The Effect of Cultural Patron-Client Relationship Perspectives on Asian Christian Spirituality in Relation to Spiritual Growth and Missions Outreach

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Abstract
Facets of worldview belief and resulting cultural practice provide the norms for maintaining the expected behavioral norms and lifestyle rhythms of peoples within their own communities. The outworking of the concept of the patron-client relationship provides a vehicle for establishing mutually beneficial relationships within such communities. However, this concept might easily be inappropriately associated with the relationship that is established with God through the atoning death of Jesus on the cross. Under such circumstances of misappropriation of the patron-client relationship, the dynamics of salvation are likely to become undermined, along with implications that might limit personal and corporate spiritual growth. The resulting potential for syncretism will inevitably also affect Christian outreach and missions. Principles are provided to maintain biblical literacy in relation to patron-client perspectives in order to aid spiritual growth and provide coherence for the message of missions.

Keywords
patron-client relationship, worldview, syncretism, spiritual growth, missions

Introduction
Bringing the gospel of Christ to the unreached, whether locally or farther afield, has been the responsibility of God’s people since Christ’s ascension. The American Christian anthropologist Paul Hiebert writes “It is not always easy to distinguish between the gospel and human cultures, for the gospel, like any message, must be put into cultural forms to be understood
and communicated by people.”¹ Asian Christian scholars acknowledge the efforts of Western missionaries in earlier times but recognize that these have often been unhelpfully colored by the colonialist background, less-than-compatible cultural perceptions, and noncontextualized churchmanship of those missionaries. The Asian Christian community has also recognized the earlier dearth of Asian Christian input into the debate on what makes for appropriate contextualization. In response to this need, the Critical Asian Principle² was developed to provide guidelines for contextualization by seeking “to identify what is distinctly Asian and use such distinctiveness as a critical principle of judgment on matters dealing with life and mission of the Christian community, theology, and theological education in Asia...[with results that include] helping the Christian community in Asia to assume its missionary responsibility.”³ Highlighting aspects of Asian distinctiveness requires delicate discernment so that even critical contextualization⁴ does not unwittingly fall prey to syncretism. In this respect, the cultural concept of the patron-client relationship requires careful examination since these relationships are prevalent with varying degrees of influence in Asian communities in ways that can also shape, in not necessarily helpful ways, and influence theological perceptions of a Christian’s relationship with God.⁵


³ The CAP principle was later reexamined and further developed in order to, among other reasons, “specifically address modern day challenges.” See Revisiting the Critical Asian Principle: Report from the CAP Discussion group held at Seminary Theoloji in Seramban, Malaysia, October 6-7 2006. http://www.atesea.org/CAPrev.htm (accessed April 18, 2023).


⁵ The author’s interests in and attention to the concept of patron-client relationships as they play out culturally with respect to spirituality and spiritual growth and from which this article is developed are seen in Vee J. D-Davidson, “Engaging with Cultural Factors That Have the Potential to Limit Spiritual Formation in Cross-Cultural Pentecostal Ministry,” a paper presented at Asia Pacific Theological Association (APTA) Symposium, Hong Kong, September 2-4, 2019, and also in Vee J. D-Davidson, Transforming Communication: Progressing from Cross-Cultural to
THE PATRON-CLIENT CONCEPT

Moreau et al. describe the concept of social power and how this can be “used as an exchange mechanism within a society…just as people are attracted to money and try to accumulate it, they are also attracted to social power and try to accumulate it. People who have social power and can control distribution of it in some way (granting favors, naming people to positions of social power) are referred to as patrons. Those who come under their power are called clients, resulting in what is called a patron-client system.”

Patron-client relationships can be found with varying degrees of subtlety and influence in every culture. Patron-client relationships are initially found among family members as the heads of families are inevitably more experienced in life and able to help the life and career development of their offspring. Other obvious scenarios include, for example, when going to a hospital for treatment, the doctors become patrons who take care of the patients who are also their clients. The doctor will be expected to aid the patient’s recovery and the patient will be expected to observe the doctor’s directions for continued healing as well as pay the fees for treatment. Similarly, a bank manager becomes the patron of a client who has applied for a loan of money with the understanding that the client will pay the loan back and usually with an agreed amount of interest.

Patron-client relationships are also purposefully sought by those of lower social power in a society by approaching those with greater social power in order to upgrade or improve the condition of the former. Each party, whether patron or client, will have a common understanding of the specifics of the role and nature of such relationships within their shared cultural context.

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Intercultural Communication of Christ (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 272-277, and as cited elsewhere in this article.


D-Davidson notes, “As with the building of any functional relationships, the potential client will likely have some kind of underlying agenda. The potential patron is first likely to weigh the potential value of permitting such a relationship because unlike paying back a bank loan, at which point the technical patron-client relationship is effectively dissolved, societal patron-client relationships tend to continue beyond the returning of favors into the long-term.”8 By its very nature, the patron-client relationship involves the paying off and paying back for a variety of favors granted by the patron, and the nature and degree of obligations will vary from culture to culture.9 Importantly, these various obligations will be mutually understood by members of each particular culture. As a result of this understanding, the client becomes a member of the patron’s in-group with responsibility to uphold and defend the patron’s interests. Due to these potential wider social implications of entering into a patron-client relationship, the relationship can also be considered as being like a “friendship with strings [attached].”10 Obligations expected of an in-group member may vary from the extremes of physical involvement in gang warfare turf battles or criminal activity to the softer life-skills of giving face to the patron or saving their face in culturally appropriate ways.11

8 D-Davidson, Transforming Communication, 87.
9 See David A. deSilva, An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004), 11, who describes the patron-client concept and obligations in the Greco-Roman world context from which the concepts of patronage and clientele were well established long before even the advent of Jesus.
11 See Do Hojung, in the context of patron-client state relationships in Asian settings, in which nations seek to gain national security benefit from a patron nation. She notes the potential for the client state even to gain a degree of influence over the militarily better equipped patron state. “Varieties of Patron-Client State Relationship: The U.S. and Southeast Asia,” The International Studies Association Conference 2016.
http://web.isanet.org/Web/Conferences/AP%20Hong%20Kong%202016/Archive/d1e66ca2-b3a1-4437-bc79-d6912a7feff6.pdf (accessed October 10, 2023).
The Effect of the Patron-Client Concept on
Asian Christians’ Faith and Life

Having described the nature of patron-client relationships, it is important to see the implications for faith and life in the context of Asian Christianity. In particular, we must be aware of how such culturally shaped relationships might affect facets of the Christian lifestyle such as prayer and obedience to God. The potential for syncretistic expression is likely to depend on how strongly patron-client relationships serve to maintain the structure of the society and the depth of cultural expectation concerning adhering to the rules of fulfillment of obligations. The expectations and rules will vary from culture to culture and may range from behavior understood to show obvious courtesy and common sense to extraordinarily subtle cues that might be easily misunderstood by the outsider. For instance, in the Chinese context, giving an unexpected gift may be due to the giver wanting some kind of favor from the receiver of the gift. The more expensive the unexpected gift is, the more likely that the giver is wanting to come under the receiver’s patronage and the receiver will be aware of this. In such a case, when engaged in cross-cultural missions, we need to be not only aware of the patron-client expressions that we have grown up with but also sufficiently informed about the role and outworking of the patron-client concept among those with whom we are engaged in missions.\(^\text{12}\)

In order to lay a solid biblical foundation for new Christians and so that their spiritual growth will not be hampered, we must be careful to discourage new believers from seeing their relationship with God through their own patron-client cultural lens. While, as Christians, we come wonderfully under God’s patronage as heavenly Father, we are not positioned as clients in the cultural understanding of coming under the direction of a patron but, rather, as God’s beloved children in Christ.

\textit{Prayer}

The new believer will have been helped in some way to come into a new life relationship with God through Jesus. Without careful instruction, they may well consider the Divine in terms of a patron and themselves

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\(^{12}\) For some biblically based principles, see Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker, \textit{Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations} (Downers Grove: IVP, 2016).
as a client who is now in a beneficial relationship. Christians who see this relationship with God on their own cultural “patron-client terms may be trying to manipulate God through prayer in the same way that their cultural patron-client relationships recognize manipulation and reciprocal obligations as part of the fabric of the relationship.”¹³

Prayer is then delivered with unsound motives and expected to be answered as a manifestation of the patron’s obligations to the client. The new Christian will expect that just as their patron-client cultural rules see the action of one side of the relationship to be the catalyst for an expected beneficial response, so praying to the patron, God, should also see the prayer as the client receiving from the patron what the client has requested. As a result, the believer has misunderstood that God has no patron-client–like obligations to Christians, and so their patron-client understanding undermines the truth of grace as being undeserved. Through the patron-client cultural lens, grace is seen as a negotiable commodity rather than freely and unconditionally dispensed. Prayer becomes a seeming negotiation between patron and client couched entirely in client self-interest with grace as a misunderstood commodity. For a new believer who is an experienced patron, the notion of grace may at best seem a false economy of effort and, at worst, a catalyst for undermining community stability.

Another potential difficulty for the new believer can arise if the evangelist, disciple, or others helping the new Christian into spiritual growth are also perceived as being patrons with the new believer as their client. Guidelines to help prevent this include being careful to both teach and live out the principle that everyone is equal before God. This can be achieved by being careful to honor each one’s dignity and not provide resources in any manipulative or condescending manner. An important in-Christ lifestyle influence can come by praying with the new believer and modeling, through prayer with thanks and praise, that God has no favorites, and that all are equally loved and cherished by him.

Prayer is a common practice among followers of the different world religions, but with quite different forms of expression and underlying motives. Helping a new believer who has been used to the practice of prayer because of their former religion requires discovering their previous motives for praying and reshaping them in terms of seeking to grow in relationship

with God through Jesus in a spiritually healthy way. This requires helping the believer to engage with the God of the Bible through prayer that follows biblical principles. This is prayer that acknowledges the nature of Almighty God as sovereign in power and authority, unconditionally loving so that guilt and shame are replaced by freedom and honor, just while also merciful, and eternally righteous. Prayer does not seek to initiate bargaining but to discover God’s will for the believer and to learn how to live in Christ in the believer’s circumstances.

While we can see numerous examples of patron-client interactions in the Bible, engaging with God is never depicted in patron-client mutual or individually selfish self-interest–based terms. At any point, either of the two parties of a culturally shaped patron-client relationship might find themselves at the mercy of the other in relation to awaited fulfillment of obligations, but God, in his sovereignty, is never at the mercy of his created ones.

**Obedience**

New believers will have no difficulty in recognizing the requirement to obey a patron’s demands or rules in order to maintain the relationship, as they will have been raised with corresponding worldview beliefs. How the requirements actually work out will depend on the particular culture’s perceptions of what makes for appropriate behavior. In any culture, the patron will have dispensed some kind of favor and the client must reciprocate appropriately, so that obeying the rules and also acknowledging ongoing expectations is mutually understood to be the correct way to behave. If the new Christian is a client, they obey to get something back and, where the patron-client relationship requires a price, the client’s obedience is selfish self-sacrifice for the expected benefits. In the cultural patron-client relationship, for the Christian patron there may well also have been some kind of reduction of their own resources, albeit perhaps on a temporary basis, but the patron will have followed the expected rules of give and take in anticipation of future material, emotional, or lifestyle benefit.

Seeing obedience to God through such a cultural patron-client lens can’t help but undermine a Christian client’s understanding that love should be the motive for obeying God, with any blessing from God as a benefit being
a purely secondary consequence. For the new believer who is accustomed
to being the patron and the social power holder, obeying God in an attitude
of humility may not come easily. Similarly, the believer may find it difficult
to pursue healthy spiritual growth that sees obedience as seeking nothing
in return other than a deeper relationship with God. Spiritual growth will
be limited by the extent to which the believer, whether holding a patron or
client role, maintains cultural patron-client expectations of obedience and
expectation of temporal benefit, as these inform inappropriate motivations
for obeying God.

The Patron-Client Concept and Doctrinal Implications

Just as the patron-client cultural lens can have an unhelpful influence on
the motivation underlying a believer’s perceptions of prayer and obedience,
so also are essential doctrinal beliefs likely to be colored by perceptions
bordering on syncretism or the mixing of unbiblical cultural perceptions
with Christian life and practice. As believers formulate their personal
understandings of relationship with God and obeying God’s leading, this
often subconscious template of principles for following Christ can’t help but
influence the message of Christ shared to unbelievers, whether formally or
informally. Unhelpful culturally shaped patron-client perspectives have the
potential to impinge on any number of lifestyle facets, whether emotionally,
mentally, or psychologically as relationships are built and lived out. Even
merely a subconscious acknowledgment of these facets is likely to color
foundational doctrinal understandings due to the all-pervasive nature of
life in community in which relationships are the necessary building blocks
of both stability and progress. When engaged in missions, such culturally
shaped outlooks can’t help but influence aspects of the missions message
that is presented.

Salvation

A new Christian will hopefully have some initial scriptural understanding
that their salvation is based on Christ’s self-sacrificial atonement for the sin
of the world both corporately and individually. As the Holy Spirit brought
them conviction of Christ as the means for any of freedom from sin or
guilt, release from shame into honor as a child of God, or freedom from
fear of worldview-shaped evils, this newness of life is poised for growth. Without careful instruction, the degree to which cultural expectations of patron-client relationships impinge on lifestyle and behavior might also bring layers of misunderstanding about the means to salvation as well as the implications of salvation. For instance, the new believer might see spiritual growth in terms of merit-making. They will have previously been accustomed to accumulating merit by honoring their patron. The expected positive results gained have then been a result of manipulative obligation rather than due to a loving relationship. If the new believer continues in this realm, this is likely to undermine potential for spiritual growth.

The new Christian needs a clear understanding that, even if they have shaped their relationship with God in the light of patron-client terms, Jesus’s love cannot be earned. While Christians seek to please God, his love, grace, and mercy are all made available on his terms alone. An inappropriate perception of salvation and spiritual growth is also likely to color beliefs about what salvation actually delivers from and into.

Cultural Expressions of Deliverance

In its sociocultural sense the patron-client relationship builds a platform that provides the means for empowerment. Development of a patron-client relationship is a catalyst for new accumulation of power among peers and/or social grouping. Those from an animist background may be attracted to Christ because of the new gain of power that neutralizes and delivers from fear; those of strongly face-saving cultures may be attracted to believing in Christ by the honor that becoming a child of God brings and that, consequently, delivers them from shame. As they have been accustomed to the honor gained through patron-client relationships, how much more valuable is the deliverance and honor gained in Christ that can never be removed.

See Jayson Georges, The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures (Kindle Gospelebooks.net: Time Press, 2017), 10, in which the author recognizes that while Western theology tends to focus on the Jewish-bound judicial approach to salvation (which is, nonetheless, the biblical focus), enquirers after Christ in Asian and other majority-world cultures are often more attracted to the effects of removal of shame that is displaced by a new honor, or a gain in spiritual power that is greater than the often fear-creating powers and worldview-related spiritual entities associated with current or previous cultural lifestyle preoccupations.
In missions outreach, these perceptions of deliverance are best explained as secondary benefits of salvation to the new believer. They may have been part of the message that attracted the new believer to the salvation Christ provides in the first place, and are clearly welcome and valid benefits of life in Christ, but, if overemphasized, they might serve to displace the Bible’s more prevalent judicial expression of deliverance. This judicial expression recognizes that Jesus’s death on the cross paid the price for the sin that separates the created ones from the creator. An overemphasis that maintains focus on the secondary benefits of deliverance might also serve to displace the crucial role, nature, and atoning activity of Jesus the deliverer. If the new Christian is also accustomed to a merit-making lifestyle through their own actions and behavior, this can also displace the nature of God as sovereign as well as downplay the effects of God’s sovereignty.

God’s Sovereignty

The new Christian, whose enjoyment and understanding of salvation has heightened their sense of personal empowerment and honor, might find difficulty in reconciling these gains with spiritual growth that is based on joyful submission and surrender to God’s plans and leading. The cultural patron-client relationship, by its very nature, limits the expectation of mutually reciprocated benefits to worldly horizons. While the gaining of benefits is based on a foundation of trust, the worldly nature of this trust has little in common with a Christian’s faith-based trust in God.

Moving from worldly to spiritual horizons, the new believer may well have grown up with worldview beliefs and coping mechanisms that respect the realm of the spiritual and spiritual activity under a patronage-like form but not to the extent that there will have been a tangible patron-client-like relationship. The spirit world was to be respected with culturally understood rules to be followed in a client-like fashion, but negotiation with such spirits was certainly not a matter of “face to face” or “heart to heart” personal engagement. Release from the unpredictable nature of such spirits may well have come as a welcome benefit of believing in Christ, but the question might still remain of how now to engage with what

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15 This judicial expression has its roots in the Old Testament sacrificial system and is fulfilled through the new covenant’s sacrifice for atonement metaphor as seen in the New Testament.
Hiebert termed the “middle ground issues”\textsuperscript{16} and how to manipulate the forces, spirits, or quirks of nature that one’s worldview proposed controlled them.

What Hiebert labels the ‘excluded middle’ is the section between religion and science where things would be explained as due to gods or spirit forces in communities where the spirit world is taken seriously. Hiebert offers that the questions of the middle level are “the questions of the uncertainty of the future, the crises of present life, and the unknowns of the past” such as how to deal with sickness, ensure a positive livelihood etc. by placating the forces or spirits behind such aspects of life’s continuity.

Hiebert’s point is that if missionaries bring a Gospel message and bible-based discipleship but do not have answers for [the specific] ‘middle questions’ of the converts, the converts will just go back to whatever magic, superstitious practices, or coping mechanisms they engaged in previously, or to find whoever they used to go to for answers.\textsuperscript{17}

The nature and timing of meeting cultural patron-client obligations, whether in relation to middle ground issues or material earth-bound practicalities, can often manifest in a pragmatic way according to whether the needed resources are immediately available or not. These expectations

\textsuperscript{16} Paul G. Hiebert, \textit{Anthropological Reflections of Missiological Issues} (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 193-197, as cited and extended in Vee J. D-Davidson, \textit{Empowering Transformation: Principles for Intercultural Planting of Spiritually Healthy Churches} (Oxford: Regnum International, 2018), 103-106. Hiebert suggests that all worldviews tend to have perceptions and beliefs related to the world available to one’s physical senses. Questions of cause and effect can be understood through natural law, scientific proof, rationalism, or similar. All worldviews also tend to have perceptions and beliefs related to the unseen world (with some cultures to a lesser degree and others to a fuller degree). Hiebert refers to these two areas of perceptions and beliefs as awareness of the Seen-Unseen Dimension or immanence and transcendence. There will usually also be perceptions relating to the mysteries of the ultimate questions of life and death as well as worldview beliefs that cover the “middle ground” questions of how to deal with life’s practicalities in relation to the unseen world, such as specific practices to ensure a good harvest or means of placating unfriendly spirits. While Hiebert was writing for what were then termed “tribal” contexts, we should note, too, that in any environment, even those of atheist belief, will have learned and developed coping mechanisms to deal with life’s contingencies.

in relation to being able to sufficiently meet tangible and material obligations can also undermine the role of faith in relationship with God. An overdependence on tangibles and purely temporal sense of engagement with the world and life’s middle ground contingencies, as supposedly controlled by a multitude of forces, undermines the concept of faith for the unseen, whereas trust in God’s all-encompassing sovereign yet unseen hand in life and events is foundational to the life of faith.

Similarly, an overemphasis on the visible and seemingly predictable, albeit even through non-superstitious adherence to practices related to middle ground issues, undermines the truth and nature of God as the one who holds all things together and who is caringly and graciously involved with his creation and created ones across time and space. New Christians will need intentional and individually shaped help to move them beyond their pre-Christ perceptions of how to handle life’s contingencies.

Perhaps our best approach can come through modeling our trust in God’s sovereignty and helping new believers to grow in trust that God is in control and knows what is best for all His children at all times; helping them to believe and know and experience, as we do, that He loves us so much He will only allow what is best for us. With new believers it is important to get at least a mental assent to God being sovereign from as early as possible—as the young believer grows in intimacy with God, through getting familiar with His Word and through an active relationship of prayer and conversation with Him throughout the day, the heart agreement will inevitably catch up along with experience. If and when things do seem to fall apart, it can be helpful (if possible) to get mature believers of the convert’s cultural background to share their experiences and encouragements too.\(^\text{18}\)

The new believer who continues to relate to God on cultural patron-client terms will soon become disappointed or even frustrated when God does not appear to respond in the way of either their cultural patrons or clients. The very nature of maintaining and growing the cultural patron-client relationship will have been based on the doing of mutually expected actions and interactions in the same way that middle ground issues were handled. We need not only to help these believers grow beyond dependence on middle ground issue actions but also to foster a healthy spiritual

\(^{18}\) D-Davidson, *Empowering Transformation*, 106.
relationship with God that comes to understand God’s unquestionable sovereignty on his terms.

Just as these new believers were used to doing expected actions to maintain their cultural patron-client status, so they undertook certain actions as coping mechanisms to address the nontangible patron-clienthood of middle ground issues.

In practical terms, the convert is used to *doing something* to answer the middle ground issues’ needs, e.g. assure good crops, guarantee a healthy baby or safe travel, etc.—what can we offer for them to *do* instead? The obvious and most sensible activity is to pray with them and acknowledge the activity of bringing the issue before God. In praying with them, it is very important to model appropriate prayer that isn’t looking to manipulate God but rather to cooperate with Him, and express the desire to be able to trust Him as sovereign whatever happens. 19

**Principles for Revealing God’s Nature in Contrast to the Patron-Client Relationship Concept in Order to Improve the Potential for Spiritual Growth**

1. On Grace and Obedience

As has been seen, cultural patron-client relationships invariably involve a relationship between two parties in which mutual obligations, payout, and balances are dependent on an economy of mutual reciprocity in relation to what is deserved. In contrast, we must help new believers understand that relationship with God through Jesus has no strings attached. God pours out undeserved grace day after day and moment by moment without any obligation in response because that is a key aspect of his divine nature. Unlike the cultural patron, God cannot act against his nature, which is grace and graciousness in perfect harmony with the desire for justice. While we cannot earn his grace and favor, we can nonetheless seek to live life in a way in which our obedience brings him pleasure and delight.

2. On Unconditional Love

Whilst the cultural patron-client relationship may well involve a degree of care, love between humans will always be limited due to the effects of sin. Increasing trust in God’s sovereignty empowers Christians to become increasingly aware of the sheer unconditionality of God’s love regardless of the circumstances of their lives. As spiritual growth unfolds and Christians grow in Christlikeness, they become increasingly thrilled at living out of God’s unconditional love. This divine unconditional love also has the power to disable the results of worldview beliefs that previously would have brought either crippling fear or shame or both. In God’s sovereignty, fear is defused and replaced by his love, and the price for shame has been paid at no expense to the recipient. There remains only the debt to love.

3. On Faith, Freewill Choices, and God’s Sovereignty

The patron-client relationship is established and maintained by a series of intentional and mutually approved choices. The benefit of one or both parties is dependent on the choices made and the consequences of the choices may also affect others either for better or for worse. Such consequences may be the means that limits ongoing benefit for others or even causes harm. While God often works his will out through peoples’ choices, his sovereignty is not limited by those choices, even if the choices are motivated to be hurtful, willfully damaging, or sinful in some other way. Faith is God’s gift to his children, and he honors and affirms faith in action and attitude that believes and trusts in the unseen, particularly when circumstances appear to be difficult or with a future positive result looking seemingly impossible.

Relationship with God places his children under his holy patronage to both trust and experience that “God has the ability to choose between the free choices of human agents by ordering circumstances without affecting the actual choices themselves”—that is, even in the face of peoples’ sinful


21 David J. Hesselgrave, Paradigms in Conflict: 10 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 35.
choices that might appear to be able to limit God’s will in someone else’s life, God can continually reorder circumstances to bring his will about. Since God is not limited by time and so can order and reorder circumstances of the past, present, and future, so can trust in his sovereignty open his children up to understanding of the potential for redemption of past poor choices, empowering in the present for God’s purpose in today’s choices, and with an assurance that he holds the future as a vision of his perfect and pleasing will.

**Conclusion**

The patron-client relationship in any culture serves to provide a mutually beneficial means for any mental, emotional, and/or physical advancement from a client’s perspective along with garnering of respect and ongoing establishment of status of the patron. This can provide for a healthy society whose stability and harmony are heightened by attention paid to the responsibilities and obligations of each party. As has been seen, the principles underlying this same cultural lens are best not applied to the relationship that becomes established with God through Christ’s sacrificial atoning death.

Unlike the holy patronage that Christians enjoy as God’s children, the cultural patron-client relationship does not provide the immeasurable grace and love-based foundation that are essential for the Christian life of faith. In the early stages of the spiritual growth of new Christians, they can be helped to overcome and surmount potential cultural limitations by our modeling the reality of appreciation of undeserved grace and living out vibrant love for God through self-sacrifice that expresses the delight of living by faith. Through this, the new believers have the provision of living visual aids who point them to the person and nature of holy patronage rather than worldly patronage.

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