

Harding University

## Scholar Works at Harding

---

Bible & Ministry Faculty Research and  
Publications

College of Bible & Ministry

---

Fall 2019

### God as Patron and Proprietor: God the Father and the Gospel of Matthew in an African Folk Islamic Context

Alan Howell

Harding University, ahowell@harding.edu

Robert Andrew Montgomery

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/bible-facpub>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Howell, A., & Montgomery, R. A. (2019). God as Patron and Proprietor: God the Father and the Gospel of Matthew in an African Folk Islamic Context. *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, 36 (3), 129-136. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/bible-facpub/24>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Bible & Ministry at Scholar Works at Harding. It has been accepted for inclusion in Bible & Ministry Faculty Research and Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholar Works at Harding. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@harding.edu](mailto:scholarworks@harding.edu).



**HARDING**  
UNIVERSITY

# God as Patron and Proprietor: God the Father and the Gospel of Matthew in an African Folk Islamic Context

by Alan B. Howell and Robert Andrew Montgomery

*“What do you Christians mean when you call God, ‘Father’?”*

**M**y friend, a respected Muslim imam, posed this question during a conversation at my (Alan’s) house. We had covered a wide variety of topics that day, mostly centered around what it meant to follow Jesus as teacher.<sup>1</sup> So it seemed natural for him to then ask what it meant for Jesus to call God “Father,” and, more importantly for him, what it meant for me as a follower of Jesus to use that same title for God.

Instead of beginning my response with a defense of Trinitarian doctrine, I used a relevant example from our context in northern Mozambique. To talk about what it means for God to be our Father, we talked about what it means for God to be our Patron. I told my friend, the imam, the story of a young man I’ve been discipling for many years now. His biological father, a good friend as well, had passed away. Since then, my wife and I have been his patrons, helping with his living expenses. As patrons, we also became his brokers to find scholarship donors so he could complete secondary school and begin his studies at a Mozambican university. One day, this young man introduced me to some friends as his “father.” While certainly not his biological parent, he used kinship language to describe my role as his patron in a way that honored me in front of others. The imam began nodding his head as I finished my story noting that the Creator God is certainly the best Patron of all. He observed that since using kinship language to refer to a human patron is honorable, it would not be a shameful way to speak of God, the divine patron.

In my experience, this line of thinking has been a simple and surprisingly appropriate way to defuse Islamic sensibilities about preconceived misconceptions of what it means for God to be Jesus’ father. It mitigates the way the Trinity has been a significant obstacle to inter-religious dialogue. Makua-Metto culture includes structures and expectations of a Patron-Client system, and it is natural to explore this social arrangement and its accompanying elements of honor and shame<sup>2</sup> in addressing theological questions.

---

*Alan B. Howell, his wife Rachel, and their three daughters resided in Mozambique from 2003 to 2018 as part of a team working among the Makua-Metto people. Alan (M.Div.) is currently serving as the Visiting Professor of Missions at Harding University.*

*Robert Andrew Montgomery served in an internship with the Makua-Metto team in Mozambique in 2017. He now lives in Memphis, TN and attends Harding School of Theology, pursuing an M.Div. degree.*

While Patron-Client dynamics may seem strange to Westerners,

knowledge of the social codes of patronage and reciprocity... [are] of great value to our appreciation of early Christian theology.<sup>3</sup>

Malina notes that,

the theme of God as Patron is heavily and explicitly underscored in Matthew. More than 70 percent of his sixty-four uses of the word "father" refer to the God of Israel. Since "father" here does not mean "father" in any actual first-century, Mediterranean social sense... the closest translation into contemporary English, mirroring first-century Mediterranean behavior, is "patron."<sup>4</sup>

Jesus, in calling God "Father," applied

kinship terminology to the God of Israel, the central and focal symbol of Israel's traditional political religion. This sort of "kin-ification" is typically patron-client behavior. God, the "Father," is nothing less than God the Patron.<sup>5</sup>

Certainly, the inverse of that is true as well: God is more than merely God the Patron. Since characteristics of the Patron-Client system are shared by the cultures of the New Testament and the Makua-Metto people of Mozambique, it should come as no surprise that this approach could be helpful in forming a theology among an African folk Islamic people group. This article begins with an exploration of how the Gospel of Matthew uses parentage, patronage and proprietorship terms and images to understand God. Then we will explore how presenting God as Patron and Proprietor resonates well among the Makua-Metto people and has the potential to be a fruitful way of talking about God the Father.

### *Parentage, Patronage and Proprietorship in the Gospel of Matthew*

The patron-client system is crucial for understanding the world of the New Testament, since

it was within this world that Jesus' message took shape and throughout

this world that the good news of God's favor was proclaimed.<sup>6</sup>

In the first century, personal patronage was the standard way of acquiring goods, protection, and advancement; the patron would offer these things to his client in return for honor.<sup>7</sup> "Not only was it essential—it was expected and publicized!"<sup>8</sup> A major gap between the wealthy and peasant classes in first century Palestine existed. Limited access to goods and an honor-shame worldview were key ingredients that led to this type of essential relationship between patrons and clients.<sup>9</sup>

In the language of the New Testament, even common terms, such as χάρις ("charis" meaning "grace"), were



shaped by the patron-client system. Today, grace is primarily a religious word, heard only in churches and Christian circles.

For the actual writers of the New Testament, however, grace was not primarily a religious, as opposed to a secular, word. Rather, it was used to speak of reciprocity among human beings and between mortals and God.<sup>10</sup>

In the first century, grace between two people in the patron-client relationship was not something that was freely bestowed by benefactors; rather it was given with the expectation that the client would respond with honor. After receiving an act of grace, the beneficiary would then return grace, initiating a

"circle dance in which the recipients of favor and gifts must 'return the favor.'"<sup>11</sup> Likewise, πίστις ("pistis" meaning "faith") is best understood within this relationship. Faith referred to dependability: both the patron and client proved their reliability in upholding their end of the relationship.<sup>12</sup>

Another expression of the way that the patron-client system shaped language was through kin-ification. Through the patron-client relationship, the two people are kin-ified, in which both become "suffuse[d] . . . involved with the aura of kinship, albeit fictive or pseudo-kinship."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, in calling God "Father," Jesus applied kinship to the God of Israel, and in doing so, established God as the divine patron.<sup>14</sup> Within this understanding of God, the kingdom of heaven, something Jesus widely proclaimed in all four gospels, is now seen as God's patronage. Those that enter into the kingdom, then, enter into the patron-client relationship with the divine patron, God the Father. When Jesus told parables, he opened by saying, "the kingdom of heaven is like . . ." In light of the kingdom as God's patronage, this is understood as "the way God's patronage relates and affects his clients is like . . ."<sup>15</sup> Additionally, as patron over the kingdom of heaven, God is its Lord and Owner, the completely sovereign and authoritative proprietor. This can be particularly seen in the Great Commission, in which Jesus receives all authority in heaven and earth from God to spread the kingdom to all nations (Matt. 28:18–20).

Therefore, as God's clients and recipients of God's grace, the human response is to give honor and worship.<sup>16</sup> Every creature is indebted to God because of the sheer act of creating and sustaining that God continually offers.<sup>17</sup> Those that enter into the kingdom of heaven, then, recognize their debt to God, and in response offer worship and dedicate their lives to that kingdom. As Christians enter

the kingdom, they then become heirs to the kingdom, receiving “adoption as sons,” (Gal. 4:5) and thus are suffused in kinship to God.<sup>18</sup>

While not exclusive to the first gospel, Matthew’s use of the patron-client relationship in characterizing God is substantial.<sup>19</sup> As we have already discussed, a major theme throughout Matthew is the proclamation of the “kingdom of heaven,” which, when understood in light of the patron-client relationship, is referring to “God’s patronage and the clientele bound up in it.”<sup>20</sup> Jesus makes God’s role in this relationship abundantly clear in the Sermon on the Mount. In the Beatitudes, Jesus promises favor towards the lowly that join his reign, for

blessed are the poor in spirit . . . those who mourn . . . those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.<sup>21</sup> (Matt. 5:3–10)

In the Lord’s prayer (Matt. 6:5–13), Jesus petitions, “give us this day our daily bread,” which shows his dependence (i.e., faith) on the heavenly patron. And in Matthew 6:25–26, for example, Jesus encourages his followers not to be anxious but to trust in the divine patron’s provision. In promising to always provide for his clients, God is putting his honor at stake by promising to be faithful.

Outside the Sermon on the Mount, we find other examples of patron-client language used to characterize the kingdom of heaven. For example, in Matthew 11:28–29, Jesus promises,

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest . . . you will find rest for your souls.

The lowly clients, unable to create their own rest, rely on the heavenly patron. Later, in Matthew 19:27–29, Peter asks what their reward will be for leaving all their own. Jesus responds,

Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed

**G**od the patron shares his power through the broker, Jesus, who uses his influence to put his followers in proper relationship to the patron.

me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Because the disciples chose to enter into the patronage of the kingdom of heaven, they will be lifted up.

A final way Matthew makes use of patron characterization for God is through the use of parables, seen particularly in the parable of the talents. In Matthew 25:14–30, Jesus tells of a master going on a journey. He entrusted his money to three of his servants. Two of the servants honor their master by investing the talents and doubling the patron’s investments. The third servant, however, buries the talent he is given, bringing no honor to the master. To each one that showed him honor, the master says,

“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.”

With this statement, the proprietor (God) invites the client (disciples) to enjoy the full benefits of his patronage. However, the master shames the servant that squandered the talent (and in turn insulted the master), casting him into the darkness, and thus making it abundantly clear that those who choose not to enter the patronage of the kingdom of heaven have rejected the benefits of grace.

In this understanding of God as the divine patron, Jesus plays the role of divine broker. Brokers had a special role in the patron-client system. A social broker’s job was to place patrons and clients in touch with one another.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, Jesus

is a broker of the Kingdom of God/heaven, offering to put people in contact with a heavenly patron, who, in turn, is ready to provide first-order resources of a political, religious and economic sort.<sup>23</sup>

Two criteria were used to measure a broker’s success: (1) he had a growing social network in which to connect with patrons; and (2) he used the power from his social network as distributors of top-quality resources.<sup>24</sup> Matthew shows Jesus meeting both of these goals in 4:23–25:

And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.<sup>25</sup>

Jesus meets these two criteria as many followed him, opting into the kingdom (patronage) of heaven as they were blessed through his many healings, exorcisms, and profound teachings.<sup>26</sup> Jesus is viewed as an exceptionally successful broker because he is sought after by so many. Through this perspective, we recognize that God the patron is generous in sharing his power through the broker, or intermediary, Jesus, who in turn uses his social influence to put his followers in proper relationship to the patron.<sup>27</sup>

As we have shown in this section, understanding the patron-client relationship offers a helpful way of viewing God the Father, the kingdom of heaven, and Jesus. God, the heavenly patron, provides grace and protection for those that enter into the patronage (i.e., becoming a disciple of Christ), promising to uphold his end of the covenant. Jesus, the great broker, connects potential clients with God, extending the invitation



to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus' healings prove his authority in offering such extraordinary benefits. As Christians join the patronage of heaven, they are kin-ified with God and treated as sons and daughters of God.

### *Parentage, Patronage and Proprietorship and the Context of the Makua-Metto*

Now we will turn our attention from the Mediterranean world of the New Testament to the Makua-Metto people of Mozambique. While these two expressions of patron-client systems are separated by time and space, in both societies the systems serve to mitigate specific challenges. Malina notes that

patron-client relations are commonly employed to remedy the inadequacies of all institutions, to cushion the vagaries of life for social inferiors,

as seen, for example, in "Third World preindustrial markets" today.<sup>28</sup>

The patron-client system offers benefits to the poor in these societies, but

as a rule... leadership is concerned with plundering rather than developing, and taxation exists for the benefit of elites and not for the common good.<sup>29</sup>

While the patron-client system shapes the national (or macro) story of Mozambique,<sup>30</sup> it also often outlines the micro (the local and personal) dimension of our ministry context as well. Malina notes that,

In ancient societies (as in most traditional societies) institutionalized relationships between persons of unequal status and resources were highly exploitive in nature. They are based on power, applied vertically as force in harsh and impersonal fashion. Superiors sought to maximize their gains without a thought to the gains of those with whom they interacted.<sup>31</sup>

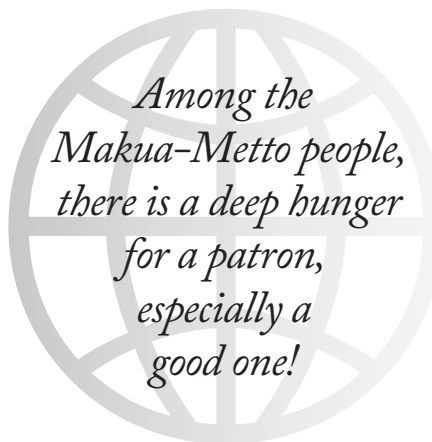
This does not negate the ideal (hope) for this system,

that even though a patron-client relationship connects persons of unequal

status and power, it requires that they treat each other, and especially that the patron treat the client, equitably and with a special concern for each other's welfare.<sup>32</sup>

As we have seen in our ministry among the Makua-Metto people, there is a deep hunger for a patron, especially a good one!

The title of "Patron," (*Patrão* in Portuguese and *Nkunya* in Makua-Metto), is used to respectfully address both human beings and God. An additional, related term and the title most commonly used for God is *Mwaneene* (meaning owner, master, or proprietor). "God as Patron," or the related image of "God as Proprietor," offer a better lens for understanding "God



as Father" in the African folk Islamic Context of the Makua-Metto people for four reasons:

1. "God as Patron and Proprietor" offers a clear call to discipleship. Referring to God as the *Mwaneene* implies God's authority over an area and is useful in noting the kinds of behavior that the Owner will not tolerate (for example, idolatry and injustice). While God is *Nkunya Mwaneene*, the best Patron and Owner possible, Satan and the demonic powers are bad patrons. Witchcraft, drunkenness, and the other powers of this world only oppress and destroy people. As "clients"
2. "God as Patron and Proprietor" provides a contextualized approach to Christology. In the previous section we looked briefly at Jesus' role as Broker in connection to God the Patron. Jesus is our intermediary and the blessing of God flows through him.<sup>33</sup> Through this lens we understand that the incarnation means that Jesus bridges the realms of heaven and earth and uses his power and influence to bless his followers. He is not a corrupt patron or a poor client but is uniquely positioned to remedy our needs and help us respond well to suffering.<sup>34</sup> Using the language of kinification we can take the language of broker one step further in considering a broker who is also the child of the patron. The broker who also happens to be the child of the owner has total authority and "run of the house." This individual has the right to lend or give what he sees fit because he is the owner's child (*Mwana a Mwaneene*).<sup>35</sup> In turn, becoming a follower of Jesus makes us, his disciples, into brokers, and Jesus himself into a patron.<sup>36</sup>

we need to carefully weigh which patron will receive our allegiance and honor and choose to follow that Patron's direction. We must also match our character to the right Patron and follow his desires for those under his authority. We learn to live honorable lives by watching Jesus, who teaches us the Owner's "code of conduct" (in Matthew 6, for example, Jesus teaches about prayer and about how to appropriately make requests of the Patron). While many Makua-Metto people pray at sacred trees or in spirit houses, Jesus, the broker, teaches us about how to make petitions of our God. The Father of Jesus is a good patron and is generous in offering blessings to us.

3. “*God as Patron and Proprietor*” sidesteps the awkward connotations and misperceptions created by the minimized role of fathers in a traditional matrilineal culture. For the Makua-Metto people, the most important man in a person’s life is not one’s biological father, but the mother’s brothers. Uncles, in this context, typically have a more “fatherly” relationship with their nephews and nieces than their actual fathers often have.<sup>37</sup> Early in our ministry our mission team wondered if shifting language in the Lord’s Prayer, for example, from “Heavenly Father” to “Heavenly Uncle” would be necessary; but, in practice, the term for father is often kin-ified to include other people and still used as a term of respect and influence even though it is not selected as primary title in reference to God. For example, people will refer to others who they respect as “father,” but here in this context it may have less positive associations or connotations than it would in other cultures. From anecdotal evidence it appears that Protestant Christians among the Makua-Metto make reference to God as Father almost exclusively in the context of saying the Lord’s Prayer or in derivatives of that prayer.<sup>38</sup> The most common titles for God are those related to Patron and Proprietor and those seem to mostly bypass problems that could arise from referring to God as Father in this matrilineal context.<sup>39</sup>
4. “*God as Patron and Proprietor*” avoids problems with Folk Islam and the challenge of speaking of “*God as Father*.”<sup>40</sup> While Father is a common title in the Christian Scriptures, the Qur’an explicitly states that Allah is not a father.<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, while the famous list of the 99 names for God in Islam unsurprisingly does not include

## The titles for God related to Patron and Proprietor bypass problems that arise from referring to God as Father in this matrilineal context.

the terms “father” or “parent,” the title Patron<sup>42</sup> and the term Owner<sup>43</sup> are included. For those who find it difficult to consider God as Father, we dialogue with them at that early stage in coming to understand God in a new way. We’re able to affirm that God is not one’s literal father or mother and that we’re applying terms and making analogies which will help them understand our relationship to the Divine. Using Patronage (*Nkunya*) and Proprietorship (*Mwaneene*) language allows us to establish that we are applying concepts that can serve as stepping stones to approach the concept of God as Parent, “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 11:31; 1 Peter 1:3; Eph. 1:3) in a way that is potentially more palatable.

While care should be taken to be sensitive to potential colonial and racial connotations of God as *Nkunya* (or variations of this term), interviews with Makua-Metto speakers revealed that pairing *Nkunya* with *Mwaneene* mitigated those associations and focused on the idea of patron not necessarily linked or associated with a white, Portuguese speaking person. Contextualized concepts of patronage and proprietorship provide a helpful lens for understanding and appreciating the parentage of God among the Makua-Metto people.<sup>44</sup> This way of speaking allows us to work around potential barriers related to culture and further interreligious dialogue with Muslims.

### Conclusion

While a Patron-Client system can and should impact the shape of ministry and missiology on a number of levels in those relevant contexts,<sup>45</sup> this

article focused on its implications for theology and Christian-Folk Islamic dialogue. We found that speaking of God as the best possible Patron and Proprietor works well as a way of relating to God as Father in honor-shame shaped cultures, from Matthew’s Gospel in the first century to the modern day Makua-Metto people of Mozambique.<sup>46</sup> As Malina notes:

If the only adequate analogy for describing God in biblical tradition is that of person, obviously God is a central person *par excellence* and can be none other than a social entrepreneur. As creator and covenant God, he clearly controls first-order resources, and hence can be readily understood as Patron.<sup>47</sup>

And becoming clients (children) of this Patron puts us in a position of special blessing and favor.

God not only dispenses general (rather than personal) benefactions like the grant of life to all creatures (Acts 14:17) or gifts of sun and rain (Matt. 5:45), but he becomes a personal patron to [those] who receive his Son. Those believers become a part of God’s own household (see, e.g., Gal. 3:26–4:7; Heb. 3:6; 10:20–21; 1 Jn. 3:1) and enjoy a special access to divine favors.<sup>48</sup>

We are offered the

assurance of welcome into God’s own extended household (thus into a relationship of personal patronage)—even to the point of adoption into God’s family as sons and daughters and to the point of sharing the inheritance of the Son (which is exceptional even in personal patronage). The authors of the New Testament therefore offer attachment to God as personal patron, something that would be considered highly desirable for those in need of the security and protection a great patron would provide.<sup>49</sup>

As followers of Jesus, we also become brokers of God's blessing and call others to enjoy the patronage of God.

From the gift of life and provision of all things needed for the sustaining of life, to the provision for people to exchange enmity with God for a place in God's household and under God's personal patronage, God is the one who supplies our lack, who gives assistance in our need.<sup>50</sup>

That message of hope resonates deeply in African folk Islamic contexts today—a promise of a powerful Patron and Proprietor that cares for and provides for his children. **IJFM**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For more on this topic, see Alan B. Howell and Robert Andrew Montgomery, "Jesus as Mwalimu: Christology and the Gospel of Matthew in an African Folk Islamic Context," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 35, no. 2 (2018): 79–87.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the implications of honor and shame on theology, specifically the doctrine of the atonement, see Alan B. Howell and Logan T. Thompson, "From Mozambique to Millennials: Shame, Frontier Peoples, and the Search for Open Atonement Paths," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 33, no. 4 (2017): 157–165.

<sup>3</sup> David A. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 137.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce J. Malina, *The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 147. For an important survey of the criticisms against Malina's model of honor and shame and a proposal for updating the way we understand its impact, see Zeba Crook, "Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 3 (2009): 591–611. In light of the shift from focusing on the individual to a deeper appreciation of the role of the public court of reputation in honor-shame dynamics, Crook suggests replacing Malina's terms "ascribed honor" and "acquired honor" with new terms: attributed honor (honor given by the public court of reputation at birth based on "family name, ethnicity, and gender") and distributed honor (honor distributed by the public court of reputation "whenever someone outwits another, when a benefaction is made, or after any kind of public challenge and riposte." (593)

<sup>5</sup> Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 147.

<sup>6</sup> David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 121. For a thorough examination of the impact of patronage in the Ancient Mediterranean world, see Zeba A. Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion: Patronage, Loyalty, and Conversion in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean*, trans. from *Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Fur die Neutestamentliche Wissensch*, 130 (Berlin: De Gruyter), 2004.

<sup>7</sup> deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 97. This is why the patron needs the client, for the patron cannot shower himself with the honor that the client is capable of doing. For a discussion of honor-shame cultures, see deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 23–93.

<sup>8</sup> deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 96.

<sup>9</sup> Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 143. While Westerners may be more familiar with a patron-tenant relationship, the fundamental difference between that and a patron-client relationship is that the tenant is under no obligation to honor the patron; the payment is the return of investment. However, the client gives no physical or monetary return to the patron. Instead, he or she offers "payment" in the currency of respect and honor toward the patron.

<sup>10</sup> deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 104. He notes three major definitions for the word "grace" in the first century context: (1) the willingness of a patron to grant some benefit to another person or to a group; (2) the gift itself, that is, the result of the giver's beneficent feelings; (3) the response to a benefactor and his or her gifts, namely, "gratitude."

<sup>11</sup> deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 106. Jesus' statement in the Lord's Prayer suggests this type of response to the grace we receive: "Forgive our debts, as we too have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). This is later reemphasized through the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:21–35. We do not, however, wish to suggest that grace is something that is "earned." Instead of something that is earned, the unearned grace necessitates a certain response (e.g., discipleship). This is the point Dietrich Bonhoeffer makes in *The Cost of Discipleship* when referring to "costly grace" as opposed to "cheap grace." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, translated by R. H. Fuller (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 43–56.

<sup>12</sup> deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 117.

<sup>13</sup> Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 146–147. With this new joining, the two interact on political, economic, and religious levels that would otherwise be impossible for members of different social classes. Further, most relationships between people of different social classes were extremely oppressive, based mostly on power and exploitation. The patron-client relationship, however, connected the two in such a way that required them to treat each other with honor.

<sup>14</sup> Malina suggests the best English translation of πᾶτερ ("pater" meaning "father") is "patron." See Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 147.

<sup>15</sup> Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 147.

<sup>16</sup> One potential problem with this metaphor is the suggestion that God needs our worship, just as the human patrons need their clients' honor. This is not the case, however, for every metaphor describing God eventually breaks down, and God is not like earthly patrons that need anything from his client (creation). Rather, as a maximally great being, God offers us benefaction in the hope that we will respond with faith. For a philosophical discussion on the doctrine of aseity, Jeffrey E. Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, edited by Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 105–128.

<sup>17</sup> deSilva, *Honor Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 129.

<sup>18</sup> deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 207.

<sup>19</sup> deSilva aptly shows that Luke uses this system as well, especially seen through the centurion in Luke 7. See 2000: 123–124. Further, Jerome Neyrey provides a helpful chart that shows the range of benefaction that God offers, including power, commitment, inducement, and influence. See Jerome H. Neyrey, "God, Benefactor and Patron: The Major Cultural Model for Interpreting the Deity in Greco-Roman Antiquity," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27, no. 4 (2005): 491.

<sup>20</sup> Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 147.

<sup>21</sup> Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 147.

<sup>22</sup> Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 151.

One example of this in the United States today is the role of real estate brokers.

<sup>23</sup> Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 152.

<sup>24</sup> Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 153.

<sup>25</sup> Also see Matthew 9:35–37.

<sup>26</sup> Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 153. Further, Jesus' repeated healings throughout



the gospel highlights the validity and efficacy of his care. See, for example Matthew 4:23; 8:1–17, 28–29; 9:1–8, 18–34; 12:9–14; 14:34–36; 15:29–31; 17:14–20; 20:29–34.

<sup>27</sup> Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 155.

<sup>28</sup> Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 145.

<sup>29</sup> Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 171n1.

That is one of the reasons why teaching on servant leadership is so difficult in this context. For more on this topic in Mozambique, see Alan B. Howell, “When Having a Bad Leader is Good: Processing a Negative Experience and Applying Leadership Lessons from the Kings,” *Missio Dei: A Journal of Missional Theology and Practice* 8, no. 2 (2017). For a work on how leadership can be done well in a modern Asian Patron-Client context, see Larry S. Persons, *The Way Thais Lead: Face as Social Capital* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> Merle L. Bowen, *The State Against the Peasantry: Rural Struggles in Colonial and Postcolonial Mozambique* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 147.

<sup>32</sup> Carl H. Landé, “Introduction: The Dyadic Basis of Clientelism,” in *Friends, Followers and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism*, eds. Steffen W. Schmidt et al. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), xiii–xxxvii.

<sup>33</sup> For more on the topic of blessing among the Makua-Metto people, see Alan B. Howell, “Building a Better Bridge: The Quest for Blessing in an African Folk Islamic Context,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 32, no. 1 (2015): 43–51.

<sup>34</sup> For more on the topic of suffering among the Makua-Metto people, see Alan B. Howell, “Turning it Beautiful: Divination, Discernment and a Theology of Suffering,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 29, no. 3 (2012): 129–137.

<sup>35</sup> Colossians 1:16 has been a helpful text for this line of thinking as “all things are made through him and for him.” One helpful parable is of a father and son building a house together, admiring their handiwork and the father handing over the keys to the son. Christians assert that this world belongs to Jesus and it is for him to reign and rule. The Broker becomes the Patron. While other Christological motifs are effective in African contexts (such as Chief, Healer, Ancestor or Liberator), we have argued elsewhere (Howell and Montgomery, “Jesus as Mwalimu,” 79–87) that Jesus as Teacher, or *Mwalimu*, is perhaps the most relevant for the African Folk Islamic

context. That being said, Jesus as Broker can be a potential secondary or tertiary image of Christ, though space will prohibit an adequate exploration of that in this article.

<sup>36</sup> Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 156.

<sup>37</sup> The Makua-Metto are matrilineal and matrilocal but are not structured matriarchally.

<sup>38</sup> While the term for father is used surprisingly sparingly, referencing humans as God’s children happens all the time—another example of kin-ification.

<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, the words for Lord (*Apwiya*) and Queen (*Apwiya Mwene*, literally “Lord King”) are linguistically related. So, in prayer for example, it is common to hear people refer to God as Lord God (*Apwiya Nluku*) which seems to reflect, in some form, the matrilineal culture of the people.

<sup>40</sup> While this article is focusing on folk Muslims in a Patron-Client context, presenting God as Father to Muslims in other socio-economic contexts, even those potentially less influenced by folk elements, is problematic as well. One recent study of Dutch Muslim teenagers discovered that they found the metaphor of God as Father to be unacceptable. See Aletta G. Dorst and Marry-Loise Klop, “Not a Holy Father: Dutch Muslim Teenagers’ Metaphors for Allah,” *Metaphor and the Social World* 7, no.1 (2017), 66–86.

<sup>41</sup> “That they should invoke a son for (Allah) Most Gracious. For it is not consonant with the majesty of (Allah) Most Gracious that He should beget a son. Not one of the beings in the heavens and the earth but must come to (Allah) Most Gracious as a servant” (Surah 19 Maryam (Mary) verse 91–93).

<sup>42</sup> *al-Wali* (#77 Name of Allah), in Surah 13:11 “. . . and there is not for them besides Him any Patron” (Sahih International).

<sup>43</sup> Depending on the translation (#84) in Surah 55:27; 55:78 and (#85) in Surah 3:26.

<sup>44</sup> The flexibility with metaphor and meaning in this folk Islamic context may make them more predisposed than other peoples to accept Patron language as a stepping stone to thinking about God as Father.

<sup>45</sup> For more on the impact of Patron-Client system on ministry see Jayson Georges and Mark Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016). See also Delbert Chinchén, “The Patron-Client System: A Model of Indigenous Discipleship,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (1995): 446–451.

<sup>46</sup> “Christians were not alone in this view of God; the Stoic philosopher

Epictetus also suggested that a person could find no better patron with whom to attach oneself than God—not even Caesar could compare (Diss. 4.1.91–98).” deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 131n22.

<sup>47</sup> Malina, *Social World of Jesus*, 151.

<sup>48</sup> deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 130.

<sup>49</sup> deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 131.

<sup>50</sup> deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 133.

## References

- Bonoeffer, Dietrich  
1995 *The Cost of Discipleship*. Translated by R. H. Fuller. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Bowen, Merle L.  
2000 *The State Against the Peasantry: Rural Struggles in Colonial and Postcolonial Mozambique*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press.
- Brower, Jeffrey E.  
2009 “Simplicity and Aseity.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, edited by Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, 105–128. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chinchén, Delbert  
1995 “The Patron-Client System: A Model of Indigenous Discipleship.” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 31, no. 4: 446–451.
- Crook, Zeba A.  
2004 *Reconceptualising Conversion: Patronage, Loyalty, and Conversion in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean*. Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Fur die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, 130. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- 2009 “Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 3: 591–611.
- deSilva, David A.  
2000 *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.
- 2004 *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.
- Dorst, Aletta G. and Marry-Loise  
2017 “Not a Holy Father: Dutch Muslim Teenagers’ Metaphors for Allah.” *Metaphor and the Social World* 7, no. 1: 66–86.
- Georges, Jayson and Mark Baker  
2016 *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations*



and *Practical Essentials*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

- Howell, Alan B.  
2012 "Turning it Beautiful: Divination, Discernment and a Theology of Suffering." *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 29, no. 3: 129-137.
- 2015 "Building a Better Bridge: The Quest for Blessing in an African Folk Islamic Context." *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 32, no. 1: 43-51.
- 2017 "When Having a Bad Leader is Good: Processing a Negative Experience and Applying Leadership Lessons from the Kings." *Missio Dei: A Journal of Missional Theology and Practice* 8, no. 2.
- Howell, Alan B. and Logan T. Thompson  
2016 "From Mozambique to Millennials: Shame, Frontier Peoples, and the Search for Open Atonement Paths." *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 33, no. 4: 157-165.
- Howell, Alan B. and Robert Andrew Montgomery  
2018 "Jesus as *Mwalimu*: Christology and the Gospel of Matthew in an African Folk Islamic Context." *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 35, no. 2.
- Landé, Carl H.  
1977 "Introduction: The Dyadic Basis of Clientelism." In *Friends, Followers and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism*, edited by Steffen W. Schmidt, James C. Scott, Carl H. Landé, Laura Guasti, xiii-xxxvii. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Malina, Bruce J.  
1996 *The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels*. New York: Routledge.
- Nerey, Jerome H.  
2005 "God, Benefactor and Patron: The Major Cultural Model for Interpreting the Deity in Greco-Roman Antiquity." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27, no. 4: 456-492.
- Persons, Larry S.  
2016 *The Way Thais Lead: Face as Social Capital*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books.



"I am truly thankful for this site and all God has done through it! Without it I never would have met Joseph, and that is truly amazing."  
- Diana

"I opened a CalledTogether account and met my wife there. We got married less than two months ago and are very happy. Thank you!"  
- Foster

"I met someone on CalledTogether that is amazing. Thank you so much for creating the website for people to meet that have a heart for missions."  
- Eduardo

**CalledTogether does not exist by accident.** We launched this strategic initiative in 2014 to unite hearts and callings around the central purpose of extending God's name and glory to the ends of the earth. God has been using families as a strategic force from the beginning, and we believe that passionate, single-minded families will be a powerful force to send out into the world. That is why we launched a completely updated and redesigned site in July 2018. Come and see what God has done already, and be a part of what's next by sharing our story with the singles you know.

[calledtogether.us/testimonials](http://calledtogether.us/testimonials)