Patron's offer through the Broker's service, therefore the Ewe Christian has become a client of the Patron with full benefits of the new status. The result is that the Ewe Christian ought

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<sup>62</sup>Initially, in the 1970's literary criticism relied more on structuralism and reader response criticism and other methods. Newer forms of literary criticism such as deconstruction also exist. "The influence of postmodernism is being more and more widely felt, whether it be through the new literary criticism, poststructuralism or reader-response interpretation" (Hagner 2012:8).

<sup>63</sup> Applied to the SOM, it can be said that Matthew's Jesus communicated a specific meaning of his Kingdom message by the way he reinterpreted the Law in the SOM. Matthew uses various symbols to communicate this meaning. The meaning communicated has many implications applicable among the Ghana-Ewe, though Matthew may not be aware of some of them (Stein 2011:33). My written or verbal expression of the meaning Evangelist Matthew tried to convey, is my interpretation of the text (Stein 2011:44).

<sup>64</sup>Using "Kingdom" with a capital letter beginning the word helps to distinguish it from earthly kingdoms.

to live as a person who has experienced theological and ethical renewal for effective and efficient discipleship. Since the study applied Robbins' SRI to analyse the Law in the SOM in the Ewe context using Jesus' hermeneutics, it will be helpful to summarise the results before drawing out some implications for the contemporary Ewe. Subsequently, after the summary, this chapter will identify from the study some important implications for the reinterpretation of the Law as the Kingdom message (Gospel) for contemporary Ewe Christian. This will help the Ghana-Ewe to identify and live by the theological and ethical lessons that Jesus teaches in the SOM.

### **5.1. Summary of the reinterpretation of the Law in the SOM**

This study has argued in chapter four that Jesus' authoritative reinterpretation of the Law in the SOM presents to the contemporary follower of Jesus, theological, pastoral and ethical implications as a member of the new Kingdom of God. To be a member of the Kingdom is to become a new covenant subject of the King. To this end, if the Mosaic Law which constituted YHWH's set of covenant stipulations for ethnic Israel, has now been transformed in a new era as Kingdom message. From the social and cultural texture of SRI, the reinterpreted, fulfilled Law of the SOM regulates the new Patron-client relationship between the divine Father-Patron and his earthly children-clients in the new covenant era. Christians of the new covenant era are the new (not renewed<sup>65</sup>) covenant people of God (Dorsey 1991:325), the Father-Patron.

The Father-Patron calls the children-clients to ethical renewal and theological transformation through unflinching obedience to the Kingdom message (Gospel). This

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<sup>65</sup> David Dorsey rejects Covenant Theology's viewpoint that the church is the spiritual Israel living under a renewed covenant and argues that NT believers live under an entirely new covenant in which legally, none of the 613 Sinaitic (Mosaic) laws are binding but all the 613 laws bind them in a "revelatory and pedagogical" (Dorsey 1991:325) sense. By "revelatory" Dorsey means to say that though the Law is not legally binding on the Christian, it is nevertheless a treasure that reveals the very "mind" (Dorsey 1991:332) of God, that is God's will and character. By "pedagogical", he suggests that the Law is profitable as Paul notes, for teaching, rebuke, instruction in righteousness and for correction. Dorsey believes that this approach, as a method of delineating the relationship between the Law

understanding guides the message of the SOM, which is the summary of the Son-Broker's programme which he brought from the Father-Patron. The Son-Broker's mission was to make people children-clients of the Father-Patron. The Patron's clients exhibit kingdom-appropriate righteousness that does not depend on hypocritical ostentation. To advertise the nature of kingdom-appropriate righteousness, children-clients must respond appropriately to the message of the Kingdom (Matt. 5:21-47). The utopian response is to exhibit kingdom-appropriate righteousness akin to the Father-Patron's perfection (Matt. 5:48).

Kingdom-appropriate righteousness is nurtured through daily, pious ritual acts such as almsgiving, fasting and prayer. These spiritual disciplines promote reciprocal, beneficial exchange with the Father-Patron (Matt. 6:1-14). Therefore, as earthly children-clients of the divine Father-Patron, the duty of clients is to honour, praise and serve the Father-Patron, who will in turn benevolently pour his benefits upon them, protect them and supply both their physical and spiritual needs. If the children-clients pray to the Father-Patron (Matt. 6:7-14) and forgive the debts of their fellow human beings, the heavenly Father-Patron will also forgive them their debts and protect them from falling into temptation. In 6:15-18, the divine Son-Broker further explains that kingdom-appropriate righteousness, cultivated through importunate prayer can be aided by private fasting, for beneficial exchange with the Father-Patron, who rewards people publicly.

The reciprocal and beneficial exchange which the children-clients have with the Father-Patron, makes the children-clients to grow in grace to serve the Father-Patron with unflinching

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and the gospel is more in keeping with the value and spirit of the Law than Covenant theologians' approach. Dorsey's approach resembles a method of solving the contentious law-gospel problems which Daniel Hays mentions as "principlism" (see Hays 2001:21-35). Like Dorsey's method, principlism fails to see biblical support for the popular tripartite classification of the Law into moral, civil and ceremonial stipulations, arguing that it is hermeneutically problematical. Principlism, proposes that the theological principle in each law being examined should be identified and then its contemporary application (implications) could be found. Principlism reaches beyond theological, biblical or religious studies, too.



obedience, honour and loyalty. The Father-Patron will then be the only Master the children-client serve. The Father-Patron does not have to compete with a counterfeit master (Mammon) for the Children-clients' loyalty (Matt. 6:24). Kingdom-appropriate righteousness gives rise to ethical and theological renewal, based on the correct attitude towards the reinterpreted Law (Kingdom message). Having the appropriate attitude makes the children-clients relate correctly to material wealth in a way that is consistent with the Father-Patron's will. Therefore, the children-clients will store up treasures in heaven, where there is no slavery to Mammon, and no depletion of treasure.

This positive client attitude to the Patron is contrary to the conduct professed by pagan elites of Rome and Jerusalem, and their ungodly Jewish collaborators who thought it was possible to serve both God and Mammon simultaneously. Even though there is no evidence that these false Jewish leaders and their Roman and Jerusalemite elites were present among the audience the Son-Broker addressed in the SOM, there is a sense in which the message of the Son-Broker was being addressed to them, to challenge them (Tryon 2006:50). These elites ruled from a distance (Rome and Jerusalem) but their presence was strongly felt everywhere in the Roman Empire (Powell 2009:25), including Galilee, where most of the Son-Broker's public ministry took place. Besides, these elites were the ones who were storing up their treasures on earth (Matt. 21:13). The bad leaders had bad eyes and had become blind guides, suffering from "blurred vision and ethical confusion" (see Moss 2011:757-776). They were mean, stingy and miserly. They accumulated more material resources than they needed. Therefore, as false patrons, they led poor clients astray by false interpretations of the Law. For instance, they taught that those who swear by the sanctuary are unbound by anything but those who swear by the gold of the sanctuary are bound by the oath (Matt. 23:16).

The recognition by the Son-Broker that the bad Jewish leaders and their Roman and Jerusalemite elites were false patrons misleading poor peasant clients, does not mean that he was teaching these clients to judge other people (Matt. 7:1ff). The Son-Broker gives categorical imperatives against judging others (Matt. 7:1-5) to teach the children-clients that if they get busy judging and criticising others, (accusing them of having bad eyes, for instance), they will forget to deal with the obstacles preventing their own eyes from being singular and good, and thereby fall into the same error that they accuse others of. To avoid this, an obedient child-client of the Father-Patron should not give what is holy to the dogs (those who are not children of the Father-Patron). Children-clients should avoid casting their pearls before swine because the dogs and swine, not realising the worth of the pearls will trample them (Matt. 7:6), and the dogs will turn around to maul them. Children-clients should therefore do the needful, and leave vengeance to the heavenly Father-Patron. Their duty is to ask, seek and knock (Matt. 7:7-11), because the heavenly Father-Patron is far more benevolent and magnanimous as to supply daily provisions of food, drink and clothing, than sinful patrons, who nonetheless, know how to give good things to the clients they exploit regularly. Even these sinful patrons do not give stones or snakes to their clients instead of bread and fish respectively (Matt. 7:11). There is therefore, no reason why the divine, magnanimous and gracious Father-Patron should fail to shower benevolent gifts on his loyal clients.

The children-clients of the Father-Patron, having been empowered to cultivate the kingdom-appropriate righteousness, can obey the spirit of the Law fully by loving one's neighbour as oneself (Matt. 7:12). If the children-clients of the Father-Patron ask, seek and knock to enjoy the Father-Patron's benevolence, should they not, in their pursuit of divine perfection, reflect the Father-Patron's characteristics? Is not obedience to the consummate, authoritative teaching of the

Son-Broker comparable to going through the narrow gate (Matt. 7:13-14)? People do not usually elect to go through a narrow gate when a broad one is available, because no one enjoys suffering and struggling, but the path of least resistance is often the dangerous one. Therefore, it is the Son-Broker's recommendation to children-clients of the Father-Patron to deliberately choose the path to life in the Kingdom, though the journey may not be pleasant.

To succeed, children-clients of the Father-Patron must be watchful and discerning enough to recognise and reject false, counterfeit brokers/agents (false prophets). These false agents/brokers are like evil Mammon, who competes to steal away child-client devotion, loyalty and service to the Father-Patron (Matt. 7:15). While these false patrons, agents and prophets may exhibit the semblance of service to the Father-Patron, their fake prophecies, exorcisms and miracles "in the Son-Broker's name", their fruits (Matt. 7:16) give them away. Their fruits demonstrate that they are servants of Mammon. Just as people can recognise grape, figs and thistles because each is unique (Matt. 7: 16), "In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit" (Matt. 7:17-18, NRSV). Their phony fruits are of no value, but since the fake fruits can deceive the unsuspecting, the right attitude for the genuine children-client is to be watchful so as to recognise and distinguish the phony servants from the true ones (Matt. 7:20). The divine Father-Patron, through his Son-Broker agent will destroy the evil trees that bear these false fruits at his own appointed time (Matt. 7:19). For the time being however, those who desire to be children-clients of the Father-Patron must be prepared to pay the prize for their choice.

To become a child-client of the divine Father-Patron is not through lip service, because many phony clients will pretend to serve and honour the Father-Patron (Matt. 7:21). These false clients merely mimic the divine miracles of the authorised Son-Broker, to deceive many, but the

divine Father-Patron knows those who belong to his Kingdom from those who are mere pretenders (Matt. 7:21-22). The Son-Broker will reject all the false clients, agents, children and envoys (Matt. 7: 23) because the Father-Patron gives him authority to judge them. The Son-Broker will condemn, without reservation, false clients who pretend to honour and serve the divine Father-Patron (Matt. 7:21-23), while serving Mammon (Matt. 6:24). In contrast to these phony agents, children-clients of the divine Father-Patron, through the Son-Broker are to act upon the Kingdom message to be wise builders, whose foundations are fixed on the rock (credible clients). If they do, no rain, floods and winds can destroy their building (kingdom-appropriate righteousness), because the foundations are solid (Matt. 7:24-27). This is how the message of the Son-Broker benefits discerning hearers.

At the end of the reinterpretation of the Law, the multitude-hearers of the Son-Broker's message are astounded because his authoritative teaching has no parallel in their history or contemporary practice. Unlike the Jerusalemite and Roman false patrons and their money-loving false (scribes and Pharisees) collaborators, the Son-Broker does not set the Law against the Gospel, but emphasises kingdom-appropriate righteousness that makes people become children-clients of the Father-Patron to live in accordance with the Father-Patron's will and character (the interpreted, fulfilled Law).

## **5.2. Implications of the reinterpreted Law for Ghana-Ewe Christians**

As noted in chapter two of the study, indigenous Ewe communities mark their identity and self-esteem (honour) mainly through the pursuit and protection of *agbe* (life), *ηκɔ nyui* (good name) and *nunyoname* (prosperity). *Agbe* is the highest good for the Ghana-Ewe. This is reflected in cultic practices and other cultural activities of the people, including worship (*subɔsubɔ*, lit. “serve, serve”) and naming ceremonies. Worship, whether to a deity or an earthly master is service.

Thus, both priests and slaves serve their masters among the Ewe. Regarding naming ceremonies for instance, numerous personal and family Ewe names, contain the word life (*agbe*).<sup>66</sup> These names show how valuable God's gift of life is to the Ewe.

*Dkɔ* (name), as an identity marker among the Ewe connotes character. *Dkɔ nyui* (good name) is derived from one's relationships, with deity (worship), fellow humans (e. g service) and ancestors (veneration). The Ghana-Ewe is truly alive when he or she is, through worship, service and veneration, living in harmony with deity, fellow humans and the rest of creation (a state of cosmic equilibrium). *Nunyoname* (prosperity, lit. things good for a person) is defined in terms of God's gift of children and good harvest or other business success. God does this as a blessing of worship (service). *Kesinɔnuwo* (wealth) is part of *nunyoname*.

Even though two millennia apart, like the audience of the SOM, the Ghana-Ewe live in a culture where material wealth is, (or perceived to be) limited, and there is wide disparity between the privileged wealthy and the disadvantaged poor. Therefore, the pursuit of *kesinɔnuwo* is vigorous and stressful, full of strange manoeuvres that including practice of sorcery and witchcraft to satisfy their needs. In the SOM the challenge is stronger in the light of the Son-Broker's reinterpretation of the Law (God's will and character) regarding the correct attitude to wealth (Matt. 6:24). The question is, with a unique history, religion and culture, defining their identity as Christians, how do Ghana-Ewe Christians navigate their lives, to live under the reign of God as their Father-Patron while, as earthly children-clients, they struggle to get their daily life supplies in the physical world? If the Ghana-Ewe see God as the Father-Patron who supplies their every

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<sup>66</sup> These *agbe*-infused names include: *Agbeko* (life alone matters), *Agbetsiafa* (the water of life is cold, i.e, it satisfies) *Agbemabiase* (God cannot be called to account for human life), *Agbeehia* (life is the greatest need), *Agbemeseli* (God controls destiny), *Agbezuge* (life is a contest, ie for some), *Agbezuke* (life is enmity, ie for some), *Agbeleŋgɔ* (there is life ahead), *Agbeli* (life endures) and *Agbesinyale* (there is hope when there is life).

need, including material things, they would trust God. If they trust God as their source of providence, there will be no need for them to try to control and manipulate phenomena so as to meet their needs. Just as Jesus offered his message to privileged people as well as religious and social outcasts, he offers his message of hope to the entire Ghana-Ewe Christian community. This offer has nothing to do with the fact that the Ghana-Ewe are a people with mutilated destiny. Jesus offers wholeness of life despite the contradictions of the Ghana-Ewe experience, the same way “ritual, purity and pollution, healing, honour and shame, and kinship” (In-Cheol 2004:26) influenced the character of Jesus’ ministry but did not prevent him from achieving his purpose.

Jesus offered an inclusive ministry while the Jewish authorities excluded those they judged to be outcasts (cf Matt. 21: 31-32). Jesus’ Kingdom message was inclusive because it was based on a love-infused reinterpretation of the Mosaic Law for his contemporary community. Thus, the social stratification that previous interpretations of the Mosaic Law created and maintained within the Israelite society (In-Cheol 2004:14), could not frustrate Jesus’ offer of his Kingdom message to people. Jesus moved the symbolic universe of the Matthean community from a focus on the Mosaic Law to his reinterpretation, his life and ministry. Therefore, his message is *εὐαγγέλιον* (good news) to his audience even if countercultural.

The fact that the other Jewish leaders antagonised Jesus in the story of Matthew is because his pronouncements and attitude towards the Mosaic Law was unsatisfactory to them. They wanted a segregated community (cf Matt. 4:24; 8:6; 9:20-23, 27) based on their skewed interpretations of the Mosaic Law and the traditions of the elders. Jesus embarked upon an all-inclusive ministry. Nevertheless, Jesus was the ultimate victor in the resulting conflict, as his resurrection shows.

This means that Jesus as Son-Broker of the Father-Patron offers the best deal. The greedy, selfish, self-serving scribes and Pharisees, and the false patrons of Rome and Jerusalem castigated

and ostracised people who needed their help. Jesus gave the latter the rare opportunity to become children-clients of a benevolent, magnanimous heavenly Father-Patron. There is no better offer. Jesus offers this divine patronage to the Ghana-Ewe too. If the Ghana-Ewe accept his offer, their lives will be transformed dramatically because their needs will be supplied from divine sources that are not subject to depletion. If they accept the offer, the Ghana-Ewe would no longer need to be involved in the ongoing, fierce struggle to find an “authentic Ghana-Ewe Christianity” which has given rise to many “versions” of Christianity among the Ghana-Ewe as the history of EPCG, for instance, has shown in chapter two of this study.

As noted in chapter two, Bremen Missionaries brought Christianity to the Ghana-Ewe in 1847. They founded EPCG. Many schisms have since affected the unity and cohesion of EPCG, leading to new, different Christian denominations within Eweland and beyond. Disagreements over interpretation of the Bible, particularly the biblical Law mostly led to the schisms. Dzobo (2018:32) has argued that Pentecostalism was largely responsible for the latest and biggest EPCG schism in 1992. Pentecostalism is a phenomenon founded on a reinterpretation of the divine Trinity, that puts, in my opinion, a lopsided emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. This cannot be separated from the meaning of biblical Law, since Jesus reinterpreted Law in the SOM, is the Kingdom Gospel of the divine Trinity of which the Holy Spirit is part. Specifically, the “lopsided” focus on the role of the Holy Spirit is evident in that Christian expression, which claims that the Holy Spirit functions to empower believers to create wealth and become “successful”. Success in this context refers to material wealth.

This understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit is akin to the misinterpretations of the Law that prevailed among the Jews during Jesus’ ministry. Jesus noted that to nurture kingdom-righteousness through spiritual disciplines that involve exchanges with the divine Father leads to

a divine perfection that makes love for enemies possible. If the Ghana-Ewe accept the Kingdom message of Jesus and apply themselves to it, rather than trust the false, wealth-making promises of the kind of Pentecostalism defined above, they would nurture inner purity that lead to righteous, outward acts. They would become meek, merciful, pure in heart and peaceful, through their hunger and thirst for kingdom-appropriate righteousness, they will be rewarded in heaven. They can rejoice even in suffering because God will comfort them. Above all, they can trust God to supply all their needs, once they strive for God's Kingdom and its righteousness first (Matt. 6:33). They would serve God, not Mammon (Matt. 6:34).

### **5.3. Ghana-Ewe appropriation of the SOM**

Since this study is an interpretation of the SOM among the Ghana-Ewe based on Jesus' consummate reinterpretation of the Law in the SOM, it is legitimate, in this concluding chapter, to compare Ewe *Mawuga* religion with Christian religion, and draw out some important parallels. If the SOM is taken to be a Jewish appropriation of God through the correct relationship to God's Law, the Ewe belief in *Mawuga* reflects a Ghana-Ewe appropriation of the SOM. If this is correct, then, belief in *Mawuga* is a contextual appropriation of God in Ewe mother tongue, custom and life. As explained in chapter two of the study, *Se* (Law) is an alternative name for *Mawuga*, and *Se* imposes limits on people and forbids certain actions. The Ewe refer to the Christian God as *Mawu(ga)*, therefore God and *Mawuga* are two ways of referring to the same deity. Ghana-Ewe Christians relate to the Christian God the same way they relate to *Mawuga*. Moreover, if *Mawuga* is God, the Lawgiver who forbids certain actions and places certain limits on people, then the Ghana-Ewe can worship or serve *Mawuga*, by obeying *Mawuga's Se* (Law and Will). *Mawuga* will, in turn make them righteous, protect them and give them their daily supplies which even the *Fiaga* (the paramount chief), cannot give because it is not within his power. The *Fiaga* himself



relies on *Mawuga* and the ancestors for his daily supplies. *Mawuga*'s servants (worshippers) will, thus, become better placed than *Fiaga*'s servants because the *Fiaga*, the ancestors, and certain wealthy human patrons of the society, who attempt to provide the needs of those who serve them cannot be better patrons than *Mawuga*.

To become clients of *Mawuga* means that the Ghana-Ewe recognise God in *Mawuga*. But the Ewe must become Christians (accept the Kingdom message of Jesus, the Gospel), first, to be able to worship and live along with *Mawuga*<sup>67</sup> as their divine Patron. Since *Mawuga* is the same as the divine Christian Patron, and Ghana-Ewe Christians are *Mawuga*'s earthly clients, the Ewe will become the salt and light of their communities and the society they live in, if they worship *Mawuga* with kingdom-appropriate righteousness. They will be able to expose and prevent corruption and other wrongdoing in society. They will overcome the temptations of anger, lust, adultery and divorce, and become so truthful that they would not need to take an oath to prove their claim. They will resist retaliation because they know vengeance belongs to *Mawuga*. They can love their enemies as *Mawuga* does wicked people. Since they worship *Mawuga* and serve their fellow human beings in love, *Mawuga* will supply their daily needs of food, drink and clothing, with more besides (Matt. 6:19-34). Subsequently, their duty will be to trust *Mawuga* as the God of providence.

Moreover, with their special relationship with the divine Patron, when they do their deeds of piety, unlike the false patrons of the *trɔwo* (lesser deities), their focus must be on *Mawuga*. Therefore, whether they are giving alms, praying or fasting, they must do so away from the public

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<sup>67</sup> As indicated in chapter two of the study, *Mawu* is a generic Ewe name for deity, and *Mawu* has many servants who are also divinities. Sometimes, the other divinities are simply called *mawuwo* (gods). When *Mawu* is used in Ewe Christian discourse, it is a reference to the Christian God of the Bible. To avoid confusion between the Christian God and the lesser gods of Ewe indigenous religion, some prefer to use *Mawuga* (the Great God) for the Christian God, as this study has done.

eye so that *Mawuga* who sees hidden things, will reward them openly. It is the clients of the *trɔwo* (lesser deities) and the unbelieving *fiawo* (chiefs) who try to impress their admirers, and counterfeit masters. Clients of *Mawuga* do not need to impress people with their service to *Mawuga*, their only Master. Since *Mawuga* is the source of their righteousness, *Mawuga's* clients (*mawusubɔlawo*) will serve *Mawuga* alone. *Mawusubɔlawo* will not share allegiance to *Mawuga* with *kesinɔnuwo* (Mammon), the evil master. If they do, they will lose their devotion to *Mawuga* and become *gasubɔlawo* (servants of Mammon). *Mawusubɔlawo* store their treasures in heaven where moth and rust and other “agents of depletion” (Tryon 2006:32) have no access. If they are true to their duty as *Mawuga's* clients, *mawusubɔlawo* have no reason to worry because their credible, benevolent and magnanimous Patron (*Mawuga*), whose providence feeds birds of the air and adorns mere grass of the field, will supply all their needs.

This is not a call to *mawusubɔlawo* (Ghana-Ewe Christians) to judge other people. On the contrary, it is an admonishing to them to keep asking, seeking and knocking (cf Matt. 7:7-11) to show their absolute dependence on *Mawuga*. They must go to *Mawuga* in daily prayer and devotion to live as true *mawuviwo* (*Mawuga's* children). They will relate appropriately with the clients of the unbelieving *fiawo* (chiefs) and the *trɔsubɔlawo* (worshippers of lower deities) so that as *Mawuga's* children, they do not fall into the trap of self-deception, to which *trɔsubɔlawo* (worshippers of other deities) and *fiasubɔlawo* (clients of unbelieving chiefs), like the scribes and Pharisees and their collaborating false patrons of Rome and Jerusalem, were victims. Once *Mawuga's* children have heard the message of *Mawu Vi la* (the Child-Broker of God) and have acted upon it, they are firmly on the narrow path that leads to *agbe* (life).

Since *agbe*, is the greatest goal of the Ghana-Ewe, along with the gift of children and prosperity, how do they, as Christians receive these benefits? As has been mentioned already, life

in the Kingdom is the true life that Jesus offers to everyone, including the Ghana-Ewe. It is a life of kingdom-righteousness in which members trust God to give them life and supplies. Kingdom members are to live in love, serve and trust God, and refrain from worrying. For the Ghana-Ewe, for whom life, gift of children and property define full identity, they are to note that though gift of children is not stated in the SOM as one of the direct benefits from God to believers, it is implied in the pericope with the positive imperatives to ask, seek and knock (Matt. 7:7-11). Therefore, as *mawusubɔlawo*, they can rest assured that if, as true children of *Mawuga*, they serve faithfully, everything will fall in place and *Mawuga* will give them life in full. The Ghana-Ewe's relationship with *Mawuga* as *mawusubɔla*, (God's servant) through *Mawu Viɲutsu la* (the Son of God), clarifies for the Ghana-Ewe, the relationship between the Law and the Gospel, to which we now turn.

#### **5.4. Ghana-Ewe and the relationship between the Law and the Gospel**

We have seen from our study that the Law in the Bible is a complex notion. In the OT, Torah which is regularly translated as “the Law” means several things. The basic meaning of Torah is “instruction”, but it is often understood as command or judgement, or ordinance or covenant stipulation (Osborne 2006:186). It is also translated as “commandment” in the Pentateuch (Hagner 2012:17). Torah as instruction is embedded in narrative context of the Pentateuch (Fee & Stuart 2003:168; Osborne 2006:186). Therefore, as instruction or teaching, Torah cannot be properly understood apart from the narrative context within which it occurs. One opposing view to the preceding discussion is that Torah focuses on what God requires in his Law and the verbs that often describe Israel's attitude towards the Torah, such as “keep”, “abandon”, “obey”, “transgress”, “walk in” and “do”, further suggest that Torah points to God's commands (Schreiner 2010:19-20). However, it seems clear that the verbs listed above can also apply to God's “instruction”. Moreover, the translation of Torah as in the LXX and in the NT (including the SOM)

shows that its principles were soon understood as legal provisions binding the Jews (Osborne 2006:186) despite its basic meaning as “instruction”.

Between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, we find that the term “law” or “laws” has several meanings (Fee & Stuart 2003:168). “Law” is used in the singular to refer to the 613 covenant stipulations plus additional commandments intended for ethnic Israel to keep, to show their loyalty to Yahweh. Sometimes the NT uses “law” specifically in this preceding sense. “Law” also refers to the Pentateuch as the Book of the Law (cf Josh. 1:8). Some NT writers use “law” theologically to refer to the entire religious system of the Hebrew Bible. Peter and some other NT personages use “law” to mean rabbinic interpretations of the OT religious system (eg Peter in Acts 10:28). Apart from these meanings of “law”, the Pentateuch is frequently called “the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 5:17-20; Luke 16:16).

The relationship between the Mosaic Law and the Gospel of the Kingdom in the NT is a thorny one, and opinions differ widely among different Christian groups. Christian history is replete with both strange and commendable attempts to delineate the correct biblical view of the relationship between the Law and the Gospel. Moreover, it is helpful to bear in mind that the Mosaic Law particularly served as covenant stipulations for ancient Israel. There is a sense in which it can be argued that the Gospel is the Kingdom message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. As early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Marcion, attempted to explain the relationship between “the God of the Hebrew Bible” and “the God of Jesus revealed in the New Testament”. Marcion was not convinced that the Hebrew Bible presents the same God as the God of the New Testament. Marcion’s attitude towards the two Testaments embraces the problem of the relationship between the Law and the Gospel. Dispensationalists, Covenant theologians, Seventh Day Adventists,

Christian Reconstructionist movements, the Worldwide Church of God (Dorsey 1991:322-325), and other movements and individual views exist that explain the relationship between the Mosaic Law and the Gospel. Dorsey's survey shows that Marcion rejected any connection between the Old and the New Testaments, because Marcion felt these two Testaments reveal two different deities.

Dispensationalists argue that God has two different programmes, one for Israel and another for the Church. Covenant theologians, including most Lutherans and Calvinists, suggest that the Gospel is a "renewed" covenant. Seventh Day Adventists, taking a cue from Covenant theology argue that it is arbitrary to isolate and reject the literal application of the Sabbath law, while claiming that the rest of the Decalogue is timeless and eternally binding. The Christian Reconstructionist movement (theonomy) proposes that both the so-called moral laws and the civil laws are normative for all Christians. The Worldwide Church of God movement claims that the Church is spiritual Israel and therefore is bound by the whole Law except those specifically fulfilled by Jesus. Even from this very brief account, the wide variety of different positions on the Law among Christian groups is evident. Dan Liroy (Liroy 2004:6) has underscored the controversy that exists among scholars not only over how the Decalogue and the SOM are connected, but also on the relevancy of the so-called moral law of the Bible.

Many scholars have studied the role of the Law in Christian salvation, for instance, as a problematical theological concern. Lutherans point to the Law and the Gospel as two different messages of salvation found in scripture. The problem with such a view is that it sets up the Law against the Gospel. The main critique of Covenant theology is that the Bible mentions a "new" covenant (see Jer. 31:31-34 and the NT) but not a "renewed" covenant (Dorsey 1991:323). Hays

(2001:21-35) and others, who hold the view of “principlism”, note that the principle underscoring the Law must be investigated and known so that it can be applied in a new context. This view resembles Dorsey’s view that none of the 613 stipulations are legally binding on the Christian, but Christians are bound by them in a “revelatory and pedagogical sense” (Dorsey 1991:325). In other words, God gave the Law as part of God’s self-revelation, to teach human beings. Dorsey believes his view is more in keeping with the spirit of the Law than the other views surveyed above, because his view, he thinks, avoids logical fallacies inherent in other views, and addresses the NT’s own ambivalence regarding the OT Law.

The proposed view in this study is that the reinterpreted, fulfilled Law of the SOM is the Gospel (*τον εὐαγγέλιον*). It is this Gospel that fulfils the Law. “Jesus’ person and ministry so fulfil the purposes of all the Old Testament that he alone now has the authority to dictate how his followers must obey those Scriptures in the new age he has inaugurated” (Bloomberg 1992:30). Jesus’ assumes a sovereign authority equal to the OT in his reinterpretation of the Law as valid and binding to the minutest degree (Matt. 5:17-19), yet the scribes and Pharisees, judging from his actions, accused Jesus of breaking the tradition of the elders by “defiling” himself through ritual impurity (cf Matt. 15:1ff). If Jesus, through his actions “broke” the Law, did he do so in favour of the Gospel of his new Kingdom espoused in the reinterpretation of the Law in the SOM? If he indeed broke the Law, did his teaching then contradict his action? Since Jesus, in the SOM claimed to have come to fulfil, not abolish the Law, how is the Law related to the Gospel of the Kingdom he preached? How does a contextual interpretation of the SOM among the Ewe from Jesus’ perspective clarify this relationship?

By the time the Gospel of Matthew reaches its climax in Jesus' Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20) to his followers, it is full obedience to the commission, not Torah observance that amounts to discipleship (Bloomberg 1992:31). We have seen from SRI of the SOM that the Law prefigured the Gospel. The Law concerns God's holiness plus righteous standards, will and values. The Law reveals God's character and drives believers to Christ, after showing them how to live for God. The Gospel exhibits God's mercy in Jesus through Jesus (Childers 2006:17, session five). Disciples of Jesus are favoured more than OT worshippers because they have seen signs and miracles, heard the Gospel preached to them and have experienced the indiscriminate outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Both the preaching and the miracles of Jesus are evidence that the Kingdom has come with its Gospel message. Through the Gospel, what was only an expectation under the Law and the Prophets, has been realised (Ridderbos 1978:71; cf Luke 16:16, cf Matt. 11; In II Cor. 4:1-7).

For these reasons, disciples of Jesus are ministers of a New covenant that radiates more glory than the glory of the Law associated with the ministry of Moses. "The secret of the presence of the kingdom of heaven lies in Jesus' victory over Satan, in his unlimited miraculous power, unrestricted authority to preach the gospel, in his pronouncements of blessedness and the bestowal of salvation upon his people" (Ridderbos 1978:82). This view further strengthens the connection between the Law and the Gospel. Hilary of Poitiers, once argued that "The God of the Law is the God of the Gospel" (Poitiers, cited in Williams 2012:15). In other words, Christ, the embodiment of the message of the Gospel is the "channel" through who the Law is ultimately understood and applied. The Gospel is the "fulfilled Law" as reinterpreted in Jesus Christ the Messiah. In Matthew, Jesus' reinterpretation of the Law "occurs in the context of the good news of the presence of the kingdom. The announcement of grace is antecedent to the call to live out the righteousness of the

law (e.g. the Beatitudes precede the exposition of the law in the Sermon on the Mount” (Hagner 2012:204).

As pointed out above, Jesus’ reinterpretation of the Law in the SOM, has as its central focus, kingdom-appropriate righteousness. Those who have kingdom-appropriate righteousness enjoy beneficial exchange with the Father in heaven, their divine Patron, therefore they are given divine enablement to serve the Father as their only Master. They understand the role of the Law in their lives as leading to theological and ethical renewal. They do not allow Mammon to rob their allegiance to their heavenly Patron, because they know that God, not Mammon (*kesinɔnuwo*) is their Patron and Master. To become a client of the Patron, as we have seen, is to possess kingdom-appropriate righteousness and enter the Kingdom. To enter the Kingdom is to become a child of the heavenly Father. The Father’s children, having kingdom-appropriate righteousness, pursue moral perfection, and are spiritually matured enough to use wealth to honour the Father. Since they have singular allegiance to the Father, they persist in seeking spiritual nourishment in him and apply themselves diligently to the Father’s message through his Son. How do the Ghana-Ewe Christians appropriate these ideals as people who have received the grace of the gift of salvation from the Father through the Son?

Chapter two of this study discussed how the Ghana-Ewe became part of present day Ghana. The chapter underscored the ambivalent role of the League of Nations in the process, especially in relation to the plebiscite that was organised to help the then Eastern Togoland to decide its political future. There is no gainsaying the fact that the identity of the Ghana-Ewe as a people today cannot be decoupled from that history. Some political commentators in Ghana and elsewhere have interpreted the events leading up to the plebiscite and the subsequent status of the people as gross



human rights abuses by local political elements with international collaborators. Therefore, some think the Ghana-Ewe are like a grafted people, with a mutilated identity (see for example Kudzordzi 2005:31ff). Because of its historical past and close ties with the Togo-Ewe, many Ghanaians for instance, see the Ghana-Ewe as a people whose identity is mixed up with the Togo-Ewe. In Ghanaian political circles, some have accused the Electoral Commission of Ghana of registering and giving Ghanaian voter identity cards to Ewes of Togo, because the EC is unable, according to this view, to properly distinguish between the Ghana-Ewe and the Togo-Ewe.<sup>68</sup>

This type of allegation and other historical experiences have greatly affected the Ghana-Ewe, including their religion. This cannot be detached from the history of Christianity in Eweland. It has been noted that Christianity came to the Ghana-Ewe through the activities of the Bremen missionaries, who first arrived by sea at the Christianborg castle in Accra, where they consulted with their missionary colleagues from Basel. The missionaries from Basel advised their counterparts from Bremen to take their missionary activities to Gabon. The Gabon mission failed, so the Bremen missionaries accepted to go to the then yet-to-be-independent Eweland. The results of the historical developments and the Ghana-Ewe acceptance of Christianity have given rise to a unique Christian expression that often generates discussion.

One discussion point, is the fact that Ghana has two Presbyterian churches, established by two separate missionary societies from Basel and Bremen. The missionaries from Basel and Bremen established the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana (EPCG) respectively. These two Presbyterian churches are separated, not by

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<sup>68</sup> For instance, the Vice President of Ghana (in 2018) Dr. Bawumia granted an interview to Joy FM, a local Accra radio station on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2015 (while his party was in opposition). Bawumia alleged that the Ghanaian voter register was bloated because it contained the names of more than 76000 foreigners, mostly from Togo. Malik Abbas Daabu posted the interview on [myjoyonline.com](http://myjoyonline.com).

doctrine, but by history and perhaps language use. The PCG has a large Akan following and the EPCG has an overwhelming Ewe membership. Some observers even assume that it is the deliberate policy of EPCG to be monoethnic in composition. However, the assumption is not valid.<sup>69</sup> For many Ewe members of the EPCG, this historic fact obscures their identity. Being accused of belonging to an “Ewe church”, constitutes an assault on their self-esteem and disturbs their cosmic equilibrium, because it is considered an attack on their good name (identity marker). It is an attack on their honour as clients of the divine Patron. This concern, coupled with the fact that Ghana is a lower middle income, developing country with many human development challenges (UN annual report 2016:2-3), makes many a Ghana-Ewe Christian feel a crisis of identity. How does Jesus’ teaching in the SOM speak to the current situation?

In his reinterpretation of the Law in the SOM through the key of love, Jesus espouses the true sense of the Law, to enable people with kingdom-appropriate righteousness to relate correctly to the requirements of the Law, and counsels those who are confused about the role of the Law in their lives in this gospel era, to simply put their trust in God. He thus, offers an inclusive message that segregates and ostracises no one. When Jesus touched a leper (Matt. 8:1-2), healed on the Sabbath (Matt. 9:18-26), permitted his disciples to pick ears of grain on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-8) or taught that it is not what entered a person that defiles him or her but what comes out of the person (Matt. 15:1ff), or summarised the Law as love for God and love for neighbour (Matt. 22:34-40), he was clarifying the connection between the Law and the Gospel. As the flawless, consummate Teacher, promised Son of David, Son of God, Wisdom incarnate and Lord (Blomberg

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<sup>69</sup> The German (Bremen) missionaries promoted vigorously the use of the mother tongue in theologising but did not decide to establish an Ewe church. Even though the church became known as “Ewe Presbyterian Church”, this was an accident of history, which became a comparative advantage in evangelisation initially. The indigenous leaders, who prematurely succeeded the Germans when the First World War broke out, changed the name in 1954 to “Evangelical Presbyterian Church”. They had argued correctly that the church had expanded beyond Eweland (see Ansre 1992:61).

2009:146-148), Jesus offers salvation to people through the Kingdom of God that he inaugurates, and teaches them to become credible members of the new Kingdom. As the promised Prophet of God (Deut. 18:9ff), who teaches kingdom-appropriate righteousness (Matt. 5:20), Jesus gives rest to the weary (Matt. 11:28-30) and all who believe him (Blomberg 2009:146). As Son of David, Jesus is the Messianic King (Son-Broker of the heavenly Father-Patron), who believing people (earthly clients of the Father-Patron) appeal to for help (cf Matt. 15:22).

As Prophet and Messiah, Jesus bears God's word. He is the Word and he reinterprets the Word. As Son, he is "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). In his Great Commission, he told the disciples, "behold, I am with you" (Blomberg 2009:147) all the days of your lives. Ghana-Ewe Christians can take comfort and consolation in the track record of Jesus. Wisdom and prophetic rhetorolects in the SOM show that while Jesus continued with the wisdom and prophetic tradition of Moses and the prophets, Jesus trumps all by his authoritative (Matt. 7:28-29), consummate and final reinterpretation of the Law, since he is the climax of God's self-revelation (see Heb. 1:1ff). Thus, he taught with great wisdom and exhibited awesome deeds of power (Matt. 13:54). Jesus' wisdom and miracles far exceed the credentials of any broker or patron that the Ghana-Ewe might have known. If the Mosaic Law with its regulations, ordinances, laws, rituals, mores, statutes, and precepts, sealed Yahweh's covenant with ethnic Israel, the reinterpretation of the Mosaic Law in the SOM finds fulfilment in Jesus' Kingdom (Gospel) message.

Thus, the Kingdom message is not apart from the Law. The mention of the Law is reminiscent of human disobedience to God, and failure to please God. The Law and the Prophets pointed to Jesus, so his Kingdom message (Gospel) is the reinterpreted Law. The Law prepared the way for his Gospel, therefore the Law is not an end, it is a means to an end (Pfeiffer et al 2008: 1018). The Law points to Christ. Understanding the Law as pointing to Christ's saving activity in

the Gospel, connects the Mosaic Law, also to Paul's "law of Christ" (*τὸν νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ*; Gal. 6: 2; cf Gal. 5: 14; I Cor. 9:21). Paul emphasizes the role of love in the Jesus story to show, that as a strong witness to Jesus among the Gentiles, he expounds the Jesus tradition in his epistles. In the incarnation of Jesus, the connection among God's promise to Abraham, the Mosaic Law, and the Gospel of Jesus in salvation history is evident. Jesus' fulfilment of the Mosaic Law is a clarification of the Gospel of his Kingdom that validates the true intention and purpose of the Mosaic Law.

The Mosaic Law contains God's moral standards founded on love. The Gospel interprets this standard for the New covenant era. Since God's character is unchanging in both the Old and New covenant eras, the moral demands befitting God's character persist in both eras. This, then means, that doing "good works" in the gospel era, is a response to the saving grace of Jesus rather than an attempt to please God through observation of the Law. As the Father's Son, Jesus endorses the ritual acts (of the Law), such as almsgiving, prayer and fasting for his followers (Matt. 6:1-18), as a means of entering beneficial exchange with the heavenly Father-Patron, whose gracious bounties showered upon children-clients will lead to their perfection (Matt. 5:48). The Son-Broker does not, however teach earthly children-clients to show their loyalty to the heavenly Patron by following legal codes.

Conceptual blending in the SOM (Matt. 6) shows that Jewish earthly clients who break free from evil, selfish patrons of Rome and Jerusalem and accept the Son-Broker's offer to be clients of the heavenly Father-Patron, order their lives through mutual beneficial exchange with the divine Father-Patron. The decision to become clients of the heavenly Patron is by far the best thing that can happen to a Galilean peasant, living in an honour and shame, materialistic culture of perceived limited resources that call for daily struggle. This is because, rather than fall in line with the normal

attitude of submitting to evil, selfish patrons, resident in Rome and Jerusalem to receive crumbs from their tables, these clients have become members of the Kingdom of God and have access to both present and eschatological benefits. For these new clients, the struggle to obey the legal codes of the Law is unnecessary because the laws have been reinterpreted by the Son-Broker, who has facilitated for them the most refreshing patron-client relationship that they can ever get. The reinterpreted Law of the SOM, binds the children of the Kingdom as fulfilled Law, not ensnaring legal codes and ceremonies. Since the Ghana-Ewe have accepted the Son-Broker's offer of a new Kingdom, their experiences need not be different from those of Jesus's audience who accepted and lived out his teaching.

With their new attitude of living for Jesus by following his teaching (Okyere 1997:123), the Ghana-Ewe ought to have a new understanding of the Law and the Gospel. Jesus exemplified the correct attitude towards the Law as fulfilled in love in both his teaching and his conduct. For instance, the intertexture of Matt. 5:17-48 shows that Jesus revised the Law on retaliation to teach the gospel principle of loving and praying for one's enemies and those who persecute Christians. This was a countercultural, disruptive, anti-establishment, mind-boggling teaching in an honour and shame culture, where failure to avenge a public affront or challenge to one's honour discredited a person and lowered one's personal honour rating. Ghana-Ewe Christians will do well to take a cue from Jesus attitude and teaching regarding the Law. Rather than struggle to find the best way to interpret and apply each single Law of the Bible to their lives as believers, Ghana-Ewe Christians can live by the gospel principle of love. If they do, they would find new theological insights from a relevant contextual interpretation of the Law in the SOM. What does this contextual theologising offer, for theological rejuvenation and renewal of ethical life for Ghana-Ewe Christians?

God's perpetual and unchanging covenant with God's people is the basis for ethical and theological renewal for those who have become God's children. Jesus' incarnation to carry out God's will on earth, amounts to the arrival of "God in context" to broker special agreement with people. Just as agreements between parties often have conditions, results and security (Pfeiffer et al 2008:386), the biblical covenant is either of the parity or suzerainty type. The Law and the Gospel are Old covenant stipulations and New covenant principles respectively. The gracious covenant of God for both the old and new eras put forward God's grace as the basis of salvation. There is, however, no disjoint between the Law and the Gospel in salvation history and other acts of God. Being saved by grace through faith (New covenant salvation) amounts to becoming a member of the new Kingdom of heaven.

The Kingdom itself is the reign of God in the present life, and the foreseeable future. The Kingdom has been inaugurated but not consummated (Schreiner 2008:54). In Matthew, the discourse on discipleship (Matt. 5-7, the SOM), introduces and expands the idea that the reinterpreted Law is the Gospel of the Kingdom. The discourse on mission (Matt. 10 and 28) isolates mission as the most important task for the members of the new Kingdom as worldwide missionaries (Schreiner 2008:48). The third discourse explains the nature and extent of the Kingdom (Matt. 13; cf 20; 22 & 25) and how the reinterpreted Law functions to guide conduct through it. Moreover, the discourse shows how the Kingdom emerges, grows and expands. The fourth discourse (Matt. 18) teaches how children of the Kingdom are to relate to one another in the Kingdom (cf Matt. 19-20). Matt. 18 gives examples of how members of the new community may relate to one another in love to affirm their resolve to live by the principles of the reinterpreted Law. The fifth and final discourse Matt. 23-25 (Hood 2009:527ff), explains what future expectations the new Kingdom community can hope for (Ladd 1959:79; Blomberg 1992a:73). It

is a future of rewards for the faithful, and punishments for the unfaithful (Pennington & McDonough 2008:32). Matt. 8-9, 11-12 and 14-16 connect with Matthew chapter 13 as additional texts that reveal the nature and application of the Kingdom of heaven. Matt. 17 gives a further example of the Law's application therefore, it is linked to the SOM. Matthew chapter 21-25 forms the unit on eschatology. How do those understandings apply to the Ghana-Ewe context?

Ghana-Ewe believers who have accepted the gospel of Jesus have no reason to feel that the circumstances of their lives determine their identity, because God gives them a new identity. They have *agbe* (life), along with prosperity because their previous self-interest, pursued based on a faulty understanding of their relationship with *Mawuga*, no longer applies to them.

#### **5.4.1. The SOM and Ghana-Ewe individual interest/self-interest**

Just as the reinterpretation of the Law in the SOM challenged the self-interests of Jesus' original audience, a contextual application of Jesus' meaning challenges indigenous Ghana-Ewe self-interests. Jesus' audience lived in an honour and shame, challenge-riposte, wealth and poverty culture of limited goods. Their self-interest was based on and determined by these social conventions. Jesus appealed to the self-interest of his disciples and the eavesdropping crowd to drop their long-held notions of the meaning of the Law for their lives, and adopt his final, authoritative interpretation of the Law for application. This means that Jesus presented to them a different attitude towards wealth than they knew. The Ghana-Ewe similarly, can expect that though people may ridicule them, because of their mutilated identity defined by their history and certain ethnocentric conventions, henceforth, their honour does not come from fighting back their critics but in willingly accepting the will of *Mawuga* for their lives. In the same way, *kesinonuwo* (wealth)

should not determine the Ghana-Ewe's honour anymore, or else they would become slaves to Mammon.

#### **5.4.2. The SOM, the Ghana-Ewe and wealth and poverty (Matt. 6:19ff)**

From Jesus' teaching in Matt. 6:19ff, we notice that wealth and poverty among his audience and the society in which they lived, had systemic and spiritual causes. First, wealth and poverty were rooted in the unjust order that pertained in the Roman Empire in which the people lived, especially in Rome. This influence was equally felt in Jerusalem, where the emperor in distant Rome, made his power felt through the governor or some other local leader. It was an unequal culture in which some people were socially and religiously excluded. Most of the excluded people were outcasts, such as prostitutes, the sick, tax collectors and sinners, lepers and the demon-possessed. The situation of the Ghana-Ewe is no different.

Most Ghana-Ewe people are poor peasants, who rely on farming and fishing for their livelihood, even though others carry out trade and handiwork as well. Four hundred years of slave trade plus a hundred years of colonisation, combines into about 500 years of suppression experience for the Ewe. Moreover, as we have seen most of the territories of the Ghana-Ewe, unlike most other Ghanaians, were not part of the then Gold Coast, which is the largest subunit of present day independent Ghana. The Ghana-Ewe were part of Togoland, but were joined to Ghana through the unethical activities of western political players and their local collaborators. Through the partitioning of Africa, the Ghana-Ewe were integrated into Ghana just before the then Gold Coast became independent. One prominent Ghana-Ewe Christian, an insider, suggests that his people are slaves in freedom (Kudzordzi 2005:31), by which he meant that the Ghana-Ewe were



suffering from identity crisis because of the fact that they suffered manipulation from political players to become part of modern Ghana.

Moreover, like the experiences of other Africans, raw materials from Eweland were unjustifiably exploited and taken away without any meaningful benefits for the Ghanaians themselves. Consequent unfair trade deals and heavy debt stocks have worsened the situation. Coupled with these, is the ever rising, sophisticated neo-liberal capitalist “super-powers” bullying the struggling economies of Africa. Corruption and bad governance have caused further deterioration of an already bad situation. Many political pundits judge China, a powerful nation busy promoting its strategic interests in Africa (and other continents) without direct political interference in the host economies, as the new colonial power in Ghana. Migrant crisis and human trafficking are on the rise. This situation directly affects the Ghana-Ewe Ewe. Juxtaposed with an already traumatic history of frustrating self-determination, these challenges have devastated many Ghana-Ewe, who realise that their political and economic fortunes are still being determined by forces outside their control.

Worse still is the influence of a new Christianity in Ghana which claims to be a saviour but which evidently ties in well with the ideology of serving God and unrighteous Mammon simultaneously. Having been labelled differently by different scholars, “Ghana’s new Christianity” proposes that everyone who becomes a follower of Jesus ought to become wealthy by right as a child of God. Some refer to it as Prosperity Gospel (Gifford 1990:375). Others label it as Prosperity Theology and one proponent calls it “Abundant Life Gospel” (Larbi 2001:312). The reasoning behind it is that the Holy Spirit empowers every regenerated person to become wiser than unbelievers so that the believer can outsmart the unbeliever in all business dealings to become rich.

The believer's faith makes all the difference. This is what the study calls the "compulsory-wealth Christianity."

Ghana's "compulsory-wealth Christianity" can be traced back to the early 1960s following the rise of African Independent Churches (AICs). Sometimes called, African indigenous or African initiated churches, the AICs (Amevenku 2010:45; Oduro 2018:128) in Ghana, as many scholars have noted, are antecedent to the rise of Pentecostalism in Ghanaian Christianity (see Baeta 1962/2004; Omenyo 2002; Asamoah-Gyadu 2018). In its classical form, Ghanaian Pentecostalism is that Christian expression which seeks to replicate in contemporary Christianity, the miracle and power-based ministry of the Holy Spirit in Acts of the Apostles. Ghanaian neo-Pentecostals added the wealth-creation bit to this Christianity, making the AICs, the Pentecostals and the neo-Pentecostals (known as charismatics in Ghana), a single phenomenon known as Pentecostalism in Ghanaian Christianity. Ghanaian Pentecostals, with their wealth-making Christianity focus mostly on addressing economic issues in the lives of their members.

The biggest economic issue in Ghana in 2018 was the collapse of seven indigenous banks. This banking crisis has direct bearing on Ghanaian Christianity because some of the promoters and directors of the defunct banks were very well-known Ghanaian pastors. They included Mensah Otabil, the founder of the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC). Another prominent Ghanaian pastor, Nicholas Duncun Williams (founder of Action Chapel International), waded into the controversy by telling his members, in a sermon on Citi TV to "shut up" and leave the unbelievers to do the criticising, because for him, Otabil is "an anointed man of God" who must not be touched (cf Ps 105:15). Otabil was the Board Chairman of the now collapsed and insolvent Capital Bank. Did Otabil try to serve both God and Mammon simultaneously? As a pastor, and

with no previous experience or training in banking, it might seem he did. As a noted vocal critic of secular political leadership in Ghana, Otabil could have been more cautious in his involvement with banking business. He has spoken authoritatively on the management of the Ghanaian economy on many occasions and in many instances. Otabil has Ghana-Ewe members in his church as well, who, like other members, must find an appropriate response to the banking crisis and their pastor's involvement. This is important because Otabil has been preaching consistently on radio and TV in Ghana on his popular programme "Living Word". He also owns a "Living Word School of Ministry", where he trains people to become pastors like him. Living Word sermons are full of "principles of making wealth." What lessons does the reinterpretation of the Law in the SOM have for (Ghana-Ewe) members of Otabil's church?

The argumentative texture of Matt. 6:19-34 shows that a re-reading of the text is strongly called for to challenge contemporary Christian attitudes towards material prosperity. While some church leaders claim that Jesus suffered for Christians to enjoy, the enjoyment they speak about is only for them as leaders and not for their followers (Adeyale 2011:102ff), even though both leader and followers believe in the same Jesus. The paradox is strengthened by the inordinate love for power and social status revealed in some Christian leaders' approach to ministry. A careful examination of some of Otabil's writings shows that he believes in the ideology that to become a Christian is to have faith strong enough to become wealthy suddenly. At the centre of his theology is his "four laws of productivity" based on his understanding of Gen. 1:28, which he summarises as follows: Growing into the image of God in purposeful, fruitful, multiplication to replenish the earth by subduing it productively (Otabil 1991:35). Otabil has since preached hundreds of sermons in which he has sought to explain these laws through daily, applicable money-making principles. He considers money-making as a right of a true child of God. Considering that Otabil's ICGC

grew fast in numbers in the mid-to-late 1980s, a period of economic turmoil in Ghana, one must give credit to Otabil for his attempt to exegete not only the Bible, but also his Ghanaian culture, into which he sought to find contemporary relevance of the message of the Bible. Otabil shares the contribution with the rest of the leaders of Ghanaian Pentecostalism who, through their sermons and messages give hope to millions of young Ghanaian Christians. Otabil's offer of hope is also evident in his contribution to education delivery in Ghana. Central University, which stands in his church's (or his) name is a modern, chartered Ghanaian tertiary institution offering all kinds of programmes to Ghanaians and foreigners, who take advantage of the university's facilities. Living Word, however, is the more regular way to see and hear Otabil in Ghana, preaching his compulsory-wealth Christianity, to give hope to people.

Even if his exegesis of the Scriptures is problematic at points, he shares SRI's concern for exegesis of, not only the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, but also the cultures that are associated with them. Exegeting both the scriptures and the cultures into which they are cast is important (Klein, Blomberg & Hubbard 1993:425). Nonetheless, while SRI has shown that deficient spirituality makes people want to serve both God and Mammon simultaneously, Otabil rather makes the dichotomy between God and Mammon very fluid. We have noted that in the SOM, Jesus laid down principles from his understanding of the Law to clarify the relationship of the Law to his Gospel. In doing this, Jesus showed that internal attitudes determine external actions, therefore the best way to pursue the Christian ideal of divine perfection, is to build Christian character. Good conduct is the direct result of good character. Good character is the result of the redeemed and renewed life, which is evident in the life of the one who has been regenerated.

The Ghana-Ewe, if they put on true Christian character, will have a full understanding of their vocation, just like the SOM audience, to claim their heritage as children of the heavenly Father. Like Israel whose vocation was to be the light of the world, and salt of the earth (Matt. 5: 13-14), the Gospel invites the Ghana-Ewe to redefine their relationship with deity just as Jesus invited his SOM audience to participate in the in-breaking of God's new Kingdom. Getting the Gentiles in would also mean that God's selection of Israel as salt and light has now been fulfilled. The Ghana-Ewe, like Israel and Jesus' SOM audience, should not be satisfied living as slaves in freedom, serving God and Mammon simultaneously. They should be worthy servants of God with kingdom-appropriate righteousness. The true righteousness will make them exhibit all the qualities Jesus addressed to them. That way, guided by the Father's own perfection, they can shine as light in the world and overcome corruptible conduct, such as serving God and Mammon simultaneously.

Through daily, pious ritual acts such as almsgiving, prayer and fasting they will overcome anger, murder, lust and adultery, resist divorce and careless oath-taking and retaliation, and live for the Father's glory just like Jesus. By so doing, they would have no need to covet anything belonging to someone else, or worry about the troubles of life, but they will strive first for the Kingdom of God and its righteousness. They will live right, storing up their treasure in heaven, where no agent of depletion can touch their wealth. It is this kingdom-appropriate righteousness that will revolutionise their ethical behaviour to be consistent with God's will. Their righteousness (*nudzɔdzɔe wɔwɔ*) will spring from their love for God, not Mammon.

Rooted in the indigenous Ewe concept of justice, *nudzɔdzɔe wɔwɔ*, (righteousness) literally, "doing thing straight" is central to *Mawuga*-endorsed piety. *Nudzɔdzɔe wɔwɔ* is regulated by *Se* (Law). *Nudzɔdzɔe wɔwɔ* is understood to mean being *Mawuga*-like (Godlike). Apart from

*Mawuga's* Law, rules, rituals, mores, proverbs, and riddles also regulate Ewe behaviour. These life-regulating activities can hardly be separated from Ewe cultic practices. Similarly, at the centre of Jesus' reinterpretation of the Law in the SOM is both justice and righteousness. Jesus did not however teach that one can attain kingdom-appropriate righteousness by observing laws. Good works, according to Jesus, are the result, not activities leading to kingdom-righteousness. The means to good works is love for God, rooted in the Jewish *Shema* (Deut. 6:6-9), and reinterpreted by Jesus in the Kingdom Gospel. Love for God builds the resilient character that enables the disciple to love their neighbours, including enemies who hurt and persecute them. When this kingdom-appropriate righteousness is rooted in divine love, it reflects the shining attribute that makes disciples light of the world and salt of the earth.

*Mawuga's* children, like God's community of ethnic Israel (required to love Israel's God and neighbour), will learn to love *Mawuga* with all their heart, soul and mind as the *Shema* indicates for the Jew (Deut. 6:4-9). This is the gist of the commandments that govern *Mawuga* and his servants. In his Kingdom message, Jesus recalls and recontextualises the *Shema* to explain that the Law and the Prophets amounts to love of God and love of neighbour. God's mercy equals the severity of the high standards of justice and love in the Law (Fee & Stuart 2003:180). The Law's essence, the Decalogue, and Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 18:19, were repeated in the prophets and reinterpreted in the NT so they form part of the Law of Christ, whose appropriation requires kingdom-appropriate righteousness.

### **5.4.3. The Ghana-Ewe and the effect of Kingdom membership**

Jesus does not define clearly the Kingdom which he addressed to his listeners. However, the Kingdom was his great vision by which he summoned people, inspiring them to join his

programme of action. The opportunity still exists, for the time being, for people, including the Ghana-Ewe to enter the Kingdom. The Kingdom demands a righteousness better than that which *trɔsubɔlawo* (idol worshippers) and *fiasubɔlawo* (worshippers or servants of human kings) advertise. The Kingdom comes with blessings that transform its new entrants theologically and ethically because Kingdom blessings are antecedent and consequent to personal transformation (Gle 2018:23), which prepares people to live by the new morality of the Kingdom (Mt 5:21-48). It is a new society in which violence is eradicated at its roots (Matt. 5:21-26), where women are no longer treated as sex objects or discriminated against by men (Matt. 5:27-32), where simplicity of speech and the transparency of inter-human relationships makes external guarantees unnecessary (Matt. 5:33-37), where order is maintained not through the fear of retaliation but through the concern of love (Matt. 5:38-42), and where men and women accept each other, across all barriers of class, caste, race and culture, as the children of the one Father in heaven (Matt. 5:43-48).

Transformed individuals who constitute the Kingdom have been reformed in their desires, attitudes and priorities to reflect their relationship with God (Gle 2018:24). Their heart motives are now radically aligned to the will of their heavenly Father. Living in the new Kingdom of God can be equated with the doing of God's will (Alexander & Alexander 1992:484). God's Kingdom is the realm where God's will is perfectly done in obedience to God's word. Jesus' life and teaching show Kingdom members how to be God's agent in the world (see Matt. 12:28; 25:41; Matt. 13:44-46 and 11:5). Other characteristics of Kingdom life include ethical and accountable leadership (Matt. 18:1-4), humility and patience, living for others and making peace even with adversaries. Subsequently, whoever fails to radiate the love of Christ, thereby proves that he or she has no part in Christ and is not included in the Kingdom. Entering the kingdom through the narrow path to

cultivate love towards enemies and exclusive love towards God as *the* Patron and Master, are not matters that can be described as a light yoke and easy burden (Matt. 11:30) but because Jesus first demonstrated it (Matt. 11:29), it remains the ideal goal to which everyone who loves God and neighbour can aspire. Though the Kingdom rates above everything and every relationship (Matt. 10:37ff., 16:24ff.), Jesus did not reject relationships of daily existence, including social and political institutions. Nor did he focus on Jewish ancestry because with the dawn of the new Kingdom, there is a reversal or at least radical revision of ancestry and identities. Even those who were outside Israel (*τὰ ἔθνη*) and had no share in the Mosaic covenant become children of the Father through proselytization and are no longer *τὰ ἔθνη* (Tryon 2006:52). With this new trend, some Israelites who considered themselves to be children of God because of their blood link to the Abrahamic covenant (cf John 8:33), may well have become *τὰ ἔθνη* and others who are *τὰ ἔθνη* because they have no Abrahamic ancestry may well have become children of the heavenly Father (Tryon 2006:52). The nature of God's offer is a free but costly salvation for all who will come to Jesus in faith.

### **5.5. The Law and the Gospel in Christian salvation**

First, how does the law-gospel debate help to explain the role of the Law and the Gospel in Christian salvation? From the perspective of Matthew's Jesus, this should again be answered within the context of God's gracious covenant. Under the Mosaic covenant, as the Pentateuch indicates, Israel had no bargaining power because the covenant stipulations were unilaterally and graciously imposed by God. Israel's role was to accept or reject the covenant wholesale. The covenant was not "earned or merited but due entirely to the kindness of God" (Stein 2011:101), therefore the promised covenantal blessings were bestowed as rewards for obedience. The Gospel of Jesus, was similarly freely offered without any preconditions, since it was God's gift that had



become visible in the incarnation of God's Son. Salvation, thus, occurs within God's covenantal relationship with a believer in Jesus, so God does not impose the covenant stipulations on people who are outside the covenant relationship. If this is the case, then the debate among scholars that one's inability to obey fully Jesus' teaching in the SOM is meant to help people to realise that they need the grace of God, is overstated.

Since salvation is God's gracious gift and nobody can do anything to deserve it, God likewise graciously gives the Holy Spirit to the saved person to serve God in obedience without compulsion. If this is so, then it cannot be said that the one who receives salvation by accepting God's offer, can please God by observing the legal stipulations of the Law, only to fail and be driven to grace. If it were so, then God might be taken to be a mean taskmaster, who takes his children through severe drilling only to teach them a lesson. On the contrary, God, through the promise, the Law and the Gospel gradually and progressively, revealed the plan of salvation by which sinners might come to God. Jesus, came to establish the true intent of the Law, so that those who accept God's promise, Law and Gospel as they accept the Triune God, might live as obedient children of a heavenly Father. These obedient children are the believers who exhibit a righteousness that far exceeds scribal and Pharisaic righteousness of Jesus' day (cf Matt. 5:20).

Jesus' six antitheses show how believers, who are appropriately righteous, might live under the grace of the Gospel in obedience to the reinterpreted Law. "The grace of the kingdom and the demands of the law as interpreted by the messianic king stand in dynamic tension throughout the gospel" (Hagner 2012:204-206) of Matthew, but the former precedes the latter. Since believers are thus appropriately righteous, they can face and overcome the temptations of anger, or murder, adultery or divorce, or careless oath-taking or retaliation or hatred for enemies (Matt. 5:21-48). They can function as salt and light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16).

The wisdom rhetorolect of the SOM shows, in this imagery, discourse on local Mediterranean moral philosophy deriving from the physical world, blending with God's cosmos (Robbins 2010:200). In the conceptual blending, clients of the divine Patron exhibit kingdom-appropriate righteousness, making them productive and reproductive agents of holiness and goodness. They are holy and good because they draw from the beneficial exchange with the heavenly Patron. This way, righteous believers "produce good, righteous action, thought, will, and speech with the aid of God's wisdom" (Robbins 2010:201).

The sacred textures in Matt. 6 and 7 show that Christians are children and clients of the Father and Patron. The Father's Son is the divine person who the Father has sent to complete God's revelation to people, which he first gave through his servants, the prophets (holy persons). The message of the Son is offered for redemption of sinful people and those who accept his message constitute the resulting redeemed community. When in future, God consummates the already-inaugurated Kingdom, the redeemed will live in it. The sacred texture "addresses redemption, commitment, worship, devotion, community, ethics, holy living, spirituality, and spiritual formation" (Robbins 2017:3). It shows how the redeemed children will share community with God their Father in his holy and glorious Kingdom.

The prophetic rhetorolect of Matt. 6 shows that those who accept the Broker's offer of the Patron's new Kingdom (*secondspace*), forsake the patronage of the evil rulers of earthly kingdoms (*firstspace*) and in the resulting blending of concepts (*thirdspace*), have joined the Father's Kingdom as children and clients. Ghana-Ewe Christians can experience theological and ethical renewal to make them God's children, likewise. The social and cultural texture of the SOM, shows that the new offer of salvation is countercultural, because it discredits the nature and value of prevailing earthly kingdoms. The new message of salvation is also a call to serve God, instead of

Mammon. Denouncing service to Mammon is based on a material ethic which is rooted in kingdom-appropriate righteousness. Once they deny service to Mammon, the children of God can serve God cheerfully, consistently, systematically and sacrificially to promote God's Kingdom (*thirdspace*). They have no reason to be mean towards such a magnanimous, awesome and majestic, and benevolent Father.

## **5.6. The SOM and theological renewal for discipleship**

The Matthean Jesus commissioned the Church to make all the inhabitants of the world his disciples, to baptise them in the name of the Trinity, and to teach them to do all that he had commanded (Matt. 28: 20). Disciple-making is a process by which people are guided to move from self-centredness to lead God-centred lives. Jesus' command to his followers to go make disciples, is mandatory, not optional, therefore obedience to Jesus' teaching is the basis for discipleship and disciple-making. Faith in Jesus as Messiah distinguishes a community even if it does not regard itself to be different. Matthew's message is clearer, more contextual and more practical when examined from pastoral, communitarian, rather than systematic theological perspective. If pastoral, the message turns on ethics, mission, worship, discipleship, stewardship, and social justice (among others), rather than as Eschatology, Christology, and Soteriology, to name a few (Powell 1995). Put, differently, Matthew's is a pastoral theology that serves as a guide to community (Allison, Jr. 1988-1997:703, 705) living.

Since a people's thinking<sup>70</sup> patterns, belief systems, modes of intellectual discourse, actions and developments all contribute to an understanding of their lives, the dynamic environment of

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<sup>70</sup> According to Culpepper, "...language defines perspectives, evokes insights, and implies judgments..." (Culpepper, 1998:1). These perspectives, insights and judgments are all involved when we use SRI. We find in this process a merger of life and language. Culpepper (1998:2) notes further that by his method of socio-rhetorical interpretation, Robbins espouses a broad approach to interpretation that embodies cultural and ideological criticism, social-scientific,

belief, language and discourse form part of the process of the interpretation of Bible texts. Thus, the call to discipleship which is summoned in the SOM and consummated in the Great Commission, is the clearest indication to God-human invitation in Matthew's gospel. The call to Christian discipleship, therefore, is an invitation to the Christ-centred life which is lived in obedience to the will of the heavenly Father. If the Christ-centred life is a life of renewal, then at the centre of this renewal is worship, which frequently shows in ritual acts of piety. Jesus' call for renewal is evident right after the beatitudes in the SOM, when he told his audience that they are the salt of the earth and light of the world.

The wisdom and the priestly rhetoricals of Matt. 5 and 6, show, that the Ghana-Ewe (people) can relate to God as their Father and Patron, to become God's light and salt in a world of sin (dark) that is lacking in saltiness (preservation of good). If they are pious, and practice acceptable ritual acts, such as prayer, fasting and almsgiving, the Patron will make them worthy, influential agents in the world. These acts of worship make room for growth and maturity towards the Father's perfection (Matt. 5:48). Prayer, for instance, is a duty of the disciple, so Ghana-Ewe people, who are obedient to Jesus can take the duty of prayer enthusiastically to enable them grow towards the Father's perfection. This is necessary because the Christian life is spiritual warfare. Since it is a spiritual battle, spiritual weapons are needed to fight and win it. If they succeed in this battle, they will no longer serve a false master (Mammon). Greed is among the dangers to victory in spiritual warfare (Childers 2006: 17; session 5), therefore, as believers, they need the type of theological and ethical renewal necessary to serve God and not Mammon.

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rhetorical and narrative criticism, literary and intertextual interpretation. Social scientific interpretation greatly illuminates our understanding and appreciation of ancient Mediterranean cultures (Culpepper, 1998:5). For Culpepper, the application of this method creates more room for further improvement in the understanding of biblical texts.

Christian love, as the personification of morality, is the key to Christian ethics. Renewal of ethical life is the result of a person's interaction with the divine which leads to a life centred on God. This interaction, amounts to the adoption of the correct attitude towards the Gospel as reinterpreted, fulfilled Law, which is evident is Christlike character that makes one's life and conduct honour God. With the incarnation, "the law is no longer the centre of gravity; Jesus is." (Snodgrass 1997:47). There is no tension between the Gospel message and the Law, only a meaningful relationship. Jesus reinterprets the Law as the authoritative Prophet, promised in Deuteronomy 18:15-19, who must be heard and obeyed (v.19) to honour the Father in heaven (Matt. 3:17). Therefore, the message of Jesus, the Gospel of the Kingdom, is the reinterpreted, fulfilled Law. Subsequently, the ethics of the Law is the ethics of the Gospel (reinterpreted, fulfilled law). In effect, ethical Christian living is Christlike living.

For Ghana-Ewe Christians, theological and ethical renewal, requires them to live in tension with the claims of Ghana's "compulsory-wealth Christianity" (CWC) with which they are confronted daily. Ghana's CWC, lacking an appreciation of a proper contextualisation of the Law from the perspective of the SOM, promotes a materialistic worldview defined by a quasi-scientific mentality, which teaches people that there are powerful enemies who want to prevent their enjoyment of material blessings and prosperity. For example, completely ignoring, Jesus' antithesis in Matt 5:43-48, these leaders quote imprecations in the Mosaic Law (and the Psalms) to encourage their followers to "attack and overcome" their "enemies." Subsequently, leaders of CWC teach their followers to "destroy their enemies" before the latter have any chance of wreaking havoc on their destiny. Ghana's CWC leaders direct their followers to quote portions of the Mosaic Law to justify the hostile attitude and actions towards those seemingly preventing them from becoming prosperous. The hostile attitude is based on a worldview that there are malevolent

spirits and their agents in the world, who constantly try to prevent people from being successful and they are responsible for both people's failures and lack of progress. The Ghana-Ewe who has experienced ethical and theological renewal, through a good understanding of the SOM, will not fall victim to this inadequate interpretation of the God's revelation.

The SOM clarifies what it means to be a follower of Jesus, who obeys the Law. Through the SOM people address their concern for spirituality based on the biblical Law and how it leads to a response in worship. If Ewe Christians gain an appropriate contextual understanding of the Law as Jesus reinterprets it in the SOM, they will better appreciate the role of the Law in their lives as Christians. Once they relate appropriately to the Law, they will develop the right Christian spirituality to respond correctly to God in worship. From the model offered by Jesus in his reinterpretation of the Law in the SOM, Ghana-Ewe Christians are called upon to adopt several strategies in their response to the challenges of the world. These include conversionist, reformist, gnostic-manipulationist and thaumaturgical attitudes as we have discussed in chapter four (section 4.7) of the study.

## **5.7. Summary and conclusion**

It has been proposed that Jesus' Gospel is the reinterpreted (fulfilled) Law, the message of the Kingdom of God. From SRI perspective, the message is located within an honour-shame, challenge-riposte, patronage-clientele, wealth-poverty, limited goods context. The resulting main characteristic of the culture is the vigorous pursuit of patron-client relationships for a beneficial exchange. The sensory-aesthetic texture of Matt. 6 shows that this earthly kingdom (*firstspace*) is characterised by the evident greed and materialism of Rome and Jerusalem, leading to allegiance to Mammon over and against God, the Patron. The social and cultural textures of Matt. 5 and 6 indicate that people need language to communicate understanding and that their languages, and

the communication that the languages evoke, are culturally conditioned (Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard 1993:173). Moreover, the social and cultural texture of Matt. 5, reveals that Jesus adopted a counterculture response to the prevailing righteousness known to his audience. Once we understand that Jesus meant to underscore the value of his Kingdom message as the Law reinterpreted for a new context (gospel era), we can apply his meaning contextually for Ewe Christians. This contextual interpretation of the reinterpreted Law of the SOM will make the appropriate impact and emotional effect on Ghana-Ewe believers (Stein 2011:34).

Since SRI combines linguistic (inner texture), literary comparative (intertexture), social and historical (social and cultural texture), ideology of the text (ideological texture) the divine-human relationship (theological/sacred texture), the Ghana-Ewe can, through SRI establish a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning of the Law for their lives from the SOM's perspective. It has been shown that none of the textures (perspective) alone produces the full range of meaning possibilities of the SOM but when the text is studied from many perspectives, the results are richer and far more reflective and wide-ranging, than singular approaches. In chapter three, it was shown that various scholarly interpretations of the Law of the SOM from source, form and redaction critical approaches, tended to emphasise Matthean sources, pericopes and theological agenda at the expense of finding holistic meaning in the text. Those approaches most of the time interpreted the Law in terms of ethics, even though most scholars acknowledge that the Law in the SOM does not only teach morality. Besides, as we have seen, using SRI to interpret the Law in the SOM produces a blend of the Law (covenant) and the Gospel (kingdom) in a unique way which highlights the significance of the SRI focus.

Apart from clarifying the law-gospel relationship, using SRI to interpret the Law of the SOM further shows that contemporary Ghana-Ewe Christians can understand themselves as

earthly children-clients of the heavenly Father-Patron, who, while still on earth under various kings and states, live specifically under the divine Father-Patron, having been brought into a mutually beneficial relationship with the Father-Patron by the Son-Broker. The result of this gracious union is that Ghana-Ewe Christians now serve the Father-Patron alone as Master, as against Mammon, the counterfeit master, who is always seeking their allegiance through numerous enticements. They can serve the Father-Patron completely because the divine Son-Broker has taught them the Father-Patron's will. Therefore, with the appropriate kingdom-righteousness, the Ghana-Ewe will not fall victim to the false claims of CWC.

All said and done, the study has supported the hypothesis that when its interpretation is explored contextually from Ghana-Ewe perspective, the Jesus' reinterpretation of the Law in the SOM functions as the reinterpreted Mosaic Law for contemporary Ghana-Ewe Christians. This contextual interpretation, however, shifts the focus of the application of the SOM from a set of ethics to struggle with, to an authentic teaching of kingdom-appropriate righteousness which ought to characterise the lives of members of God's inaugurated, and still advancing Kingdom community, to which the Ghana-Ewe Christian also belongs.

To sum up, there is a sense in which it could be argued that the pre-Christian, Ghana-Ewe worshippers of *Mawuga* related to *Se* (Law), in terms of rules and regulations to ensure that they avoided certain actions and carried out others, based on what they knew to be *Mawuga's Se* (Law). This pre-Christian, Ghana-Ewe attitude towards God's Law, is comparable with scribal and Pharisaic attitudes towards the Mosaic Law during the earthly ministry of Jesus. Therefore, by reinterpreting the Mosaic Law with the love key as his Kingdom message for a new community of his day, Jesus equally addressed a pertinent concern of the indigenous Ghana-Ewe, who have become his disciples. Likewise, the kingdom-appropriate righteousness that Jesus said led humble



worshippers to mimic the perfection of the divine Father, is equally needed among Ghana-Ewe Christians of today. If they relate to the divine Father appropriately, they will receive strength to exhibit such righteousness, so that the Ghana-Ewe will no longer be attracted to the false appeals of “compulsory-wealth Christianity”, but rather trust God to supply everything they need.

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