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# God's patronage constitutes a community of compassionate equals

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The central themes of Jesus' preaching, the kingdom and household of God, are root metaphors expressing the symbolic universe of God's patronage subverting patronage and patriarchy structuring contemporary Mediterranean society, thus legitimising an anti-hierarchical community of faith. This dominant focus of Jesus' message was discarded, as society's prevalent patronage and patriarchy became the societal structure of the later faith communities. Today, patronage and patriarchy still forms the social structure for a large sector of Christian communities and many cultures, resulting in inequality, injustice, exploitation and suffering. This article proposes that the only remedy for the faithful is a return to Jesus' essential message, by investigating the social dynamics suggested by these root metaphors using metaphor theory and social scientific methods. Patronage is studied within contemporary Roman and Mediterranean aristocratic patriarchal society, forming an a-typical broad-based needle-like power pyramid with multiple similarly structured power pyramids within, based on a morality of indebtedness, honour and power. Jesus accepted God as his father and declared the advent of God's patronage as king (kingdom of God) and father of the faithful (children of God). Within the kingdom and household of God, there was no hierarchy, except for the primate of the first born son, whom Jesus symbolises as broker for God's patronage to all his followers. Within the faith communities there should be no hierarchy or any form of clientage other than God's patronage. Rather, the faithful are equal and should serve each other and their communities with compassion, responsibility and justice.

**Contribution:** The contribution of this research is its focus on similarity and dissimilarity of these patronage metaphors and their application to subvert the power dynamics of patronage and patriarchy within the community of the faithful, in order to proffer God's patronage of a society of caring, selfless equals today. This research falls within the scope of HTS Theological studies, as it is a multi-disciplinary study of key biblical metaphors investigated with accepted methodology resulting in valid conclusions which are ethically sound.

**Keywords:** patronage; patriarchy; kingdom of God; household of God; metaphor; symbolic universe.

## What does God's patronage imply for the faith community?

We can speak of God only by comparison to human experience (Van Aarde 1991:5–6). As theology can be described as anthropology (Bultmann [1948]1980:192), the language of theology is also the language of analogy. There is, for instance, a definite link between social structure and language about God. 'Hence, for a fundamental perspective about God to permeate a society, there has to be some social structure to serve as an analogy for articulating that perspective' (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:406). Jesus thus used the language of patronage to articulate the relationship between God and the faithful. As John Dominic Crossan states aptly, referring to patronage and clientage: '… they can organize heaven just as well as earth' (Crossan 1992:68).

Jesus' metaphors of the kingdom of God and God as father to the faithful as his family are the essential analogies (root metaphors) for articulating His ideas about the relationship between God and the faithful and their social interaction within their circle and towards others. These metaphors are expressions of the symbolic universe of God's patronage (Malan 2016a). Patronage constituted the main bond of human society in the first century Roman (and thus Palestinian) world (Van Eck 2013).

The question is: Did God's patronage as preached by Jesus legitimate clientelism, or was it meant to subvert the idea of patronage within the community of faith? To put it in other words: Is the kingdom of God an anti-hierarchical entity and thus a community of equals? Or was the

community of faith to replicate the prevalent patronage and patriarchy found in society at large?

Answering these questions is extremely relevant for Christianity in view of prevailing patronage and patriarchy in many faith communities (Van Wyk 2018), resulting in suffering and injustice (Pillay 2015:558–567), as well as racism, sexism, colonialist imperialism and dehumanisation, as may be seen in the history of Islam, Judaism and both Roman Catholic and Protestant Christianity (Schüssler-Fiorenza 1993:1–6, 211–236). Systemic patronage (manifested in political and economic clientelism) causes governmental corruption to flourish and it can ultimately lead to state capture, which occurs in open political systems and in market economies. It can cause long-term exploitation, poverty and hardship as the captured state becomes the prevalent government form exploited by corrupt actors in the economy controlling the state's extractive and distributive regimes (Croucamp 2019:290–296).

To answer these questions, Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God has to be understood within its context of first century Palestine as a Roman territory. Furthermore, a grasp of patronage as a social concept as practised in the Roman era and in the Israelite patriarchal household is necessary before moving on to Jesus' views on God's patronage. But firstly, the metaphorical aspects of similarity and dissimilarity should be pondered in order to investigate to what extent God is similar and/or dissimilar to an ancient king or father from first century Roman Palestine.

## Understanding metaphor dynamic: Similarity and dissimilarity

As early as Aristotle, an essential aspect of metaphor was accentuated, namely dissimilarity. '… [*A*] good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars' (*Ars Poetica* 1459a, as quoted by Hausman 2006:214). Ricoeur (1977:13–23) regarded dissimilarity as a dynamic characteristic of metaphor: transferring to the noun a name that is alien or dissimilar, belonging to something else. The confrontation of the dissimilar elements in the metaphorical process unlocks the meaning conferred by a metaphor (Van Luxemburg, Bal & Westijn 1983:239). The implication for the patronage (and patriarchal) metaphors *kingdom of God* and *God as a father* should be noted: a characteristic foreign to the noun 'God' is transferred, conferring both similarity and dissimilarity. God can thus be described as a patron, like an ancient Middle Eastern king or father, but also dissimilar; however, not completely so, as He is different from them. Unlocking the meaning resulting from the confrontation of similar and dissimilar will be based on interpretation (Van Luxemburg et al. 1983:239), leading to the surprise of understanding resulting from the combining of elements not combined before (Ricoeur 1977:236–237). To what extent God is similar and/or dissimilar to an ancient king or father? What surprise of understanding awaits an interpreter? To answer these questions, Jesus' attitude and behaviour towards institutions of patronage will have to be investigated, for example, towards his father, his family and the temple elite. Deductions will be made based on social-scientific research.

## Patronage as a social concept

Patronage can be defined as a fundamentally unequal social relationship of reciprocity between patrons and clients, based on dependency and indebtedness. Lower status clients have their needs met by the favours of higher-status, well-situated patrons. Indebted to the patron, a client undertakes to repay the patron when and in whichever way the patron determines. It is an open-ended relationship as the patron, by helping, implicitly promises to be open for further requests at later times (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:388). Applied to modern-day politics, patronage reveals itself in the practice observed by political officials of filling government positions with employees of their own choosing (Legal Dictionary 2008), or public office awarded as payment for political support, even from an opposition party (Reid 2003). Patronage is closely related to clientelism, where a client gives political or financial support to a patron in exchange for some special benefit or privilege (Merriam-Webster.com 2012). Although suggesting a benign relationship, it can also become a vehicle of improper and corrupt conduct (Southall 2014:343–344).

## Clients in crisis: The context of Jesus' patronage metaphors

Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed the kingdom of God or God's patronage as the solution to the problem of the Israelite elite forsaking their obligations to their clients, instead using their own power and the power of the Roman presence to constrain the peasantry beyond the limits of endurance. Misfortunes such as disease, natural disaster and loss of life were exacerbated by mounting social ills, peasant vulnerability and loss of land. Israel's aristocrats' failing in their social roles as patrons left peasants destitute. Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom was proffered as the solution to this crisis. God was presented as the patron for all Israel (Malina 2001:34, 141–142), the ultimate patron graciously providing resources mediated through Jesus as broker (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:388–390). To what extent are these metaphors applied with similarity and with dissimilarity in mind? To what extent is God thought of as a human-like father and king and to what extent not? To answer this question finally, we need to view patronage in Jesus' time.

## Patronage and clientelism in the Roman-era Mediterranean region

Patron-client relationships characterised aristocratic societies such as first century Israel's advanced agrarian society (Van Eck 2009). It was a society consisting of 'haves' and 'have-nots'. Patronage or clientelism is the relationship between 'haves' serving as patrons for 'have-nots' who become their clients, thus providing them with access to scarce resources controlled by patrons but not readily accessible to clients (Moxnes 1991:243). It is an intrinsically unequal reciprocal

relationship, where clients view their patrons as superior and more powerful and where patrons view their clients as their dependants (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:388). These exploitative relationships benefited the patrons far more than their peasant clients and can be described as extractive relationships, resulting in plundering rather than developing, exploitation of resources and taxation for personal benefit of the elite, and control of land by expropriation and debt creation (Eisenstadt & Roniger 1984:208).

This variety of unequal reciprocity is the asocial extreme form, which seeks self-interest at the expense of others, whereas generalised reciprocity is an act of altruism extended to the kin group in extreme solidarity and balanced reciprocity to serve the mutual interests of neighbours and villagers (Malina 1986:98–106). To what extent was the kinship reciprocity altruistic in a patriarchal society?

## Patriarchal society and patronage

Classical patriarchy refers to the domination of the male over the female, children, servants and slaves (Ackerman 1992:95). The father is the head of the family in patriarchal societies, leaving power essentially in the hands of men and resulting in male-dominated societies. Thus, the structure of the father ruled society: aristocracy over serfs, masters over slaves, racial overlords over colonised people (Reuther 1983:61). In patriarchal societies, the principal symbolisation of all social relations are in terms of the father's kinship role as head of the family, where women and children are treated as property. The effect is that the two social domains of public (political) and private (familial) life are under the constraint of potential and real abuse of authority (Van Eck 2013). This is reinforced by the fact that the father's authority over his family was absolute (Van Aarde 2000); respect for and obedience to the family head was at the top of the traditional values list (Funk 1996:198), and he acted as their patron, with them as his dependent clients (Malina & Rohrbaugh (2003:388, 365–366). The bond between patronage and patriarchy is indivisible.

There is a specific similarity between patriarchal society and patronage, as both are about power. Patronage was already prevalent in ancient empires, as empires are about power distributed through a network of interrelated patron-client relationships, forming many pyramids of power unified at the top in the office of the emperor (Horsley 2011:17, 33–34). Loyalty and inequality ensured the reciprocal nature of these relationships. Such a relationship could represent itself as a negative reciprocity, an exploitative practice given a (patriarchal) kinship veneer by calling it patronage (Van Eck 2013). As in patriarchal families, in which the father is the patron to his dependants, parties entering into any patron-client relationship enter into a bond which resembles patriarchal kinship. The client relates to the patron as to a more powerful kinsman, while the patron sees to his clients as to his dependants (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:388). By giving patron-client relationships a kinship veneer, their deeply exploitative nature was masked, concealing the rapacity of the ruling class and naturalising fundamental unequal relationhips through routines of theatrical reciprocity (Elliott 2008:29). Thus the pyramids of power present in patriarchal patronage societies resemble the power pyramids present in patriarchal families; patriarchy is part of the ideology of patronage and vice versa. The prime patriarch is the ruler, whose role is replicated in all other power pyramids of patriarchal society, from the elite and the bureaucracy down to the structure of family life (Horsley 2011:17, 33–34). As the pyramid structure suggests, power is effected by more powerful patriarchal figures, suggesting inequality which creates reciprocal relationships relying on need, help and indebtedness permeating society from top to bottom, thus forming the crucial economic and social infrastructure for the elite patronage (Crossan 1992:65). Add to this the aspect of scarce resources and the fundamental value of honour, another limited resource, and the scene is set for the system of patronage to flourish unabated (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:369–372). There seems to be little room for altruism in such a societal structure.

## Power pyramids in Roman Palestine

The structure of the power pyramid of the Roman empire was somewhat unique. Crossan (1992:43–46) reminds us that the fundamental issue, according to Gerhard Lenksi's model of social stratification, is that Roman Palestine was an agrarian society characterised by marked social inequality and profound differences in power, privilege and honour when compared to horticultural or industrial societies (Lenski 1966:190, 210, 298). Of the nine classes within agrarian society, the minority top five classes (the rulers, governors, retainers, merchants and priests) were separated from the large mayority of the lower four classes (the peasants, artisans, unclean, degraded persons and expendable persons) by a great divide. The power pyramid thus formed has a very wide base tapering upwards to form a needlelike shaft. It is noteworthy that not all classes are divided by horizontal lines, as several of them have lines sweeping upwards, giving some higher members of a lower class more power and privilege than some lower members of a higher class. There existed a considerable mobility between these classes, although in such agonistic societies, mobility was more frequently downward than upward in the long run (Lenski 1966:215–290). This extreme form of the power pyramid demonstrates the utter inequality and extreme extortion of the powerless majority by the minority elite in such agrarian societies.

Another aspect of the power pyramid about which Crossan reminds us, referring to Thomas Carney's work, is that there may be many small pyramids of power within a greater pyramid structure or there may be only one great pyramid. The last version does not apply to Roman Palestine. This is not industrial society's typical three-class stratification of upper, middle and lower classes within one pyramid, but a web of patronal relations which characterised ancient societies, thus forming a peculiar power pyramid within which an abundance of interconnected power pyramids flourish so that '… the client of a power wielder becomes a powerful man and himself in turn attracts clients'

(Crossan 1992:59). This process was repeated frequently, resulting in many pyramids within the large, extremely broad-based needle-like pyramid of agrarian patronal society. The result of such pervasive authoritarian ways of thought was a fundamentally anti-economic ideology: wealth was not attained by increased production, but by taking it with force from somebody, either as booty or as taxes (Carney 1975:61, 93–99). The powerful exploited the powerless and also the less powerful, not only in the large broad-based steeple-form power pyramid, but within the multitude of smaller power pyramids and also within the rank each pyramid held within the patronage pyramid.

## A morality of indebtedness, honour and power

How was this attained? How can we understand the prevalence of patronage within the Roman empire, as it differed so much from other enduring pre-indrustrial empires? Richard Saller (1982:32–33, 194, 205–206) noted the instance of candidates for government administration. The Ottoman and Chinese empires developed palace schools and relied on competitive examinations regarding the training of administrators. The Roman empire, with its small bureaucracy, relied on personal introductions by patrons from within the patronal webs across the total power pyramid to select promising candidates rather than on formal, impersonal written applications for government postings. Such a system neccesitates the maintenance of relationships of indebtedness to permeate society from top to bottom in order to provide not only government administrators, but every possible service in the economy. One should register that the web of patronage, with accounts between patron and client that could never be calculated or balanced, was the dynamic *morality* that held society together. Such a system relied absolutely on the imbalance of indebtedness, on never fully settling the accounts, thus never ending the patron-client relationships of mutual indebtedness which formed the mainspring of Roman society. Mutual indebtedness was of such importance that Crossan calls it '… the dynamic morality that held society together' (Crossan 1992:65), structuring every sector, be it family, economy, or government.

Crucially linked to the morality of mutual indebtedness is the value system of honour and shame in patronal societies. Malina (2003:369) refers to it as 'the fundamental value, … the core, the heart, the soul' of Mediterranean society. Honour can be regarded as the worth of a person in the eyes of society, thus placing one within the pyramids of power and one's position within the large power pyramid. One's ranking is always insecure and unstable, constantly forcing individuals to prove and assert themselves, constantly being preoccupied with honour and shame in order to be continually regarded as worthy of a rank in society (Crossan 1992:10). The honour–shame value system forms part of the framework by which people communicate and gain an identity both with and within society, thus forming part of the moral system (Gilmore 1987:3, 16, 17, 125).

First century Roman Palestine was an aristocratic society (Van Eck 2009). Malina reminds us that honour (public reputation or evaluation) was the pivotal, fundamental social value which implied a claim to entitlements. In such a society, one was born within a specific rank of honour (ascribed honour), from which it was difficult but not impossible to move upwards (acquired honour), while moving downwards was easier (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:369–372). Roman Palestine can also be described as limited goods and therefore an aggressively competitive or agonistic (fight-prone) (Malina 2001:37) society; therefore, one's honour ranking was regarded as extremely precious and was defended with vigour, even with physical confrontation, at the slightest provocation. As honour was also regarded as a limited commodity, more honour could be attained only by taking it with force (verbal or physical) from another individual or group. Power seeking more honour afforded moving upwards in ranking and thus formed part of the moral system, which held honour attained as important as honour of the family into which one was born. In such a society honour is more important than honesty (Crossan 1992:11), leading to a state in which certain forms of criminality, especially by the powerful, can be acceptable and can be compared to crime syndicates such as the Sicilian Mafia, founded entirely on fear inflicted by physical violence and extortion (Malina 2001:28–30). On this aspect, with regard to the patronage system even today, Southall (2016:80–84) concurs, referring to endemic corruption during the rule of Jacob Zuma's African National Congress (ANC) government in South Africa. The conclusion to be drawn is that power (effected by the use of physical violence resulting in fear and suppression, underpinned by values of loyalty and honour, and supported by the idea of perpetual indebtedness and the might to control scarce resources) is the dominant aspect of patronage morality as it determines one's place of honour and one's place within the larger power pyramid, as well as the network of small power pyramids. This in turn provides the power and influence to broker a larger network of more relationships providing more influential dependants serving the personal interests of their patron as more resources flow towards a patron.

## Symbolic universes legitimise morality

An ideological idea world which legitimates and structures a society, and forms the identities of individuals and the roles they fulfil, is called a symbolic universe (Berger & Luckmann 1975:91–120) or a world view (Malan 2016b), of which a mythology, religion and philosophy are examples. Symbolic universes legitimate the current morality and defend it against competing societies' symbolic universes (Berger & Luckmann 1975:122–129). The Roman emperor cult is an example of such a 'sacred canopy' structuring and legitimising Roman society and its morality of indebtedness, honour and power. The Roman emperor was *pater patriae*, the great patron of all at the top of the power pyramid, dominating all of the smaller power pyramids within Roman society. The emperor cult legitimated his position and power, as well as the patronal and patriarchal structure of Roman society and its

morality of power and violence, honour and indebtedness (Van Eck 2013). Such an ideated world and the form of society it legitimates can be countered only by another symbolic universe legitimating another kind of society. Jesus's subversive proclamation of the kingdom of God and the family of God as God's patronage was meant to be an opposing world view of this type, designed to structure and legitimise an alternative society and morality within the Roman world. Such an alternative society (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:1–22) has it own vernacular, values and dynamics and functions on the fringe of society and in opposition to it.

## Jesus: Patronage and patriarchy

Was the idea for Jesus' proclamation of God as king and father that such a system of patriarchy should be replicated in the community of his followers, with the same inequalities, pyramids of power and indebtedness present among the faithful? Or were they meant to be a society of equals under God as patron? In which way was God's patronage similar and/or dissimilar to the prevalent patronage?

## Jesus and his father: The importance of Jesus' baptism

What was Jesus' relationship to his father like? We do not know. The stories of Jesus' birth and childhood are not historical but are symbolical (Borg 1994:23) and were part of the post-Easter strategy depicting Jesus' divinity by reverse Christology (Funk 1996:279–294). There is no certainty that Joseph, of whom the birth stories in Matthew and Luke spoke, was a historical person (Van Aarde 2001:4). Rather, Jesus' behaviour suggests his absence (Jacobs-Malina 1993:2–6) and we know nothing about the quality of the relationship, if any. The suggested relationship may symbolise the rejection of Jesus by his own people just as the patriarch Joseph was, but who, like Joseph, became a model of compassion and forgiveness (Van Aarde 2001:94–95).

In this regard, the baptism story is important, as it was composed specifically to provide an interpretative frame for the gospel, thus for understanding Jesus' behaviour (Funk 1996:130), namely as that of a child of God.

The First Testament traditions were still alive that the temple with its priesthood was the link between heaven and earth, the place where sins were forgiven and healings were possible (Crossan 1992:140, 142). Having a legitimate and honourable Jewish father afforded a son entrance to the temple and thus to the presence of God.

This was not the case for fatherless males. Van Aarde suggests that Jesus was suffering the implications of being fatherless in his society and that he was healed at his baptism from 'sinful sickness' such as the stigma of being a fatherless son and thus granted the remission for such a sin, access to God and the status of child of God. His baptism can also be interpreted as a conversion experience transforming Jesus' life and as the incentive for Jesus starting a ministry of healing, granting people forgiveness of sins, access to God and the status of children of God (Van Aarde 2001:53, 58–59, 65). He associated with outcasts and proclaimed God's kingdom (patronage) to them. The authority to do so was centred in Jesus' conviction that God was his father (patron) (cf. Borg 1994:110, 117–118), which is alluded to in the words spoken by God at his baptism (Van Aarde 2001:65, 67–69). This shows a disregard for the hierarchy and power structure of temple authorities, and especially for the purity codes, legitimising a hierarchy of 14 degrees ranging from pure to impure according to which access to God was granted or denied (Van Aarde 2001:130–134) and by means of which the temple state also controlled the patriarchal society (Mack 1996:20–22). In this way, Jesus regarded all healed and forgiven people as equal before God. This is the starting point for an argument that the metaphors of God's patronage were meant to imply an end to all forms of patronage, clientelism and hierarchy within the community of Jesus followers and that under God's patronage, all were equal.

In order to change the failing patronage system, Jesus had to have sufficient standing, such as that of a true prophet. Such prophets' legitimacy was characterised by their experiencing an altered state of consciousness (Pilch 1993:231–244) as Jesus experienced at his baptism (Mk 1:9–11; Lk 3:21–22), legitimating not only Jesus but also his prophetic message (Malina 2001:144–145). Religious altered states of consciousness can often be expressions of an alternative symbolic universe and Jesus' 'conversion experience' can be compared to Paul's conversion (Malan 2016b), namely as trading one symbolic universe (Judaism's temple ideology) for another (the patronage of God).

## Jesus and his family

We know that Jesus' mother and brothers (he may have had sisters) were sceptical of Jesus' preaching and even wanted to take him home with them as they thought he was mad (Mk 3:31–35; Gospel of Thomas 99; Valantasis 2008:54–195). This tension conceivably goes back to Jesus, whose subversive teaching and behaviour crossed religious and social barriers as a matter of principle (Funk 1996:4, 198). Jesus' answer that those who do his Father's will are his mother and brothers is a sharp move away from the temple ideology and the importance attached to the biological family and is the foundation for a new household of God accepting Jesus' teaching and becoming loyal to the Father. This is one of the most radical aspects of Jesus' proclamation, when evaluated from a Mediterranean cultural viewpoint (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:159). Thus, Jesus declares his followers to be a replacement family and, however one explains the literal absence of Jesus' father, his new metaphorical family lacks a literal father as well (Crossan 1992:299). Sayings like this one and the saying about the division of a five-member family (Lk 12:51–53) attack the normalcy of the hierarchical patriarchal family and tear it in two along the axis of domination and subordination, as well as cutting across the

sex and gender lines of demarcation (Crossan 1992:300–301), legitimating an anti-hierarchical egalitarian society and family life under God's patronage.

## A new kind of family

Family life would of necessity have to replicate the structure of the faith community legitimated as egalitarian by the symbolic universe of God's patronage, expressed by the root metaphors such as children of God and kingdom of God (Malan 2016a). Jesus' message was therefore subverting the patriarchal family, which was the centre of both identity and material security and was also the primary social unit, which in that world was a microcosm of a hierarchical social system (Borg 1994:81–82).

There was a tendency to make Jesus' wisdom conform to popular expectations, to assimilate his vision to conventional wisdom and therefore to ordinary ways of seeing and speaking. This led to a shift in focus away from the vision that motivated Jesus to Jesus the visionary; away from the kingdom of God to Jesus himself:

> The crowning development of this process was the loss of immediacy of the kingdom, of the overpowering nature of its glimpse. The fusion of present and future in Jesus' vision was dissolved, and the future again segregated from the present. The enchantment of the kingdom was gone. God's incursion into history was again anticipated as an event of the future rather than as a fact of the present. (Funk 1996:241)

The effect was that the symbolic universe of the patronage of God was adapted to become the patronage of Jesus (Van Eck 2013) as the mythology depicting the deity of Jesus was formed (Funk 1996:241) (see in this regard also Mack 1996:75–222), and the previous root metaphor of the kingdom of God became a reference to God's future awaiting the faithful. The social universe legitimated by this symbolic universe of Jesus' patronage represented the Mediterranean patriarchal society as the later Jesus followers tried to make the gospel attractive in their mission to win new converts.

This tendency continued progressively in time. Jesus' egalitarian (fictive) family ideal as depicted in the Synoptic tradition differs vastly from the household codes found in later epistles. The household codes of Colossians, Ephesians, the Pastoral Epistles and 1 Peter seem to correspond with treatises on household management since Aristotle. They can be viewed as a kind of family propaganda, as they set the ideal to be followed, which was that of domestic order in a patriarchal hierarchy. This differed greatly from the earlier Synoptic tradition, which preferred discipleship and community cohesion above family ties and loyalty (Osiek 2006:835–839). In this tradition, Jesus' call for discipleship is a call for self-denial (Mk 8:34; Mt 16:24; Lk 9:23), which runs parallel to denial of the traditional patriarchal family, as the community of faith becomes (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003) a new fictive kin-group, treating each other as family members and forming egalitarian faithful families. The initial fictive kin-group started as the core group which formed around Jesus, notably in Galilee. Traditional values (see above 'A morality of indebtedness, power and honour') were supplanted by a new range of honourable behaviours such as loyalty, humility, accepting and even ceding one's place (reversal of status) and selfless service (love) to other in-group members (Malina 2001:113–139), which challenged the values of their society in a fundamental way (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:186). What motivated the initial followers of Jesus?

## Dying and rising

The basic presupposition for those following Jesus was to follow his 'way'. The Synoptic tradition reveals the path of death and resurrection as 'the way' Jesus taught. It is the path of self-denial, the dying of an old way of life and following Jesus on the path of death (Mk 8:34 and parallels). Dying and rising to be born again is the root image or root metaphor for the personal transformation at the centre of Christian life. It is a transformation from an old way of being to a new one, from an old identity to a new one (Borg 2003:107). This new way of life is life under God's patronage, life in the kingdom of God, life as children of God. Therefore the root metaphor of dying and rising to a new life is another root metaphor which supports the symbolic universe of God's patronage. Again, it implies an absolute end to the prevalent morality of indebtedness, honour and power causing inequality, injustice and exploitation and the fresh dawn of a new morality of love as taking responsibility for one another, of caring and self-sacrifice (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:380–381) based on God the patron's gracious kindness brokered by Jesus of Nazareth (Malan 2016a).

The death and resurrection root metaphor for a new way of life is symbolised by the single most universal symbol of Christianity, namely the Cross. It not only recalls the historical fact of Jesus' crucifixion as an execution, but symbolises 'the way': the path of personal transformation as dying and rising with Christ. It means the death of a way of life separated from God and to be born to a life centred in God. This new life has compassion as its primary quality, as Jesus sums up his ethics and theology: 'Be compassionate as God is compassionate.' The Aramaic and Hebrew associations with the meaning of being compassionate are to be 'womblike': life-giving, nourishing, embracing. This is the primary distinction of the community of Jesus followers (Borg 2003:112–123).

Baptism and Eucharist are the liturgical symbolisation of the dying and rising to new life root metaphor, affirming the centrality of dying and rising to new life with Christ as the way of Jesus' followers (Borg 1987:112–113).

## Inclusivity

The shape of the Jesus movement reflected Jesus' inclusive vision. It was an inclusive movement, negating and subverting the boundaries set by the purity system. Included

were women, untouchables, the poor and maimed, and the marginalised, as well as people of stature who were attracted to his vision. The Jesus movement constituted a radical social reality with an alternative vision. 'It was a "discipleship of equals" embodying "the egalitarian praxis" of Jesus' vision' (Borg 1994:56–57). The kingdom of God was not an apocalyptic or heavenly ideal but the idea of a better way to live than within the current Israelite patriarchal temple state with its adherence to Pharisaic purity codes. The attractiveness of the movement was based on the invitation to experiment with the notion of the kingdom of God (Mack 1996:40, 58–59, 73).

## Conclusion: God's patronage constitutes a community of compassionate equals

The patronage metaphors of the kingdom of God and God as Father of children transfer characteristics foreign to the noun 'God', conferring both similarity and dissimilarity. God is compared to a patron, like an ancient Middle Eastern king or father. In which regard is God similar and/or dissimilar to a king or father?

The confrontation of similarity and dissimilarity in the metaphorical process unlocks the meaning of the metaphors *kingdom of God* and *God as father*. The following dissimilarities can be noted (see Table 1).

The only similarity is that both God and earthly kings and fathers are patrons. The quality of the patronage is extremely dissimilar, intended to subvert earthly patronage within the community of faith. Unlike the exclusive patronal society, which is agonistic and defends honour with aggression, the faith community should be tolerant, inclusive, caring and peace loving.

One may ask: Why use patronage terms if there are so many dissimilarities? The answer lies in the metaphors' power when the dissimilarities create tension. The effect was a subversion of the power of societal patrons in order to proffer God's patronage as a better alternative than that of the social patrons. In fact, the language of subversion is used to promote a new society metaphorically described as the kingdom of God and the family of God. In this society God is the only patron of his faithful. Within this society no power structures exist, as all members are equal and should serve the others unselfishly. In such a structure there would be no place for power, thus it would not be misused and no exploitation should be possible. The symbolic universe of God's patronage brings an end to patronage and clientelism within the community of the faithful. It legitimates a morality of compassion, care, righteousness and devotion (loyalty) and a society which lives by those qualities based on God's patronage, which is of the same essence (Malan 2016a). God's patronage is dissimilar to the patronage of powerful men and therefore constitutes the community of faith. It is also dissimilar to patronal and patriarchal societies with their power pyramids and exploitation. A return to Jesus' vision is the only way for the faithful to escape the inequality and suffering caused by patronage and patriarchy. Rather, Jesus' goal of a caring, selfless society is the best future we can hope and strive for (Robinson 2007:76–80).

**TABLE 1:** Kingdom of God and God as father.

| God as father and king: Dissimilarity | Earthly fathers and kings |
|---|---|
| Care, protect and provide | Exploitation |
| Benevolent use of power | Rapacious misuse of power |
| Motivated by love, compassion, grace | Motivated by power, greed |
| Followers are equal: selfless service | Followers unequal: power pyramids |
| Morality of compassion, care, devotion | Morality of power, honour, indebtedness |
| Tolerant, caring, peace-loving society | Agonistic, fight-prone, aggressive society |
| Inclusive society | Exclusive society |


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The author has declared that no competing interest exists.

### Author's contributions

I declare that I am the sole author of this research article.

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