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Family, Patronage, and Social Contests: Narrative Reversals in the Gospel of Mark

Narry F. Santos
Greenhills Christian Fellowship, Canada
narry_santos@yahoo.com

Abstract

This article explores the cultural concepts of family, patron-client relations, and challenge-response social contests of the first-century Mediterranean world and argues that the Gospel of Mark incorporates these honor-loaded concepts and radically transforms their content through narrative honor reversals, in order to teach the new value system in the fictive family of Jesus. Mark's narrative reversals transformed the major role of family honor in his Gospel.

I. Introduction

The three cultural concepts of family, patronage, and social contests were commonly found in the first-century Mediterranean world[1] or culture-continent.[2] This paper seeks to show that in his Gospel, Mark intentionally included these three cultural concepts and conducted narrative reversals with them. Through an exploration of the Gospel's radical honor reversals, this paper contends that Mark both affirmed the value of these concepts and transformed their contents to fit the new value system of the fictive family of God.

Moreover, I propose that Mark did such transformation in order to highlight three reversals, namely: (1) the importance of the new fictive

[1] The "first-century Mediterranean world" refers to the "Greco-Roman empire, with its three million and half square kilometers [as] an island of civilization" (B. J. Malina, "Is There a Circum-Mediterranean Person? Looking for Stereotypes," *BTB* 22 [1992]: 66). However, the original generation of anthropologists who talked about family honor as a "Mediterranean" value focused on Iraq, Turkey, Greece, Spain, and Morocco. For our purposes, first-century Mediterranean definitely includes the area of Palestine, where the value system of family honor was at work in Jesus' time.

[2] By "culture-continent," I mean "a region sharing a common set of cultural institutions that has persisted over a long period" (R. L. Rohrbaugh, ed., *The Social Sciences and the New Testament Interpretation* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996], 10).

family of God over the natural family; (2) the role of Jesus as the new Patron-Broker above the prevailing patronage system; and (3) the institution of new honor values to supercede an ethical system filled with social contests. To show how these reversals unfold in the Gospel, I will first explore the dynamics of the three cultural concepts and then investigate how Mark incorporated and transformed them in the narrative.

II. Family-Related Honor Concepts in the First-Century Mediterranean World

The family, patronage, and "challenge-response" social contests[3] were common bearers of honor in the first-century culture-continent. Individual or group honor was embedded in the family, embodied in patron-client relations, and encountered in honor-ridden social contests.

Honor Embedded in the Family

The family played a pivotal role in the Mediterranean culture of Jesus' day. It functioned as an important institution of honor in antiquity. In fact, "Few aspects of Mediterranean culture are more pervasive or central than family honor."[4] The family gave its members their personal identity and social standing. It also provided its members a stable sense of belongingness and acceptance. But in return, they were expected to exercise exclusive loyalty toward the family.

In the first-century setting, family honor was typically represented by two key elements: (1) family blood and (2) family name. First, honor existed within one's family "blood" (i.e., all the relatives of the family). This implies that a person could always trust his blood relatives.

However, outside that family circle, all people were presumed to be dishonorable and untrustworthy, unless proven otherwise. With outsiders, one had to play the challenge-response social contest and put one's own honor and family honor on the line. Typical forms of social

[3] Esler comments on the pervasive nature of social contests: "Virtually any form of social intercourse—gift-giving, dinner invitations, discussions in public places, buying and selling, arranging marriages and any form of agreements on matters of common interest—opens up to the participants an opportunity to enhance one's honour at the expense of someone else" (P. F. Esler, *The First Christians in their Social Worlds: Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation* [London: Routledge, 1994], 27).

[4] P. F. Esler, "Family Imagery and Christian Identity in Gal. 5:13 to 6:10," in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor* (ed. H. Moxnes; London: Routledge, 1997), 124.

contests can occur in the marketplace, gymnasium, synagogue, banquet with one's male companions, or practically any place where there are public eyes. Any public occasion in public space is open for a social tug-of-war, to excel over others and gain honor, except in the context of one's family and circle of friends.

Thus, the family took a central role in the agonistic character of honor societies, and presented a common front toward outsiders.[5] But despite the common front of family unity, there were also intra-family interactions that brought conflicts within family groups. There were differences in wealth and status, of public honor and position that became hereditary within the lineage. Because of these differences, family squabbles emerged.

In addition to family blood, the family "name" gave honor within the Mediterranean world. The family name was preserved at all costs. Members of the family would fight ferociously with other families and clans, in order to have a good name. For the first-century persons, a good name signaled family honor.

Males received family honor through the name of their fathers and kinship groups. For example, Peter was called "Simon, son of John" (Matt 16:17). James and John were always known as the "sons of Zebedee" (Luke 5:10). To know the family name was to know the honor rating of an individual. That was why Matthew (in Matt 1:1-17) and Luke (in Luke 3:23-28) both presented the genealogy of Jesus in their Gospels as a claim of status for Jesus' name, "the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matt 1:1) and "the son of Adam, the son of God" (Luke 3:38).

Honor Embodied in Patron-Client Relations

Aside from honor embedded in the family, the first-century Mediterranean society also conferred honor to persons, who had unequal honor ratings, through the patron-client relations. Patron-client relations served as the social-exchange mechanism of reciprocity and obligation.[6] Its dyadic relation between unequal persons produced bonds of uneven exchange, loyalty in exchange for tangible acts of generosity.[7] It included

[5] D. A. de Silva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 166.

[6] E. Gellner, "Patrons and Clients," in *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* (ed. E. Gellner and J. Waterbury; London: Duckworth, 1977), 1-6; S. N. Eisenstadt and L. Roniger, "Patron-Client Relations as a Model of Structuring Social Exchange," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22 (1980): 42-77.

[7] C. H. Landé, "The Dyadic Basis of Clientelism," in *Friends, Followers, and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism* (ed. S. H. Schmidt et al.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), viii-xxxvii.

a wide range of social relationships: father-son, God-man, saint-devotee, godfather-godchild, lord-vassal, landlord-tenant, politician-voter, and professor-assistant. This reciprocal social exchange between unequal persons, called the "patron-client" relation in Rome and the "benefactor-beneficiary" phenomenon in Greece, was prevalent in the Greco-Roman period. Such prevalence is seen in the period's literary and inscriptional evidence.

For example, a representative literary evidence for patron-client relations is an early second-century letter from the Roman senator, Pliny the Younger, to his patron, the Emperor Trajan. The letter contains Pliny's request to Trajan:

> Gaius Pliny to the Emperor Trajan. Valerius Paulinus, sir, has left a will, which passes over his son Panus and names me a patron of his Latin freedman. On this occasion I pray you to grant full Roman citizenship to three of them only; it would be unreasonable, I fear, to petition you to favor all alike, and I must be all the more careful not to abuse your generosity when I have enjoyed it on so many previous occasions.[8]

A representative inscriptional evidence for patron-client relations is found in a third-century bronze tablet inscription from Rome. It contained the following public praise of a patron:

> In the consulship of Imperator Caesar Marcus Aurelius Severus Alexander, 13 April: the council of the community of the people of Clunia co-opted Gaius Pudens Cornelianus, legionary legate, a man of the highest distinction, as its patron for itself, its offspring, and posterity, because of his many outstanding services to them as individuals and collectively; the envoy used was Valerius Marcellusof Clunia.[9]

Moreover, the Gospel of Luke cites a "patron" example. A Roman centurion sent some Jewish elders to Jesus, in order to request Jesus to come and heal the centurion's slave (Luke 7:3). When they talked to Jesus, the elders used patronage language to persuade Jesus to come. Referring to their generous patron (i.e., the centurion), they said, "He is worthy of having you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us" (Luke 7:4-5).

In general, the patron-client relation is one of personal loyalty and commitment entered into voluntarily by two or more individuals of unequal status. It is based on differences in social roles and access to

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[8] Pliny, *Epistles* 10.104.

[9] *ILS* 6109. Cited in J. H. Elliot, "Patronage and Clientage," in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (ed. R. L. Rohrbaugh; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 144.

power, and involves the reciprocal exchange of different kinds of valuable goods and services to each partner.

The patron is the one who uses his or her influence to protect and assist another person, who becomes the patron's client. In return, the client provides to the patron certain valued services. The patron can secure for the client a diversity of goods, including food, financial aid, physical protection, career advancement and administrative posts, manumission (i.e., release from slavery), citizenship, equality in or freedom from taxation, protection of property, support in legal cases, immunity from expenses of public service, help from the gods, and, in the case of provincials, the status of being a friend of Rome.

In return for receiving goods from the patron, the client remains under the power and within the patron's family. He or she owes the patron a variety of services and is obligated to enhance the patron's prestige, reputation, and honor in public and private life. For example, the client favors the patron with daily early-morning salutations, supports his political campaigns, pays his fines, furnishes his ransom, supplies him information, does not testify against him in the courts, and gives public memorials of the patron's benefaction, generosity, and virtue.

Thus, in this reciprocal relationship, a strong solidarity linked to personal honor and obligation relates to the values of friendship, loyalty, and fidelity. The patron-client relation can be so reciprocal that patrons may even call the clients their friends.[10] Such a link leads to a paradoxical combination of inequality in power with expressions of solidarity in terms of interpersonal sentiment and obligation. However, this paradoxical reciprocal situation can make the relationship unstable.

The relation can become unstable, because voluntary relations and mutual obligations may not be enough protection from possible coercion or exploitation. If the patron's power to monopolize the relation is weakened or is robbed by a more powerful patron, it is likely that the strength of the ties between the patron and the client could be weakened and that the client might turn to establish a relation with a new patron.[11]

In summary, the patron-client relation has seven common features: (1) it is an "exchange" relation (i.e., a tangible good is exchanged for an

[10] K. O. Sandnes, *A New Family: Conversion and Ecclesiology in the Early Church with Cross-Cultural Comparisons* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994), 51; cf. R. Saller, "Patronage and Friendship in Early Imperial Rome: Drawing the Distinction," in *Patronage in Ancient Society* (ed. A. Wallace-Hadrill; London: Routledge, 1989), 81-96.

[11] J. Bossevain, "When the Saints Go Marching Out: Reflections on the Decline of Patronage in Malta," in *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* (ed. E. Gellner and J. Waterbury; London: Duckworth, 1997), 81-96.

intangible gain); (2) it is an "asymmetrical" relation (i.e., a "lop-sided friendship"[12] between a person of great material or spiritual power and a person with little power); (3) it is a "particularistic" and "informal" relation (i.e., resources are channeled to specific individuals); (4) it is a "supra-legal" relation (i.e., not fully legal but based on mutual understanding); (5) it is often a "binding" and "long-range" relation (i.e., strong sense of interpersonal obligation); (6) it is a "voluntary" relation (i.e., established and abandoned by choice); and (7) it is a "vertical" relation (i.e., binds the patron and clients or networks of clients together).[13]

An important form of patronage is called "brokerage." In brokerage, the broker-patron functions as a mediator, who gives a client access to the resources of a more powerful patron. For example, well-connected members of the Roman elite were brokers between the local administrative center and the surrounding rural districts.

For lower-ranking persons to gain effective influence on some higher being, such an intermediary broker-type person, a fort of go-between, is necessary to act as a social lever. The broker must in some way relate to or come from the same sphere as the higher being whom he wishes to influence, or from a sphere above that being.[14]

Brokerage involves a relationship between several actors. The same person may simultaneously be a broker (or mediator) between higher and low-ranking people or groups, and a patron to clients below him. A broker can be a representative for the central power, for instance, a military commander, a wealthy landowner in the village, or even a "holy" man. In a wider sense, certain groups or professions can serve as brokers, such as teachers, priests, and artists. Thus, brokers form a channel of communication between the power and culture of the urban elite and the traditional norms and values of village peasants.[15]

[12] E. Wolf, "Kinship, Friendship and Patron-Client Relations in Complex Societies," in *Friends, Followers and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism* (ed. S. H. Schmidt et al.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 174.

[13] S. N. Eisdentadt and L. Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 48-49; cf. J. K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (JSNTSup 75; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 30-33; H. Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 42.

[14] B. J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (3d ed.; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001), 105.

[15] H. Moxnes, "Patron-Client Relations and the New Community in Luke-Acts" in *The Social World of Luke-Acts* (ed. J. H. Neyrey; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 241-48.

Honor Encountered in Challenge-Response Social Contests

In the first-century Mediterranean world, honor was not only kept in the family and the unequal patron-broker-client relations. Honor was also encountered among persons of equal honor standing. These people took part in the "challenge-response" social contests, using three distinct stages. These three stages are as follows: (1) the challenger puts forth the challenge in some form of action (word, deed, or both); (2) the challenged person and the watching public perceive the message as a challenge; and (3) the challenged one reacts, and the public evaluates the reaction.[16]

Aside from the equal status of the challenger and the one challenged, the presence of other people, who witness the challenge-response, play a crucial role in the social contest. The public hears the challenge, interprets the challenger's words or deeds as challenge, hears the reaction of the one challenged, and assesses who wins or loses in the social tug-of-war. To the one whom the public declares as winner, honor is conferred. To the one whom the public declares as loser, dishonor is attached.

Positive Honor Challenge

The challenge can either be positive or negative. A claim is positive, when the reason in entering another's social space is to gain a share in that space or to gain a cooperative and mutually beneficial result. Examples of positive claims include a word of praise, gift, sincere request for help, and promise of help plus the actual help.

Though these challenges are positive in the sense that they seek no harm for the other person and that they bring no lethal results to the recipient, these messages are still regarded as challenges in the sense that they put the recipient on the spot and his status or reputation on the line.

Let us take a word of praise as an example. A rich young ruler approached Jesus, knelt before him and said, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? (Mark 10:17). Calling Jesus as "Good Teacher" seems good. But Jesus responded, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone" (Mark 10:18). His refusal of the praise can to be seen in terms of the culture of positive challenge. As Neyrey suggests, "The challenge of Jesus rests in the sense that, if complemented, Jesus would in turn be obligated in some way to reciprocate."[17] A compliment

[16] Malina, *NT World*, 33.

[17] J. H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1998), 45.

(whether sincere or not) is generally taken in the first-century setting as a challenge to one's honor. Thus, there is a need to deflect the praise.

Another biblical example of a positive honor challenge is the request to Jesus by James and John's mother—"Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom" (Matt 20:21). Jesus replied, "You do not know what you are asking" (Matt 20:22a), and flatly denied the request. This request is a positive honor challenge that Jesus had to resist, because it attempted to take away from him what he may not wish to give, in the way the mother of James and John demanded.

However, in other positive honor challenges, Jesus granted the requests put before him. Jesus healed the epileptic boy (Mark 9:25-26), though he initially responded to the request of the boy's father with these words: "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be with you? How long must I put up with you?" (Mark 9:19). Moreover, Jesus healed the daughter of a Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:29-30), though he initially replied to the woman's request this way: "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" (Mark 7:27). In both these cases, the suppliants responded in faith, affirming their trust in Jesus.

Negative Honor Challenge

If the challenger in the social push-and-pull contest seeks to hurt or harm another person, then the challenge is taken as negative. The negative challenge can come in the form of an insult, physical affront, threat, or threat with an attempt to fulfill it.

The negative nature of the challenge (whether in word or deed or both) must be recognized as negative by both the receiver of the challenge and the watching public. When both agree in perceiving the challenge as negative, they conclude that the challenge is a threat to maliciously usurp reputation or deprive it from someone. This is where the second stage of perception in the challenge-response process begins. The one challenged must assess his perception in terms of the publicly acknowledged norms of judging.

Let us go through a challenge-response that involves a negative challenge. This process will include a claim, challenge to the claim, response to the challenge, and verdict decided by the viewing public. The example relates to the healing of a paralytic (Mark 2:1-12), with the scribes and Jesus engaged in a negative challenge-response.

Specifically, the honor contest starts with Jesus making the claim to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5). Then the scribes challenge that claim with a question in their heart, "Why does this fel-

lows speak in this way? It is a blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7). Jesus proceeds with a counter-challenge, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'?" (Mark 2:9). Then Jesus chooses the "harder" saying and heals the paralytic (Mark 2:10-12a). As a result, the people "were all amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this'!" (Mark 2:12b).

Thus, the public verdict favored Jesus. To him they conferred honor. To the scribes, they attached dishonor. Jesus won the challenge-response contest. The Gospels show many other negative contests between the religious leaders and Jesus. These contests would usually lead to increased honor for Jesus and increased dishonor for the leaders.

Reasons for the Agonistic Nature of Honor

Why were the first-century Mediterranean people hooked on social contests for honor? Four complementary reasons account for these prevalent challenge-responses. These four reasons are as follows: (1) the perception that all goods, including honor, existed in limited supply; (2) the phenomenon of "envy" that resulted from the success of others; (3) the "love for honor" that pervaded Greece, Rome, and Judea; and (4) the general competitive nature of ancient society.[18]

Though the people's love for honor and their competitive nature (as seen in their Olympic and Isthmian sports, drama, and poetry contests) promoted social push-and-shove, the perception or image of limited good is the primary cause for the culture's competitiveness. Within their culture thrived the firm belief that all good were limited, both material and non-material. All goods, from land and food on the one hand, to honor and happiness on the other, were regarded as absolutely finite in quantity and always in short supply. Foster described this image of limited good in the setting of a peasant society:

> By "Image of Limited Good" I mean that broad areas of peasant behavior are patterned in such a fashion as to suggest that peasants view their social, economic, and natural universes—their total environment—as one in which all of the desired things in life such as land, wealth, health, friendship and love, manliness and honor, respect and status, power and influence, security and safety, exist in finite quantity and are always in short supply, as far as the peasant is concerned. Not only do these and all other "good things" exist in finite and limited quantities, but in addition

[18] De Silva, *Honor, Patronage*, 31.

> there is no way directly within peasant power to increase the available quantities.[19]

From the Mediterranean perspective, since all goods were limited, a person could only increase the supply of goods at the expense of someone else. This view accords with the "zero-sum" nature of peasant economics: if someone gets ahead, someone else is sure to have lost.

III. Family-Related Honor Concepts in the Gospel of Mark

We have just surveyed the first-century Mediterranean honor system in the family, patron-client relations, and challenge-response social contests. Mark incorporated these family-related honor concepts in his Gospel, in order to highlight the importance of these cultural concepts to the new family of God.

Family Honor in the Gospel of Mark

One key observation in the Gospel of Mark is the extensive use of "family" language. The inclusion of the family theme in the Gospel is important, because it immediately links the idea of honor to the family concept in Mark. As Moxnes says, "The main cultural context of the family in the Mediterranean area of Antiquity is that of honor and shame."[20]

Mark uses the family language in many instances, as represented by the following words: "father,"[21] "mother,"[22] "son,"[23] "sons,"[24]

[19] G. M. Foster, "Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good," *American Anthropologist* 67 (1965): 296; idem, "The Image of Limited Good," in *Peasant Society: A Reader* (ed. J. Potter et al.; Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1967), 300-23.

[20] H. Moxnes, "What Is Family? Problems in Constructing Early Christian Families," in *Constructing Early Christian Families*: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor (ed. J. Moxnes; London: Routledge, 1997), 19-20.

[21] The 17 instances of the word "father" are in Mark 1:20; 5:40; 7:10 (2x), 11, 12; 8:38; 9:21, 24; 10;7, 19, 29; 11:10, 25; 13:12, 32; 14:36; and 15:21.

[22] The 17 instances of the word "mother" in Mark are located in Mark 3:31, 32, 33, 24, 35; 5:40; 6:24, 28; 7:10 (2x), 11, 12; 10:7, 19, 29; and 15:40, 47.

[23] The 32 instances of the word "son" are seen in Mark 1:1, 11; 2:5, 10, 28; 3:11; 5:7; 6:3; 8:31, 38; 9:7, 9, 12, 17, 31; 10:33, 45, 46, 47, 48; 12:6 (2x), 35, 37; 13:26, 32; 14:21 (2x), 41, 61, 62; and 15:39.

[24] The three instances of the word "sons" are found in Mark 3:17, 28; and 10:35.

"brother,"[25] "brothers,"[26] "daughter,"[27] "husband,"[28] "wife,"[29] "child,"[30] and "children."[31]

The first-century families included their slaves and servants as part of their extended families. Mark uses the following words for these extended family members: "slave,"[32] "servant,"[33] and "servant girls."[34] In addition, Mark uses the terms "house,"[35] "houses,"[36] "household,"[37] "home,"[38] and "hometown."[39] He also specifies in his family language the activities that families do (e.g., "eating,"[40] "buying,"[41] "selling"[42]) and the items that families need (e.g., "bread,"[43] "denarii"[44]).

[25] The 12 instances of the word "brother" occur in Mark 1:16, 19; 3:17, 35; 5:37; 6:3, 17; 12:19 (3x); and 13:12 (2x).

[26] The eight instances of the word "brothers" are in Mark 3:31, 32, 33, 34; 6:18; 10:29, 30; and 12:20.

[27] The nine instances of the word "daughter" are located in Mark 5:23, 34, 35; 6:22, 25, 26, 29; and 7:26, 29.

[28] The only one instance of the word "husband" is seen in Mark 10:12.

[29] The eight instances of the word "wife" are found in Mark 6:17, 18; 10:11; and 12:19 (2x), 20, 23 (2x).

[30] The ten instances of the word "child" occur in Mark 5:39, 40, 41; 7:27, 28, 30; 9:36, 37; 10:15; 12:19; and 13:12, 17.

[31] The nine instances of the word "children" are Mark 7:27; 10:13, 14, 24, 29, 30; and 13:12.

[32] The five instances of the word "slave" are located in Mark 10:44; 12:2, 4; 13:34; and 14:47.

[33] The three instances of the word "servant" are seen in Mark 1:20; 9:35; and 10:43.

[34] The only instance of the word "servant-girls" is found in Mark 14:66.

[35] The 21 instances of the word "house" occurs in Mark 1:29; 2:15, 26; 3:25 (2x), 27 (2x); 5:38; 6:10; 7:17, 24; 9:28, 33; 10:10, 29; 11:17 (2x); 13:15, 34, 35; and 14:14.

[36] The two instances of the word "houses" are in Mark 10:30 and 12:40.

[37] The only instance of the word "household" is located in Mark 6:4.

[38] The eight instances of the word "home" are seen in Mark 2:1, 11; 3:20; 5:19; 7:30; 8:3, 26; and 14:3. Though translated "home" in English, it has the same Greek word (οικος) for "house" and "household."

[39] The two instances of the word "hometown" are found in Mark 6:1, 4.

[40] The 15 instances of the word "eat" occurs in Mark 2:16; 3;20; 5:43; 6;31, 36, 37 (2x); 7:3, 4, 5; 8:1, 2; 11:14; and 14:12, 14. The word "eating" occurs six times in Mark 2:16 (2x); and 14:18 (2x), 22.

[41] The word "buy" is in Mark 6:36, and the word "buying" in Mark 11:15.

[42] The word "sell" is located in Mark 10:21, and the word "selling" is in Mark 11:15 (2x).

[43] The 11 instances of the word "bread" are seen in Mark 6:8; 7:2, 5, 27; 8:4, 14, 16, 17; and 15:1, 12, 22.

[44] The word "denarii" is found in Mark 6:37 and 14:5, and the word "den-

In addition, Mark includes episodes that involve the family members seen together or being mentioned together. In Mark 1:16, the brothers Simon and Andrew are presented together, engaged in the same fishing trade. In Mark 1:19-20, the brothers James and John were introduced together in a boat setting, mending their nets with their father Zebedee and some hired servants.

In Mark 10:29-31, the household is mentioned to include house, sisters, mother, father, children, and land. Moxnes gives relevant insights on the description of families in Mark 10:29-31:

> [It] focuses on the importance of the house and farm as the center for a group of people. In the passage in Mark 10:29-31 we meet the family as a household, a group of people bound together by close kinship, who live together and make a living together. This is a pattern found in many peasant communities, in which the place of residence and subsistence takes precedence and defines the group that lives and works there. This perspective focuses on the family as a co-resident group that performs various tasks: production, distribution, transmission, reproduction, and that serves as the primary group of identification.[45]

As a "co-resident" group, the family members live and work together within the context of socio-economic relations.

Mark also has several episodes that show a father appealing on behalf of his children. In Mark 5:22-23, Jairus appealed to Jesus that the latter graciously heal the former's daughter. When Jesus arrived at Jairus' house, he allowed Jairus and his wife only (aside from Jesus' disciples) to come where the child was (5:40). In Mark 9:16-18, a father appealed to Jesus to help the former's demon-possessed boy. These appeals for help on behalf of their children reflect a father's care as provider and nurturer of his family, especially in nurturing father-son relations that are based on the father's authority and the son's right to inherit the father's role.[46]

In Mark 6:1-6, the people from Nazareth identified Jesus in relation to his family. They asked, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, are not his sisters here with us?" (6:3). In an earlier account, the mother and brothers of Jesus were together, on their way to see and restrain Jesus, after they heard that Jesus had not been eating (3:19-20, 31) and that the people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind" (3:21). With respect to

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arius" in Mark 12:15.

[45] Moxnes, "What Is Family?," 23.

[46] F. Barth, "Role Dilemmas and Father-Son Dominance in Middle Eastern Kinship Systems," in *Kinship and Culture* (ed. F. L .K. Hsu; Chicago: Aldine, 1971), 87-96.

Jesus' family and their effort in this specific episode, their action can be taken as a "story of how they attempt to protect the family honor."[47]

Patron-Client Relations in the Gospel of Mark

In the Gospel of Mark, honor us deeply embedded in the family. Honor is also observed in the Gospel through the common cultural concept of patron-client relations. In a sense, this reciprocal and cooperative relationship between people of unequal honor status is evident in Jesus' exorcisms, healings, and miracles.[48] As God's broker, who is the divine patron, Jesus dispensed the heavenly resources to the earthly clients in dire need of those resources.

Apart from Jesus, the disciples played the role of brokers in distributing the divine provisions from Jesus (who aside from being broker is also a patron to the disciples and other clients). In Mark 6:7, the disciples were sent out two by two, with the authority over unclean spirits. In obedience, they actually fulfilled their role as brokers, when they "went casting out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them" (6:13).

In another occasion (6:30-44), the disciples played the broker role, by presenting to Jesus the people's need for food (6:35-36), by carrying out Jesus' instructions, and by distributing the bread to the 5,000 men (6:39-41). They also handled a similar broker role in Jesus' feeding miracle for the 4,000 (8:1-10).

Extreme Love for Honor in the Gospel of Mark

We have seen a handful of examples in the Gospel that reveal the common concepts in the first-century Mediterranean society. These examples fall under the two categories of family and patronage. We now turn to another major area, which answers the question, "Why are first-century Mediterranean persons hooked on honor contests?" In the Gospel, what is most prevalent is the preference for love of honor, as reflected in the value system of the disciples and religious leaders.

The disciples showed their love for honor through their instances of misunderstanding. In each of the three passion predictions of Jesus, Mark presents the disciples as followers who misunderstand. In the first passion prediction (8:31), Mark portrays Peter as the disciple who misunderstands through his rejection of the idea that Jesus is about to suffer

[47] Moxnes, "What Is Family?," 28.

[48] The following Markan passages relate to the patron-client relations: Mark 1:40-45; 2:5, 10; 3:13-19; 5:6-7, 18-20, 24b-34; 6;10-13; 7:24-30; 10:13-16, 26-30, 35-45, 47; and 11:9-10.

and be rejected. For Peter, the thought of Jesus' suffering and rejection sounds "dishonorable" for the spiritual leader of God's new family. For Peter, an honorable man does not go through shameful suffering.

In the second passion prediction (9:31), the disciples misunderstand by debating who was the most honorable among them and by jockeying for positions of highest honor (9:34). Their love for honor again prompts them to disregard the impending shame of Jesus' death, just as this same love for honor impels them to regard highly their projected seats of honor in the kingdom.

In commenting on the disciples' love for honor and their jockeying for power, Malina and Rohrbaugh state, "A squabble over honor status would be typical with any ancient Mediterranean grouping."[49] However, Mark goes beyond simply the disciples' squabbles. He also includes Jesus' correction of the misunderstandings and love for honor through the three discipleship discourses (8:34-9:1; 9:35-50; 10:42-45).

Aside from the disciples, the religious leaders also fall prey to the excessive love for honor. An example comes from Jesus' own assessment of the scribes: "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation" (12:40).

The extreme love for honor of the scribes expressed itself in the "honor display" of their clothing (i.e., long robes that attract public attention and deferent respect). Their excessive love for honor also showed itself in the demand for public respect in popular and populous places. These leaders displayed their religious importance and external spirituality through their claim for the prestigious chair in the synagogue. They also clamored for their social significance through their insistence of being treated as a celebrity in pompous and prestigious parties. They also flaunted their external spirituality through prayers that people admire as holy. This kind of honor keeps a pretense of public holiness, but in reality merely harbors hollow hypocrisy. Jesus greatly condemned this kind of love for honor.

Apart from the extreme love for honor, envy is singled out as a dominant factor in the hostility of the religious leaders against Jesus. In Mark 15:10, Pilate perceived that envy pushed the chief priests to have Jesus brought before him. Jesus' increasing popularity and honor status made the religious leaders so envious, that they could not bear seeing this pattern continue. Thus, they had to put a stop to Jesus.

[49] B. J. Malina and R. L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992), 237.

Jesus also describes this envy as part of the evil intents that come from the human heart, and as part of the evil things that come from within and that defile a person (7:21-22). The mix of envy and evil intents has eaten away the little honor left in the religious leaders. Commenting on this evil envy, Esler states, "The linked phenomenon of envy and the evil eye reminds us of the extremely serious, almost pathological, dimension to the Mediterranean striving for honor."[50]

The culture's agonistic nature, extreme love for honor, and envy sit well with the perception of limited good. In the Gospel, this perception is linked to the related concepts of honor and poverty. This is the connection: in the limited-good mentality, the rich who increase in wealth and honor affect directly the poor, by causing the poor people's increase in poverty and dishonor. The image of limited good interprets a "robbing" of ones own goods and honor, when someone else increases his.

Mark uses the related concepts of riches and poverty through the following words: "rich,"[51] "wealthy,"[52] "poor,"[53] "property,"[54] "moneychangers,"[55] and "money."[56] The impact of the perception of limited good is implied in Jesus' charge that the Temple officials have turned the Temple from a house of prayer into a "den of robbers" (11:17). In the Temple context of having moneychangers and buy-sell business deals (11:15), Jesus accused those amassing wealth in greedy and vicious ways. This greed directly diminished the limited good and honor of the lowly religious participants. The link is seen this way: "Given a limited-good view of the world, if the Jerusalem Temple personnel and their supporters were amassing wealth stored in the 'den of thieves,' then large numbers of persons were simultaneously becoming poor and unable to maintain their honor as 'sons of Israel'."[57]

So far, we have inspected the three major cultural areas of family, patron-client relations, and the contributing factors for extensive challenge-response social contests (i.e., extreme love for honor, envy, agonistic nature, and perception of limited good). These three areas reveal to us the common honor concepts found in the Gospel of Mark.

[50] Esler, "Family Imagery and Christian Identity," 124.

[51] The word "rich" occurs in Mark 10:25; 12:41, and the word "riches" in Mark 4:19.

[52] The word "wealthy" is in Mark 10:23.

[53] The word "poor" is located in Mark 10:21; 12:42, 43; and 14:5,7, and the word "poverty" in Mark 12:44.

[54] The word "property" is seen in Mark 3:27 and 10:22.

[55] The word "moneychangers" occurs in Mark 11:15.

[56] The word "money" is found in Mark 6:8; 12:41; and 14:11.

[57] Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 252.

Thus, Mark has incorporated the first-century Mediterranean honor concepts in his Gospel. His sensitivity to these cultural concepts makes him effective in bringing to his audience Jesus' honorable message. He recognized how embedded people's identity and honor are in the family, how societal features (e.g., extreme love for honor) are nurtured in competitive challenge-responses, and how cooperative relations are embodied in patron-client relations. His recognition of these relevant cultural concepts is evident in the Gospel. In fact, his use of these honor concepts serves as smooth points of entry for Jesus' teaching on the new family of God, of divine-human patron-client relations, and of God's new honor value system.

VI. Narrative Reversals of Family Honor in the Gospel of Mark

To explore the narrative reading of family honor in the Gospel of Mark, I will focus on the reversal of the audience's value system through the Markan use of family. Oporto decries that "sayings and pronouncements which reflect a conflict between the disciples and their families have not received the attention they deserve in the research of recent years."[58]

Neyrey also points to the "need for further studies in fictive kinship, that is, the ways in which the first Christians regarded and treated each other as 'family'",[59] and Bradley speaks of family history as "virtually a new field of Roman historical scholarship."[60] Indeed, there are

[58] S. G. Oporto, "Kingdom and Family in Conflict: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus," in *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible: Essays by the Context Group in Honor of Bruce J. Malina* (ed. J. J. Pilch; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), 210-38; cf. A. D. Jacobson, "Divided Families and Christian Origins," in *The Gospel behind the Gospels: Current Studies on Q* (ed. R. A. Piper; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 376; S. C. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (SNTSMS 80; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 220.

[59] J. H. Neyrey, "Loss of Wealth, Loss of Family and Loss of Honor: A Cultural Interpretation of the Original Four Makarisms," in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in Its Context* (ed. P. F. Esler; London: Routledge, 1995), 139-58 (156-157).

[60] K. R. Bradley, *Discovering the Roman Family: Studies in Roman Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 5.

not many academic studies that focus on the fictive family,[61] the Roman family,[62] and the family in relation to the New Testament.[63]

I propose that Mark is reversing the readers' family honor system. In his narrative, I see Mark stressing the greater value of the new family of God, and challenging his readers to exchange family honor with a higher loyalty to Jesus and his new fictive kinship. This new family of Jesus brings with it a new honor system from the vantage point of the "court of reputation" of God, who brings about the coming near of his kingdom through Jesus and his new family.[64]

The new fictive family refers to Jesus' group of followers, who are described as a household or more specifically, as a "household of faith" (cf. Gal 6:10). A fictive family is unlike a normal family in that it is not based on "naturing" or biological reproduction. Rather, it is concerned

[61] The few studies on the fictive family include R. A. Harrisville, "Jesus and the Family," *Int* 23 (1969): 425-38; J. Dupont, "Jesus, His Family and His Disciples," *JSNT* 15 (1982): 3-19; I. Ellis, "Jesus and the Subversive Family," *SJT* 38 (1985): 173-88; D. May, "Leaving and Receiving: A Social-Scientific Exegesis of Mark 10:29-31," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 17 (1990): 141-51, 154; W. Carter, *Households and Discipleship: A Study of Matthew 19-20* (JSNTSSup 103; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994); J. Painter, "When Is a House not Home?: Disciples and Family in Mark 3:13-35," *NTS* 45 (1999): 498-513.

[62] For recent work on the family in Roman society, see D. Kertzer and R. Saller, *The Family in Italy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Bradley, *Discovering Roman Family*; B. Rawson, *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); idem, *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991); B. Rawson and P. Weaver, eds., *The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment Space* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997); M. Henry, "Review Essays: Some Recent Work on Women and the Family in Greek and Roman Antiquity," *Journal of Family History* 14 (1989): 63-77; S. Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988); idem, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992); T. Widemann, *The Roman Household: A Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

[63] For studies on families related to the New Testament world, see C. Osiek and D. L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1997); K. C. Hanson, "Kinship," in *Social Sciences and NT Interpretation*, 62-79; B. Malina, *NT World*, 134-60; K. C. Hanson and D. E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 19-61; J. W. van Henten and A. Brenner, eds., *Families and Family Relations as Represented in Early Judaisms and Early Christianities: Texts and Fictions* (Leiden: Deo, 2000).

[64] For a discussion of a "higher court of reputation" regarding the minority group in the Book of Hebrews, see D. A. de Silva, *Bearing Christ's Reproach: The Challenge of Hebrews in an Honor Culture* (N. Richland Hills: BIBAL, 1999), 14-9.

with "nurturing" or social support, concern, interest, and help. Malina describes the nurturing support in the fictive family this way:

> Consequently, fictive family in antiquity designates a group that has the structure and many of the values of a patriarchal family: a central person who is like a father, with members who treat each other like siblings. The teacher, faction founder, head of a trade guild, or patron of a club (collegium) had the father role, while the disciples, faction followers, and clients were like siblings. Through discipleship, faction membership, and clientelism, a person entered another, secondary set of kin-like relationships.[65]

Though the natural family is the source of honor in the first-century Mediterranean world[66] and though the main cultural context of the family is that of honor,[67] the fictive or surrogate family of Jesus is to be considered as the more valuable pattern for family in the social world of the first Christians.[68] In the Markan narrative, Jesus relativizes the importance of the natural family in favor of his new fictive family, and capitalizes on this embedded family-honor mindset by changing the content of what is honorable in the path of discipleship.

In fact, the Gospel traditions provide evidence that Jesus' call to discipleship sanctions the relativization of household ties (Matt 10:37-38).[69] Barton sees the family-relativization material in the Gospels primarily as a "rhetorically powerful metaphorical way of calling for the displacement of every obstacle to true discipleship of Jesus, in light of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God."[70]

Jesus emphasizes in the Gospel of Mark that "the group of disciples must now function as a family: family is not abolished but extended. The boundaries of kinship are not removed but reset. Those who will fulfill the role of true family members are those bound together not so

[65] B. J. Malina and J. H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996), 160.

[66] Moxnes, *Constructing Early Christian Families*, 28.

[67] Moxnes, *Constructing Early Christian Families*, 19-20; idem, "Honor and Shame," *BTB* 23 (1993): 167-76.

[68] Rohrbaugh, *Social Sciences and NT Interpretation*, 28.

[69] Moxnes observes that a family relativization, which may involve "rejection of the social family is often combined with joining groups with a family-like character" (Moxnes, *Constructing Early Christian Families*, 4).

[70] Barton, "Relativization of Family Ties," 81. Destro and Pesce see discipleship as an "alternative, a counter-cultural social structure, so to speak, in which the only influence of kinship structure may be in the form of brothers and mothers as disciples" (A. Destro and M. Pesce, "Kinship, Discipleship, and Movement: An Anthropological Study of John's Gospel," *BibInt* 3 [1995]: 266-84).

much by blood or social structures."[71] These true family members are to derive their new identity from Jesus and their allegiance to the heavenly Father. In fact, "allegiance to the one true God transcends family ties and legitimizes their subordination."[72]

With the new identity of Jesus' followers as the fictive kinship group, there must be a change of meaning in the use of the honor terms. In relation to Paul's description of the new honor identity of the Roman Christian community, Moxnes comments:

> This change in value, although the vocabulary is retained, is significant. Paul shares concepts for values within his cultural context, but in many instances he changes the content of these concepts. Thus, there is a transformation of values that corresponds to the changes in group structures, to the creation of new groups and marking off new identities and borders.[73]

Transformation of the Family in the Gospel of Mark

How did Mark show the transformation of the family in the Gospel? Mark did this in three ways: (1) relativization of the family, (2) use of the new family of God as a metaphor of the kingdom of God, and (3) adoption of the father-son relation as an analogy of the Father-Son relation between the heavenly Father and the disciples.

Relativization of the Old Family

First, Mark transformed the family by emphasizing the greater value of the new family of Jesus (also called "fictive kinship" or "fictive family")[74] over the significance of the natural family. In other words, Mark relativized the first-century family honor. Barton clarifies this change of family precedence and allegiance: "The Gospel traditions provide clear evidence that Jesus' call to discipleship explicitly sanctioned the relativization of kinship and household ties."[75]

Such family relativization occurs in Mark 3:20-21, 31-35. In this passage, Jesus' family wanted to seize him, because of its perception of Jesus' madness (3:21). When the crowd in the house informed him that his mother and brothers were outside seeking him (3:32), Jesus asked,

[71] C. Osiek, "The Family in Early Christianity: 'Family Values' Revisited," *CBQ* 58 (1996): 1-24.

[72] Barton, "Relativization of Family Ties," 98-9.

[73] H. Moxnes, "Honor and Righteousness in Romans," *JSNT* 32 (1988): 64.

[74] Malina and Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul*, 160.

[75] Barton, "Relativization of Family Ties," 81.

"Who are my mother and my brothers?" (3:33). Then looked around and answered his own question, "Here are my mother and my brothers!" (3:34). He qualified (or widened the scope of) who these new mothers and brothers were. He declared, "Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother" (3:35).

Thus, Jesus brought a new concept of family, which is more honorable in his sight. Using Jesus' words, Mark also identified what is honorable within Jesus' new family—doing the will of God. This shows how family relativization is at work.

Mark 10:28-31 continues the pattern of family relativization. The context of this passage talks about the rich young ruler's refusal to sell all he had and follow Jesus, because of his great possessions (10:21-22). After Jesus gave his short teaching on the difficulty of the rich to enter the kingdom of God (10:23-27), Peter blurted out, "Look, we have left everything and followed you" (10:28). This comment seems to be asking Jesus, "What's in it for us?"

Moreover, Mark 13:9-13 gives an example of the relativization process. This passage appeared within Jesus' eschatological teaching (13:1-37). In relation to the disciples, he warned them ahead of time that they would go through suffering and persecution from the hands of the religious and political leaders (13:9). The disciples would also receive persecution from their own families: "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved" (13:12-13).

Mark 13:9-13 shows the extreme results of the disciples' disruption from their natural family, in light of their allegiance to Jesus' name. This betrayal by family members reveals why the relativization happens in the Gospel. Instead of following God and being loyal to him, the earthly family denies him and is disloyal to him. With such a context of family betrayal, the members of the new family must not worry, for the Holy Spirit will be with them (13:11), and they must endure to the end, for if they do, they will be saved (13:13).

Family as Metaphor of the Kingdom of God

Aside from relativizing the family, Mark transformed the family through the metaphor of the kingdom of God. Mark depicted the kingdom of God using the family language.[76] For example, the word "life" is used as part of the "new family" language, connected to a person who, in losing his life for the sake of Jesus and his gospel, saves it (8:35). So

[76] Sandnes, *New Family*, 65-67.

a person who "enters life" (9:43, 45) also inherits "eternal life" (10:17) and becomes part of the new family of God.

Just as a person with physical life is a member of a family, so a person with spiritual or eternal life is a member of God's fictive family. The words "life" and "eternal life" form part of the new "family of God" language.[77] Mark intentionally employed the metaphor of "entering life" in the "new family" language to symbolize or picture "entering the kingdom of God" (9:47).[78]

In addition, Mark used the "new family" expression, "receiving children (which is linked to "receiving" Jesus and the one who sent him in 9:37). This expression serves as a metaphor for belonging, entering, or "receiving the kingdom of God." Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it" (10:15).

Moreover, the link between the new family and the kingdom of God is evident in the same mission of gospel proclamation by both new entities. Part of the new family's mission through the 12 apostles is to preach and proclaim the gospel (3:14). Similarly, the first message that Jesus proclaimed relates to the preaching of the gospel and the kingdom: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (1:15).

Jesus was conscious of his mission to preach the gospel: "Let us go to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do" (1:38). Similarly, they did the same ministry: "So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent" (6:12). Therefore, the integral common denominator between the new family of God and the kingdom of God is the singular mission to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom to the whole world (13:10; 14:9).[79]

Analogy of the Father-Son Relation

We have seen that Mark transformed the first-century Mediterranean family concept through the relativization of the family, and through the new family-of-God metaphor to picture the kingdom of God. The last way that Mark transformed the family concept is through the adoption of the cultural father-son relation into a metaphor of the Father-Son

[77] J. G. van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel according to John* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), 398.

[78] For the same expression "enter the kingdom of God," see Mark 10:15, 23, 24. 25.

[79] D. Rhoads, "Mission in the Gospel of Mark," *CurTM* 22 (1995): 340-55 (341).

relation between the heavenly Father and Jesus. Mark also extended this Father-Jesus relation to the Father-disciples relation.

The Father-Son relation is evident in the Gospel. In Mark 8:38, Jesus talked about himself as the Son of Man, who will later come "in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." In this verse, Mark put the terms "Son of Man" and "Father" side by side. In Mark 13:32, Jesus again talked about his coming again: "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Once again, the terms "Son" and "Father" are placed together. In Mark 14:36, Jesus talked to the Father about his cup of suffering, calling him "Abba, Father."

In Mark 11:25, Jesus taught his disciples about prayer and forgiveness. Part of this verse has the phrase "your Father in heaven." Here, Jesus extended the Father-Son relation to the Father-children relation. For the disciples, this extension meant that they could enjoy an intimate Father-children relation, just as Jesus enjoyed his Father-Son relation.

V. Narrative Reversals of Patron-Client Relations in the Gospel of Mark

Mark did not only transform the first-century concept of family, he also transformed the patron-client relation. This patron-client transformation has been described as the "dominant analogy behind synoptic theology in general."[80] Mark's decision to transform this social structure into a "dominant analogy" directly relates to the reality that both the patron-client and family structures are conduits of honor in the time of Jesus. These two social structures are the cultural bridge, where the honor values pass through, in order to connect different conflicting groups in the ancient Mediterranean world.

If Mark were to influence his readers to follow the new honor value system of Jesus, he needed to reconfigure these social structures. He had to persuade his audience to take the journey from the "old" honor system to the "new" one. How did he do it? He did it by urging them to pass through the cultural bridge of the transformed family of God and the reconfigured "God-as-Patron-Benefactor, Jesus-as-Broker, Disciples-as-Clients" relations. As Elliot confirms, "[B]enefactor/patron conventions have provided a metaphor for the early Christian conceptualization of God and Jesus as consummate Benefactor and model for Christian emulation."[81]

[80] Elliot, "Patronage and Clientage," 152.
[81] Elliot, "Patronage and Clientage," 152.

Mark reconfigured the patron-client conventions into metaphor by reformatting the human-human relation into a divine-human one. As the consummate Patron-Benefactor, God can be seen as the Divine Ally, whose natural and supernatural, material and immaterial resources are always available, to provide for and protect them from any form of need or danger.

As the Divine Broker, Jesus can be viewed as the Model Mediator, who is a perfect example of constantly being connected to the Father, of always knowing the needs and struggles of the disciples, and of consistently opening the heavenly doors of God's provision, protection, presence, and power.

As mediator, Jesus incarnates and personifies God in his life, teaching, deeds, and mission. As broker, he understands the suffering of the disciples, models to them how to honor their Patron, identifies their needs and weaknesses, and supplies them with what they need, teaching them how to overcome their weaknesses.

As the clients, the disciples can be seen as faithful followers, whose trust and faith in Jesus must be constant, whose loyalty and faithfulness to Jesus must be consistent, and whose understanding of Jesus must be continuing. As clients, the disciples must always be dependent on and grateful to their Patron-Broker, since they are constant recipients of the Patron's benevolence, grace, and favor.

As co-clients to the same Patron-Broker, the disciples had to learn to be benevolent and gracious to the other disciples, and to have greater reciprocity among themselves as equals. They needed to see that they were not competitors or fellow-combatants for honor, but rather colleagues and fellow-contributors to the honor of their gracious and generous Patron-Broker.

VI. Narrative Reversals of Honor Values in the Gospel of Mark

We have overviewed how Mark transformed the first-century social structures of the family and patron-client relation into the new family of God and the God-as-Patron-Benefactor, Jesus-as-Broker, Disciples-as-Clients relation. Mark also radically reversed the honor value system.

Malina points out the need to reverse or change the new family's value system and behavior patterns: "Affiliation with the new fictive kin group also requires a new range of behavior that show the collectivist virtues of the new group."[82] Senior also sees the value of radical reversal:

[82] B. J. Malina, "'Let Him Deny Himself' (Mark 8:34//): A Social Psychological Model of Self-Denial," *BTB* 24 (1994): 115.

"Life within the community is to be characterized by an expression of power that is diametrically opposed to that experienced in society."[83]

Mark reversed the four factors that made first-century Mediterranean honor cultures preoccupied with combative and competitive challenge-response contests. The four factors that must be reversed are the perception of limited good and honor, envy, agonistic nature, and extreme love for honor.

In the Gospel, Mark reversed the perception of limited good into a perception of abundant good. For example, the parable of the soils and its interpretation (4:1-20) talked about the good soil as "growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold" (4:8), and the ones who "hear the word and accept it" (4:20) as bearing fruit "thirty and sixty and a hundred fold" (4:20). These statements affirm the reversed perception of abundant good in God's kingdom.

In addition, the parable of the "growing" seed (4:26-29) talked about natural growth that produces the harvest. Right after this parable comes another, the parable of the mustard seed (4:30-32), which illustrates the kingdom of God's unhindered growth from small beginnings. These parables reversed the perception of limited good to that of abundance.

The perception of abundant good (and honor) was also shown in Jesus' promise to those who left family and fields for his sake and the gospel, and who will "receive a hundredfold now in this age – houses, brothers, and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecution – and in the age to come eternal life" (10:30). The hundredfold nature of the rewards "now in this age," along with the eternal life "in the age to come," revealed the reversal of the image of limited good.

Two other statements from Jesus affirmed this reversal: (1) "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible" (10:27); and (2) "So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (11:24). These two statements are part of the dynamics of abundant good for those who are part of God's kingdom.

In addition, the many healings, miracles, and exorcisms of Jesus display his reversal of the limited good perception. Jesus is the Divine Broker, who dispenses the abundant good of the heavenly Benefactor. Moreover, the transfiguration of Jesus (9:1-8) and his glorious return indicate that the perception of abundant good stretches even beyond the present and touches the realm of future unlimited good.

[83] D. P. Senior, "'With Swords and Clubs. . .' – The Setting of Mark's Community and His Critique of Abusive Power," *BTB* 17 (1987): 10-20.

Aside from the perception of limited good, the other three factors that nurture challenge-response social contests are reversed in this way: (1) the reversal from envy to love for neighbor as oneself (12:31); (2) the reversal from the agonistic nature to an amicable nature through peace with one another (9:50), forgiveness (11:25), reception of children in Jesus' name (9:37), and non-stopping of a worker who does not belong to one's group (9:39-40); and (3) the reversal from the extreme love for honor to extreme love for God (i.e., "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and all your strength"–12:30) and God's honor (i.e., give "to God the things that are God's"–12:17).

These reversals reveal the new contents of what are honorable in the narrative. These new contents basically shift from the externally based honor system that values social precedence, to the internally-based honor system that highlights gracious character and deeds. These contents also move from the family-focused, human-endorsed court of reputation, to the new-family-focused, and divine-endorsed court of reputation.

In summary, Mark transformed the cultural honor concepts of family, patronage, and social contests in the Gospel through narrative reversals. These reversals show three key lessons: (1) the new fictive family of God is more important than the natural family; (2) Jesus now serves as the new Patron-Broker, who is above the prevailing patronage system; and (3) the new honor values of love, peace, forgiveness, and doing God's will now supercede the agonistic system of social contests.