

Title The Course of Compassion:
A Curricular Analysis of *Splanchnizomai* in the Teaching of Jesus

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Presented By Fred Lyon, *UnionPSCE*

Introduction

It is hoped that the research appearing in this paper will eventually become part of a dissertation intended to engage in a curricular analysis of compassion relative to the twelve occurrences of the Greek verb *splanchnizomai* ('to be moved with compassion') in the New Testament. Along with the stories of Jesus feeding crowds in Mark and Matthew, the dissertation will consider *splanchnizomai* in accounts of Jesus teaching compassion both by healing particular individuals and through teaching in parables. For the purpose of 32/RIG, my focus is on the feeding narratives because in addition to feeling the most sure-footed researching these stories, I believe they lend the most relevance to a discussion of globalization starting from a Christian context.

In preparing this essay, the outcome of sorting through my research has resulted in some minor changes from what I originally proposed to present. First, for at least the next five minutes, the working title has been modified a bit to read, "The Course of Compassion: A Curricular Analysis of *Splanchnizomai* in the Teaching of Jesus." Second, to help ensure that the summarization of my research for 32/RIG actually remains a summary, the Feeding of the Five Thousand recorded Mk 6:30-44 is the primary text employed in my examination of *splanchnizomai* in Jesus' teaching.

This paper has two major sections and concludes with a short third. First, ***Splanchnizomai So Far*** summarizes pertinent findings concerning: 1) the biblical context of *splanchnizomai*, and 2) the course of compassion in Mk 6:30-44. The second section, **Relevance to Globalization**, offers a social-scientific reading of Mk 6:30-44 *vis-à-vis* patron-client relations, which provides a starting point for (my purposes) a larger discussion of the coming reign of God and (the purposes of this year's APRRE Annual Meeting topic) Christians engaging in the kind of religious pluralism that is conducive to responding positively to issues of globalization. **Looking Ahead** is the final section and briefly considers how I anticipate to pursue a more thorough curricular analysis of *splanchnizomai*.

Splanchnizomai So Far

Biblical Context

Compassion is not a warm fuzzy word.

Compassion is the central effective manifestation of God's love, the substance of the power with which God exhibits forgiveness, healing, mercy, and restoration. No other activity, attitude, or attribute of God to which the writers of the Old Testament bear

witness exceeds the compassion of God's saving presence in relation to Israel.¹ In the New Testament, compassion is directly connected with accounts of Jesus demonstrating the coming reign of God through miracles ("acts of power") and teaching about the reign of God through parables.

Compassion in the Old Testament corresponds to the Hebrew root *rhm* and its derivatives. About these forms of *rhm*, Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. comments that "all are used to describe God's being and God's activity."² Crucial to this understanding of compassion is that all the derivatives of *rhm* follow from *rechem*, which means 'womb.' The visceral here by no means diminishes the divine import. For in this we encounter especially evocative imagery of God's compassion that helps make the human experience of divine forgiveness and God's response to human suffering profoundly familiar, real, even understandable.

Likewise, the generative qualities of the womb express the creative, re-creative, and restorative power of God's compassion. Diane Bergant observes that God's compassion "is more than comforting, it is creative. As the womb brings to birth life with all of its possibilities, so divine compassion brings to rebirth life that was threatened or perhaps lost."³ This rebirth generates a renewed capacity for human beings not only to respond to God's compassion, but to interact compassionately with one another as well.

In her examination of *rhm* and its derivatives, Bergant identifies compassion in terms of four thematic categories: covenant renewal; mercy after wrath; repentance of sin; national restoration. This leads to several conclusions. First, the essential being of God is connected to God's compassion, suggesting that compassion constitutes God's nature and, accordingly, God's covenant renewing activity. Second, human experience of God's compassion is not realized without repentance wherein human beings acknowledge when they have broken covenant with God and then actively seek God's forgiveness. Third, in addition to forgiveness God's compassion is experienced in the alleviation of human suffering. Thus, fourth, the ultimate goal of God's compassion is the restoration of God's people. Throughout, it is understood that compassion is at the core of both divine-to-human and human-to-human interactions.⁴

Turning to the New Testament, the word that primarily takes up the meaning of *rhm* and its derivatives in Greek is *splanchnizomai*, meaning 'to be moved with compassion.' The root of *splanchnizomai* is *splanchnon* (usually in the plural, *splanchna*) which most graphically means 'guts' or 'bowels.' *Splanchna* are the 'inward parts' of animals that are reserved for sacrifices. Pertaining to human beings, *splanchna* are the 'vital organs' wherein emotions are seated.

The most elevated human sense of *splanchnon* is that of 'womb' such that *splanchnizomai* comes to have the connotation that one is moved with love from the womb. *Splanchnizomai* identifies a profoundly intense emotional evocation that viscerally propels one into compassionate action toward others. This corresponds to personal and communal nurturing among human beings, God's salvific activity in human

¹ Gary L. Sapp, ed., *Compassionate Ministry* (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1993), 12.

² Sapp, 36

³ Sapp, 25.

⁴ Sapp, 15-24.

history, and God's eschatological completion of God's salvific activity that is already evident in the present.⁵

Splanchnizomai only appears in the Synoptic Gospels---nine accounts of Jesus addressing the needs of others with acts of power and three parables in which compassion is central to the lesson Jesus teaches.⁶ Consequently, *splanchnizomai* is dominated by the presence of Jesus' own compassion and the compassion he teaches others. The nine acts of power stories are characterized by:

- Jesus being moved with compassion to help those in need
- people anticipating that Jesus' compassion can take care of their need
- Jesus' compassion being intrinsic to the salvific and eschatological content of the miracles.

In the three parables, *splanchnizomai* signals the most decisive action in determining the outcome of the narrative flow of each story, which Jesus uses to drive home the gist of his teaching about the coming reign of God.

In both the Old and New Testaments, that which primarily evokes compassion is the suffering of others. Whether God, Jesus, or human beings exhibit it, the biblical understanding of compassion involves the active response of bearing with others in their suffering---including suffering along with others in the midst of addressing their suffering. This understanding is articulated by the word itself in English, for "compassion" is rooted in the Latin, *compati* [*com*=with + *pati*=to bear, suffer].

One ramification emerging from the biblical understanding of compassion is that the one moved with compassion bears with others until suffering is alleviated. God's interaction with Israel not only recovers them from suffering. It also renews covenantal relations with Israel even after God has just cause to be angry over their violation of covenantal promises. Compassion is God's final say to times of Israel's suffering as well as to times when Israel rightly deserves, and actually receives, divine discipline. During the ministry of Jesus, his compassion results in deeds of power through which those in need are thoroughly healed and nourished. Likewise, when Jesus teaches about compassion in parables, the examples of the Good Samaritan and the father of the prodigal son illustrate that compassion involves a committed follow through toward the recovery and restoration of those to whom we respond compassionately.

A second ramification follows from the thoroughness of God's compassion, namely, that receiving divine compassion equips us for extending compassion to fellow human beings. Indeed, God expects those who experience the benefits of God's compassion to become compassionate themselves. The parable of the Unforgiving Steward [Mt 18:23-35] indicates that God takes compassion so seriously that human beings should not trifle with God's compassion by withholding it from others.

A third ramification is that compassion is not always a matter of dire straits. This is especially noticeable when instances of the use of the noun *splanchna* are taken into consideration. In the Song of Zechariah, God's compassionate disposition is compared to a light guiding us out of darkness so that we may walk in peace [Lk 1:78-79].

⁵ By salvific I mean the accomplished salvation history of God. By eschatological I mean the future consummation of God's salvation history.

⁶ Mt 9:35-38 does not include an act of power, but it has apparent redactional connections to the miraculous feeding of the crowds in Mk and Mt. Mk 1:40-44 contains the textual variant, "anger," but the more standard reading is "compassion."

Compassion is one of the articles of spiritual clothing worn by the people of God [Col 3:12]. Grateful for caring support from the Philippians while he is in prison, Paul writes that he longs for them “with the compassion of Christ Jesus” [Phil 1:8]. There is an optimistic dimension to biblical compassion---witness the joy of the prodigal son’s compassionate father---which reminds us that, in English at least, “compatibility” is rooted in *compati* just as much as “compassion” is. In the parable of the Good Samaritan [Lk 10:25-37], compassion not only brings us out of our isolation from God and neighbor but also helps sustain the faithful concord of our interrelationships with God and neighbor.

Finally, as previously mentioned above, there is the connection of compassion to the salvific and eschatological work of God in the Old Testament as well as to the New Testament record of Jesus demonstrating and teaching the coming reign of God. To speak of compassion from a biblical context is to be conversant with receiving the benefits of, and then participating in, God’s will done on earth as it is in heaven. To speak of compassion is to tell the story of God breaking into our midst to comfort us with abiding strength to be healed and to be holy according to God’s compassionate purposes.

The Course of Compassion Illustrated by Mk 6:30-44

In the parallel attestations to Jesus feeding the crowds found in Mk 6:30-44 [Mt 14:13-21] and Mk 8:1-10 [Mt 15:32-39], that which explicitly prompts Jesus into action is compassion.⁷ The key to fully appreciating the acts of power that flow from Jesus’ compassion is this---what Jesus does with the people is just as miraculous as what he does with the loaves and fish. He compassionately ‘works’ the crowd in amazing ways.

In doing so, Jesus offers them an education in the coming reign of God.

Throughout Jesus’ ministry, acts of power are crucially associated with his demonstration of, and identification with, the salvific-eschatological activity of God breaking into human history. An essential dimension of this activity is the additional testimony that Jesus coordinates his miracle working with the proclamation of God’s coming reign through teaching.⁸ Along with teaching via sayings and parables, Jesus employs acts of power---not only to teach about the coming reign of God, but also to actually demonstrate and enact it. Mk 6:30-44 in particular attests to Jesus teaching by means of words reinforced by wonders. Moreover, education occurs throughout the feeding narratives in the sense of *educere*, ‘to lead out,’ wherein Jesus is portrayed leading the multitudes out from a state of brokenness and into a state of restoration.

As Jesus’ compassionate course of action comes to fruition, a curriculum unfolds. By curriculum, I have in mind the meaning Patrick Slattery encapsulates:

The understanding of curriculum that is proposed is not restricted to the modern program of studies in the schools of the twentieth century as codified in textbooks, guides, scope and sequences, and behavioral lesson plans. Rather, the verb form of curriculum, *currere*, which refers to running of the race rather than the race course itself, is primary. This process of curriculum as *currere*...emphasizes the individual’s own capacity to reconceptualize his or her autobiography, recognize connections with other people, recover and reconstitute the past, imagine and create possibilities for the future, and come to a greater personal and communal awareness...the

⁷ In the first parallel, the writers describe Jesus being moved with compassion. In the second, Jesus himself declares he is moved with compassion.

⁸ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 60-70.

curriculum as *currere* is an interpretation of lived experiences rather than a static course of studies to be completed.⁹

To explore the movement of Jesus' compassion in terms of *currere*, I will focus primarily on the Mk 6:30-44, with supporting references made to the remaining three feeding narratives from Mark and Matthew.

All Jesus wants to do is go with his disciples to a deserted place. Yet they cannot shake a multitude who are hounding them so hard that when Jesus and his disciples reach the spot where they are seeking some rest, thousands of people are there already. Even so, Jesus responds with compassion and teaches these thousands until it starts getting late, toward dinnertime. Overcoming his disciples' concern about not having enough food to feed so many people, Jesus has the people form into groups. He takes only five loaves of bread and two fish, looks up to heaven, blesses and breaks the loaves, then gives the food to the disciples to distribute to the crowd. Everyone eats until they are stuffed. There are twelve baskets of leftovers after everyone is finished.

Mark's account of the Feeding of the Five Thousand is perhaps familiar enough that it is easy to take for granted, if not overlook all together, the astonishing dynamics operating among Jesus, the disciples, and the crowd. These dynamics flow from the compassion of Jesus and bring forth ever-increasing degrees of interrelatedness among the participants that radically cross socio-economic/socio-political/socio-religious borders. What Jesus does with food and humankind in Mark 6:30-44 is equally miraculous. Jesus' compassion takes this throng of people from a state of being **cut-off** and brings them together into **community** that is deepened by **companionship** and eventually hallowed unto **communion**.

Cut-Off What specifically prompts Jesus' compassion is the observation in Mk 6:34 that those in the crowd are "like sheep without a shepherd," a metaphor for the people being cut-off from authentic religious leadership.¹⁰ In both of Matthew's feeding narratives, the spiritual disenfranchisement of the crowd is underscored by the great need for physical healing. In the Mk 8 [Mt 15] parallel, Jesus addresses physical hunger. All in all, Jesus is moved with compassion to mend a broken mass of people.

Community Jesus begins by fashioning the crowd into a community as he patiently teaches the people for the better part of a day. Unity and wholeness emerge, overwhelming the original dissimilitude of the multitude. They become a community precisely because Jesus is moved with compassion to take care of them. This is reinforced when he gathers them group by group to eat. Ties presently binding the crowd into community will become more blessed as Jesus leads them into companionship and communion.

Companionship Having fed the hearts and minds of the crowd by teaching with words, Jesus feeds and teaches through the wondrous multiplication and distribution of food. Companionship emerges from the sharing of the bread and fish, both by Jesus with the crowd and the members of the crowd among themselves.

⁹ Patrick Slattery, *Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), 76-77. Here, Slattery is influenced particularly by William F. Pinar and William H. Schubert.

¹⁰ In addition to the Mt 14:14 parallel reiterating this, the redactionally related Mt 9:36 adds Jesus describing the people as "harassed and helpless."

Literally from the Latin, *companis* [*com*=with + *panis*=bread], companionship is rooted in the sharing of food, hence such definitions as ‘mess mates’ and ‘bread fellows.’ One cannot be a companion without sharing one’s sustenance with another. At the same time, such sharing makes one a companion. This is evident in fellowship that develops among family and friends breaking bread together. Yet at the same time, implicit to the word “companion” is the notion that sharing food has the potential to make strangers familiar.

Mk 6:30-44 substantiates this. For through the sharing of bread and fish, Jesus enacts and sets in motion a radical chain reaction of hospitality (in Greek, *philoxenia*, which literally means ‘love of/to strangers’).¹¹ Indeed, regardless of the particulars of the miraculous production of the meal, the companionship depicted in Mk 6:30-44 is cause for wonder due to so many people actually eat with so many strangers.¹²

If the multitude is exclusively Jewish, the protocol for Jews sharing meals even among themselves is not conducive to engaging in such a spontaneous and public sharing of food. Then again, given the close proximity of the district of Galilee to Gentile territory, it is not absolutely unlikely that the crowd could be an intermingling of Jews and Gentiles. Such a mixed crowd, of course, would make the sharing all the more startling. Either way, companionship initiated by and resulting from Jesus’ compassion is breaking down barriers among strangers, leading to an expansion of the familiar beyond the familial that is at the heart of the good news Jesus teaches.

In the course of responding to one another as companions and to Jesus as the source of that companionship, the multitude experiences a deepening of the community already emerging when the crowd first listens to Jesus teach. Companionship fosters a new framework for community that prepares a place for holiness to enter the realm of interrelationships among people in the crowd. Which brings us to communion.

Communion Throughout the gospels, whenever Jesus shares meals outside the obligations governing table fellowship, he is serving up the coming reign of God. This is highlighted in Mk 6: 41 by the portrayal of the way Jesus imparts the bread to the people. He takes the loaves, blesses them, breaks them, and gives them to the disciples to be distributed---echoing Mk 14:22, which contains the eucharistic formula instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper.

This verbal link between the Feeding of the Five Thousand and the Last Supper is not a coincidence. Mark intends to establish a correspondence between these two holiest of meals from the gospel record of Jesus’ ministry, both of which signal communion---divine-to-human and human-to-human---unfolding through the salvific-eschatological activity of Jesus. In the feeding narrative, the eucharistic formula reinforces the significance of the companionship operating in the multiplication and distribution of food---as companionship deepens community, communion hallows companionship. Also, given that the eucharistic formula originates from everyday Jewish prayer before meals, as well as the main meal at Passover, it is worth noting that whereas companionship makes the strange familiar, communion takes up the familiar into

¹¹ The word *philoxenia* itself does not appear in the text of Mk 6:30-44.

¹² By “particulars of the miraculous production” I recognize, on the one hand, the traditional view that the miracle of the multiplication is done directly by Jesus. On the other hand, there are more contemporary views that contend the miracle of the multiplication is that Jesus’ initial act of generosity prompts the multitude to share provisions they may already have in their possession.

something new. This something new is the hallowing good news of the coming reign of God.

Mk 6:30-44 indicates that this communion functions in a contemporaneously past, present, and future dimension. The present act of power of the superabundant production of food recalls from the Old Testament past both the provision of manna to Israel in the wilderness and the feeding miracles attributed to Elisha. At the same time, the present act of power is verbally linked not only to the account of the Last Supper, but likewise to the future hope of the messianic banquet.¹³ Along these lines, contemporaneity operates integratively among community, companionship, and communion. The curriculum of compassion occurs more simultaneously than in a rigid sequence.

This sense of convergence marks compassionate divine-to-human and human-to-human interaction in the coming reign of God. If we believe Jesus is God revealed *in carne*, then God undergoes communion with the human condition---which includes God directly experiencing the compassion of having one's own guts wrenched. Divine compassion breaks into human history to mend human brokenness, restoring and equipping humankind to participate more fully as covenant partners in communion with God. Finally, compassion driven communion infiltrates the vast matrix of human interrelationships, concretizing and consecrating all that makes for authentic accord among people---which sometimes requires crossing borders and breaking barriers that construct discord among people.

Splanchnizomai is a middle passive verb that signals profound activity. Jesus is viscerally moved to gather a spiritually eviscerated throng and lead them out of helplessness into holiness. Not only is Jesus moved with compassion. There is likewise a curricular movement to both the compassion Jesus experiences and the way Jesus gives expression to his compassion. For Jesus' compassion runs its course as the cut-off crowd educes Jesus' salvific-eschatological concern, then out of this concern Jesus conducts the crowd into community, companionship, and communion. Sacredness unfolds amid the social interaction in concurrence with Jesus' compassion. As Jesus teaches with words and wonders, the multitude is educated about the coming reign of God.

Relevance to Globalization

What are patron-client relations and how do they operate in Mk 6:30-44?

John H. Elliot provides a helpful explanation of the socio-cultural institution of patron-client relations that would be known both by Jesus and the author of the Gospel of Mark:

The literary and epigraphic evidence from the Greco-Roman period abundantly attests the existence of a Roman institution known as *clientela*, or, in modern terms, patronage and clientage. This fundamental and pervasive form of dependency relations, involving the reciprocal exchange of goods and services between socially superior "patrons" and their socially inferior "clients," shaped both the public and private sectors of ancient life as well as the political and religious symbolizations of power and wealth...In this relationship of binding and long-range character designed to advance the interests of both partners, a 'patron' (*patronus, patrona*) is one who uses his

¹³ Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 164-65.

or her influence to protect and assist some other person who becomes the patron's 'client' (*cliens*). In return, this client provides to the patron certain valued services. The influence of the patron could be enlisted to secure for the client a diversity of 'goods' including food, financial aid, physical protection, career advancement and administrative posts, manumission, citizenship, equality in or freedom from taxation...The client in this relationship remains under the power (*potestas*) and within the *familia* of the patron for life (as in the case of manumitted slaves). He or she owes the patron a variety of services (*obsequium*) and is obligated to enhance the prestige, reputation, and honor of his or her patron in public and private life.¹⁴

Dale B. Martin refers to patronage as "the patron-client structure and its accompanying patronal ideology."¹⁵ Patronal ideology is characterized by structures of mutual benefits as well as networks of obligation, loyalty, honor, and even friendship that develop across various strata of social status in the course of patrons and clients interacting with one another. Indeed, both Martin and his mentor, Wayne A. Meeks, identify a discernible measure of social mobility within patron-client relations, especially in urban contexts.

However, K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman point out that the urbanization of antiquity was the result, at least in part, of the organization and appropriation by cities of an agricultural surplus produced in the hinterlands...cities accumulated what was produced beyond the subsistence needs of the peasants...they became the centers of control, primarily over land use and raw materials, and thereby determined the conditions under which all other parts of the system operated.¹⁶

Patronage in Palestine is patronage in the hinterlands. This means that Palestinian patron-client relations are much more likely to take place against the backdrop of the more oppressive and imperialistic treatment of client states within the *Pax Romana*. The powerful in the outposts of the empire---and those scrambling to enhance, manipulate, and protect whatever benefit they can derive from the powerful---are less benevolent to the powerless than those who wield power in the midst of the empire's metropolises.¹⁷ Opportunities for social mobility and integration in Palestinian patron-client relations are less likely to feature structures of mutual benefits and more likely to be dominated by economic, political, and social power struggles among the classes.

To examine how patron-client relations operates in Mk 6:30-44, it is useful to consider some background from Mk 6:14-29---the story of the beheading of John the Baptist---which immediately precedes the Feeding of the Five Thousand. The high on power plays, low on benevolence dimension of patronage practiced in Palestine describes the ethos of the Herodian family in relation to their clients, especially powerless peasants. It is in the midst of a quintessential high power play, low benevolence event that the death of John the Baptist occurs.

Particularly telling in Mk 6:14-29 is that John's death takes place at a banquet thrown by Herod for his clients, that is, "for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee [Mk 6:21]." Banqueting is one of the

key attributes of patronage/clientage in the ancient Mediterranean...a time to display one's honor by how grand a feast could be offered. The seating arrangements symbolized the relative status within

¹⁴ Richard L. Rohrbaugh, ed., *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 148-149. Note: Patron-client relations are also evident in first century Palestine; cf., , 63-97.

¹⁵ Dale B. Martin, *Slavery and Salvation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 29.

¹⁶K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 78-79.

¹⁷ Hanson and Oakman, 99-125.

the group. Being invited indicated one's membership in the in-group. And banquets were opportunities not only to socialize but to share information, make deals, and cement attachments.¹⁸ The deal John the Baptist gets is having his head served up on a platter. An understanding of the social value of honor in patron-client relations highlights the depravity of this act.

The importance of honor is intrinsic to and, indeed, part of the currency of the exchange of benefits that sustains the patronage system---including the rather public social function of a patron throwing a banquet for clients.¹⁹ Admittedly, clients are more obligated to give honor to patrons than patrons are obligated to grant honor to clients. Nevertheless, good patrons---even merely politically shrewd patrons---typically neither expand the number nor strengthen the loyalty of their clients by putting them to shame. Moreover, the patronal ideology does place economic, political, and social expectations upon patrons to honor the commitments that they make to clients.

John the Baptist tells Herod that it is unlawful for him to be married to his brother's wife, Herodias. Despite this and the fact that Herodias reacts by holding a deadly grudge against John, Herod fears John because he knows John is righteous and holy. The Gospel of Mark records that even though John's words greatly disturb him, Herod actually likes listening to the Baptist [Mk 6:20]. But most significant---and unique from Matthew and Luke's accounts of the Baptist's death---is Mark's clarification that Herod offers John protection [Mk 6:20]. I believe this indicates that the ethos of a kind of patron-client relationship is operating in Herod's decision to give John protection. Granted, John does not view himself as a client of Herod. Yet, Mark specifically describes the king in language suggestive of Herod assuming a patronal stance toward John.

This strongly drives home the heinous character of Herod's actions in Mark 6:21-28. It is bad enough that John is executed because Herod honors promises resulting from his lecherous flirtation with Herodias' daughter. It is worse still that Herod allows for the decapitation of John. Then by any standard, really, but especially from the standpoint of honor and shame in patronal ideology, Herod reaches the dregs of the barrel of his shameful treatment of John. He has the Baptist's head displayed on a platter in the midst of a central venue of patron-client relations, namely, the banquet assembly. Emerging from cues to patron-client relations in Mk 6:14-29 is the portrait of a highly dishonorable and dysfunctional patron.

On the heels of this story is Mark's portrait of Jesus feeding the five thousand---a portrait colored by language that links to the imagery of patron-client relations. This imagery is most evident in two significant ways that are related to the use of food. The first already has been covered above in my discussion of how Jesus' compassionate response to the multitude culminates in community-companionship-communion.

The second cue is the use of the phrase *symposia symposia* in Mk 6:39. Mark is the only Gospel writer who uses this particular language to describe how Jesus seeks to gather the multitude into groups to share food. *Symposion* means 'a drinking party' or 'banquet'.²⁰ C.E.B. Cranfield elaborates that the "underlying Aramaic is probably...the

¹⁸ Hanson and Oakman, 84-85.

¹⁹ Philip F. Esler, *The First Christians in their Social Worlds: Social-scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 1994), 25-29.

²⁰ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 787.

word used to denote a group of people eating the Passover meal together.”²¹ However, J.H. Moulton and G. Milligan posit that *symposia symposia*, “can no longer be regarded as Hebraistic.”²² So, on the one hand, Mark could be using *symposion* to imply a loaded double meaning combining “banquet” with “Passover” to indicate a holy banquet and thus holy patronage. Yet, on the other hand, even if Moulton and Milligan are correct about there being no connection to Passover, the meaning “banquet” alone is a cue that suggests Jesus is performing the role of patron when he orders the *symposia symposia* arrangement.

Verbal cues in Mark 6:30-44 combined with those in Mark 6:14-29 strongly indicate the operation of patron-client relations and, consequently, the appropriateness of employing patronal imagery to interpret Mark’s account of Jesus feeding the five thousand. Essential to understanding this patronal imagery is Jesus’ compassionate use of food contrasted with the savagery of the banquet hosted by Herod. There are some further social-scientific factors related to the use of food that underscore how in “working the crowd,” Jesus challenges worldly patronal ideology and points the way to the new patronage of the coming reign of God.

First there is the issue of food scarcity and limited goods. Inherent to agrarian Palestinian society,

especially the grinding reality of life for the peasants, was a belief that all goods were limited, both material and non-material. All goods, from land and food on the one hand to honour on the other, were regarded as finite in quantity and always in short supply...since all goods were limited, a person could only increase his or her supply of them at the expense of someone else.²³

The reality of food scarcity emphasizes the wonder of the superabundant multiplication of resources. It also helps highlight Jesus’ capacity to move the multitude to share so openly with one another, no matter what the particulars of the food source happen to be. In other words, if the food comes from people responding to Jesus’ initial demonstration of hospitality by then opening their own sacks and sharing food they already have with them, they are freely parting with the severely limited resources that are rightfully theirs. If the food is multiplied supernaturally by Jesus, then everyone is freely foregoing the opportunity to hoard an extraordinary windfall of food resources. And from either perspective, those entering this amazingly spontaneous banquet do not gain their own benefits at the expense of anyone else.

This absence of personal aggrandizement corresponds to the second issue, namely, the way honor operates when Jesus enters into patron-client relations, specifically by feeding the multitude. Again, Philip Esler offers some important background:

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.²⁴

Jesus is not motivated by personal honor and certainly seeks nothing at the expense of others as he extends prodigal patronal beneficence by bountifully responding out of

²¹ C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 218.

²² J.H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1952), 598.

²³ Esler, 35.

²⁴ Esler, 27.

compassion toward the multitude. Absent, too, is any advantage-taking or *quid pro quo* sensibility among the crowd as they share such an abundance of food with one another.

All of this is further reinforced by what follows Mk 6:30-44, both in references Jesus makes to food in Mk 7:14-30 and in his use of food when he feeds the four thousand in Mk 8:1-10.²⁵ As he takes the Pharisees to task over issues of cleanliness and food [Mk 7:14-23], then interacts with the Syrophenician woman [Mk 7:24-30], Jesus makes it clear that food---as well as how and with whom we consume food---can no longer be used as a source of religious division and exclusion. This holds for Jews among themselves and, more significantly, between Jews and Gentiles. Using food to overcome, not promote, division and exclusion is further reiterated with the second miraculous feeding in Mk 8:1-10. The likelihood in Mk 8:1-10 that the multitude is a mingling of Jews and Gentiles is even higher, the breaking down of religious barriers among strangers all the more compelling.²⁶ Which leads to a final social-scientific consideration.

In the particularity of Mk 6:30-44 as well as the overall sweep of Mk 6:30-8:10, there is the unfolding awareness that Jesus is turning earthly patronal ideology head over heels---and doing so precisely by compassionately ushering in the heavenly patronage of the coming reign of God. At the core of this salvific-eschatological activity is divine compassion breaking into human history to mend human brokenness---which often requires crossing borders and breaking barriers that construct discord among people. Here, Brian Blount's understanding of boundary crossing in relation to the Gospel of Mark is greatly informative:

In Jesus' preaching the power and the reality of the future kingdom of God was realized in the human, socio-historical present. In the various manifestations of that preaching, e.g., the healings, the exorcisms, and the teachings, God's future power invaded and transformed the human present. Jesus' preaching shattered economic, political, cultic, legal, and ethnic boundaries. It was as though in his preaching Jesus opened up a present pocket of future power that resisted and overwhelmed the boundaries separating Jews from each other and Jews from Gentiles. In Mark's narrative story, then, Jesus' preaching was the future kingdom exploding transformatively into the present moment.²⁷

The type of patronal ideology Jesus fosters through the use of and references to food in the Feeding of the Five Thousand has profound religious implications for overwhelming the borders constructed by table fellowship and ritual purity, both within the Jewish community and beyond it to interactions between Jews and Gentiles. Moreover, the compassion of Jesus initiates a multitude of benefits related to crossing the borders of all manner of socio-economic/socio-political/socio-religious norms for patron-client relations---from the micro-systems of households and villages on up through to the macro-system of the empire.

²⁵ Beginning with the Feeding of the Five Thousand and ending with the Feeding of the Four Thousand, Mk 6:30-8:10 comprises a major *inclusio* in the Gospel of Mark.

²⁶ Traditional interpretations of Mark's two feeding narratives contend the crowd of 5,000 is Jewish, while the 4,000 are Gentile. More likely, the proximity of Galilee to Gentile territory would result in mixed crowds at both events. The likelihood of mingling at the second feeding is greater if only from the standpoint that even if the 4,000 are exclusively Gentile, a Jew and his disciples are breaking bread with them.

²⁷ Brian K. Blount, *Go Preach!* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 8. Note: I would add to Blount's list of manifestations of preaching all of Jesus' deeds of power, including feeding the five thousand.

This is because the patronal ideology generated by the compassion of Jesus unravels the warp and woof of patron-client relations that weave the fabric of culture---particularly the manipulation of power that determines social mobility and integration---throughout the Mediterranean in the first century, CE. In sharing food, Jesus is establishing the patronage of the coming reign of God wherein there is liberating social mobility and integration based on the mutual benefits of grace-filled servanthood. Herod certainly cannot compare, nor can any worldly patron, because worldly patronal ideology is fundamentally an enterprise of greed-driven self-interest, no matter how enlightened.

Jesus compassionately proclaims a new patronage, the foundation of which is the coming reign of God. Patronage generated by Jesus is a matter of honoring personal commitments to others no matter how great or small. Patronage generated by Jesus is a matter of going about the business of sharing benefits that do not come at the expense of others. Patronage generated by Jesus concurs with the curriculum of compassion illustrated in Mk 6:30-44, wherein the cut-off are generously conducted by Jesus into community, companionship, and communion without regard to customs and mores that codify socio-economic/socio-political/socio-religious division and exclusion.

This is where the course of compassion captured in Mk 6:30-44 is congruent with concerns about globalization---at least from the context of crossing borders to openly participate in the realm of religious pluralism. For to be compassionate to others is to be predisposed to a more radically responsive awareness of and openness to the many voices of the religiously pluralistic world brought into closer and closer proximity by globalization. Gil Bailie demonstrates that the feeding narratives provide a starting place---if not a launching pad---for Christians to become conversant in the kind of pluralism that, in my opinion, is conducive to the productive engagement of globalization.

The point of the feeding...was not food; it was the breaking down of religious and social barriers that Jesus had been challenging as spiritually inconsequential in his preaching. It was hands-on learning. It was practice for living in the kingdom...Jesus preached of a God of love and forgiveness and then invited those who heard his message to sit down together and live for a moment in the kingdom about which he was preaching. Changing the human heart and liberating those trapped in religious superstition is simply a greater miracle than pulling loaves and dried fish out of a basket. The feeding of the multitude is a real miracle. The miracle was a new kind of community, one generated by prayer and inclusion, a "new generation." Transitory as it may have been, it remains a model of new community, one on which all human culture will one day have to be based. The social bond that gave the community that Jesus inspired its coherence had one conspicuous feature: the breaking down of religious prejudice.²⁸

Here, the compassion of Jesus and the coming reign of God articulate, and yet accelerate beyond, the capacity of the Christian context to be both starting place and launching pad for confidently engaging religious pluralism and the border evaporating tendencies of globalization. Here, we discover the grammar for intra-, inter-, and trans-communal conversations through which new community emerges as the result of crossing (double crossing?) divisive and exclusionary borders. Such crossing is more than a good idea, it is fundamental to the good news that God's reign is coming to fruition always even now.

It starts with the patron himself, most graciously hosting and benefiting his clients at his own expense. To follow Jesus' patronage is to consume a steady diet of being launched across earthly borders---socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-religious---

²⁸ Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1995), 214-215 [emphasis Bailie's].

to challenge divisive and exclusionary systems of benefits that eventually benefit nobody, including those who think they are doing just fine by the system. Taking on these borders---defying greed-driven self-interest with grace-filled servanthood---is risky business. Often it will get you a cross before it will get you across. Nevertheless, the patronage of Jesus promises that, eventually, compassionately taking on these borders crosses us over into holy ground.

And it is well worth the risk.

Looking Ahead

I do not know if I have provided a curricular analysis of *splanchnizomai* so much as I have identified the components of a curriculum in the movement of compassion operating in Mk 6:30-44. More thorough analysis will need to include filtering the curriculum I believe I have pinpointed through the screen of curriculum theory and theorists. In this regard, I am drawn to theories/theorists that traffic in the importance of aesthetics, autobiography, caring, conversation, empathy, experience, gestalt, intersubjectivity, narrative, phenomenology, praxis, and prolepsis. More particularly, treatments of *currere* by Maria Harris, William F. Pinar, and Patrick Slattery are indispensable. Most particularly, if I had to narrow down to one theorist, I would choose Duane E. Huebner because of his focus on all of the above, plus a simultaneously *avant-garde* and state of the art curricular approach to spirituality, transcendence, and theology.²⁹

In another respect, I would like to explore curricular analysis through the epistemological sifter of the threefold, interrelated ways of knowing (a curriculum within epistemology itself?) via *theoria*, *poiesis*, and *praxis*.³⁰ In simplest terms, this corresponds to head, heart, and hands approaches to learning and curriculum. It also coordinates with the relationship among sympathy (cognitive understanding), empathy (affective feeling), and compassion (concrete helping action) identified in several essays on compassion in *Compassionate Ministry*.³¹

²⁹ Vikki Hillis, ed., *The Lure of the Transcendent: Collected Essays by Dwayne E. Huebner* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1999), see the appraisal of Huebner in William F. Pinar's introduction, xv-xxviii.

³⁰ Marianne Sawicki, *Seeing the Lord: Resurrection and Early Christian Practices* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 11-12.

³¹ Sapp, ed., see Chapters 2, 3, 5, and 6. Chapter 6 is "Compassion in Religious Instruction" by James Michael Lee.