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## Exploring the Paradigmatic Attribute of Compassion into Market Dynamics

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**Abstract:** Generally identified within the ethical frame of nursing care and care studies, this paper explores compassion and argues towards a paradigmatic potential that may contribute into the project of a person-oriented market ethos. A critical multi-scientific analysis of compassion narrative is hoped to achieve from both the religious and secular narratives. This is accomplished through a thorough review of the literature as well as a content analysis of the various frames. In the end, a matrix of theoretical assertions is proposed with applications and implications to how a person-oriented market would be possible.

**Key Words:** radical compassion, market ethics, Lampert, Hellwig, praxis

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to forward a critique of the neoliberal market system that erodes the personhood of the market anthropos and treats him/her as mere object in the commodification process of the invisible hand in the market world. In this context, the paper argues towards a more personalist approach into market dynamics by exploring the concept and praxis of compassion and its applicability in market ethics which many believe is primarily located within the socio-spatial realm of care ethics. Triggering one's

gut over reason, instinct more than heart, impression has it that the *anthropos*' natural capacity for care and concern for fellows has since been set aside, ignored or masked. Matthew Fox (1997) refers to it as the "exile" (p. xi) of compassion, setting it aside into the realm of ignorance, at times consciously aware to distort it and keep it down.

Taking a cue from Fox, this paper attempts to investigate further on the various narratives on compassion (both religious and secular texts), its state of exile and where it has been located since it was "pushed back"



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by the onslaught of modernization and globalization.

As compassion is construed as a virtue that exhibits empathy to the suffering other, at least within the realm nursing care, it is important to also take into account its potential paradigmatic attribute towards a critical-theological theorization of market. It is futile to speak of compassion in the market, let alone use it as a framework for developing a moral praxis in the market economy if and when there is not a clear argument for not only the normative capacity of compassion unto market dynamics (structural level), but also its redemptive power to liberate the alienated *anthropos* (agency level). Hence, two key directions are deemed essential in legitimizing the claim for praxis of compassion: 1) restructuring of the market practices and artifacts and 2) enlightened compassionate orientation of individual *anthropos*. Simply put, it is a case of integrated and balanced effort from both the structure and agent(s).

## 2. COMPASSION: A SYNERGISTIC EFFORT BY BOTH STRUCTURE AND AGENT

By positing an inherent and therefore natural capacity of human person for compassion, this paper clearly argues for a feasible realization of praxis of compassion related to and even despite the conditions observed in the context of global economics. Recent scientific studies that have attempted to underscore the psychological and neural basis of a compassionate person have attached the capacity for other-directed action in the human brain's pain reception and processing (Norman, 2008, p. 52). Overall, there is good reason to think that people, by normative nature, are inherently compassionate. People have capacity for compassion (Norman, 2008, p. 53).

This paper then asks the following questions: on what conditions can a person maximize his/her potential for compassionate behavior? In what instance will a discerning person decide to cooperate by giving donation and the like?

Recently, a study has been conducted in an attempt to explain this predicament. Among them is Stephan Meier's empirical research involving students at the University



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of Zurich, the findings of which are published in his book, *The Economics of Non-Selfish Behaviour*. His study reveals that peoples' market behavior is usually based not on narrow self-interest but on pro-social motivation. It apparently debunks the popular economic theory that posits peoples' default behavior towards taking advantage or exploiting the system or another individual for own sake (Meier, 2006, p. 53).

A compassionate action is enabled by natural capacity; environment and structures play a big part as to its actual realization. There is then an encompassing need that in order to provide the best ecology for a compassionate action, a strong institutional and moral framework must be established, for by which, framing effects can also thereby support for the practice of compassionate behavior. It is crucial to establish an institutional environment for the practice of pro-social behavior. Defined as the "set of fundamental political, social and legal ground rules that establish the basis for production, exchange, and distribution" (Davis and North, 1971, p. 71), any desire for a collective pro-social behavior among a group of people

necessitates institutionalization of such culture that starts with creating the environment for it. This type of pro-social behavior that is dependent on context has been labeled by Isaac et al (1991) as "institutional framing" (p. 384). A certain school, for example, is known to have been implementing an effective reward system in lieu of its fund-drive advocacies inasmuch as students receive favorable incentives in their grades or class scores in exchange of their participation and contribution. While seen to be superficial and nowhere expressive of the so-called "selfless" giving, it is at the very least effective in realizing the needs and objectives. As to whether it has been contributive to the over-all maturing process of an individual is relatively unknown, at least insofar as this paper is concerned. It appears to be rather very artificial and insincere, the students' behavior may be seen as initial steps towards a more internalized and principled act of giving, where narrow self-interest (direct incentives, tangible rewards etc.) ceases to give way to a more "unselfish" act while not truly selfless as it is still and will always be self-interested and self-directed in terms of



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personal satisfaction, inner peace, and happiness among others.

Meier's emphasis on institutional framing as key to providing a nurturing condition for a compassionate behavior resonates the paper's initial assumption that a legitimate praxis of compassion necessitates strong structural adjustments. This is also reflective in some way with Dagmang's (2010) proposed measures for countering structural impingements, "Building those conditions [objective determinants] assumes the need for settings which make it possible for persons to be more cooperative or even altruistic than individualistic and competitive" (p. 281). While this paper argues for a balanced effort and mutual inter-adjustments by both the structure and agent, it seems to suggest, based on reading both Meier and Dagmang, that the character and temperament inherent in structure enforces a more powerful stance to determine the change in any given cultural practice than any individual or group of them imposing one's will over any structure. It may be construed then that in the discourse of structure/agency, providing a suitable setting precedes dispositional and

attitudinal adjustment by any individual or groups of them. It is easier to facilitate real change among people if and when there is a structure that supports it than an individual shouting for reforms in the midst of cold institutions and their tolerant subjects. Dagmang (2010, p. 281) asserts "Thus, promotion of settings that foster social awareness, cooperation, and altruistic behavior should be a greater focus of an ethics that promotes the dignity of individuals and groups."

As this section highlights the natural capacity of an agent to be compassionate for the other and the need for an environment (or an institution) to "frame" such compassionate tendencies, it is also believed that the human person's compassionate predisposition is not only a capacity for behaving properly; it is also a potential sentiment for a truly social transformation.

### 3. LAMPERT'S RADICAL COMPASSION: A VIABLE EMOTION FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Earlier, it was noted how compassion has been placed in exile by the growing



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insensitivity and indifference of the globalized market-driven world. Traditional religions in the world however are also partly blameworthy for reducing compassion to a mere sentiment, devoid and deprived of its “active” engagement. Fox (1997) reiterated that in his investigation of the first thirteen encyclopedias of both Protestant and Catholic traditions, the word "compassion" had only one entry which was reduced to mere expression of "sentimentalism", into "emoting with Mary at the foot of the cross" (p. 5).

As sentimentalism was developed from the Middle Ages to nineteenth century, the true meaning of compassion was sidetracked. Sentimental piety became dominant feature in expressions of pieties and ritual hymns of both the Protestant and Catholic churches alike (Fox, 1997, p. 5). Sentimentalism does not only block people to doing justice in society, it is in fact its opposite. It actually interferes with people’s capacity for action. Being compassionate then in sentimental nuance is understood as a flight from action and an escape from politics and justice-making. It was this reduction of compassion to rank feeling that allowed

Friedrich Nietzsche to attack compassion, as sentimentalized by Christians (Fox, 1997, p. 6). It was a compassion that was devoid of action. Reduced to a feeling, Max Scheler posits the criterion of action to rectify this religious reduction of compassion. “It is one of the marks of genuineness in pity that it should lead to acts of beneficence [and sentimental pity] has nothing whatsoever to do with pity” (Fox, 1997, p. 6).

While religious traditions are partly to blame for the loss of compassion as action, it is also believed that Modernism reduces its dynamic character for social action in order to cover social manipulations. For the wealthy and rich to perform a philanthropic deed has become for them an excuse to distance themselves from the victims of the global jungle. While not entirely bad as it seems, it however masks the preservation of status quo and such ideological character is therefore reinforced by certain altruistic acts like but not limited to the so-called corporate social responsibility. By giving help to the poor, it enables the wealthy to sleep well at night knowing that through it, he/she has not only been generous to them; he/she has also made



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sure to retain and sustain their distance and social standing (Lampert, 2005, p. 177).

It is therefore obvious that in the rich history of compassionate action and its related concepts, various socio-political and religio-hierarchical structures had contributed to the so-called “exile” of compassion – its loss of meaning and its alienation from action as mere sentimentalism. Lampert (2005) has attempted to address this predicament by proposing his so-called “radical compassion” (p. xix).

Lampert proposes this imperative of compassion in the context of his criticism of the already established thesis on compassion spearheaded in both Buddhist and Christian religious traditions. His alternative model then, as he claims, is neither Christian nor Buddhist; not even associated with any religious framework.

Lampert's argument to disassociate Jesus' compassion to his idea of a radical compassion is flawed. In fact, a historical critical analysis of Jesus' Kingdom of God model reiterated this call of social action in the face of social injustice through an act of

compassion. It has been central to Jesus' social "rage" and activism.

What is the nature of such rage that Lampert's model requires? One thing is clear: radical compassion is never satisfied with the feeling of sorrow and that rage entails the emotion of anger understood in the context of social misery felt and experienced by the victim (Lampert, 2005, p. 165). This same kind of rage and anger as expressions of radical compassion upon social distress is reflective of the way Jesus addresses the iniquities of His time. There was Jesus condemning the blatant insensitivity and indifference of merchants around the temple (Jn. 2:13-17, Mt. 21:12-13, Mk. 11:15-18, Lk. 19:45-46); and when He got angry to Pharisees whose self-righteous behavior and close-mindedness unwillingly ill of societal structures despite his words and miracles (Mk. 3:1-6). Jesus' rage may not be as violent as Lampert can tolerate in his own model, but Jesus' audacity and bravery to address the social ills in the face of possible death and condemnation from authorities were more than enough to agitate the status quo and uncover the social manipulations present





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therein during His time. Again, the intention and spirit of Lampert's radical compassion may not be expressive of Christian tradition in its storied medieval past but is very much reminiscent of the Kingdom model of Jesus of Nazareth.

What Lampert however claims commonality with various religions is specific as to their "great rarity and measured exclusivity that they attribute to compassion as a phenomenon" (Lampert, 2005, p. 180). While in the same belief that compassion is inherently human and is an ordinary event happening every now and then in the degree of sentiment and feelings, the irony is, according to Lampert (2005) that it is also the least performed in terms of concrete action for social change (p. 181).

Aside from its criticism of religious nuances related to his radical compassion, Lampert also cautions that his imperative to compassion assumes an antithetical attribute against oppressive structures ideologically masked in a stable status quo. Even with threat to disordering the social artifact, Lampert (2005) still proposes for the necessity and urgency of radical compassion,

while conscientious of its quasi-anarchistic ramifications (p. 182).

Lampert's proposed radical compassion finds similar temper in Sharon Welch's (1985) "communities of resistance" that aim to empower resisting agencies and structures by providing them with social, moral, and intellectual support in order to challenge existing dominant ethos and culture. Such a strong revolutionary tenor is expected if to create a major structural change in the realm of compassionate behavior in society, as an essential character to justify its paradigmatic potential.

In his genealogical survey of compassionate action, Lampert (2005) finds out that history has rarely been a witness to compassionate activism; allowing only three modes of action for easing distress. They are empathetic treatment, act of giving, and rehabilitation; all of which however are partial reflection of the imperative of radical compassion (pp. 166-170). Lampert (2005) believes that there is a need to introduce a fourth mode of action that would embody radical compassion or social activism, one that is not borne from an organized ideology



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or a result of systematic call for justice. Rather it is simply a genuine response to the suffering of the other/s (p. 171). It is an attribute of radical compassion that does not merely motivate the agent to feed the hungry person but to extend its search for answer by calling for a social change that would eliminate any condition of hunger. It is radical enough to address and cure the very root cause of such distress and predicament. It does not content itself with transitory, trivial, and cursory solutions to a long-embedded social curse and plaque. It counters the social oppression with social activism.

Another interesting attribute in Lampert's imperative is the rationalized character of a compassionate response, contrasted with the usually emotionally-charged response to a distress with impulsive call for donation of shabby clothes for the victims or with provision for an immediate material relief sent and delivered to the suffering, without necessarily meeting them in person.

With Lampert's radical compassion, it has outlined in detail the transformative character of compassionate action while also

revealing its strategy of resistance and rage against oppressive structures and practices. While Lampert claims such methods to be non-Christian, it is arguably however reflective of the very nature and strategies employed by Jesus of Nazareth during His time.

#### 4. HELLWIG'S CHRISTOLOGICAL NARRATIVE ON COMPASSION AND ITS MARXIST SHADES

Monika Hellwig complements the predicament of compassion, defined as exiled by Fox and as reduced to mere sentiments according to Lampert. Obviously, the problem of compassion, to state rather simply, is that despite its natural human capacity, it has been pushed back to few places (home, among friends, care centers, faith-based communities, and traditional groups among others), and has since failed to define basic human action and tendencies particularly in the much-modernized and industrialized environment of the liberal/capitalist world. It seems therefore commonsensical to blame capitalism and liberalist tendencies of the market to the outright loss and discomfort of compassionate behavior. But is it fair to





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accuse the “(by)-product” of Industrial Revolution to compassion’s quandary? A number of them have sided with the affirmative, while mainly expanding their articulations along the Marxist lines. While Hellwig is one of them, her Christological discourse on compassion is greatly influenced by questions raised particularly from Liberation Theology.

Her book, *Jesus: The Compassion of God*, offers new perspectives on the narrative of Christian life by presenting Jesus as the “incarnate Compassion of God” (Hellwig, 1983, p.121).

What Hellwig has emphasized is its theological character to refer to it as a reality of “social sin.” Its theological character however rests not on mere abstract formulations of the Medieval Classical Christianity but on contemporary Christian praxis aimed to liberate the oppressed in “concrete historical dimensions.” Not to be construed as mere practical response to suffering and violence, Hellwig proposes to balance it with a need for a faithful communion and surrender to God. To imitate

Jesus as the compassion of God is a faith-based praxis (Hellwig, 1983, p. 122).

It is not a mere revolution out of deep suffering and desire for redemption without depth of faith commitment and expression. It is precisely the faith to Jesus who liberates that enjoins an active engagement to free the oppressed and restructure the system.

Another notable Hellwig’s (1983) contribution on the thesis of compassion is her attempt to theorize the compassion framework along the lines of the Christian-Marxist encounter (p. 142). What is interesting in her work is that she has not only debunked the negative and anti-Christian connotations charged against Marxism but has found notable similarities between the Marxist ideals and that of Christianity’s. Furthermore, she has even to some extent credited Marxism for continuing the once-neglected Christian obligation for social justice particularly during the height of the “fortress image” of the Medieval Church (Hellwig, 1983, p. 148).

The Christians in the past may have accused Marxism of its atheistic tendencies and its attack on religion as “the opium of the



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people,” but Hellwig claims that all have been misconstrued interpretations by the once-dominant and close-minded church. If the reason for this compassion predicament is essentially structural and wide scale and if suffering and oppression of today’s world demands big and wide structural changes (Dagmang’s *structural anti-impingements*, Meier’s *institutional framing*, and Lampert’s *radical compassion*), Hellwig asserts that the only way to create real and lasting structural adjustments is an active engagement that is transformational and revolutionary. For structural repair is not only concentrated on one aspect, it is rather encompassing and total. On this end, Hellwig (1983) has proposed a number of practical ways (p. 149).

It may not be the obvious typical options offered by classical Christianity of embracing suffering in hope of a promised bounty in the next life, and of offering one’s life to the extent of “tolerating” passivity. It is revolutionary and engaging. It is structural and radical. It is not a mere option among others. It is an invitation to change one’s paradigm and orientation that despite and amidst the structural sin, a culture of faith-

based praxis can stand. It is not a mere feeling of the suffering other; it is liberational and redemptive not only of the individual in distress but also the structure and system that has been demonized by evil ways and means.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Why choose the virtue of compassion as a paradigmatic tool in a theological analysis of the market structure and its dynamics?

Based from an exposition and analysis of the narrative of compassion from various theorists and perspectives, it has provided an initial ground for utilization of compassion as critique of the rationalized market dynamics. This paper posits some of its salient points.

First, this paper highlights an account of its summary of findings:

- That the capacity for compassionate behavior is naturally human, even proposed to be genetically and biologically conditioned, citing the case of some diagnosed social disorders whose bearers are not found to be



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capable of feeling and acting compassionately

- That the global setting of industrialization and the consequences that result from it (consumerism, materialism, capitalism etc) decay the human capacity for compassion until it has, at some point, found to be already in exile, pushed back to few places like nursing homes, care centers etc.
- The predicament of compassion has reached the level of structures and systems; completely powerful entities that naturally enslave people towards alienation (reification and commodification). So is the change of its enslaving institutions and systems demands an active engagement defined in terms of its being revolutionary and radical.

The following are the perceived reasons to justify the framework of compassion as a legitimate paradigm for

theological analysis of market and its dynamics:

1. Compassion's naturally-inherited inclination translates as a human capacity (potential) for acting to ease or eliminate the suffering of the other. While some researches and experiments have cited its possible genetic and biological disposition, many social experiments have also showed that one's compassionate behavior is still and cannot not be self-interested. Furthermore, if such characteristic (to be compassionate) is inherent, it means that an individual, by nature, would already be disposed for compassionate action. It only needs suitable environment and appropriate motivation to spark the inherent inclination. This assumption can be further bolstered by Sigmund Freud's "theory of internalization" which states that an individual, in the course of his/her personality



formation, internalizes the moral values of the structure through a series and network of interactions with other personalities (Parsons, 1964, pp. 18-19). This just goes to show that among anything else, the change of individual disposition still rests on its supportive and cooperative environment and culture.

2. While the first highlights the individual capacity for internalization, as long as there are appropriate conditions for it, the second one emphasizes the capacity of compassion as a value to necessitate structural reforms and reorientation. As cited above by Meier in his theory on “institutional framing” and Dagmang’s theory on “structural anti-impingements,” it is a case of creating a culture of engaged compassion among committed and cooperative individuals. By strengthening the moral fiber of each major moral institution like

the church, school, home, peers, government, and civil society to stand by its own moral grounds, it is highly likely that praxis of compassion can take place.

3. The liberational and revolutionary character of compassion as engaging, active, radical, and with rage or anger is in fact a fundamental character in any praxis (grounded theologizing). Its salvific dimension of addressing the (material) needs of the poor and oppressed as seen in Jesus’ words and deeds in real historical timeline is crucial to the renewed understanding of theologization in today’s time – one that is always at the margins and suffering individuals.
4. Compassion’s orientation to (social) action and (social) justice is an appropriate condition for any discourse of praxis. Lampert’s radical compassion and Hellwig’s exploration of Jesus as the Compassion of God advocates an



- engaging and revolutionary framework for compassion.
5. Fox's discourse on proposing compassion as possessing a communal character of togetherness, one that is not exclusive but inclusive, emphasizes shared suffering of anguish and shared celebration of joy. This is another important facet of any proposed praxis. This has also been discussed by Dagmang in his "theory of impingements."
  6. Lastly, compassion has tendency to be a counter-cultural value orientation that can potentially be a threat to oppressive status quo and thereby serves as a kind of conscientizing moral framework that sets not only corrective measures but normative ones as well.

All in all, these are but few reasons that justify the value of compassion in being utilized as a paradigm for analyzing the market along the framework of compassion.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The social character and predicament of the suffering victim, manifesting in various appearances in the market world (worker, beggar, manager, and criminal among others) have become ever more confused and conflicted with the loss of compassion to mere sentiment and feelings. Add to that is the apparent reification of such consciousness to become, just like any oppressive structure of today, an institutionalized taken-for-granted everyday practice – a *habitus*. It is not that people have lost the capacity for feeling the other; for they have merely failed to recognize that the other needs liberation from such depressing situation. This moral insensitivity dulls the natural giftedness of human person towards compassionate action that is totally liberational and radical - as in to the very depths. Lampert may have proposed a strong alternative to prevailing sentimentalism with his radical compassion model. Its engagement to social activism is but its logical choice for recovering the victims and that rage and anger may have been necessary emotions at certain point. While its vigor and texture suit the so-



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called praxis of compassion, it would still be highly essential, for the purpose of legitimation, that such praxis finds its authentic spirit from the hermeneutics of Jesus' compassion as articulated in the Gospels.

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