

Patrons and Clients

1. Introduction

The purpose of the paper is to consider the significant contribution that a literary-cultural reading of biblical texts can make in enabling individuals and communities to relate with greater relevance and understanding to societies with a very different comprehension of life and the world. Its starting point is the recognition of the gulf that separates twenty-first century northern European and North American cultures from the honour and shame culture of first-century Palestine and the inherent risk of twenty-first century ethnocentric and anachronistic reading of New Testament texts. The paper examines the way in which these dangers might be overcome by combining cross-cultural anthropological research with careful literary analysis.

The theme of patron-client relationships, so prevalent in the ancient world, is proposed as one specific element of the honour and shame culture and is explored from both cultural-anthropological and literary angles. The cultural-anthropological angle draws on the research of and enters into dialogue with the Context Group and the work of Malina, Neyrey and Rohrbaugh, among others. The literary angle draws on the history of parable research and focuses on close readings of two parables in Luke's Gospel which relate to patron-client relations, the parable of The Survivor Client (Luke 16:1-8a) and the parable of The Resisting Clients (Luke 19:11b-27).

The value of the Context Group's contribution to biblical interpretation in terms of exposing ethnocentric and anachronistic readings and of providing insights into Mediterranean culture is acknowledged, though critical evaluation suggests that the Group's approach tends to be too general and stereotypical. Through such cultural-literary interpretation of parables the reader is drawn into a closer and more insightful reading of the narrative itself and into a deeper understanding of how these two parables reveal Luke's Jesus' contribution to the model of patron-client relationships.

This cultural-literary analysis not only alerts twenty-first century readers to the dangers of reading from the point of view of their own culture, distant in time and space from the New Testament, but provides insights which facilitate attempts to relate to individuals and societies, both around the world and in their own contexts, whose culture is more akin to that of first-century Palestine. Following a brief outline of the purpose of the Context Group's work and of the approach to parable interpretation adopted in this paper, the discussion proceeds to a critique of the Context Group's understanding of the patron and client model and to close scrutiny of the two parables in question. In posing the specific question: Does Luke's Jesus reveal a positive understanding of patronage, which can also support the idea of an analogy with divine patronage, or are the webs of patron-client relationships more negative, exploitative and fragile? the intention is that these investigations will provide a perspective on and encourage engagement with those cultures where the patron and client model still predominates today.

1.1 Cultural Anthropology and the Context Group

The Context Group's point of departure is the recognition that the culture and society of the New Testament documents are quite foreign to industrialised North American and northern European interpreters. In order to avoid anachronistic and ethnocentric readings, therefore, it is essential to acknowledge the otherness of distant cultures (Lawrence 2004:9-25), at the same time recognising that the interpreter's worldview is not the norm but, from the standpoint of those outside the interpreter's culture, simply a further example of otherness (Lawrence 2004:20). Osiek, in her assessment of social-scientific approaches to the New Testament, underlines the way in which developments in a whole range of areas in recent centuries, including the fields of technology, philosophy, politics, economics and psychology, have led to present-day readers inhabiting a wholly different world of meaning from those in the pages of the New Testament (Osiek 1984:24). Comprehending first-century Palestinian culture requires, then, the crossing of a bridge from one world to another, a bridge, which, as Rohrbaugh indicates, comprises a number of obstacles to understanding, including the availability of language; the desire to maintain a threatened identity; different means of communicating and ways of seeing the individual and community; assumptions of human similarity, and cognitive style (Rohrbaugh 2006:1-17). Since it is impossible to travel back in time to first-century Palestine (Osiek 1984:25), cross-cultural anthropology becomes the means by which such obstacles may be negotiated, the starting point for which are anthropological studies of the Mediterranean, drawn initially from the publications of Pitt-Rivers and Peristiany (1966), which form the basis for developing abstract models designed to be heuristic tools for the investigation of biblical texts (Esler 1994:12-13). The work of the Context Group focuses predominantly on the significance of a culture of honour and shame, but recognises that this operates within the broader socio-political context of a highly stratified society.

1.2 Parable Interpretation

In the readings that follow the parables are understood as narratives which juxtapose story and reality, providing depictions of life in first-century Palestine, which resonate with the audience because the latter can recognise elements of the story as being true to their own experience. They do not purport to be about some particular theological or religious entity, but are grounded in the common everyday life of the hearers and are designed to challenge the audience to reflect carefully and thoughtfully on their own existence and on the way the world works. Since the parables are essentially stories inviting listeners to discern the truth of their own situations and since the very nature of story is of something open to interpretation, the narratives must be allowed to stand free of any interpretative frame which might close down avenues of thought or even distort the flow of the account (Hedrick 1994). The focus falls on the actual words of the parable itself and not on meanings imposed by the Gospel author either before or following the narrative sequence. Nevertheless, there is recognition of the individuality and artistry of the author's composition, so there is no search for the original words or an originating structure. It is the parables of Luke's Jesus which are under investigation.

With regard to figurative and non-figurative interpretations this study rejects allegorical readings, since they diminish the significance of the story's plot, its dynamics and immediacy and its original social context. The focus is directed instead towards a combination of the

kind of non-figurative approaches espoused by Hedrick (1994) and Herzog (1994), which see the narrative as depicting the world as it is, with the metaphorical understanding of Funk (1966), which juxtaposes the everyday with the strange in order to draw listeners into a new perception of reality.

In contrast to the notion that the narratives illustrate or define some kind of religious truth it is proposed that the parables are more than stories about God and the kingdom of God. They are depictions of Jesus' society, narratives examining the way people live in relation to one another in the private as well as public sphere. They deal with questions of expected and unexpected behaviour, the degree to which people respond conventionally and unconventionally, and they ask questions of the predominant social attitudes. This is not to sideline God and the religious, but to see them as elements embedded in society along with kinship, politics and economics (Malina 2001:16). The question is not so much whether Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God, but whether he challenges the cultural assumptions and norms of his day. A parable then becomes a story of some recognisable social situation laid alongside the culture of the day, thereby inviting a more critical interaction with that culture.

While the parables are historical artefacts revealing something about the society and culture of a distant time and place, they are also literary creations, which encourage the reader into encounters with the text in participatory and imaginative ways. Historical analysis grounds the parables in Jesus' context and emphasises the considerable gulf between the first-century setting and the twenty-first-century experience of today's post-industrial society reader. Literary analysis inspires a close reading of the plot and the characters and invites questions concerning their motivation and emotions and how they see the world and respond to it, drawing today's readers into the story, so that they too sense the challenges and opportunities.

2 Patrons and Clients - The Model

The following definition from Lande provides a helpful point of departure:

A patron-client relationship is a vertical dyadic alliance i.e. an alliance between two persons of unequal status, power or resources each of whom finds it useful to have as an ally someone superior or inferior to himself (Lande 1977:20).

Despite the gulf in social status, the relationship offers mutual benefit. Indeed it is because of this imbalance that the association becomes a system of exchange. The patron provides support for his client, be this the provision of food, money, security or legal support, and in return he receives an enhanced reputation for generous benefaction, along with the loyalty of the client (Hanson and Oakman 1998:73; Stewart 2010: 158-160). In the Roman setting the honouring of a patron manifests itself in one way through the custom of the *salutatio*, the daily appearance of the clients at the patron's home in order to offer respect and deference and to see what service they might do for their patron (Hanson and Oakman 1998:73). Saller points out that the *salutatio* was also a marker of status for the clients, their relative honour depending on the order in which they were received (Saller 1989:57). From the point of view of the patrons it was not necessarily the quality of the relationship which mattered, but the quantity of clients (Wallace-Hadrill 1989:64), and treatment of clients could be demeaning and humiliating, possibly in order to underline the client's inferiority (Goodman 2007:233).

Scholars have delineated the basic characteristics of patron-client relationships along the following lines. They are based on an asymmetrical relationship between parties of different social status, but incorporate a sense of interpersonal loyalty and obligation which is expected to be of some duration. There is a reciprocal exchange of goods, designed in part to furnish the patron with a greater degree of honour (Oakes 2010:178), while there is an understanding that the arrangement is entered into on a voluntary basis (Saller 1989:49; Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984:48-49). At a superficial level these terms suggest a positive, or, at the very least, a neutral relationship furnishing mutual benefit, but scratching a little beneath the surface reveals a more complex picture, highlighted by Garnsey and Woolf. Focusing on the rural poor in the Roman world, they emphasise that becoming clients amounts to a survival strategy and a relationship into which they enter from a position of distinct vulnerability (Garnsey and Woolf 1989:157-158). Before proceeding to further investigation of some of the more negative features of patronage, however, it is important to consider the approach of the Context Group, since that investigation will facilitate a critique of their stance.

Certain members of the Context Group develop a particular emphasis in their use of the patron and client model for interpretation of the New Testament, understanding it not only in terms of relationships between human beings, but also between God and humans. Malina discerns the hierarchical asymmetry of patronage in Palestinian landowner and tenant relationships where the power resides in the hands of the one who owns the land and retains control of employment and the produce (Malina 2003:389), but he ventures further than this in adopting the model as a means of understanding God's relationship with humankind. Noting the etymological connection between patron and fatherhood (Latin *pater*) and putting this alongside the designation of God as Father in the New Testament, as well as the use of grace and favour language, which belongs both to the setting of patronage and to God's activity in the New Testament, he holds God to be the ultimate patron who gives graciously of his resources (Malina 1988:2-32; 1998:151-155). Moxnes follows in the same vein in his analysis of patrons and clients in Luke's Gospel. Though he refers briefly to several of the parables depicting this arrangement, including the two under discussion in this paper, his initial focus is the story of the Roman Centurion in Luke 7:1-10, in which the centurion serves as benefactor and patron to the village, but defers to the greater authority of Jesus (Moxnes 1991:252-254; see also Elliott 1996:145-146). Moxnes pursues his thesis further, distinguishing between the positive brokerage of Jesus and the inadequate brokerage of the Pharisees and the wealthy. Jesus, as the true broker, facilitates access to God, who is patron of the poor, offering an alternative kind of patronage and benefaction based on servanthood rather than exploitation (Moxnes 1991:257-260), what Moxnes terms the "transformation of patron-client relations" (Moxnes 1991:265). Neyrey is likewise of the persuasion, not only that God can be understood in terms of patronage, but that God, as benefactor and patron, provides the major cultural mode for interpreting the deity in Greco-Roman antiquity (Neyrey 2005:465-492). He pursues the same analogy in his reading of John's Gospel, where Jesus, as the door (John 10:7,9) is the broker belonging to two worlds, that of God the patron and that of the disciples, the clients. Jesus becomes the bridge between God and the disciples, who should honour the Father and patron and display loyalty and fidelity. Neyrey emphasises the unity that Jesus shares, on the one hand with God the patron (John 10:30) and on the other hand with the people (John 15:1-10) (Neyrey 2007:271-291).

What becomes clear from this brief survey is that members of the Context Group have not been content to limit the use of the patron-client model to asymmetrical relationships between human beings, but have sought to develop it into an analogy of divine-human interaction. The chief problem with this, and one which renders it ultimately unconvincing,

lies in the way the analogy has become distant from the original pattern of patronage, inaccurately glossing over some of the stark realities of hierarchical human social settings. Insufficient attention is paid to the negative exploitative elements of patronage systems, where the imbalance in power and motive between patron and client is significant and needs to be exposed. Evidence of this tendency is found in the work of Neyrey, Malina and Moxnes itself. In his article on Jesus as broker in John's Gospel Neyrey admits the presence of coercion and exploitation from patrons towards their clients, but simply leaves it as a passing comment in the footnote and proceeds to ignore this aspect of the model (Neyrey 2007:273). Both Malina and Moxnes cite Luke 7:1-10 as a prime example of patronage, the Roman centurion being a highly respected benefactor in his local village, providing a synagogue for the local community (Malina 2003:390; Moxnes 1991:252-253). Yet behind this stands the larger context of Roman occupation, which receives no mention. The centurion is only in a position to be a generous benefactor in the first place because of systemic oppression. Moxnes displays a similar reluctance to explore the issues of social stratification and power imbalance in references made to what he terms patron-client parables in Luke's Gospel (Luke 12:43-46; 16:1-8a; 19:11-27), simply citing them as examples of patron-client relationships rather than examining the complex nature of the associations themselves (Moxnes 1991:253). The readings of the latter two parables in this paper seek to provide a corrective to this superficial approach.

The key features of the patron-client model outlined above suggest that, despite the asymmetry and imbalance in power, there is nevertheless a degree of mutual benefit to be derived for both parties. While this may partially be the case, what such a formulation disguises is the precarious reality of the situation in which the clients find themselves. So a degree of scepticism is required which calls into question how much the client actually benefits from a system which is designed to foster and reinforce inequality, thus maintaining the status quo, a point that has not gone unnoticed by scholars, as in the work of Gilmore who suggests that

patronage relations provide a consistent ideological support for social inequality and dependency throughout the Mediterranean area (Gilmore 1987:192-193).

For the poor, patronage counts as one among a number of survival strategies. While kinship ties, neighbours and fellow villagers might be a source of assistance based on horizontal solidarity, patrons are more powerful and possess more resources. However, they offer only a vertical relationship, which demands dependency and draws clients into a preoccupation with the relationship with their patron at the expense of solidarity with their fellow poor and marginalised (Garnsey and Woolf 1989:153; Osiek and Balch 1997:49-54). Inevitably the patrons pull the strings and retain the power, so that the whole arrangement becomes not merely an asymmetrical relationship but a form of social control, not least since a scarcity of resources means the patron has the power to refuse as well as to provide (Wallace-Hadrill 1989:72-73; Batten 2010:168-169). Furthermore, benefaction, from the perspective of Jayakumar in his appraisal of the patronage system, is designed not to relieve poverty, but to naturalise the inequalities, furnishing a justification of dominance (Jayakumar 2008:237-254).

The plight of the poor not only renders them powerless relative to the patron, but also undermines the notion of the voluntary nature of the patron-client relationship. Eisenstadt and Roniger note how such arrangements can combine coercion and exploitation on the one hand with voluntary relations and mutual obligations on the other hand (Eisenstadt and Roniger

1984:49), but a poor peasant driven by the need for survival does not become a client entirely out of voluntary choice, but because this may appear to be the only solution (Drummond 1989:109). So it is important to keep in view that, while patrons and clients might both benefit from the association, there are nevertheless severe limits to the mutual and voluntary nature of an arrangement which reinforces social inequality. It is for this reason that Crossan entitles his chapter on the morality of patronage “Slave and Patron” (Crossan 1991:43).

Much of the moral complexity of patronage in antiquity outlined above is lost once it is developed into a model for God’s relationship with humanity which focuses on divine benefaction and favour towards those who are exclusive members of God’s community. Furthermore the divinisation of the model shifts attention away from the impact of patron-client relations in first-century Palestine, the immediate setting for Jesus’ public work and the context in which he utters his parables. In turning now to two of these narratives in Luke’s Gospel which, it is maintained, can be interpreted in the light of patron-client associations, it will be possible to make a clearer assessment of the perceptions of Luke’s Jesus with regard to the system of patronage and its consequences for those caught up in it.

3 The Parable of the Survivor Client (Luke 16:1-8a)

3.1 The Setting of the Parable

Two specific issues arise regarding the context of this parable: first, how it relates to what precedes it and, second, how it concludes. Luke places the story of the Survivor Client directly after that of The Father and the Two Lost Sons (Luke 15:11b-32). They sit comfortably side by side, for they both depict village scenes and village dynamics, though the latter focuses on family life while the former deals with master-steward or patron-client relationships in the sphere of employment and business. Coutts detects a common theme of repentance and forgiveness, arguing that the steward is reinstated by the master, but this parallel breaks down since he is praised, not given his job back (Coutts 1949:54-60). Donahue discerns ten points of similarity, including vocabulary, between the two, which encourages him to understand the second in terms of the first. Hence he holds Luke 16:1-8a to be about a foolish master, just as Luke 15:11b-32 is about a foolish father. Their folly, in the eyes of the world, is the forgiveness they exercise (Donahue 1988:167-168), though there is no explicit mention of forgiveness at all in the parable of the Survivor Client. The master figure is understood to be analogous to God, revealing the common tendency towards allegorisation, which fails to take the parable as a story in its own right and removes it from the social context it depicts. Nevertheless, though Donahue’s eventual interpretation may be suspect, his comparison of the two parables does demonstrate Luke’s careful compositional technique.

Concerning the conclusion of the parable it is widely held that interpretative comments have been added in attempts to make sense of such a puzzling story (Dodd 1961:26). What is not so universally accepted, however, is where the applications for the story begin. Jeremias (1972:45-48) and Crossan (1992:106-107) maintain that the narrative comes to a close at 16:7, suggesting that *ὁ κύριος* of 16:8a is Jesus, on the grounds that the master would not commend a dishonest steward who has just tricked him out of his profits. It is true that such praise appears rather implausible, but the question then arises as to why the master of the story would not respond in this way when Jesus does. Others propose that the concluding verse is 16:8a (Bailey 1976:102-106; Donahue 1988:162-163; Scott 1989:256-260; Herzog

1994:233-236; Hendrickx 1986:192-193; Loader 1980:518-532; Kloppenborg 1989:474-495; Parrott 1991:499-515) on the grounds that the master's response rounds off a narrative which would otherwise be left hanging with no conclusion. It is also pointed out that the δ κύριος of 16:8a relates back to the same δ κύριος of 16:3,5, so there is no need to understand the reference in 16:8a as being to Jesus. Though it is clearly surprising that a master praises his steward's dishonesty, it is not unusual for a parable to subvert the anticipated, and in the context of this parable, it may well be designed to draw the hearer into deeper reflection.

The $\kappa\alpha\iota$ ἐγὼ ὑμῖν λέγω in 16:9 obviously leads into a comment outside of the story (Hultgren 2000:148), which leaves the question of 16:8b, regarded by some as the application of the parable (Jeremias 1972:182; Marshall 1978:621; Lee 1997:520-528). This too seems to be an interpretative statement which seeks to give a reason why the steward has been commended, and proposes a contrast between the morality of "the world" and "the people of God" (υἱοὶ τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου and υἱοὺς τοῦ φωτός). It would be strange to place such words on the lips of the master of the story, and they sit much more easily as a direct point addressed to Jesus' audience, or, more likely, to Luke's community.

Since the purpose of this examination of the parables is to treat them as self-standing stories and to resist understanding them only in the light of the applications given them in the text, the reading that follows concentrates on Luke 16:1-8a, taking the master's response to his steward as the conclusion.

3.2 Reading the Parable of the Survivor Client

Scene One The Challenge (16:1-2)

The first scene introduces the protagonist, the rich man (πλούσιος) and his steward (οἰκονόμον) and sets up what is often regarded as "the accounting", but which might more appropriately be called "the challenge". The wealthy man, possibly to be understood as a negative figure on account of his wealth (Kloppenborg 1989:487-488; Combrink 1996:281-306), and quite probably an absentee landowner (Scott 1989:260), employs a steward to run his affairs. Though some have proposed that the οἰκονόμος be understood as a slave (Beavis 1992:37-54; Udoh 2009:311-335), the fact that he is dismissed rather than sold (Bailey 1976:92); that he assumes he will possess some freedom in seeking hospitality among others (Landry and May 2000:296), along with the degree of responsibility he bears, suggests that Mann is more accurate in regarding him as a commodities manager responsible for making deals and profits for his employer (Mann 1990-91:234-235). Together they find themselves in precisely the patron-client relationship outlined above in which there is interdependence and mutual gain, but still hierarchy, inequality and vulnerability. The landowner can use the steward to make profits from the land while at the same time distancing himself from those he exploits. The steward benefits from his position as a paid employee and by taking a cut of the profits (Herzog 1994:240-244), but his position is made more complex by being both client and patron, client to the rich master and patron to those who work the land, making him, in effect, a broker.

There is a further character or group of characters who are responsible for the series of events taking place at all, namely the one (for convenience the singular will now be used in this discussion) who makes the initial charge against the steward and whose identity remains

hidden behind the passive *διεβλήθη*. Perhaps the author's intention is to deflect attention away from this element in the story in order to heighten the focus on the subsequent responses of the master and the steward. It seems more likely, however, that the audience is being encouraged to dwell for a moment on this point and to ask themselves who this character may be. The use of the passive creates a sense of "anyone". Since the person is not identified he could be anyone, and members of the audience may be familiar with circumstances where they can identify who this "anyone" is. As Marshall points out, *διαβάλλω* means "to bring charges with hostile intent" with no implication that they are either true or false (Marshall 1978:617), which suggests not merely an act of protest carried out by those being exploited, but, more likely, a degree of challenge and competition. It may be that one or more characters have determined to get rid of this steward in order to usurp his position, a far from impossible scenario. Perhaps a fellow servant in the master's household has his eye on the job.

The charge brought to the master, therefore, constitutes a challenge, a significant feature of the honour and shame culture in which the story is set. Acquiring honour was often achieved by means of a challenge-riposte exchange in which two people of similar social status seek to increase their own personal honour by outdoing the other. The exchange is initiated by one challenging the other with a word or gesture or action, positive or negative (Malina 2003:334), which has the potential to undermine the other's honour. This is followed by a riposte that seeks to deal adequately with the challenge or returns a heightened challenge to the initial challenger. The verdict of winner and loser is made by the public (Neyrey 1991:131). What seems to be happening in this story is that the steward is being challenged and his reputation threatened by someone who successfully persuades or convinces the master to be his mouthpiece. The steward is accused of *διασκορπίζων τὰ ὑπάρχοντα* of the master (16:1), which cleverly draws the master into the affair as an interested party. Whether *διασκορπίζων* refers to inefficiency (Crossan 1992:107) or misappropriation of funds (Jeremias 1972:181), it is the master's funds and profits that are in question. So he acts, calling his steward to produce the accounts and informing him of his dismissal. Though the steward has lost his job, the challenge-riposte game is still on. He does not deny the charge, for that would simply be to offer a defence. Instead he determines to respond by going on the offensive and seeking to outdo the challenge voiced by his master. The accounting is his opportunity to put his own challenge back both to his employer and to the challenger, who, if he eventually takes over the steward's position, will find himself dealing with the same peasants as the present steward.

Scene Two The Riposte (16:3-7)

The steward's soliloquy, a not uncommon feature of Luke's parables, stands in stark contrast to his master's previous behaviour, for before he acts the steward reflects on his options and then makes his choice. In literary terms the soliloquy slows down the plot and highlights the steward's capacity for agile thinking. The rich man, on the other hand, makes and announces his decision to dismiss the steward on the basis of an unsubstantiated charge and before he has even seen the accounts. Indeed, while the steward conjures up a means of securing his survival, the rich man is presented as something of a fool. Not only does he respond to the charge rather than the evidence, he also proves himself to be incompetent in allowing himself to be defrauded without realising it in the first place. Moreover he is slow to make public the steward's dismissal, thus giving the latter the opportunity to manipulate the figures in the accounts.

The soliloquy reveals the steward's motivation (Parrott 1991:499-515) and is significant for two further reasons. First, it indicates that the steward wants to avoid the "shame" of begging (*ἐπαιτεῖν αἰσχύνομαι*), which is important because it indicates that shame and honour lie at the heart of this story. The steward is seeking an honourable way out and must find a means of establishing some degree of honour in the challenge he throws back at his employer. Second, his internal speech indicates the reason for the course of action he is about to take in seeking to secure his future survival by forging friendships with those from whom he has previously exacted payment of debts. It is vital not to lose sight of this when considering what he proceeds to do with the accounts. His focus is on establishing new relationships for the future rather than preserving old ones from the past. As his master had called him in (*φωνήσας* 16:2), now the steward fulfils the role of master and patron, summoning the debtors (*προσκαλεσάμενος* 16:5).

A number of theories have been proposed concerning the reduction of debts. Derrett suggests that the amount of reduction represents the interest on deferred payments that would have been written into the original account, in order to conceal the usury which was illegal according to Torah. So the debtor ends up paying the correct amount, but not the interest, depriving the master of considerable profit, but removing the dishonest usury, so that he is regarded as righteous (Derrett 1970:48-77; Wright 2000:224-230). Following this argument Brown maintains that the parable is therefore an indictment of usury (Brown 1992:121-145). Fitzmyer understands the interest element to be the steward's commission which he now forgoes (Fitzmyer 1964:23-42). Both Derrett and Fitzmyer are at pains to show that the steward is not dishonest and is therefore worthy of praise at the conclusion to the story.

Bailey's objection to Derrett's proposal is based on the fact that it implicates the master in dishonesty and unrighteousness. He suggests that the steward reduces the bills so that the debtors will appreciate the master's assumed generosity, a stance taken also by Landry and May (Landry and May 2000:309). The master will then enjoy the ensuing praise and increase in reputation, understand the advantages of being viewed as generous and forgive his steward (Bailey 1976:107). While Derrett and Fitzmyer seem preoccupied with protecting the steward's integrity, Bailey is determined to paint a positive image of the master – something he is required to do because he is working on the prior assumption that the master represents God.

All three of these proposals focus on the character of the steward or master and seek to justify their actions in one way or another. However, the text itself is not concerned with their honesty or dishonesty, but with the steward's survival and how he secures a future for himself which is not totally devoid of honour. It is his wisdom that is praised, not his honesty or dishonesty (Ireland 1992:5-47). He needs to survive and make his riposte and does so by reducing debts. In patron-client language he offers favours to his clients in the expectation of the reciprocated favour of hospitality and friendship. In so doing he deprives the master, who has challenged him, of not insignificant sums and makes a considerable and weighty response in the challenge-riposte exchange, leaving the ball firmly back in the court of the rich man.

Scene Three The Outcome (16:8a)

Pursuing the challenge-riposte exchange through to its conclusion, or its next stage at least, the master is now required to reply. The steward's actions are clearly in the public

domain, since news of such significant debt reduction would undoubtedly travel swiftly, and so the rich man must make his response. Though no indication is given about re-employment of the steward, the master does commend him, thereby implicitly acknowledging the quality and force of the riposte. He has refused to lie down meekly and has begun to manufacture his own future survival. Some have seen the master's commendation of his steward's action as ironic (Fletcher 1963:15-30; Porter 1990:127-153), but this fails to recognise the significance of the fact that the master's praise is given in reported speech, not in direct speech, thus removing it from the private sphere of one to one conversation to the public acknowledgement required by the honour and shame game of challenge-riposte.

Ultimately the outcome is left open and uncertain, a strange, even comic, tale, offered to encourage reflection on the way the world often functions without satisfactory solutions (Beutner 2007:59-63). The listener is given the assurance neither that the steward is welcomed by those whose debts he has reduced, nor that he has convinced the master he should have his job back. However, the story does conclude with the commendation of the steward and therefore his victory in terms of honour and reputation. His action has impressed.

Who, then, is the loser in this story? It is not the wealthy landowner whose position and status in society enables him simply to dismiss this episode, and perhaps learn from it. It is, rather, the one who brought the charge in the first place in the hope of finding favour with the master. Having made the original challenge, he has been outdone by the agility and courage of the steward. Even if he rises to the vacant position of steward he is likely to find his predecessor prepared to try and outwit him on future occasions from his home among the peasants.

3.3 Concluding Remarks

The parable of the Survivor Client leaves various questions unresolved. The master's commendation provides a surprising twist at the end, but fails to mention whether his steward will now keep his job. Forgiveness is not pronounced, but then neither does the steward repent. Equally there is no assurance that he does enough to receive the protection and friendship of those whose debts have been reduced. What is more certain, however, is that the steward has succeeded in maintaining or even increasing his honour and reputation. This much can be gleaned from the master's praise. The steward has at the very least created the possibility of future survival.

The steward is depicted as being always one step ahead of those around him, an image that is paralleled in the story of Rahab and the Israelite spies (Joshua 2). As a prostitute she too has something of a suspect past, but prostitution is often about surviving in a world which abuses, exploits and oppresses. Rahab calculates how she is going to survive the threat of Israelite invasion confronting Jericho, so shrewdly she manipulates the action, sending her own king's men on a wild goose chase (Joshua 2:5-7) and then flattering the Israelite spies (Joshua 2:8-14). In so doing she manufactures a win-win situation for herself, for her betrayal of the king is secret, so if Jericho withstands the attack her future is secure. Similarly her pact with the spies provides for her safety if Jericho falls. Furthermore, in the midst of this intrigue she finds herself switching from role of patron to client. As patron she furnishes the favours the Israelite clients are seeking. Ultimately, however, she will be dependent on protection afforded her by her new patrons, the Israelites. In a similar way the steward of the parable

comes to the conclusion that his survival too depends on making the transition from one network of relationships to another.

4 The Parable of the Resisting Clients (Luke 19:12b-27)

4.1 The Setting of the Parable

Luke positions this parable at the conclusion to his travel narrative (Luke 9:51-19:48) as Jesus moves ever closer to Jerusalem. The preceding verses deal with Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus in Jericho (Luke 19:1-10). Luke 19:11 then provides a transition and reason for the telling of the parable, which is to diminish expectations of the imminent arrival of the kingdom following the heightened anticipation of people on hearing the words: *σήμερον σωτηρία τῷ οἴκῳ τούτῳ ἐγένετο* (Luke 19:9). Clearly Luke, or some previous author, has decided to interpret the parable of the minas in terms of the delay of the parousia, an angle of approach adopted by many interpreters (Dodd 1961:115; Jeremias 1972:59; Marshall 1978:702; Lambrecht 1981:188-189; Boucher 1983: 143), though Johnson argues that Luke is actually announcing the immediate emergence of the kingdom (Johnson 1982:139-159). The story itself, however, is far richer than this, being both more evocative and provocative with regard to the social and political climate of Jesus' day. To consider it simply as an allegory about the parousia (a story which it is unlikely Jesus would have uttered himself), or to view it only in terms of stewardship (Flusser 1989:9-25), is to diminish its power and significance for a first-century audience in Palestine, exploited as they were by Roman occupation and members of the Jewish elite. In order, then, to allow it to make its fullest impact the story needs to be taken on its own and not understood purely in religious terms or in the light of Luke's immediate context.

Two versions of this parable exist in the Synoptic Gospels, here in Luke and in Matthew 25:14-30. (There is a third version from the Gospel of the Nazoreans on which Eusebius comments (Malina and Rohrbaugh 2003:386). The textual similarities between Matthew and Luke suggest that there was perhaps one original story, which some attribute to Q (Donahue 1988:105; Lambrecht 1981:19, 167-168), though the distinctive divergences have led others to suggest provenance from independent sources (Dodd 1961:108; Jeremias 1972:59-60; Boucher 1983:146; Snodgrass 2008:531). The most striking difference between Matthew and Luke is the presence in Luke of a second narrative strand which can be detached from the story of the minas. This consists of 19:12b, 14-15a, 27 and has been identified as the throne claimant story (Jeremias 1972:59; Weinert 1977:505-514; Boucher 1983:147), which will be considered in more detail in the subsequent reading of the parable. Here it is simply noted that this is to be seen, not as an intrusion into a parable about entrusting money to servants, nor as a clumsy merging of two stories. It is not that Luke is careless in bringing two stories together, but that he is careful in weaving one, the parable of the minas, into the social, political context of Roman occupation and client kings, thus providing two levels on which the whole can be read. It is precisely because it rounds off both levels of the narratives that 19:27 is taken to be the conclusion of the story, though it is conceded that 19:26 appears to be a free-floating phrase that may have been added from elsewhere.

4.2 Reading the Parable of the Resisting Clients

Scene One Departure and Return (19:12b-15)

As indicated above, the Parable of the Resisting Clients presents the hearer with a very clever intertwining of two levels of patron-client relationship. The nobleman (εὐγενής) clearly already fulfils the role of patron in respect of the ten slaves he summons. They are his clients, or retainers (Herzog 1994:155-157), who act as brokers between himself and those who work the land for his profit. This man heads off on a journey to claim a kingdom in order to increase his power and extend his patronage. In turn, however, he also is a client, a client king entrusted with responsibility for governing by a higher authority. The patron, then, is also a client and dependent on his own patron for maintaining his power and control.

Luke's version of the parable holds in tension both the local sphere of a master's relationship with his retainers or slaves and the more global political context of the Roman Empire, the emperor being the ultimate patron with whom client kings around the empire seek favour. A number of scholars (Jeremias 1972:59; Marshall 1978:701; Crossan 1992:100-101; Scott 1989:223; Culpepper 1995:362-364) discern in this story an historical allusion to Jewish kings claiming power, from Herod the Great (Josephus Jewish War I 279-285) to Archelaus and Antipas (The Jewish War II 15, 18) and Agrippa (Antiquities of the Jews 18. 244), and there is indeed a remarkable similarity between Luke's account and the story of Archelaus, who travelled to Rome after Herod's death to claim the vacant throne (Schultz 2007:105-127). He was opposed by a deputation of Jews, who succeeded in persuading Caesar Augustus to limit the scope of Archelaus' kingdom. The violence alluded to at the conclusion to Luke's narrative (19:27) reflects Archelaus' extremely vicious tendencies, which included the killing of three thousand Jews in the Temple precincts.

Having noted the presence of the throne claimant narrative in Luke's version, interpreters then often proceed to put it to one side and focus on the part of the story that deals with the master and three servants, reading it as a version of Matthew's parable (Matthew 25:14-30), an unfortunate tendency since it limits attention to the parochial and neglects exploration of the impact of Roman occupation and Roman client kings on the non-elite Jewish population. Culpepper argues strongly against this and concentrates exclusively on the theme of the greedy, vengeful king, who serves as an antitype for Jesus (Culpepper 1995:361), but as a result of concentrating on the character of the king, Culpepper's reading tends to skim over the central part of the story which focuses on what the servants do with the money they are given. This first scene describes not only the departure and return of the nobleman, but uses this journey to create time and space in the plot during which the servants are expected to invest and make profits. Having summoned the servants once to give them the minas, now the nobleman calls them again for a reckoning or accounting. In the meantime his status has changed, for he has achieved increased power and authority. The question is now whether his servants have taken advantage of this opportunity to prove themselves and to enhance their own profile and prospects.

Scene Two The Accounting (19:16-23)

The accounting is the moment when the truth is revealed or exposed. In this instance the truth relates not only to what the servants have done or not done during the nobleman's absence, but more significantly to the characters of both the servants and the rich man. Existentially they are defined by their actions. The first two servants are rewarded for their business acumen. They have grasped the opportunity to show their master what they can do

in achieving returns for him. At this point it is important to note that this money is still regarded as belonging to the nobleman (ἡ μνᾶ σου 19:16,18) and how, in a clever attitude of self-effacing deference, the servants opt for the passive voice, which serves to underline the way in which these two characters are buying into their master's attitude and behaviour. The purpose is to make money, to accumulate wealth. Both are rewarded with jurisdiction over a number of cities, which neatly ties this episode to the purpose of the nobleman's journey, but also provides a stark point of conflict between these two servants and those who have opposed and presumably continue to oppose the king.

The response of the third servant stands in bold contrast to that of the previous two. What is to be made of his action of wrapping up the mina; of expressing his fear, and of the accusation he levels at the nobleman? Moreover, what truth does this reveal about himself, his master and the system in which he lives? The predominant interpretation of this parable has tended to ignore or minimise the significance of the third servant's outburst against his master and to disregard especially the fact that the king does not dispute its validity. The likely reason for doing so is to protect the notion of God's integrity, justice and generosity, for often the king is understood as being analogous to God or Jesus. This is certainly the case with Dodd, who takes the original purpose of the parable to be a judgement against complacent Pharisees who refuse to let go of their notion of "scrupulous discipline" and take risks that Jesus invites of them (Dodd 1961:111-113; Jeremias 1972:61-62). For some the final execution is to be seen as divine vengeance on those who reject Jesus (Creed 1930:235; J Sanders 1981:660-668; Weinert 1977:505-514). Others too find fault with the third servant. Donahue suggests that he acts out of the fear of failure and maintains that the master is not harsh, but generous (Donahue 1988:108). Via proposes that the third servant wants to avoid the risk of trading in the market place, noting that he is paralysed by his anxiety and attempts to shift the blame for his fear and inactivity onto his master (Via 1967:119). For Via this is a tragic parable of a man who refuses to take risks and take responsibility, thereby rejecting the opportunity to create meaning for his existence. Scott concludes in a similar vein, claiming that the future is to be invested in and embraced, rather than hidden away from (Scott 1989:234). Finally, Wohlgemut, in arguing against Rohrbaugh, points out that fear militates against defiance and that it is fear not defiance that motivates the servant (Wohlgemut 1997:115-116).

This negative attitude towards the third servant ranges across all three issues raised above. With regard to his fear, this is interpreted as inadequate courage to take risks. With regard to the wrapping up of the mina, this is viewed as being highly imprudent since he will be held responsible for any loss that occurs. Hiding it in the ground would remove this burden (Scott 1989:228). With regard to his outspoken attack on the master, this is understood as not fully appreciating the latter's generosity in giving him the chance to make more of himself.

There is, however, an alternative way of depicting the third servant's character, which grounds him firmly in the patron-client and limited good society of the first century. His fear is genuine; his courage in refusing to conform and in speaking out is phenomenal, and his concealing of the mina in a cloth serves to underline his willingness to take responsibility for himself and for his actions amid the precarious vulnerability of his situation. This servant is protesting against the oppressive greed of the nobleman or master (Fortna 1992:211-227; Ford 1997:32-46; Schottroff 2006:181-187), and of his fellow servants, all of whom buy into the system of unjust wealth accumulation. As Malina and Rohrbaugh (2003:384-386), Rohrbaugh (1993:32-39), Herzog (1994:150-168) and McKenna (1995:113-126) point out,

this story is not to be interpreted within the context of a modern day capitalist society with its notion of unlimited good, but against the background of a limited good society, where one person's gain is another's loss. The truth of the system is revealed by the courage of this one converted whistleblower (Herzog 1994:167-168), who risks everything by his protest and now counts himself among those who have objected to his master and awaits his fate.

Scene Three The Judgement (19:24-27)

The plot reaches its climax with two words of judgement pronounced by the king. The first of these is directed at the third servant. He loses the mina that was never his in the first place. The authenticity of 19:25, the spontaneous protest, is disputed (Marshall 1978:708), but, if accepted, it serves to emphasize the astonishment and restlessness of the neighbours with regard to wealth accumulation. Perhaps emboldened by the third servant's courage the bystanders now feel able to voice their protest.

The second judgement brings the story back to those who have not yet been properly dealt with following their opposition to the nobleman's rise to power. Those who stand in the way of greedy, powerful members of the elite will be crushed, even if they stand together in solidarity. The parable does indeed conclude on a tragic note, not, as Via would have it, the tragic failure of an individual to grasp the opportunity to define himself existentially, but the tragic consequences of a system which fails to make room for protest and snuffs out the existence of anyone who is courageous enough to define and reveal the truth.

4.3 Concluding Remarks

Read in this way the parable of the Resisting Clients pronounces judgement not on the individual servant who refuses to do business with his master's mina, but on the master himself. In the voices of protest of a delegation to Rome and in the voice of an individual servant who stands up to his master, some dare to utter the truth and to say "No", rendering themselves vulnerable to violent consequences. It is a story which has the potential to transport the listening peasants of Jesus' day back to the story of Naboth's Vineyard (I Kings 21). Here too the action is played out in the political sphere. King Ahab, in thrall to his greed, desires Naboth's vineyard. Naboth, on the grounds that it is his ancestral inheritance, has the courage to say "No", believing perhaps that Ahab might understand his reasoning. Jezebel, however, refuses to accept this as the final outcome. She and Ahab are not to be denied. Her words to the sulking Ahab are poignant and pertinent, both to her story and to the parable in Luke: "Do you now govern Israel?" (I Kings 21:7a). For Jezebel this is not about a vineyard only, but about power and control and crushing resistance, so she proceeds to manufacture Naboth's death. Ahab then takes possession of the vineyard without enquiring into the circumstances surrounding the death or reflecting on the consequences for Naboth's family. Crucially, however, the truth will not remain concealed. The prophet Elijah summons Ahab to an "accounting" and confronts him with the judgement.

Jezebel's question: "Do you now govern Israel?" might equally be found on the lips of the first two servants in the parable: "Do you not have the power to do as you wish, to obtain what you desire, to make judgements according to your whim?" The question posed by the third servant comes from a different angle: "Do you not imagine that there might be an alternative way to govern and a different model for your kingdom?" His voice is, of course,

as weak as Naboth's, and so he must wait in hope, vain or otherwise, for divine judgement and vindication.

5 Conclusion

Both the parables in Luke 16:1-8a and Luke 19:12b-27 offer vivid depictions of patron-client relations in first-century Palestine, with the issues of power, control and greed on the one hand, and of vulnerability, precariousness and survival on the other. Whether the focus is a wealthy landowner and his relationship with his tenant farmers or the grander political map of Roman emperors and client kings, what lies at the heart of the matter is land and who controls it. This is made all the clearer by considering the connections with two significant stories from Israel's tradition, the stories of Rahab and of Naboth's Vineyard, which themselves revolve around land ownership, greed and control.

At the outset of this paper the question posed concerned the degree to which these narratives support a positive view of patronage in the human interaction of first-century Palestinian society, which in turn would help to substantiate the Context Group's proposal of defining God's relationship with humanity in patron-client terms. The evidence from the readings proposed above indicates that they do not present such a positive picture. The steward in the first story finds himself seeking to survive in the midst of serving as client to his master and patron and as patron to his peasant clients, while in the second narrative the third servant courageously resists pressure to multiply the wealth of his greedy patron and master, but is expected to have to count the cost for what is regarded as subversive disobedience. While it is important to add that this does not mean that the two clients have no choice at all and are not utterly trapped, for there is the option of courageous rebellion, what it does make clear is that the power structures are so defined that the clients are dependent for their survival on the response of their patron, and these two parables offer contrasting outcomes in this regard, one lenient and the other vicious. Together, then, they reflect a reality which emphasises and reinforces the separation between patrons and clients, rather than the mutuality which binds them to one another. This suggests that the predominant image which results is not the Context Group's portrayal of generous benefaction, but of greedy exploitation, a perspective which provides an appropriate angle of approach to understanding and engaging not only with societies where the patron-client model is prevalent in relationships between individuals, but also with international relations where the same model continues to dominate.

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