

**DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING CENTRE**

**PATRON-CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS  
AND THE CHALLENGE FOR THE THAI CHURCH**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED AS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE MASTER OF CHRISTIAN STUDIES DEGREE  
DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING CENTRE - SINGAPORE**

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**BANGKOK, THAILAND  
APRIL 1997**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Firstly, I would like to express my thanks to Dr. David Harley for his help, support and enthusiastic encouragement throughout the writing of this thesis. My thanks also to the rest of the staff and board at the Discipleship Training Centre. I would like also to thank the Thai students at D.T.C. who helped me in my thinking and understanding of the subject.

Much gratitude also to Dr. Bob and Mrs. Khajohn Batzinger of the Singapore Bible Society whose comments, advice and direction helped me to pursue the writing of this thesis at a time when I felt like discontinuing.

A special thanks to Dr. Mary Cooke, Dr. David Conner, Dr. Ken Webb and Dr. Chaiyun Ukosakul whose suggestions and materials have been most helpful.

I also feel a deep sense of gratitude to my Thai brethren in Bangkok, whose discussions and comments initially aroused my interest in this subject.

I would like to thank my home church, Ivy Cottage Evangelical Church (Manchester, England) for their encouragement and unfailing support throughout this period of study.

Finally, but not least, I would like to thank my family, my wife Flor for her constant love, support and ideas, and my children, Paul and David, for their understanding.

## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the patterns of patron-client relationships in Thai society. Chapter 2 examines the hierarchical nature of Thai society and the individuality of the Thai in general, identifies indebtedness and obligation as characteristics of these relationships, and identifies the expectations and pre-requisites both of patrons and their clients.

Chapters 3 and 4 considers biblical perspectives on relationships and leadership, by an examination of the biblical models of the church as a "family" and a "body", and by a study of outstanding leaders in the Old Testament (Moses and David) and in the New Testament (Jesus and Paul). Characteristics of the biblical pattern include unconditional relationships, mutual submission, mutual dependency and accountability, servant leadership, team work, and transparency.

In chapter 5, the biblical teaching regarding leadership and relationships are applied to the Thai context. The expectations of leaders and members are considered. Strengths and opportunities afforded by the patron client system are contrasted with fundamental objections and potential problems. Recommendations for how the Thai church may work within the patron-client system yet sanctify it and progress towards the biblical pattern are suggested. Through increased faith in God, the indwelling love of Christ and a transformation of thinking by the Holy Spirit, the challenge is for the Thai church to move towards this biblical pattern.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Whenever the gospel enters a culture and a church is planted, the gospel inevitably influences and changes that culture. Likewise, the culture moulds and affects the style of the church that is planted. The effect of culture upon the church can be evidenced in patterns of worship, evangelism, relationships and leadership.

The influence of culture may serve to advance the development of the church in ways that are consistent with biblical principles. Conversely, it may also hinder the church from developing in a biblical fashion.

The preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ by Protestants in Thailand commenced 180 years ago in 1816.<sup>1</sup> The church in Thailand first emerged among the Chinese in 1837<sup>2</sup> and then some years later among the Thai. Today, approximately just one person in six hundred is Christian.<sup>3</sup> Relatively small churches with a typical membership of around 30 to 50 are scattered throughout Thailand. All of these churches are influenced in varying degrees by the Thai culture.

### 1.2 Description of Topic

In the course of my 16 years experience in "church-planting" and "leadership training" in Thailand, I have become increasingly aware of certain cultural elements embedded in the Thai church. My objective in this

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<sup>1</sup> Alex Smith, Siamese Gold (Bangkok: Kanok Bannasan, 1982), xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> The Maitri Chit Church (being the first Protestant Church in Asia); Ibid., 21

<sup>3</sup> Statistics quoted at the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand Annual General Meeting. (Pattaya: Annual General Meeting 1995, March 1996)

dissertation is to explore one of these elements, namely "Patron-Client relationships".

This study deals primarily with the relationship between church leaders and members. It also, however, covers a wider spectrum of relationships within the church, especially where one person exercises influence over another.

### 1.3 Definition of terms

The word "patron" is derived from the Latin word "pater", meaning *father*. Webster's Dictionary defines "patron" as:

1. among the ancient Romans, a master who had freed his slave, and retained some rights over him after his emancipation; also a man of distinction under whose protection another placed himself
2. a person corresponding in some respects to a father; protector; benefactor
3. (a) a person usually a wealthy and influential one, who sponsors and supports some person, activity, etc. (b) a champion; advocate; supporter<sup>4</sup>

Webster's Dictionary also defines "client" as:

- a follower, retainer, one who hears (his patron), from *cluere* to hear oneself called
1. among the ancient Romans, a citizen who placed himself under the protection of a patrician, who was called his patron
  2. a dependent; one under the protection or patronage of another
  3. loosely, a customer<sup>5</sup>

It will be immediately obvious from the above definitions that "patron-client relationships" were an integral part of the life of the Roman Empire<sup>6</sup> and were well known to the New Testament writers<sup>7</sup>. From the author's observations and study of Thai society, "patron-client relationships" are a very strong component in the life of the community. This is of particular importance in a society where minimal government social welfare is available.

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<sup>4</sup> Webster, Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary, unabridged 2nd edition. (1975), s.v. "patron"

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., s.v. "client"

<sup>6</sup> Chapter 5 gives an historical perspective on "Patron-client relationships".

<sup>7</sup> Chapters 3 and 4 gives biblical perspectives on "Patron-client relationships".

Strong, binding relationships are formed which are beneficial to both patron and client. In the context of Thai society, the patron may be anyone from a more senior student (รุ่นพี่), or elder brother/sister พี่ชาย/พี่สาว), to an influential politician or even the King<sup>8</sup>. A patron may generally be anyone who is in a position of seniority to another (pen pu yai<sup>9</sup>) and thereby able (and often expected) to do favours, or use his influence on behalf of his junior (client). In return for the benefits received, the "client" will reciprocate by giving loyalty and service, in whatever way possible, to the "patron". The sophisticated etiquette of titles given to a senior or junior in the Thai language<sup>10</sup> is an indication of the extent to which patron-client relationships are embedded in the Thai mind and society.

Inevitably these same patterns of relating are evidenced within the Thai churches. It is true that strong bonding of relationships should indeed take place within the church. The objective of this paper, however, is to explore how both the positive and negative aspects of patron-client relationships may influence Thai churches, and what Biblical models of relationships are most relevant and applicable for future emphasis and teaching.

## 1.4 Limitations of Study

### 1.4.1 Society

Thailand is divided into several regions<sup>11</sup>. It is also populated by people of many different races<sup>12</sup>, predominantly the Thai and the Thai/Lao.

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<sup>8</sup> Note that traditionally the King is seen as Patron of all Thai citizens.

<sup>9</sup> เป็นผู้ใหญ่

<sup>10</sup> A more detailed explanation is found in Chapter 2.

<sup>11</sup> The largest regions are the Northern, Southern, Central and North-eastern regions.

<sup>12</sup> Such as the Thai, Thai/Lao, Kmer, Malay, Chinese, various tribal groups.

In terms of culture and environment, Thailand has been described as two countries in one, Thailand One (the majority of the country which is rural and traditional), and Thailand Two (predominantly modern, urban Bangkok where values are changing more rapidly).

The traditional Thailand One and modernized Thailand Two exist side by side. Every Thai person, it seems to me, is living at the intersection of Thailand One and Thailand Two. Isn't this a historically pregnant moment? Co-existence of "banana-mango" and "coffee-pizza"! This is the historical context in which many other changes are taking place in the life of the people of Thailand<sup>13</sup>

This study will deal primarily with "patron-client relationships" as relating to the Thai and Thai/Lao people. Despite some differences in values held by rural Thai (Thailand One) and urban Thai (Thailand Two), the concepts of "patron-client relationships" within these two groupings are quite similar. The study is not, therefore, limited to any particular location.

#### **1.4.2 Church denominations**

With respect to "patron-client relationships" within the Thai Churches, I do not presume to have observations and conclusions that will be immediately applicable to all denominations and in all areas. I have endeavoured, however, to seek contributions from church leaders of varying denominational backgrounds. I believe that to some extent the recommendations made for future emphasis and teaching (in chapter five) will be helpful not only to those churches, which I know best, in Bangkok and the Northeast of Thailand, but to Thai churches in general.

While it is not my aim to discuss Chinese churches, it must be noted that in most Thai churches (especially in Bangkok) there is a significant Chinese element. This need not be a problem for our study, since most Thais of Chinese race would in the first instance call themselves Thai, signifying an assimilation of Thai values.

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<sup>13</sup> Kosuke Koyama, Waterbuffalo Theology (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1974), 6.

## **1.5 Structure**

Chapter two describes how "patron-client" relationships are generally evidenced in Thai society (i.e. within the sphere of society described above - 1.4.1). It is argued that the "patron-client" formula is clearly visible in the nuclear family, extended family, the workplace or social circle, and may be said to be one of the basic building blocks of society.

Chapter three gives a biblical perspective on relationships within the church. Particular attention is given to the models of the "family" and the "body". The importance of every individual, intimacy, security, freedom and mutuality are found to be some of the basic characteristics of biblical relationships.

In chapter four the study continues the biblical perspective with an examination of leadership models. The Old Testament examples of Moses and David are considered, followed by the New Testament examples of Jesus and Paul. Common themes are identified such as servant leadership, and faith in God. Other important topics that are discussed include team work, care and provision for others, transparency and authority.

Chapter five explores the effects of "patron-client" relationships within the Thai church. Positive aspects are considered but various questions are raised as to the appropriateness of such relationships. In particular, a question is raised regarding the extent to which such relationships may be justified and utilised for the sake of the growth of the church. A challenge is made to the Thai Church to move towards a biblical pattern of relationships. Recommendations are made that certain aspects of Christian teaching should be emphasised, which will strengthen the development of the church in its growth towards biblical maturity.

## **1.6 Sources**

### **1.6.1 Own observation**

I first came to Thailand in 1980 after two years preparation for overseas missionary work at All Nations Christian College (Hertfordshire, England). Prior to this I was an engineer in a computer company in Manchester. For the past 16 years, my wife (of Filipino nationality) and I have been working in close association with and alongside the leaders of a group of Thai churches both in Bangkok and the N.E. of Thailand. We do not belong to a missionary society but work under the umbrella of the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand<sup>14</sup>. This has meant that we have been integrated closely into a network of relationships with Thai brothers and sisters in Christ, which we have greatly appreciated. Observations of relational dynamics, noted from our own sphere of ministry and contacts, are the primary source of material in this dissertation.

### **1.6.2 Interaction and Interviews**

It has been my privilege to meet and discuss the material of this dissertation with a variety of pastors, students, missionaries and Thai people. Their observations and comments have provided a secondary source of information.

### **1.6.3 Major textbooks**

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<sup>14</sup> (E.F.T.) is a representative body of evangelical Christians; recognised by the Thailand Ministry of Religious Affairs; and a member of the World Evangelical Fellowship.



The subject of "patron-client" relationships in Thai society is quite well documented. Of particular value has been a series of papers compiled by Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute entitled Traditional and Changing Thai World View, Norman Jacob's book entitled Modernization without Development and Dr. Henry Holmes and Suchada Tangtongtavy's book Working With the Thais: a Guide to Managing in Thailand. These were valuable sources of material in the analysis of "Patron Client Relationships in Thai Society" (Chapter 2). Edwin Zehner's two papers regarding the influence of Thai culture on church leadership were also particularly helpful resource materials for "Challenges for the Thai Church" (chapter 5).

### **1.7 Importance of the study**

I have been particularly concerned to investigate what form of leadership will best facilitate the church in Thailand. How may leaders be free to both lead and serve their followers without the burdensome constraints and expectations of being a "benefactor" to them? How may "clients" be true followers of Jesus Christ without an inappropriate sense of indebtedness to their leaders as "patrons"? How may the dynamics of "patron-client" relationships be utilised in the church without compromising scriptural principles?

This study provides a summary of how relationships work in Thailand. The conclusions provide a framework for how the "Patron-client" system may be redeemed or sanctified so as to bring relationships more in line with biblical norms for the church. It is hoped that this study will be valuable to other Christians, both missionaries and Thais alike, who are seeking to build the kingdom of God in Thailand.

### **1.8 Conclusion**

The subject of this dissertation is enormous in scope and in significance. It is also a potentially sensitive subject. It is written with the sincere desire that honest thought and reflection may enable us to glorify God through our relationships in Thailand. It is hoped that others may be stimulated to study and write further on this subject.

## CHAPTER 2

### PATRON-CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS IN THAI SOCIETY

#### 2.1 Introduction

"The Thai social system is hierarchically structured"<sup>1</sup>

"Thailand is a hierarchical society"<sup>2</sup>

These two simple statements provide a major key to understanding Thai behaviour. To understand Patron-Client Relationships in the Thai society, one must first understand its hierarchical character.

From childhood, every Thai is taught to be aware of who are their seniors and who are their juniors.

A significant part of socialisation is oriented toward making the young learn appropriate behavior to deal with it. In particular, they are taught to recognize the difference between high and low status "thi sung thi tam"<sup>3</sup> (literally "high place" and "low place") and the behavior appropriate to each. Those who do not recognize and conform to the norm of behavior of "thi sung thi tam" are frowned upon and disliked in society.<sup>4</sup>

This does not mean that a Thai may not move up or down the social ladder. In the Thai world view, society appears primarily as a hierarchical system with all positions in it fixed and arranged in ranked fashion. However, individuals who occupy these positions are free to move in any direction such as soccer players on the soccer field.<sup>5</sup> It does, however, mean that he should learn,

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<sup>1</sup> Titaya Suwanjata, "Is Thai social system loosely structured ?" Social Science Review, (1976), 171-187

<sup>2</sup> Henry Holmes and Suchada Tangtongtavy, Working with the Thais (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1995), 26.

<sup>3</sup> ที่สูง ที่ต่ำ

<sup>4</sup> Chai Podhisita, "Buddhism and Thai World View," in Traditional and Changing World View (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, 1985), 32.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 44.

and behave appropriately according to his present social position.<sup>6</sup> The expectations of those who are senior and those who are junior are clearly defined:

As for adults, they should act respectably and not play with children so much that children consider them as equals. Those who are getting old should not behave like young people. An older woman who dresses up like a young girl or who has the manners of a young girl is criticized. Also, an older man who acts foolishly like a young man is condemned. Older people should demonstrate that they are worthy of respect.<sup>7</sup>

Most Thais are keenly aware of their position of seniority to some (and the obligations they have towards them) and their position of inferiority to others (again with its own set of obligations). For example, it would be normal when eating out as a group, for the most senior in the group to pay for the bill.

As Henry Holmes points out in his book "Working with the Thais", most Thais are reasonably comfortable with the notion that some individuals in society "deserve" to have power. In fact this ability to accept "Power Difference" has been analysed in the Thai work place by Dr Geert Hofstede (industrial psychologist). "Power Difference" is defined by Hofstede as:

"the extent to which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions and organisations is distributed unequally"<sup>8</sup>

Measuring "Power Difference" in different cultures, Dr Hofstede's survey revealed that Thais of both junior and senior rank (compared to those of 32 other cultures) expect and even prefer there to be greater hierarchical gaps among levels of management.

It will be helpful to investigate the roots of the hierarchical structure of the Thai society.

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<sup>6</sup> A mother, or father or grandparent in Thailand will bless their infant by saying ขอให้เติบโตเป็นนายคน เป็นเจ้านคน (may you grow up to be a leader and a boss)

<sup>7</sup> Navavan Bandhmedha, "Thai Views of Man As a Social Being" in Traditional and Changing World View (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, 1985), 95.

<sup>8</sup> Geert Hofstede, Culture's Consequences (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1984)

In the fifteenth century, King Borommatrailokanat, more simply known as King Trailok, put into legislation ideas that were already strongly in practice: the ranking of all citizens within the kingdom based on numbers. Originally, the ranking of the king's subjects had been based on size of land-thus the name *sakdi na*<sup>9</sup>, or "field power". However, when Trailok enacted his Law of the Civil Hierarchy, he was able to classify and place every individual, irrespective of land holdings, by assigning the person a certain *sakdi na*, a number.<sup>10</sup>

Ordinary peasant freemen were given a *sakdi na* of 25, slaves were ranked 5, craftsmen employed in government service, 50, and petty officials, from 50 to 400. At the *sakdi na* rank of 400 began the bureaucratic nobility, the *khunnang*<sup>11</sup>, whose members ranged from the heads of minor departments at a *na* of 400 to the highest ministers of state, who enjoyed a rank of 10,000. The upper levels of nobility ranked with the junior members of the royal family. and most princes ranked above them, up to the heir-apparent, whose rank was 100,000. In the exhaustive laws of Trailok's reign, which read like a directory of the entire society, every possible position and status is ranked and assigned a designation of *sakdi na*, thus specifying everyone's relative position.<sup>12</sup>

*Sakdi na* was abolished four hundred years later by King Chulalongkorn but the fundamental belief that every person should have a place in a hierarchy, and be to some extent content with it, lives on to this day. As can be seen from the above quote: King Trailok put into legislation ideas that were already strongly in practise. What factors influenced Thai society prior to King Trailok and what is perpetuating this same framework of thinking today?

## 2.2 Buddhism

### 2.2.1 Power Distance

Buddhist thinking, most probably, is the first major contributing factor.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Thai hierarchical view of society is that one's status in the hierarchical system is believed to result from accumulated past karma<sup>13</sup> in the form of bun<sup>14</sup> (merit) and bap<sup>15</sup> (demerit) . The degree of "high-ness"

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<sup>9</sup> ศักดินา

<sup>10</sup> Holmes, Working with the Thais, 27

<sup>11</sup> ขุนนาง

<sup>12</sup> David K.Wyatt, Thailand - A Short History (Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 1982)

<sup>13</sup> กรรม

<sup>14</sup> บุญ

<sup>15</sup> บาป

or "low-ness" of an individual's status is believed to vary according to his store of bun and bap. The more bun, the higher one's status; the less bun (or the more bap), the lower the status. One can see from this the extent to which the Buddhist world view has influenced the Thai view of the social order.<sup>16</sup>

Theravada (or Hinayana<sup>17</sup>) Buddhism is the state religion of Thailand.

The spread of Theravada Buddhism among the Thai people began during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when they migrated from the Chinese south-western province of Yunnan into Thailand, which had already been strongly influenced by Buddhism, first from lower Burma since the time before the seventh century and secondly from conquered northern Thailand by the Burmese Buddhist king Anawrahta in the eleventh century. They adopted it as the state religion of their first kingdom founded in A.D. 1238.<sup>18</sup>

Its belief in endless cycles of birth and rebirth (wian wai dtai gurt<sup>19</sup>) fit well with natural life in Thailand.

Mother nature, the monarchy and Theravada Buddhism are the three basic continuities in the life of the Thai people. The people live in the land of fertile paddy fields (fertile in producing not only rice but also mosquitoes). There are three regular circling seasons: hot, rainy and cool. When you have been through this eighty times you are eighty years old! Thailand's nature is hospitable to the people. There are no typhoons, earthquakes, floods, droughts and bitter cold.<sup>20</sup>

In Buddhist thought, salvation is earned through good works. Good deeds (or merit) from previous lives will determine the state into which one is born. This well explains why the Thais can readily accept "Power Distance".

Most Thais are reasonably comfortable with the notion that some individuals in society "deserve" to have power. As mentioned earlier, many Thais believe that the person with power gained it, at least to some extent, through the accumulation of merit in earlier existences. The society is therefore ranked-a natural order of things. This acceptance of power is easiest for Thai subordinates when the manager (male or female) is already in place, with his or her rank already designated. On the other hand, when a Thai becomes a manager by emerging through the ranks, it is much more difficult for him to assume acceptable or credible power.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Podhisita, "Buddhism and Thai World View", 33.

<sup>17</sup> หินยาน meaning "*the Lesser Vehicle*" - with stress on individual self effort; in contrast to Mahayana (มหายาน) "*the Great Vehicle*" - which believes in a broader basis of emancipation through powers other than one's own self

<sup>18</sup> Shin Hong-Shik, The thought and life of Hinayana Buddhism (Bangkok: Kanok Bannasan, 1990), 29.

<sup>19</sup> เวียน ว้าย ตาย เกิด

<sup>20</sup> Koyama Kosuke, Waterbuffalo Theology (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1974), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Holmes, Working with the Thais, 62.

### 2.2.2 Merit

Traditionally, it appears that more credence has been given to a person's right to seniority because of his/her past (unknown) merit, rather than the visible earning of it through educational qualifications and other accomplishments. Being born into certain prestigious families (having the right surname -*mi nam sagun*<sup>22</sup>) is enough to guarantee prestige and honour. There are some changes, however, particularly in Bangkok, where people are increasingly accepted for positions of authority on the basis of academic and other achievements.

This measure seniority in relation to power, wealth, professional rank, age, merit and birth. Merit is the combination of one's ability, intellectual or spiritual attainment, and accomplishment in various areas of life; it includes one's earned rank and position. Deference is normally given to each of these aspects of seniority. Naturally, if a person possesses many of these qualities, he's reckoned as being very senior indeed.<sup>23</sup>

Karmic thinking has also given the Thai a passive understanding of man's relationship to nature. In contrast to the Christian understanding of man's dominance over nature<sup>24</sup>, the Thais see no real distinction between man and nature.

Anthropologists mostly hold that man's assumptions about nature, the physical world he sees around him, can take many forms. (1) mastery-over-nature, where man is viewed as the master or controller of nature (i.e. a dominant value orientation of the Americans); (2) harmony-with-nature, where man lives in harmony with nature so that even his creations should blend in with the surrounding nature (i.e. dominant value orientation of the Japanese); and, (3) subjugation-to-nature, where man is viewed as the passive victim of forces of nature about which there is nothing he can do, as illustrated by a fatalistic attitude towards illness and death (i.e. a dominant value orientation of the Spanish Americans). The man-nature world view of Thai people is more of the third subjugation-to-nature type. The Thai view of life is frequently influenced by the belief that numerous things or events which happen in their lives are beyond their control. There is nothing they can do about it but accept it. <sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> มีนามสกุล

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>24</sup> Gen 1:28

<sup>25</sup> Suntaree Komin, "The World View Through Thai Value Systems," in Traditional and Changing World View (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, 1985), 174.

This "man and nature" world view is very much influenced by the Buddhist philosophy which views life as part of nature and the universe. He cannot escape from the natural laws which govern the universe.

There is, monk, nothing whatsoever which is permanent, fixed, lasting, not subject to the law of decay (and), forever remaining the same.

There is, monk, no sensation whatsoever..., no perception whatsoever..., mental phenomenon whatsoever..., no consciousness whatsoever which is permanent, fixed, lasting, not subject to the law of decay, (and) forever the same.<sup>26</sup>

The Thai people's acceptance of "Power Distance" and hierarchy may thus be largely accredited to the influence of Buddhist karmic thinking. Each person has his or her predetermined place. One may be able to change the way of things in part but do not hope for too much. As one Thai girl from the N.E. region explained to the writer, when being encouraged to enter further education "I was taught by my parents not to hope for anything... in this way I won't get disappointed".

Is it not a familiar motto among many people in Thailand that a man always gets a bowl of rice whether he works hard or he doesn't (Tham koh cham, mai tham koh cham<sup>27</sup>)? This simple saying would seem to reveal the 'perception' of many people of the 'upper limits' of possibility of occupational improvement in a society such as Thailand.<sup>28</sup>

### 2.2.3 Opportunism

The Buddhist view of man's subjugation to nature, however, also gives rise to "opportunism" rather than "hard-work" as being a root to success.

In general, therefore, to be successful and to "achieve" in Thai society does not depend so much on one's competence as on one's ability to perceive and choose the right means and opportunity that lead to success in the society.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> "Samyutta-kikaya (PTS ed.) 3:147, in H.Wolfgang Schumann, Buddhism, trans. George Feuerstein (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing house, 1974), 43," in Hong-Shik, The thought and life of Hinayana Buddhism, 38.

<sup>27</sup> ทำข้าวชาม ไม่ทำข้าวชาม - literally.... when you work you get a plate of rice... when you do not work... you get a plate of rice.

<sup>28</sup> Boonsanong Punyodyana, Loosely Structured Social System: A Thai View (New Haven: Yale U.S. - E. Asian Studies, 1969), 194.

<sup>29</sup> Komin, "The World View," 179.



Thai society is "relational". The Thais are very much aware that the right relationship, the right connection, or being in the right place at the right time, could be the means of advancing oneself.<sup>30</sup> This gives rise to the careful culturing of relationships<sup>31</sup>. These relationships are discussed further in 2.3.3

## 2.2.4 Individualism

It is interesting to note also that Buddhism has not only influenced the Thai society towards *hierarchy* but also towards *individuality*. The Thai puts the greatest value on his being an *individual*. From a survey of urban Thais<sup>32</sup>, *Independence* was regarded as the most important value held.

Thais are very individualistic. They are perceived as admirably "self-reliant" (Asphorn Meesook, and Bennet, 1973<sup>33</sup>) to the extent of being highly "egoistic" and "irresponsible" (Supatra Suparp, 1975).<sup>34</sup>

"Hai dton pen ti pung kong dton"<sup>35</sup> (i.e. you must depend on yourself) - as emphasised in Theravada Buddhist thinking. The extent to which either hierarchy or independence is worked out in daily life will be discussed later.

## 2.3 Economic Factors

### 2.3.1 Interdependence

The second factor influencing the perpetuation of "Power Distance" is the absence of social welfare and the uneven distribution of wealth in Thai society.

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<sup>30</sup> The converse is also true: breaking a connection or being in the wrong place at the wrong time, may be a reason for one's downfall (hence the Thai traffic police's carefulness about who they give tickets to !)

<sup>31</sup> It should be noted that there is a trend today among young professionals to seek work in an international organisation rather than a more traditional business because they see a greater opportunity to be recognised for their own *competence*, rather than *personal connections* or *seniority*, as in the past

<sup>32</sup> Komin, "The World View," 189.

<sup>33</sup> N.Culture in collision: An experience in Thailand. Paper presented to the 25th anniversary World Mental Health Congress of the World federation for Mental Health, Sydney, Australia, 1973)

<sup>34</sup> Komin, "The World View," 184.

<sup>35</sup> ให้ตนเป็นที่พึ่งของตน

Through economic necessity, the Thai people have to depend upon one another. It is not a question of "learning" dependence. Each Thai born into the world is dependent on others. In turn, others will be dependent on them.

Apart from government schools (to which parents will pay a minimal tuition fee), and government hospitals (which generally work on a "pay as you can afford" basis), there is no government housing, no welfare state, no government support for those out of work, no government old-age pension, no disability allowance, no child benefits etc. etc.

Children are dependent on their parents. Later, parents are dependent on their children. Poorer family members are dependent on richer family members. These are facts of life which one may dislike but eventually must accept.

Since Thai peasants regard children as precious property, having many children is not considered a burden to the family. Like valuable property, the more you have the more you are satisfied.<sup>36</sup>

### **2.3.3 Social Groupings**

As a result, social groupings have emerged where different levels of interdependence are understood and practised. The behaviour of an individual at any particular time will be determined by the social grouping to which he or she is relating.

The Thai peasants view of others in relation to themselves can be divided into 5 categories as follows:

1. Those in the bun khun<sup>37</sup> network. They are treated favorably in every instance.
2. Those in the government circle, especially the high ranking government official chao nai<sup>38</sup>. They are treated with respect, fear, and (or even hatred on some occasions, depending on particular individual performance. Normally Thai peasants avoid contact with government officials.

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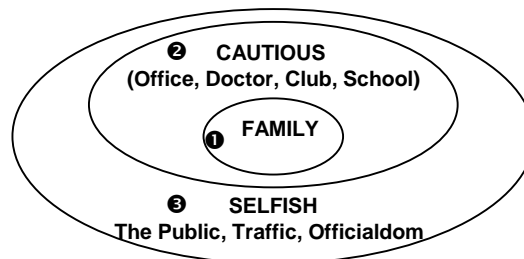
<sup>36</sup> Snit Smuckarn, "Thai Peasant World View," in Traditional and Changing World View (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, 1985), 138.

<sup>37</sup> บุญคุณ see 2.3.3 (Bunkhun) for definition. Here it may be replaced by "family and close circle of co-dependents"

<sup>38</sup> เจ้านาย

3. The merchants who are considered a "necessary evil". Thai peasants do not like them but somehow cannot do without them.
4. Religious leaders. especially Buddhist monks. They are viewed as highly sacred, symbolizing the sacred world and all "goodness" available in the world of man.
5. Strangers. They are to be avoided if possible because of unknown qualities which may be harmful to one's well-being and property.<sup>39</sup>

Dr Henry Holmes suggests there are three social groupings in which the Thais relate. He describes them as 3 concentric circles: The Family Circle, The Cautious Circle and the Selfish Circle.



In the Family Circle, the individual is closely intertwined with the fortunes (and misfortunes) of the other family members. There is a degree of informality and forgiveness when necessary.

The second circle, the Cautious Circle, comprises of those with whom the Thai interacts on a frequent but more "official" basis and with whom it is advantageous to remain on good terms.

Members of your Family Circle may forgive you your transgressions and mistakes. Members of the Cautious Circle may not be so forgiving.<sup>40</sup>

It is in this circle where one will evidence 'proper' Thai behaviour (i.e. of courtesy, caution, deference and friendliness). Each side wants to keep the relationship running smoothly for the good of both parties. This social grouping is of most interest to our study since relationships within the church would generally fall into this category. Most personal friends would also fall into this grouping. Occasionally, however, friends will "take" or "receive" the

<sup>39</sup> Snit Smuckarn, "Thai Peasant World View," 140-141.

<sup>40</sup> Holmes, Working with the Thais, 41.

other as a family member (rap bpen phi bpen nawng<sup>41</sup>) whereby the obligations and privileges of the Family Circle would apply.

The Selfish Circle is the outside world. Here, each person feels anonymous, where nobody will recognise him, where there is no leverage through relationships. Here "independence" comes to the fore most notably.

It is in the Selfish Circle where one's high standing in the community doesn't get any recognition; nobody seems to notice, or care. It is the arena where a foreigner hears street boys call, "Hey you", where she is grossly overcharged, where her place at the movie queue is brusquely usurped, where the government clerk treats her coldly. Here, rather than in other circles, we also see most of the examples of littering, spitting, load talking, bumping into one another, or other "selfish" behaviour.<sup>42</sup>

It is within circle 1 and circle 2 that the Thai receives and gives social welfare. The acceptance and deference towards seniors within one's "Cautious Circle" is an economic and social necessity for "getting on". To have somebody more wealthy or influential within one's "Cautious Circle" is a comforting "insurance policy" in the case of illness, loss of job or other time of special need. Great care must be given to addressing correctly those within this "cautious circle".

Some foreigners have observed that when they join an ongoing conversation among a group of Thais, even though the Thais all speak English fluently, they may continue to speak in Thai in spite of the visitor. To the foreigner this behavior may seem rude, but the reason may be this: When Thais are forced to speak English they are denied the much larger array of suitable pronouns which allow them to express subtle gradations, and hence adequate regard for one another. How can they convey respect to a senior Thai with the very egalitarian pronoun "You"? As one observer expressed it, Thai language serves as the expression of "respect among non-equals".<sup>43</sup>

Calculating the correct use of the first, second and third person pronouns is both a social necessity and a skill. The Thais are constantly aware of the necessity to refer both to themselves and the second or third party in the most "politically correct" way.

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<sup>41</sup> รับเป็นพี่เป็นน้อง

<sup>42</sup> Holmes, Working with the Thais, 43

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 38

In choosing pronouns proper, the speaker must consider both personal characteristics and the relationship between himself and the other party in the conversation. The personal characteristics that primarily determine the choice of pronouns are sex, age and social position. The relationships that determine pronouns are those of social status and intimacy. The relative status of the addressee or referent with respect to the speaker is generally calculated from their comparative possession of socially valued characteristics such as seniority, noble lineage, higher education, a large income and positions of formal authority. Two persons who have the same valued characteristics may be considered equals, but if one has a valued characteristic while another does not, the former is considered superior to the latter. Occasionally, the criteria for status are in conflict. For example, a question arises in determining how a young rich noble should address a poor old farmer. The noble may use a term for inferior /kuhn<sup>44</sup>/ (you) since the farmer is lower in social position, but he may also use the extended kin terms as such as /lung<sup>45</sup>/ (parents elder brother) to show friendly respect to age. In such a case of conflict, if the speaker does not feel free to categorize the addressee by status, he will avoid using pronouns altogether.<sup>46</sup>

Some of the terms for the first person singular are:

*phi, nawng, ajarn, kroo, lung, lahn, paw, luhk, pom, chan, dichan, kapachao, karpra-ong, grapom, row, nu* <sup>47</sup>

Some of the terms for the second person are:

*phi, nawng, tahn, pra-ong, ajarn, kroo, lung, lahn, luhk, kuhn, nu, paw* <sup>48</sup>

Some of the terms for the third person are:

*phi, nawng, tahn, pra-ong, ajarn, kroo, lung, lahn, luhk, kao, paw*<sup>49</sup>

The hierarchical nature of society may be demonstrated by looking at how these terms may (or may not) be used between juniors and seniors (see chart<sup>50</sup>)

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<sup>44</sup> เขา

<sup>45</sup> ลุง

<sup>46</sup> Thai Views of Man as a Social Being *Navavan Bandhmedha* Ph.D (Linguistics) Chulalongkorn University p.87

<sup>47</sup> พี่ น้อง อาจารย์ ครู ลุง หลาน พ่อ ลูก ผม ฉัน ดิฉัน ข้าพเจ้า ข้าพระองค์ กระผม เรา  
หนู

<sup>48</sup> พี่ น้อง ท่าน พระองค์ อาจารย์ ครู ลุง หลาน ลูก คุณ หนู พ่อ

<sup>49</sup> พี่ น้อง ท่าน พระองค์ อาจารย์ ครู ลุง หลาน ลูก เขา พ่อ

<sup>50</sup> Adapted from: Navavan Bandhmedha, "Thai Views of Man As a Social Being," in Traditional and Changing World View (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, 1985), 88, 91.

**SOME EXAMPLES OF PRONOUN USAGE (Chart 1)**

Forms	speaker's characteristics							addressee's characteristics							speaker's relationship to addressee					Notes	
	social position			sex		age		social position			sex		age		status			intimacy			
	royalty	priest	common people	male	female	adult	child	royalty	priest	common people	male	female	adult	child	superior	equal	inferior	intimate	non-intimate		
<b>First Person</b>																					
pom				✓	×	✓	×			✓				✓				×	✓		with king
dichan				×	✓	✓	×			✓				✓				×	✓		
karpraputajoa	✓	×	✓											×			✓				father to child child to father teacher to pupil
nu	×	×	✓			×	✓			✓			✓	×			×				
nawng		×	✓							✓				✓			×			✓	father to child child to father teacher to pupil
phi		×	✓							✓				✓			✓			✓	
paw		×	✓	✓						✓			×	✓			✓			✓	father to child child to father teacher to pupil
luhk		×	✓				✓			✓			✓	×			✓			✓	
ajarn			✓							✓				✓			✓			✓	priest to king
kroo			✓							✓				✓			✓			✓	
attama	×	✓	×	✓	×	✓	×	✓		×				✓			✓			✓	
<b>Second Person</b>																					
khun		✓	✓				×			✓							×			✓	gives deference
tahn			✓							✓			✓				✓			✓	
nu			✓				×			✓				✓			×			✓	for king or God
nawng			✓							✓				✓			×			✓	
phi			✓							✓				×			✓			✓	for king or God
paw			✓							✓	✓	×	✓	×			✓			✓	
luhk			✓							✓				✓			×			✓	for king or God
ajarn			✓							✓				✓			×			✓	
kroo			✓							✓				✓			×			✓	for king or God
mahabopit		✓	×					✓		×				✓			×			✓	
<b>Third Person</b>								referent's characteristics							speaker's relationship to referent						
kow			✓											✓			✓			✓	gives deference
tahn			✓										✓			✓			✓	for king or God	
nawng			✓										✓			✓			✓		for king or God
phi			✓										✓			✓			✓	for king or God	
paw			✓										✓			✓			✓		for king or God
luhk			✓										✓			✓			✓	for king or God	
pra-ong		×	✓						✓		✓			✓			✓				✓
ajarn			✓										✓			✓			✓		

✓ Semantic feature in question is present    × Feature is absent or its opposite is present

Absence of symbol indicates that the feature is irrelevant in the usage of the given form

[First Person (in order): ผม ดิฉัน ข้าพระพุทธเจ้าหนู น้อง พี่ พ่อ ลูก อาจารย์ ครู อุตมา    Second Person: คุณ ท่าน น้อง พี่ พ่อ ลูก อาจารย์ ครู มหาบพิตร Third Person: เขา ท่าน น้อง พี่ พ่อ ลูก พระองค์ อาจารย์]

For instance, in a non-intimate relationship, a junior may call a senior "tahn"<sup>51</sup> (you) . The senior would not call the junior "tahn" but would call him "kuhn"<sup>52</sup>.

On first contact, most Thais will seek to identify their relative position to one another. Once the most appropriate usage of pronoun nouns has been established, the conversation and relationship may continue more confidently.

In all social groups we know of, people seem to need to be able to identify their own status i.e. their vertical position in relation to others. This is certainly so for a Thai. Without this knowledge of who he is in relation to the others, he can't really function with confidence.<sup>53</sup>

Both Buddhism and economic constraints, therefore, lie at the root of the hierarchical structure in Thai society. Let us move on to consider how this hierarchical structure has given rise to "Patron-Client" relationships.

### 2.3.3 Bunkhun

Perhaps the most fundamental value that has merged out of the hierarchical nature of Thai society is the concept of bunkhun<sup>54</sup> (referred to in some quotations as bun khun). A correct understanding of *bunkhun* will lead to a correct understanding of "Patron-Client" relationships.

The term is sometimes referred to as phra khun. There is no English equivalent of this term but it may be described as any good thing, help or favor done by someone which entails gratitude and obligation on the part of the beneficiary. Thus, if my friend helps me to overcome a difficulty whatever it is he is said to be ni bun khun (one who has done favor). I am supposed then to be grateful and to seek an occasion to repay the favor whenever I can. In this way, anybody can be a phu mi bun khun<sup>55</sup> to anybody else. Thus in actual life an individual may owe many people bun khun.

The term khun in this context refers to any good thing, favor or help extended to others. Hence, bun khun is any good thing, favor or help which is meritorious

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51 ท่าน

52 คุณ

53 Holmes, Working with the Thais, 26.

54 บุญคุณ

55 ผู้มีบุญคุณ

(bun<sup>56</sup>) but since it creates a social tie, it also entails some kind of obligation in part of the receiver.<sup>57</sup>

The bun khun system of obligation and the network that develops from it are based on the provision of benefits or favors of any kind by one party to another and the special relationship thus established between the two parties. The relationship is unequal by the fact that the grantor party places the grantee in his debt by his favor while the grantee, by accepting the benefit, contracts the obligation to show gratitude and return the favor at an appropriate time.<sup>58</sup>

Bunkhun, or indebted goodness, is a psychological bond between someone who, out of sheer kindness and sincerity renders another person the needed help and favor, and the latter's remembering of the kindness done and his ever-readiness to reciprocate the kindness.<sup>59</sup>

Personally, I question whether the help or favour rendered is invariably motivated from sincerity and sheer kindness, though this may well be the case in the majority of instances. Whatever the motivation, however, the dynamic of bunkhun is shared between the *giver* and the *receiver*. The giver of bunkhun is seen as having *mettaa karunaa*<sup>60</sup> i.e. mercy and kindness. This quality is particularly applicable to interactions between people of different status levels where the superior, or stronger person behaves benevolently to those below him.

A boss should be forgiving of a subordinate who has made a big mistake. A teacher should be generous with time and effort in order to help his students. A rich person should be generous with tips to servants and donations to beggars.<sup>61</sup>

The receiver of bunkhun will have the feeling of "gratitude and indebtedness".

"One must appreciate those who have done favors for one. A child should feel great gratitude and indebtedness to his or her parents, as should student to teacher, servant to master, or a friend to another friend who has helped him or her."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> บุญ

<sup>57</sup> Chai Podhisita, "Buddhism and Thai World View," 47.

<sup>58</sup> Snit Smuckarn, "Thai Peasant World View," 139.

<sup>59</sup> Suntaree Komin, Psychology of the Thai People, (Bangkok: Research Center, National Institute of Development Administration, 1990), 168.

<sup>60</sup> เมตตากรุณา

<sup>61</sup> Holmes, Working with the Thais, 31.

<sup>62</sup> Juree Vichit-Vadakan, "All Change for Thai Values," A paper presented at a seminar Societies on the Move: Changing Values (Colburi, Thailand: 1990. Reprinted in the Nation, June 21, 1990)



This feeling of "gratitude and indebtedness" is called by the Thais *pen ni bunkhun*<sup>63</sup> . This feeling runs very deep and will normally result in some form of reciprocity, especially in the form of *loyalty*. I would like at this point to mention the practise of "vote-buying" during Government elections as a preliminary example of this unseen bonding. Through my contacts with Thai farmers in the N.E. who have received money from a politician in order to vote for him, I have often been amazed to find that the farmer does indeed vote for that politician, even though their vote was made anonymously. Why does he not "pocket the money" and then vote as he likes? Whether he likes the politician or not, whether he believes in his policies or not, the farmer subconsciously realises his indebtedness (*pen ni bunkhun*) and returns the favour. Having received a favour, he feels he "*must*" return it. Politicians, knowing the psychology of their constituents, are willing to "invest" countless millions of baht in this practise<sup>64</sup>. This example will also serve to illustrate my premise above that not all favours done have pure motives<sup>65</sup>.

Normally, however, the *bunkhun* relationship continues amicably and respectfully between the two parties through continuous cycles of giving, receiving and reciprocating.

For example, a subordinate makes a mistake that negatively affects a customer. The boss covers and protects the subordinate by taking care of the problem. The subordinate, grateful, works extra hard on another difficult project. On the successful completion of the project, the boss praises the subordinate and treats the subordinate and his co-workers to an extravagant dinner. It is possible for this *bunkhun*

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<sup>63</sup> เป็นหนี้บุญคุณ

<sup>64</sup> Note that this practise seems to be mainly perpetuated among the poorer and less educated of the Thai population. Very few cases of "vote-buying" are heard of in Bangkok. This is not to say that the more affluent and higher educated are less affected by the concept of *bunkhun*. It is probably simply because fewer are willing to place themselves into an indebted position by receiving money in return for their vote.

<sup>65</sup> This feeling of "indebtedness" is not limited to Thailand of-course. For instance, some years ago when I was in the Philippines, I listened to a supporter of President Ferdinand Marcos (now deceased) being interviewed on the T.V. The interview was taking place after Marcos had been expelled from the country on charges of corruption. As a receiver of benefits bestowed on him by Marcos, the man being interviewed said that even though he now knows that Marcos is corrupt, he would still be loyal and vote for him.

relationship to continue until the death of one of the parties. It may even extend into the family of the parties involved, sending the relationship on a fruitful and endless continuum.<sup>66</sup>

The Bunkhun relationship starts and is perhaps most strongly felt within the nuclear or extended family.

This bun khun obligatory relationship is especially strong within the family and kin circle where the younger generations are very much obligated by the bun khun rendered by the older generations.<sup>67</sup>

Those who do not take good care of their aged parents are considered ungrateful children and are normally condemned by their other kin and neighbors.<sup>68</sup>

Podhisita describes this as a contractual relationship between parents and children.<sup>69</sup>

No one can ever redeem his debts to his parents who, bad or good, are always sacred to their children. Seniority plays an important role in the Thai kinship system. As a rule, senior members of a family are regarded as "advisors" and "patrons" of the younger relatives who, consequently are expected to show them respect, obedience and gratitude and are expected to provide labor in return when needed. Thus, relationships among kin, especially close kin, is characterised by strong dependency and reciprocity, involving the available resources and skills of each. In return for services rendered or other reciprocal acts, however, it is not necessary to be punctual. Time schedules for obligated service are not fixed precisely among Thai peasants. This can be flexible and it depends very much on specific situations and immediate needs. For example, at harvest time, a family may need help from kin. This need should be responded to promptly by relatives who are not fully occupied by their own urgent work. Again, when a younger brother needs money for some necessary expense such as paying education fees, buying a water buffalo, and so on, his well-to-do brother or sister is expected to give him the money if it appears that their parents cannot do it.<sup>70</sup>

However:

The bun khun relationship is, also strong outside of the kinship circle. Indeed, what Hanks (1975)<sup>71</sup> refers to as "entourage" and "circle" as basic units of Thai social grouping are largely constituted by bun khun relations.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Holmes, *Working with the Thais*, 32.

<sup>67</sup> Chai Podhisita, "Buddhism and Thai World View," 39.

<sup>68</sup> Snit Smuckarn, "Thai Peasant World View," 138.

<sup>69</sup> Chai Podhisita, "Buddhism and Thai World View," 39.

<sup>70</sup> Snit Smuckarn, "Thai Peasant World View," 138-139.

<sup>71</sup> Lucien M. Hanks, "The Thai Social Order as Entourage and Circle." in *Change and Persistence in Thai Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 197.

<sup>72</sup> Chai Podhisita, "Buddhism and Thai World View," 39.

Apart from the "Family Circle" of close kin, the "Cautious Circle" can be understood to be the sphere in which *bun khun* relationships take place.

The bun khun system thus reinforces the particularistic relations predominant in Thai society. Thai peasants therefore behave differently with individuals who are outside the bun khun network. At least, they do not feel any obligation towards them.<sup>73</sup>

The *bun khun* constraint is therefore an explanation for the different style of behaviour the Thai displays within and without his "Cautious Circle" and his "Selfish Circle".

Phillips points out that, because of low expectations about events or people, "most Thai rarely live at, or even reach, a high emotional pitch". (Phillips, 1965, p.60). It might be true in the case of a noncommittal relationship where it is not likely that there will be emotional reaction. However, the Thai can easily be provoked to strong emotional reactions if the self or anybody in the close bun khun relation network like mother or father is insulted. There are countless examples reported in the media of people readily injuring or killing another person because of trivial insults.<sup>74</sup>

Without the bun khun element the "Me"<sup>75</sup> interaction is an 'etiquettical relationship', or a 'transactional relationship', further from the self. It is valued second and is based upon such values as being 'responsive to circumstances and opportunities', 'polite', 'caring, considerate', self-control and tolerance.

Since 'individualism' is the top value ranking, it serves as the basic personal motivation, most readily to be activated for actions. If it is motivated through the "I" and the bun khun relationship, it will be manifested in honest, sincere, stable, reliable, and predictable behaviors. But if this individualism is motivated through the "Me" interaction, the transactional type of relationship, it will activate the value of being responsive to circumstances and opportunities to the full and, consequently, manifest itself in behavior that is perceived and interpreted as 'without discipline', 'irresponsible', 'non-committal', 'unreliable', 'opportunistic', selfish, and unpredictable, and so on. Such behavior is widespread and readily observable in everyday life.<sup>76</sup>

The concept of *bun khun* is not limited to just one strata of society but exists on all levels, and aids society as a whole to flow in a civil and friendly manner. Each Thai, to a greater or lesser extent, is both a "receiver" of

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<sup>73</sup> Snit Smuckarn, "Thai Peasant World View," 140.

<sup>74</sup> Komin, "The World View," 185.

<sup>75</sup> Suntaree Komin explains "*The "I" is the ego-self, the inner private self in which the individual preserves a core of integrity. The "Me" is the social self (society incorporated). The public self functions to serve the expectations of others and is thus more uncreative and more static. In any social interaction, the Thai can readily compartmentalise these two selves and decide whether it is the "I" who is operating or the "Me", depending on the type of relationships involved. The type of relationship is distinguished by the feelings of the interactors. The "I" interaction is a psychological investment relationship - the bun khun or grateful relationship*" (Ibid., 183.)

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 183-184.

bunxhun (from those *above* him) and a "giver" of bunxhun (to those *below* him).

This concept of bunxhun may perhaps be the single most important aspect of social relationships in Thailand.

Bun khun obligation is very important in Thai social life. Indeed, it is next to kinship in importance as a basis of social relationships in Thai society. Those who "recognize the bun khun of others", i.e. do not fail to return the favor, are always praised; those who neglect this obligation are disliked.<sup>77</sup>

"The Thai are brought up to value this process of gratefulness the process of reciprocity of goodness done, and the ever-readiness to reciprocate. Time and distance are not the factors to diminish the bunxhun."<sup>78</sup>

A person who initiates a bun khun relationship by providing a benefit that establishes the debt of gratitude is called *phu mi pra khun*<sup>79</sup>. Beneficiaries of such favors who respond with proper gratitude are called *phu mi khwam katanyu ru khun*<sup>80</sup>. If on the contrary, they do not show gratitude and do not return the favour as they should, they are referred to as *khon nerakhun*<sup>81</sup> and nobody will want to make friends with such people.<sup>82</sup>

As Chai Podhisita points out:

Duties performed by those expected to do so, such as parents and teachers, are considered to be not merely duties but also bun khun. In sociological terms, this may be seen as social obligation, and in this sense, the Thai bun khun is not at all unique. However, there is something more than just an obligation involved here. As noted earlier, the term bun as the Thai understand it also refers to the provision of benefits in a non-religious context. In other words, any good act, religious or not, may be referred to as a kind of bun. Thus, helping others, performing one's duties to the best of one's ability, etc., are all bun. <sup>83</sup>

It is therefore impossible to avoid *bunxhun* relationships, at least to some extent. The result of which is a "binding" effect which limits and constrains individuals to certain patterns of behaviour.

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<sup>77</sup> Chai Podhisita, "Buddhism and Thai World View," 39.

<sup>78</sup> Komin, Psychology of the Thai People, 169.

<sup>79</sup> ผู้มีพระคุณ

<sup>80</sup> ผู้มีความกตัญญูหรือคุณ

<sup>81</sup> คนเนรคุณ

<sup>82</sup> Snit Smuckarn, "Thai Peasant World View," 140.

<sup>83</sup> Chai Podhisita, "Buddhism and Thai World View," 39.

Since the Thai social system is hierarchically structured (Titaya Suvanjata, 1976<sup>84</sup>) implying unequal interpersonal relation given the existence of bunkhun relationships and the formal relationships dominated by status-power, it follows logically that these relationships generate in the receivers of bun khun a sense of dependence and obligation characterised in such personality traits as trust, respect, obedience, non-assertion, self-effacement, submission, conformity, compliance, etc.<sup>85</sup>

If possible, most Thais would seek to avoid bunkhun relationships.

Thai people are cautious about bunkhun relationships and do not, if possible, allow themselves to become involved in them; unless necessary. The reason lies in the belief that "the debt of bunkhun, unlike other debts, is never completely repaid." It appears, then, that while bun khun is highly valued in Thai society, people are wary about it, for once they get into its web, they are supposed to be strongly bound by it.<sup>86</sup>

From the following chart, however, which presents a partial summary of relationships characterised by bunkhun, it will be seen that it is impossible for the Thai to isolate himself from this "web".

<u>Superior Side</u>	-----	<u>Subordinate side</u>
Father & mother	-----	Sons and daughters
Teachers	-----	Disciples, students
Senior relatives	-----	Junior relatives
Patronage friends	-----	Receiving friends
Helping neighbours	-----	Receiving neighbours
Particular individual	-----	Particular individual

By the fact of being born a Thai, a person is already in the bun khun network system. First of all, he is indebted to his parents. later, to his teachers, senior relatives and so on and so forth.<sup>87</sup>

It is also seen to be respectable in Buddhist teaching and thought:

The bun khun relationship in Thai society may be seen as validated by the Buddhist teaching concerning "rare persons" which is familiar to most Thai people. It is expounded in temples as well as in schools. According to this doctrine, rare persons are (1) those who have rendered a favour (pubbkari<sup>88</sup>) , and (2) those who show gratitude and repay the favor done to them (katannu katavedi<sup>89</sup>) Buddhism regards such persons as exemplary individuals whose actions bring harmony and happiness to society.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Titaya Suvanjata, "Is Thai social system loosely structured ?" Social Science Review (1976, 1), 171

<sup>85</sup> Komin, "The World View," 184.

<sup>86</sup> Chai Podhisita, "Buddhism and Thai World View," 39.

<sup>87</sup> Snit Smuckarn, "Thai Peasant World View," 140.

<sup>88</sup> ผู้อุปการี

<sup>89</sup> กตัญญู กตเวที

<sup>90</sup> Chai Podhisita, "Buddhism and Thai World View," 40.

It is also noteworthy that those who begin a *bunkhun* relationship are generally required to continue it. During my first year in Thailand, I considered inviting a Thai to live with me for a period of time until I got married. I was warned by a respected Thai teacher to be careful in extending such favours, since if I ever ceased to do so, the recipient could become angry. To cease providing benefits is generally understood as rejection. Some years ago, when an important businessman died, the Bangkok Post interviewed certain people who had received favours from him. One man related how even though he was no longer employed by the businessman, he continued to receive a New Year financial gift from him. This continued for some years until eventually the businessman stopped giving to him. The man said that initially he was angry. Later, however, he continued to respect him. It would be impossible to understand such a reaction without first an understanding of the strong bond (often of economic security) *bunkhun* generates.

One may wonder why anyone ever commences the cycle of *bunkhun* in the first place? As has already been suggested, the reasons are manifold, some pure, some less pure. In order to succeed, a business man must have loyal workers, a leader must have loyal followers. In order to live, the poorer man must have a welfare network. The "I scratch your back, you scratch my back" mentality and obligation generated by *bunkhun* maintains some form of cohesion in a society where individualism would otherwise reign.

To succeed as a manager in Thailand

1. Earn their friendship in order to get their trust
2. Earn their respect. In order to earn their respect you have to be in a position of seniority or you have to command fear resulting from your power
3. You have to make them owe you something. Always give and make them see that you are always sacrificing and giving.  
(your staff will hereby be fearful of you, but they will also be obligated to you. And then they will do everything for you.)

*by a Thai hotel manager.*<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Holmes, Working with the Thais, 61

Here then, is the underlying psychology of "Patron-Client" relationships in Thai society. The patron is one who gives favours to the client, thus forming a *bun* relationship. The client must then reciprocate this favour.

Chaiyun Ukosakul helpfully points out a certain particularity of the patron-client system in Thailand as opposed to that found in other countries.<sup>92</sup>

The Thai will uphold this material interdependence only as long as it serves to benefit both sides. The Thais believe that the determination of a person's status in the social hierarchical order is dependent upon a composite quality called "merit" (*Bun*)<sup>93</sup> or "virtue" (*Khwaam-dii*)<sup>94</sup>....they can expect such visible evidence of their good *Karma* such as wealth or pleasure. .... This obligation or loyalty<sup>95</sup> will exist as long as there are mutual benefits; as long as the patron is viewed as possessing greater merits. However, if the patron should suffer misfortune, this would indicate that her/his merit is insufficient, or that her/his *Baap*<sup>96</sup> (sin) has now overcome her/his *Bun* (merits). S/he is, therefore, no longer dependable, so her/his client withdraws.<sup>97</sup>

There is a relationship, therefore, between outward prosperity (being a symbol of merit in the Thai world view) and the ability to lead, influence or patronise others.

The above factors have a strong influence on the expectations of the style of leadership exercised in Thailand. The Thai have quite a clear understanding of what they expect from their leaders and from their followers.

## **2.4 Expectations for a Leader**

(or the Client's expectation of his Patron/benefactor/boss) :

### **2.4.1 Authority (Phradet / Amnat / Sitamnat)<sup>98</sup>**

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<sup>92</sup> For instance he mentions Japan as having a stronger and more durable mutual bonding between patron and client. Chaiyun Ukosakul, A turn from the wheel to the cross (Vancouver: Regent College, 1993), 142.

<sup>93</sup> บุญ

<sup>94</sup> ความดี

<sup>95</sup> meaning between patron and client

<sup>96</sup> บาป

<sup>97</sup> Chaiyun Ukosakul, A turn from the wheel to the cross, 142-144.

<sup>98</sup> พระเดช / อำนาจ / สิทธิอำนาจ

The leader holds his (hierarchical) position because of his merit (bun). He should therefore be feared. The leader must command respect. His manner, behaviour, dress (and even his car!) should all reflect his position of authority. It is the boss who should take initiative and come up with the new ideas. It is his job to know what his juniors think rather than the junior's job to initiate saying it. It is his job to see that there is a problem rather than to be told it. He knows all the jobs under him and gives "hands-on" leadership. (These expectations of the leader or boss are quite different from those within a "flat" or "non-hierarchical", "power-distributed" society as in most Western countries).

#### **2.4.2 Benevolence (Phrakhun / Metagaruna)<sup>99</sup>**

The leader (or patron) is expected to be a father-figure (head of family). He is to provide protection, emotional support, favours, cover the mistakes of his subordinates and reward them lavishly. He should help manage their personal affairs from hospital bills to education costs or to funerals. These favours may even extend to other members of his subordinate's family.<sup>100</sup> He should be forgiving, generous with time and effort to help personally coaching his juniors in their work (or in the case of teacher to student). He should be generous. Through these many acts of benevolence, he builds up the *buhnkhun* (or indebtedness) with his workers.

As suggested by Henry Holmes<sup>101</sup>, he is expected to exercise several honoured values: *Kreng Jai*<sup>102</sup> (being considerate), *Hai Kiat*<sup>103</sup> (giving honour),

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<sup>99</sup> พระคุณ / เมตตากรุณา

<sup>100</sup> An acquaintance of mine related how her sister needed to purchase a wig because of a problem with her scalp. She had relayed her sister's need to her own immediate supervisor at work and was glad to receive from her the necessary funds.

<sup>101</sup> Holmes, *Working with the Thais*, 46-55.

<sup>102</sup> ความเกรงใจ

<sup>103</sup> การให้เกียรติ (e.g. by attending their important ceremonies, or asking their advice)



Nam Jai<sup>104</sup> (being good hearted), Hen Jai<sup>105</sup> (empathising), Jing Jai<sup>106</sup> (being sincere), Sam Ruam<sup>107</sup> (not showing too much emotion). Note that many Thai words are combinations of the word "Jai" (heart) giving an indication of how much Thais are concerned with how people feel.

Holmes suggests that the exercise of *phradet* and *prakhun* over a period of time will give rise to the leader possessing *baramee* (baramee is power and strength derived from respect and loyalty)<sup>108</sup>.

## 2.5 Expectations for a follower

(i.e. The leader's expectations of those he is leading; or the patron's expectation of his clients)

By building up *bunkhun* (meritorious acts on their behalf) the leader will expect to be repaid by:

### 2.5.1 Deference (Hi Giat)<sup>109</sup>

The leader expects his subordinates to honour, respect and trust him.

### 2.5.2 Loyalty (Katanyu)<sup>110</sup>

The leader expects his subordinates to support, follow and promote him and his cause. They should be willing to do anything he wants (no questions asked<sup>111</sup>). In cases of ethical decisions, their loyalty to their boss should rise higher than their conscience.

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<sup>104</sup> มีน้ำใจ (e.g. buys food & gives to everyone, invite all staff out)

<sup>105</sup> การเห็นใจ (or to understand - literally to "see into the heart")

<sup>106</sup> ความจริงใจ

<sup>107</sup> สำนวน (e.g. to stay calm, not expressing anger)

<sup>108</sup> Holmes, *Working with the Thais*, 67

<sup>109</sup> ให้เกียรติไว้ใจ นับถือ

<sup>110</sup> จงรักภักดี ซื่อสัตย์ กตัญญู

<sup>111</sup> Grengjai เกรงใจ

Note that the loyalty expected of a "client" is rendered more towards the particular leader than the institution or company as a whole. This will become particularly evident when their leader leaves the company. Sometimes his whole section will leave with him.

If either the client or the patron fails to meet, or moves away, from these expectations, he can expect to be cut off from the bunkhun relationship and relegated to the "selfish circle" where he must fend for himself. Repairing damage to a bunkhun relationship is sometimes next to impossible. He is now outside the "cautious circle" of bunkuhn, probably never to return.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The Thais are basically independent and individualistic. Through the influence of Buddhism and economic necessities, however, the society is hierarchical, giving rise to "dependency" relationships (bunkhun) - which this study calls "Patron-Client" relationships. There are expectations upon both the patron and the client which, if met, will lead to mutual advantage.

Chapter 5 will consider the implications and effects of "Patron-Client" relationships within the Thai Church.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Biblical patterns for Relationships within the Church**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Our purpose in this chapter is to provide a biblical framework for relationships within the church. I shall start by investigating biblical teaching regarding the reason and motivation for making relationships. I shall then consider two models the Bible gives for relationships within the church, namely the "Body" and the "Family". These models provide a framework for understanding the nature and pattern of how relationships among Christians should be expressed.

#### **3.2 Purpose And Motivation In Relationships**

Why do Christians have or seek to form relationships? This is an increasingly important question. Our modern technology has the potential either to lead us into isolation, or to increase our interaction with each other. Church services via cable T.V. or radio, interactive church home pages on the world wide web, may lead us to question the need to relate to each other. The emergence of eMail, however, assists speedy communications, enabling relationships to grow and develop even from a physical distance.

Is our motivation correct in the relationships we seek to develop? Do we have ulterior motives for getting to know certain people, such as a motivation for personal gain or manipulation?

We must first consider the purpose and motivation for relationships from a biblical perspective.

##### **3.2.1 Human beings need companionship**

The first relationship between humans was that between Adam and Eve. God gave Eve to Adam primarily to help and support him.

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."<sup>1</sup>

God saw that Adam's relationship with the animals was not sufficient for him.

The man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.<sup>2</sup>

The word "helper" in Hebrew is *`ezer* {ay'-zer} meaning "a help" or "one who succours"<sup>3</sup> - literally "one who stands alongside". The result of this relationship was that they became "one-flesh" with subsequent procreation and multiplication.

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.<sup>4</sup>

Through this first relationship it is implied, therefore, that man is not designed to exist in isolation. He needs relationships with those of the same "flesh".

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh"<sup>5</sup>

This, I understand, applies not only to the marriage relationship but reflects a basic human need for social companionship and interaction. Humans are so designed that they need companionship and complementarity.

### **3.2.2 Christians are meant to love others**

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."<sup>6</sup>

Jesus teaches that both in our relationship with God, and in our relationship with other people, love is to motivate our actions. The word used in the Greek is "agape", being the quality of love that God Himself demonstrates to

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 2:18.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 2:20.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Brown, S. Driver, and Charles Briggs, Hebrew and Greek Lexicon of the Old Testament, s.v. "*`ezer*."

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 2:24.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 2:23.

<sup>6</sup> Mt. 22:36-40.

us. It is a love that can be "one-way". That is, it gives out and does not require repayment. It continues to give out even if there is no return. It is unselfish and unconditional. The giver of this love may be abused, but the love is not diminished. This love is seen supremely in and through the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Only through the new birth and through the implanting of His nature in us by the Holy Spirit can such love be evidenced in our relationships.

"For Christ's love compels us"<sup>7</sup>

### **3.2.3 Christians are called to reflect Christ's glory in their relationships**

Our relationships using the model of The Body shall be looked at in more depth in 3.3.1. It is important, however, for us to consider this briefly here because it affects our motivation. In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul parallels the relationship between husband and wife to Christ and His church.

For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery -- but I am talking about Christ and the church.<sup>8</sup>

From this passage, it is understood that God's eternal purpose for the redeemed human race is that it should be the body and bride of Jesus Christ. A true recognition of this wonderful truth must radically affect our motivation in forming relationships with each other.

We must see that our brother or sister belongs to Jesus Christ (whoever or whatever standing he or she is). He/she is very valuable property and has great dignity by virtue of whose he/she is. Secondly, he or she is the object of Christ's love. Jesus is preparing him/her to be His spotless bride. We must, therefore, treat him/her with great respect and resolve to build him/her up for the Lord's sake. Thirdly, Christians *together* constitute His

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Cor. 5:14.

<sup>8</sup> Eph. 5:31-32.

bride, His body. We must learn to be at one with others since this is our eternal destiny. We must learn to relate with other members of the body since we're incomplete without them. The "radiant"<sup>9</sup>, corporate, church is meant to be a display of the wisdom of God to the principalities and powers.

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms<sup>10</sup>

For the glory of God himself, and for the sake of Jesus Christ, it therefore behoves us to relate correctly to our fellow believers.

### **3.2.4 Christians are to extend the Kingdom of God through their relationships**

When talking about the cost of discipleship, Jesus said:

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."<sup>11</sup>

Jesus commands His disciples to spread the rule of God on earth. The relationships they form, therefore, should have this God-centred motivation, a desire to spread God's rule in people's lives. They are to transmit Christ and His life to those they disciple. Their motivation is not to increase their rule over lives but Christ's. As with Paul, our aim is to "present everyone perfect in Christ"

We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.<sup>12</sup>

### **3.2.5 Summary**

We see, therefore, that there are several Biblical reasons for forming and developing relationships. These vary from our need as human beings for

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<sup>9</sup> Eph. 5:27.

<sup>10</sup> Eph. 3:10.

<sup>11</sup> Mt. 28:19-20.

<sup>12</sup> Col. 1:28-29.

social interaction and complimentary help, to more spiritual goals such as the desire to display Christ's glory and our responsibility for the extension of God's kingdom. The Bible does not justify, however, the forming of relationships for the purpose of selfish gain or personal promotion.

### **3.3 Models**

The Bible uses many models to describe our standing and relationship to God and to each other. Paul describes the Christians at Corinth as "God's Field"<sup>13</sup>, "God's Building"<sup>14</sup> and "God's Temple"<sup>15</sup>. The writer to the Hebrews describes Christians as "God's House"<sup>16</sup>. We shall consider what are arguably the two most important models in the New Testament, namely the "Body" and the "Family".

#### **3.3.1 The "Body"**

The model of the body is important because it describes how Christians should relate both to each other and to God. Paul uses this model to stress the following points.

##### **3.3.1.1 Christians are Christ's Body**

Christians together constitute the Body of Christ.

"for we are members of his body."<sup>17</sup>

Christians are the physical representation of Jesus Christ on earth.

For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. <sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> 1 Cor. 3:9.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Cor. 3:9.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Cor. 3:16.

<sup>16</sup> Heb. 3:6.

<sup>17</sup> Eph. 5:30.

<sup>18</sup> Eph. 5:23.

It must always be remembered that the source, owner and centre of attention must for ever be Jesus Christ. Paul considers Jesus to be the Head of the body and Christians to be the arms, legs and other members. Just as in a normal body, every member must be vitally connected to the head in order to grow and develop.

Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. <sup>19</sup>

All our actions and relationships, therefore, are to exalt Jesus Christ as the head. No other member of the body is to take this place.

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>20</sup>

This is relevant to the work of making disciples. We must teach people to become disciples of Christ, not of ourselves, since each Christian belongs primarily to Jesus, not to a leader, group or church. They are to be enabled to relate directly with Him, not through another person.

### **3.3.1.2 Importance of every individual**

A significant truth about relationships which is revealed through the model of the body is that every person is important.

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Col. 2:18-19.

<sup>20</sup> Col. 1:18.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Cor. 12:12,15-17,25,26.



Gottfried Osei-Mensah writes:

In the church of Jesus Christ there is no appendix. There is no dispensable organ within the body which may be cut off without any consequences for the rest of the body.<sup>22</sup>

This truth is relevant to our study of "patron-client" relationships. The poor and weak in society may easily be overlooked. They are disqualified as patrons and can offer little as clients.

The truth is that in the body of Christ, every member is significant. In fact Paul indicates that the weaker member may even be afforded greater importance. The equality of every believer is expounded by Paul in Galatians:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.<sup>23</sup>

Slaves are to be given equal status as their masters. James rebuked his readers for distinctions they made between the rich and the poor.

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor.  
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We are, therefore, to accept one another, bestowing honour on each other. Other members are not to be seen as tools for our own benefit. The "stronger" party must not put the "weaker" party on the spot, giving little or no room to manoeuvre or to refuse a request.

The model of the body illustrates the quality of relationships we are to have. "Care" is a fundamental characteristic. We care for one another because each member is essentially valuable.

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<sup>22</sup> Gottfried Osei-Mensah, Wanted: Servant Leaders, (Ghana: Africa Christian Press. 1990), 16.

<sup>23</sup> Gal. 3.28.

<sup>24</sup> Jam. 2.1-6.

So that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.<sup>25</sup>

Just as the physical body cares and gives attention to any member that is suffering, so too in the body of Christ. Benevolence, generosity and charity should be hallmarks of the relationships between believers. Paul further understood that the sufferings he endured in caring for the church, actually were beneficial in the up-building of the body of Christ.

Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps the most striking aspect of our relationships to be observed in the model of the body is that of our dependency on one another. Each member is important and needed by the other.

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.....<sup>27</sup>

Just as the arm is dependent on the hand to carry out its functions, so too is the hand dependent on the arm for its support. One may suppose that the hand is more dependent on the arm than the arm is on the hand. The point here is not the extent of dependency but the need for completeness. As we have seen already, it was not good for the first man, Adam, to be alone. He was incomplete without Eve. We have been created with the need to depend on others. As each person has gifts that vary, we are exhorted both to contribute to, and depend upon, one another.

How does this truth correlate with statements such as:

I can do everything through him who gives me strength.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> 1 Cor. 12:25-27.

<sup>26</sup> Col. 1:24.

<sup>27</sup> Rom. 12:4-6.

<sup>28</sup> Phil. 4.13.

Is our dependency not to be on Christ alone and not on others? In the same epistle, Paul also says in relation to his imprisonment:

for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. <sup>29</sup>

Our dependence is on Christ alone, but we must remember that Christ's body is actually the other Christians, through whom He ministers to us.

Our emphasis should be that each member is a vital part of a living body. The body is a living organism, and each of its members are indispensable within it.

The church of today is failing to fulfil its purpose largely because it has ceased to be an organism. A church in which one person preaches, a few teach, and a few others work in an administrative ministry, but the vast majority simply listen, learn and follow without becoming functioning members of the body, is not an integrated organism.... In the face of the demands of today's society, the survival of the church is dependent upon its being "fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part" to fulfil its purpose in Christ.<sup>30</sup>

The word used in the Greek for body is "soma", meaning a physical body.

Richards and Hoeldtke suggest that:

*Soma* is more than the physical body; it is the person himself.<sup>31</sup>

The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology states:

In Paul *soma* has a specialized meaning in the sense of person..... *soma* is not merely an outer form but the whole person<sup>32</sup>

Richards and Hoeldtke make the point that:

Scripture suggests that because the church is a living organism, the very body of Jesus, it also *functions* as a living organism.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Phil. 1.19.

<sup>30</sup> Jerry Wofford and Kenneth Kilinski, Organization and Leadership in the Local Church, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 134.

<sup>31</sup> Lawrence O. Richards, A Theology of Church Leadership, 31.

<sup>32</sup> NIDNTT, 1:234, s.v. "soma."

<sup>33</sup> Lawrence O. Richards, Clyde Hoeldtke, A Theology of Church Leadership (Michigan: Zondervan, 1980), 32.

It is imperative, therefore, that the each member of the church acts in relationship and harmony with the others, as in our model of the body. Each member must have "living" relationships with the others. Only as this happens in reality will the church be truly built up.

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.<sup>34</sup>

We are part of the same body and mutually dependent. Our actions affect each other either directly or indirectly. We must therefore submit and be accountable to one another. Just as a cancer must be dealt with in the physical body before it infects the whole, so too must the offending member of Christ's body be dealt with.

No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main.... Any man's death diminishes me because I am involved in Mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.<sup>35</sup>

Nowhere is this more true than in the Body of Christ. No-one is to be above the rebuke and discipline of the other members of the body.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.<sup>36</sup>

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.<sup>37</sup>

It is not only younger Christians who are to be held accountable for their actions, however. Even senior leaders are to be rebuked when it is necessary. Paul relates in Galatians 2:11-14 how in Antioch he rebuked Peter for compromising essential aspects of the faith. It may be harder for those who are younger to rebuke older members, but sometimes it is necessary.

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<sup>34</sup> Eph. 4:16.

<sup>35</sup> John Donne, Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, Meditation 17 (1624).

<sup>36</sup> Eph. 5:21.

<sup>37</sup> Heb. 13:17.

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers,<sup>38</sup>

### 3.3.1.3 Unity

The model of the body is a beautiful picture of unity. Normally the members of the body are united as one whole. An amputated arm or leg is a most distasteful sight. Independence, division and disharmony are totally alien to the "body" model of the church.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.<sup>39</sup>

One of the great themes of the New Testament is that through Jesus' death and resurrection, He has torn down the division between Jews, Greeks, slave, free etc.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.<sup>40</sup>

And in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.<sup>41</sup>

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.<sup>42</sup>

Paul's foremost complaint to the church at Corinth was that it was divided into factions.

One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?<sup>43</sup>

Any church whose membership polarises towards one race, or towards just one strata of society, or towards one particular leader, cannot adequately

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<sup>38</sup> 1 Tim. 5:1.

<sup>39</sup> Col. 3:15.

<sup>40</sup> Gal. 3:28.

<sup>41</sup> Eph. 2:16-17.

<sup>42</sup> Eph. 3:6.

<sup>43</sup> 1 Cor. 1:12-13.

express the Body of Christ. For the sake of the glory of Jesus Christ, the church must display a visible unity.

### **3.3.2 The "Family"**

The second model which we consider here is the family. The Bible teaches us the following points about the family which are pertinent to our discussion on Christian relationships.

#### **3.3.2.1 Family of God**

If I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.<sup>44</sup>

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household<sup>45</sup>

The highest privilege of every believer is to belong to God's family. Jesus anticipated that believers would become one family with Him and His Father.

He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."<sup>46</sup>

Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.<sup>47</sup>

Jesus further exhorted his believers

"But you are not to be called `Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth `father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven."<sup>48</sup>

No human leader must take the place of the father in the family. God Himself is our father and we are all brethren. This has considerable bearing on the style of leadership to be exercised within the church.

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<sup>44</sup> 1 Tim. 3:15.

<sup>45</sup> Eph. 2:19.

<sup>46</sup> Mt. 12:48-50.

<sup>47</sup> Heb. 2:11.

<sup>48</sup> Mt. 23:8-9.

Paul talks of being "adopted" into His family as sons.

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."<sup>49</sup>

The true birth-cry of every believer is an exclamation of joy rising from the realisation of his sonship. Being "born-again from above" into God's family, the Christian begins to be transformed into the character of God Himself. In the words of Oswald Chambers "the Christian is one who bears a strong family likeness to Jesus Christ".

### **3.3.2.2 Intimacy**

The family is a beautiful picture of the intimate relationships which can be experienced by believers. No other human institution provides such a context in which rich and poor, masters and servants, young and old, and people of every social standing, may relate intimately together as brothers and sisters.

### **3.3.2.3 Security**

The family should be the place above all others where one feels safe, protected and sheltered.

Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.<sup>50</sup>

Membership of our physical human family is temporary, but membership of the family of God is permanent. All aspects of the physical, mental and spiritual welfare of the members should be catered for. This raises certain important questions such as: how do the responsibilities of the spiritual family differ from that of the earthly family? It is not my objective to answer these questions in this paper, except to observe that the church, as the family of

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<sup>49</sup> Rom. 8:15.

<sup>50</sup> Jn. 8:35.

God, has a "benevolent" responsibility towards its members in proportion to its ability. As far as it is able, the church has a responsibility to provide for the total needs of its members, not just their spiritual needs. Note the references to "family" in the following verses.

If anyone has material possessions and sees his **brother** in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? <sup>51</sup>

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his **household** to give them their food at the proper time? <sup>52</sup>

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the **family** of believers. <sup>53</sup>

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these **brothers** of mine, you did for me.' <sup>54</sup>

There are, of course, boundaries to both corporate and individual responsibility within the family of God. All should carry their own daily burdens but there are larger burdens, beyond the individual's ability to bear alone, which should be shared within the family.

### 3.3.2.4 Freedom

In this context of intimacy and security, as in our nuclear families, each member should be free to express themselves, to make mistakes and to be forgiven. There should be no inhibitions between us despite differences in social rank.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>55</sup>

This is difficult to achieve in a society where respect for one's seniors (pu yai)<sup>56</sup> is very important. Chapter five discusses some of the difficulties faced

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<sup>51</sup> 1 Jn. 3:17.

<sup>52</sup> Mt. 24:45.

<sup>53</sup> Gal. 6:10.

<sup>54</sup> Mt. 25:37-40.

<sup>55</sup> 2 Cor. 3:17.



by both seniors and juniors in exercising their freedom to be the person they are, rather than the person they are expected to be.

### **3.3.2.5 Mutuality**

Members of Christ's family must share the same fate as each other. This has already been seen in connection with the body (if one suffers then all suffer).

It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household! <sup>57</sup>

Here, in particular, we see that we share the same fate as the Lord Jesus Christ. We suffer with Him, but we will also be glorified with Him.

The provision of physical, mental and spiritual security (3.3.2.3) is just a part of the mutual responsibility we bear together.

For it is time for judgement to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? <sup>58</sup>

God will judge His church as one family, not as many separate units under various individual leaders. We have a shared responsibility to use our resources wisely, to uphold God's interests in this world, to maintain unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit -- just as you were called to one hope when you were called - - one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. <sup>59</sup>

## **3.4 Conclusion**

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<sup>57</sup> Mt. 10:25.

<sup>58</sup> 1 Pt. 4:17.

<sup>59</sup> Eph. 4:3-6.

From our observations we can summarise the following emphases concerning Christian relationships. Fundamentally, Christian relationships must stem from a love for Christ and for His glory. As in the human body and the family, relationships should be characterised by unconditional love, care, mutual submission, dependency, and accountability. Every person is important and has a role to play within the living organism under the headship of Christ.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Perspectives On Leadership**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter considers biblical perspectives on leadership. It includes the Old Testament models of Moses and David and the New Testament models of Jesus and Paul. Principles are drawn from their lives and teaching which are relevant to our discussion in chapter five regarding the church in the Thai context.

#### **4.2 Old Testament examples**

There are four main offices of leadership found in the Old Testament. They are Prophets, Priests, Judges, and Kings. It is not my objective to give an exhaustive study of these offices, rather to study two exemplary leaders, namely Moses and David.

##### **4.2.1 Moses**

Moses was a prophet, priest and judge in Israel. As a prophet, he "saw" what God was going to do and spoke out what God wanted to say.

Three key terms are used of the prophet. Ro'eh and hozeh are translated as "seer." The most important term, nabi', is usually translated "prophet." It probably meant "one who is called to speak."<sup>1</sup>

As a priest, he mediated between the people and God.

The Hebrew term for Priest is "kohen" the active participle of the primitive root "kahan", apparently meaning to mediate in religious services.<sup>2</sup>

As a judge he acted as a deliverer.

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<sup>1</sup> Homan's Bible Dictionary for Windows Version 1.0c (Parson's Technology Computer Software, 1994), s.v. "Prophesy, Prophets."

<sup>2</sup> Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of The Old Testament (London: Oxford University Press, 1968),. s.v. "kohen, kahan."

A shophet, or "judge," was a military leader, civil administrator, and decider of cases at law, very likely acting as an appellate court.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4.2.1.1 Dependency on God

Moses was perhaps Israel's greatest leader. God formed this leader over a period of 80 years, giving him the best of education while he was in Egypt, yet removing his own self confidence while he was exiled in Midian.

Moses, however, grew up in the house of Pharaoh and suffered from the pharaonic complex of making people dependent upon his own power and authority. Thus, he had to experience a personal transformation as a leader before he could lead the people into God's way of a more humanized community.<sup>4</sup>

Later, a major characteristics of his leadership was his dependency on God. For instance when God told Moses He would no longer go with them, Moses responded by saying:

If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. <sup>5</sup>

It is clear that Moses saw that he was incapable of leading the people by himself without God's intervention and presence.

Moses also depended on God to keep him in ministry. On various occasions God vindicated Moses' leadership when it was challenged. Moses himself left the vindication to God<sup>6</sup>. It is noteworthy that as a result of the one public occasion when Moses failed to display dependency on God (the striking of the rock at Kadesh<sup>7</sup>), Moses forfeited the privilege of leading the nation into the promised land. Total dependency on God serves to focus people's attention on the Lord Himself as leader of His people rather than on a person.

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<sup>3</sup> Homan's Bible Dictionary, s.v. "Judges, Book of."

<sup>4</sup> G.W. Icenoble, Biblical Foundations for Small group Ministry (Illinois: IVP, 1994), 93.

<sup>5</sup> Ex. 33:15.

<sup>6</sup> For example: Num. 12:1-16 The episode of Miriam and Aaron challenging Moses' authority.

<sup>7</sup> Num. 20:1-13.

#### 4.2.1.2 Servant leadership

Moses also demonstrates servant leadership. It was not by personal choice that he led the Israelites out of Egypt. All ambition had been wiped out of Moses' life through his 40 years tending sheep. God appointed and commanded him to go. He was first and foremost a servant of God. Secondly, he was a servant to the people. In his priestly role, Moses pleaded their cause before God. He selflessly acted on their behalf. For instance, when God suggested He destroy the people and make the nation again from Moses, Moses pleaded on their behalf.<sup>8</sup> Through various crises, Moses sought the people's welfare not his own, often crying to the Lord for their deliverance.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4.2.1.3 Shared ministry and leadership

Moses did not seek to monopolise the priestly ministry nor to magnify his own position. For instance, he desired *all* to come before the Lord and hear God's voice at Sinai.<sup>10</sup> On another occasion a young man told Moses that Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the camp. Joshua told Moses to stop them, but Moses replied:

"Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"<sup>11</sup>

Icenoble suggests that:

Moses, as the primary redemptive leader, had to come to grips with the need to guide the people of God out from under their "Kingly" expectations of leadership and into a new understanding of their "priestly" calling into mutual leadership and ministry.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ex. 32:10-11.

<sup>9</sup> Ex. 8:8-15; Ex. 17:4; Num. 11:2; Num. 12:13.

<sup>10</sup> He knew it was God's intention that the people be a "*Kingdom* of priests, a holy nation". Ex. 19:6.

<sup>11</sup> Num. 11:27-29.

<sup>12</sup> G.W.Icenoble. Biblical Foundations, 93

In Exodus chapter 18 Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, saw that Moses was carrying more burden in leadership than he could carry. Moses graciously listened to Jethro's suggestion to appoint other leaders to help carry the load. It is worth noting the qualities of men to whom Moses was told to delegate leadership in Exodus 18:21.

He had to look for (1) men who feared God, (2) men of truth, (3) men who hated dishonest gain. There is no reference in these qualifications to educational background or any particular skills or talents. These qualities represent men who can be trusted and followed. It is a godly life-style that counts! <sup>13</sup>

Similarly, Moses later delegated the leadership of Israel to Joshua, his servant. Hocking gives the following insights as to the calibre of life God both saw in Joshua and expected him to have.

In Joshua 1 there is a list of qualifications he would need for effective leadership: (1) spiritual strength and courage (Joshua 1:6-9); (2) constant meditation in God's Word (Joshua 1:8); and (3) uncompromising obedience to God's commands (Joshua 1:7-8). God said that if these qualities are in Joshua's life, he can expect prosperity and success.<sup>14</sup>

His godly qualities indicate the kind of person to whom Moses delegated leadership.

In summary, Moses demonstrated total dependency on God, the attitude of a servant and a willingness to share ministry and leadership.

#### **4.2.2 David**

David was the second King in Israel and probably the most loved. Before considering his character and leadership, I would like to point out that it was never God's intention for Israel to have a King.

No immediate successor was appointed to lead the nation of Israel after Joshua's death. One may ask why? Did God intend to emphasise that He Himself is their leader, that indeed they were to be ruled as a *theocracy*? I

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<sup>13</sup> David L.Hocking, Be a Leader People Follow (California: Regal Books, 1979), 12

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

am inclined to believe that this indeed is the case. When Gideon was approached to become a "King-like-figure" over the people and to set up a dynasty he refused. He preferred, rather, to lead them in the more informal position as a "judge" (or deliverer).

But Gideon told them, "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you." <sup>15</sup>

Gideon evidently understood that it was not God's primary desire to give them a King. He knew that such a King may usurp the place of God in the people's thinking. In practise, however, the informal nature of the leadership of "judges" was unable to keep sinful Israel from reverting to idolatry and other forms of apostasy (though other forms of leadership similarly were unable to do so). A cry came from the people for a King to rule over Israel in similar fashion to neighbouring nations. They said to Samuel:

"now appoint a King to lead us, such as all the other nations have." <sup>16</sup>

It is evident that the people wanted both a figure of authority and an institution of authority which would give them the security (leadership and benevolence) they felt they lacked. Samuel was displeased by their request.

But you have now rejected your God, who saves you out of all your calamities and distresses. And you have said, 'No, set a King over us.' So now present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and clans." <sup>17</sup>

"But when you saw that Nahash King of the Ammonites was moving against you, you said to me, 'No, we want a King to rule over us' -- even though the LORD your God was your King. <sup>18</sup>

Back in the Pentateuch, however, God had predicted that the people would in fact finally insist on having a King and had already set out some guidelines.

When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "Let us set a King over us like all the nations around us," be sure to appoint over you the King the LORD your God chooses. He must be

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<sup>15</sup> Judges 8:23.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Sam. 8:5.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Sam. 10:19.

<sup>18</sup> 1 Sam. 12:12.

from among your own brothers. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not a brother Israelite. <sup>19</sup>

God comforted Samuel:

And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their King. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. <sup>20</sup>

God told Samuel to warn the people of how the King would consume their manpower and resources for his own benefit.<sup>21</sup>

On a positive note, however, David became King and was called a "man after God's own heart".<sup>22</sup> David overcame God's "prejudice" against a King and portrayed qualities of character and leadership pleasing to God. I mention just two of his qualities which I believe are most relevant to our study.

#### **4.2.2.1 Faith in God**

David demonstrated great faith and trust in God. From his youth he fought with lions and bears and accredited his deliverance to the Lord. When still only a young man, he displayed more courage than all the soldiers of Israel being confident to fight against the giant of the Philistines, Goliath.

The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."<sup>23</sup>

His faith was especially seen as he trusted in God to give him the crown of Israel. Saul was King but God had rejected him because of his disobedience<sup>24</sup>. David had been anointed by Samuel.<sup>25</sup> Yet it was several years before David actually became King. During that time Saul sought

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<sup>19</sup> Deut. 17:14-15.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Sam. 8:7-8.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Sam. 8:9-18.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22

<sup>23</sup> 1 Samuel 17:37

<sup>24</sup> 1 Sam. 15:23,35; 16:1.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Sam. 16:1.



fervently to kill him. At least twice David had opportunity to kill Saul but did not dare lay his hand on the Lord's anointed.<sup>26</sup> Rather, he left it to God to work out the means whereby his enemy could be defeated and he himself become King. He did not scheme and manipulate his own way to being King but trusted God to work out His plan for his future in His way.

#### **4.2.2.2 Care and provision**

David modelled how a King should behave as a "patron" to his people. He fulfilled the expectations they had of him as their leader. He was expected to lead them into battle and secure victory. He was expected to provide for them.<sup>27</sup> He was expected to provide them with security. In one instance, when David and his followers were coming back from battle, they found their homes wrecked and the wives and children taken captive. David's people were so angry they were going to stone him !! Only when he led the men to retrieve their property was his credibility restored and enhanced.<sup>28</sup> He was expected, as King, to "judge" or mediate in their disputes. He was available for the commoner to bring their request. It was through this very issue that Absalom, David's son, sought opportunity to usurp authority from the King by intercepting "would be clients" at the gate of the city<sup>29</sup>.

It is interesting to note that similar expectations of "hands-on" leadership, provision and security are expected of leaders in the Thai context. As a King, David fulfilled these expectations. In fact it was a common expectation that the King would serve His people and their interests and thereby please them. For example, when Rehoboam took over the throne

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<sup>26</sup> e.g. 1 Sam. 24:21-22.

<sup>27</sup> 1 Sam. 21:3-6.

<sup>28</sup> 1 Sam. 30.

<sup>29</sup> 2 Sam. 15:1-6.

from Solomon (David's son), the recommendation of Rehoboam's older advisors was:

"If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants."<sup>30</sup>

This advise, describing the complementary benefits and return of favours, is very similar to "bunkuhn" relationships as described in Chapter 2. It was set in the context of the possibility of a tyrannical successor to Solomon. Rehoboam rejected their advise and lost most of his Kingdom.

David also showed many other fine qualities among which was his musical ability expressed through his deep worship of God, as reflected in many of the psalms. He knew how to form deep, open and trusting relationships, such as his relationship with Jonathan<sup>31</sup>. He accepted and humbled himself when he was shown to have sinned, as in the incident of his adulterous affair with Bathsheba, showing genuine repentance<sup>32</sup>. In these and other ways, David showed himself to be indeed a "man after God's own heart".

### **4.3 New Testament examples**

We consider here the examples of the two major figures of the New Testament, Jesus and Paul.

#### **4.3.1 Jesus**

In considering Jesus as a leader, we must remember that He is also Lord and Master. He can claim far greater rights over his followers than any ordinary human leader. In some respects, therefore, His leadership is a

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<sup>30</sup> 1 Kings 12:7.

<sup>31</sup> On Jonathan's death, David said: "I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women" 2 Sam. 1:26.

<sup>32</sup> 2 Sam. 12:1-13.

"special case" rather than an "example". Yet, in the light of His position, His example of *servant leadership* becomes even more significant, both as an example and as a precedent for us to follow.

I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet.....  
I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. <sup>33</sup>

#### **4.3.1.1 Servant leadership**

Jesus primarily entered the human race in order to serve:

just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." <sup>34</sup>

This is in stark contrast to the general direction of service in the world and in the patrimonial system. As we have seen, the patron is expected to be benevolent, granting favours and "serving" the client. However, this is generally in terms of using his power or influence on behalf of the client. It would be most confusing to the client if the patron was to literally wash their feet (as it was confusing to the disciples). It is normally expected that the "client" will do the menial work and so serve the patron.<sup>35</sup>

In relationship to the Church, as His bride, Paul says:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>36</sup>

Jesus came to win His bride, and He did so through serving and personal sacrifice. His motivation was pure "agape" love, a love that demands nothing in return. He is *not* our servant, and we should not treat Him as though He were. Even so, He does serve us because of the abundant love He has for us.

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<sup>33</sup> Jn. 13:14-15.

<sup>34</sup> Mt. 20:28.

<sup>35</sup> Refer to Chapter 5 for further discussion of this point (5.4.4.1 Equality of all believers)

<sup>36</sup> Eph. 5:25.

He demonstrated His servanthood through His involvement with those He met. He was not aloof but was involved with each person that came to Him, from the rich and influential to the social outcast such as the leper or the prostitute. He served each one by identifying and providing for their real need.

However, Jesus did not always meet the expectations of those close to him. For instance when his friend Lazarus was sick, he waited another two days where he was before going to see the family, in which time Lazarus had died.<sup>37</sup> Jesus was constantly aware that his whole life was to be under the control of His Father, whether it be His actions or His time:

Therefore Jesus told them, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right."<sup>38</sup>

Not only did Jesus demonstrate servant leadership, but He also taught his disciples that this was to be their style of leadership too. James and John's striving for "position" provoked the following teaching from Jesus:

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave -- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."<sup>39</sup>

Richards and Hoeldtke, commenting on this passage say:

The passage attacks many of our ingrained presumptions about leadership..... The passage states it clearly: the ruler is "over" those he leads. But the servant is among." We cannot be servant-leaders if our position or role or our own attitude tends to lift us above others and makes a distinction between us and the rest of the people of God.<sup>40</sup>

There are boundaries or limits, however, to the extent to which a leader may be required to serve or act in a benevolent manner. It is important to

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<sup>37</sup> Jn. 11:6.

<sup>38</sup> Jn. 7:6.

<sup>39</sup> Mt. 20:25-28.

<sup>40</sup> Lawrence O. Richards, Clyde Hoeldtke, A Theology of Church Leadership, 106

note this since the patrimonial context can be very demanding on the patron.

The New Testament teaches:

For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have. <sup>41</sup>

Just as the leader must not be overbearing to those being led, so too, those led should not be overbearing to the leader. The leader must be free to give and act as the Holy Spirit leads him and not be enslaved to the high expectations of others.

He should not be viewed as the source or provider of material benefits for the group. Indeed, when Jesus fed the five thousand he rebuked the crowd for following Him for the sake of the food. When the people expected Him to be like Moses who fed the people for forty years in the wilderness He corrected them saying it was not Moses who fed them but God Himself.<sup>42</sup>

#### **4.3.1.2 Good shepherd**

Jesus is the "Good Shepherd"<sup>43</sup>. This indicates his care, knowledge, provision and compassion for those in His care.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." <sup>44</sup>

His love for those in His care extends to personal sacrifice. In 4.3.2.1 we shall see that Paul also had the same quality of love:

So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well.<sup>45</sup>

Jesus contrasts his care for the sheep to that of the hired servant:

The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. <sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> 2 Cor. 8:12.

<sup>42</sup> Jn. 6:25-32.

<sup>43</sup> Jn. 10:1ff.

<sup>44</sup> Jn. 10:11.

<sup>45</sup> 2 Cor. 12:15.

<sup>46</sup> Jn. 10:12-13.

Jesus demonstrated a genuine care for the sheep which was void of ulterior motives or promotion of His own interests.

#### **4.3.1.3 Authority**

Jesus taught the crowds and his disciples "as one who had authority". This was in contrast to the "debating" and "disputing" of the teachers of the law.<sup>47</sup> Jesus *knew* His Father, He *knew* who had sent Him. He lived by the authority invested in Him by the Father. He fully understood matters of life and was able to draw others to listen to Him. It was not his oratory that attracted, but His authority. Indeed many listened and did not understand what He said.<sup>48</sup> He said that He deliberately cloaked His teaching in parables so that the average person could *not* understand.<sup>49</sup> Jesus hid the content and source of His authority from the casual listener. Only those who were hungry to understand the truth, really embraced His teaching and became one with Him. He did not seek to appeal to the masses. He was not seeking a great following. He was seeking those who would truly repent and open their lives to truth. To such people, He gave everything. To the sceptical or undecided, however, He hid Himself. In some respects, therefore, Jesus remained "distant", only allowing a few to really know Him.

Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. <sup>50</sup>

Although Jesus had all authority, Jesus style was not authoritarian. He never commanded or even persuaded men and women to follow Him. After the feeding of the five thousand and His discourse on the "bread of life" and the need to "eat His flesh and drink His blood", many turned away from Him.

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<sup>47</sup> Mk. 1:22; Mt. 7:29.

<sup>48</sup> Jn. 13:28; Mk. 6:52.

<sup>49</sup> Lk. 8:10.

<sup>50</sup> Jn. 2:23-24.

It seemed possible that even his closest disciples would also turn away. Jesus made no appeal, but simply asked:

Will ye also go away? <sup>51</sup>

Here we see God's "authority" in its purest form. Jesus had no need to resort to human methods to manipulate his followers. He could fully trust His Father to "keep" those He wanted. The seal of His authority was sufficient to keep the true disciples with Him. Peter said:

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." <sup>52</sup>

Authority, its limits, correct uses and abuses will be discussed further under Paul (4.3.2.3)

#### **4.3.1.4 Courage**

Jesus' leadership style is marked by courage. When the crowds were gathered in the temple, Jesus did not hesitate to express His anger publicly at the money changers who defiled God's house.<sup>53</sup> When invited to a meal, He did not hesitate to rebuke his host for inviting only the influential<sup>54</sup>. Jesus spoke out against the influential rulers of His day, not compromising His message to keep in favour<sup>55</sup>. Supremely, Jesus displayed courage in laying down His life, His work, as He went to the cross. He entrusted everything to God believing that God would raise it up again<sup>56</sup>.

#### **4.3.1.5 Mercy**

Jesus' life and ministry was characterised by acts of mercy.

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<sup>51</sup> Jn. 6:67 (A.V.).

<sup>52</sup> Jn. 6:68.

<sup>53</sup> Jn. 2:15.

<sup>54</sup> Lk. 14:12.

<sup>55</sup> Mt. 23:29.

<sup>56</sup> Acts 2:26-28.

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. <sup>57</sup>

Jesus used his power, for instance in healing the sick, not to "show off" or to attract attention to Himself, but because he had compassion and mercy on the sick person. He had the means to help, and He used His means. It is true that some of His miracles became signs, pointing to who He is. The fact that they subsequently became signs could, however, be incidental to Jesus' major motivation in healing.

#### **4.3.1.6 Graciousness and gentleness**

John says at the beginning of his gospel:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. <sup>58</sup>

Jesus was full of Grace and Truth. Nowhere do these two great qualities come together more completely than in the Lord Jesus. It is important for us to remember this, since generally speaking Western culture has developed *truth* but sometimes at the expense of grace. Eastern cultures have developed *grace* (and graciousness) but sometimes at the expense of truth. Both are present to the full in Jesus. He consistently demonstrated grace and gentleness with those He met. Despite His awesome holiness, the worst of sinners knew they were accepted and felt comfortable with Him<sup>59</sup>. Children always had access to Him (despite His disciples' endeavours to turn them away)<sup>60</sup>.

#### **4.3.1.7 Truthfulness**

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<sup>57</sup> Acts 10:38.

<sup>58</sup> Jn. 1:14 (and also see verse 17).

<sup>59</sup> Lk. 7:37-39.

<sup>60</sup> Mt. 19:13-14.



As we have seen, Jesus was not only full of Grace but also full of Truth. Seventy-eight times in the gospels, Jesus says "I tell you the truth". He did not shrink from telling the truth even when it might cost him a follower.<sup>61</sup> He exposed error and confronted it with truth, for example when Peter tried to persuade him not to go to the cross.<sup>62</sup>

Jesus gives us an example, therefore, of building relationships based on truth. He was not devious in His ways, but was transparent, walking in the light.

#### **4.3.1.8 Identification**

Jesus is the eternal Word of God, yet He was born fully as a man<sup>63</sup>. He was born a Jew at a time when the Jews were despised and lived under Roman occupation. He grew up in a poor family and identified with Jewish customs and culture. He fully identified with those among whom He ministered. He ate the same food and spoke the same language. He demonstrates a leadership that fully identifies with those He leads. We are called to same *Incarnation* principles.

#### **4.3.1.9 Uninhibited by tradition**

Although Jesus fully identified Himself with the Jewish people, He was not afraid to break customs when necessary. For instance, in John 5:1-15 Jesus did a remarkable thing. He healed a man who had been crippled for thirty-eight years by the pool of Bethesda. When the religious leaders heard about the healing, one might have thought they would have rejoiced with the man who had been healed. On the contrary, they sought occasion against Jesus because He had healed on the Sabbath. Many other examples could

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<sup>61</sup> e.g. the rich young ruler (Lk. 18:18-22).

<sup>62</sup> "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mt. 16:23).

<sup>63</sup> Jn. 1.

be given to demonstrate how Jesus broke the traditions of the day, whether they were laws concerning food, laws concerning ceremonial washings, or Sabbath laws.

Jesus had a "back to basics" leadership style. He knew God's laws were meant to help, not hinder, people in living fulfilled lives. So He put the emphasis where it belonged - on compassion, love, faithfulness to others and to God - not on outward behaviour.<sup>64</sup>

Jesus also broke the expectations even of His own family. When they came to see Him, He may have seemed impolite in His insistence that those who listen to His words are His true family.<sup>65</sup>

Jesus did not compromise in relationships, therefore, when customs hindered the truth He was seeking to demonstrate.

#### **4.3.1.10 Forgiveness**

Grace, again, is evident in Jesus' relationships through His forgiveness. He taught Peter to forgive seventy times seven times.<sup>66</sup> His demonstrated benevolence by forgiving the woman caught in adultery.<sup>67</sup> His was a compassionate leadership, not a harsh one. Even on the cross, he asks His Father to forgive those who crucified Him:

"for they do not know what they are doing."<sup>68</sup>

He did not use this as an occasion to put down his "enemies" in order to further promote Himself in the eyes of his followers. Rather, His desire is to bring all to the Father. In terms of "patronage", Jesus will actually present all ultimately to the Father.

Then the end will come, when he hands over the Kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Michael Youssef, The Leadership Style of Jesus (Illinois: Victor Books, 1986), 61.

<sup>65</sup> Lk. 8:21.

<sup>66</sup> Mt. 18:21-22.

<sup>67</sup> Jn. 8:3-11.

<sup>68</sup> Lk. 23:34.

#### 4.3.1.11 Provision

Finally, Jesus provided for those who followed Him. Often through miraculous ways (such as the turning the water to wine<sup>70</sup>, the five loaves and two fish<sup>71</sup>, tax payment in the mouth of a fish<sup>72</sup>), He demonstrated that He is indeed "Jehovah Jirah".<sup>73</sup> Jesus' entourage at times was quite considerable, and it was expected that He would provide or make provision for the daily living expenses. He had, in fact, delegated the area of finances and looking after the funds to Judas of all people.<sup>74</sup>

A valid question is: "Is it permissible for men and women to follow Christ's example in this respect? Should leaders today provide for the necessities of their followers?" It was certainly true that the Apostles carried on this duty within Jerusalem. They collected and redistributed whatever the Christians gave them<sup>75</sup>. They particularly distributed and cared for the widows.<sup>76</sup>

The answer to both of the above questions must be a resounding *yes*. We must qualify the answer, however, since it must be stressed that no particular leader constitutes Christ in His totality. It is more helpful to insist that the **whole** leadership of a church should make provision for its members. Again, this statement must be qualified. "Should make provision for" means, "should make sure the members are provided for in one way or another". Context and culture will be a major factor in determining how much a leader group will need to give attention to the material welfare of its members. In a

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<sup>69</sup> 1 Cor. 15:24.

<sup>70</sup> Jn. 2.

<sup>71</sup> Mt. 14:17-20.

<sup>72</sup> Mt. 17:27.

<sup>73</sup> Literally: "Jehovah sees". The symbolic name given by Abraham to Mount Moriah in commemoration of the interposition of the angel of Jehovah who prevented the sacrifice of Isaac and provided a substitute (Gen. 22:14).

<sup>74</sup> Jn. 12:6.

<sup>75</sup> Acts 4:34-35.

<sup>76</sup> Acts 6:1.

society with a developed social welfare system, it is probable that most of the members are already provided for in one way or another. In a rural Thai village, however, the need to address material needs is acute. Failure to do so would render the church irrelevant to the felt needs of the members.

#### 4.3.2 Paul

Paul is of particular significance to us since he says himself that

But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience **as an example for those who would believe** on him and receive eternal life.<sup>77</sup>

Paul also tells his readers to follow his example in three other passages.<sup>78</sup> Paul is set forward, therefore as an example. We will look particularly at the example he sets in his leadership.

##### 4.3.2.1 He was genuinely concerned for his followers

To the believers in Corinth, Paul said that he would gladly spend everything on them, even his own self.<sup>79</sup> Again, to the Thessalonian church, he told them how he compared himself to a mother caring for her children. He told them that because of his love for them he was willing to not only share with them the gospel but also his whole life.<sup>80</sup> His love and concern for his followers is clearly seen in the following passage:

I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as **my dear children**. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus **I became your father** through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, **my son** whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> 1 Tim. 1:16.

<sup>78</sup> 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:7.

<sup>79</sup> 2 Cor. 12:15.

<sup>80</sup> 1 Thess. 2:7-8.

<sup>81</sup> 1 Cor 4:14-18.

The familial terms he uses above to describe his relationship with those he led, clearly demonstrate the close relationship he developed with those he led. His was not a "remote" leadership, but one which was deeply involved.

On more than one occasion, he wrote something similar to the following:

But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. <sup>82</sup>

#### 4.3.2.2 He pointed people to Christ

Paul was very clear in his objectives for those he led.

We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so **that we may present everyone perfect in Christ**. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. <sup>83</sup>

He wrote in a similar manner to the Corinthian church, saying that his purpose was to present them as a pure virgin **to Christ**.<sup>84</sup> It *is* true, however, that Paul had personal reasons for desiring a strong spiritual state for his believers. He said to the Thessalonian church that his object in glorying before the Lord at His return would infact be the Thessalonian Christians themselves.<sup>85</sup> This only goes to demonstrate, however, how Christ centred he was. He did all for Christ's approval. He lived with a constant mindset that Christ will come and judge each man's work.

Paul did not, therefore, make disciples of himself, but of Jesus Christ. He taught new Christians how to respond to the Holy Spirit,<sup>86</sup> and emphasised the fact that the believer belongs to Christ, not to men.<sup>87</sup>

#### 4.3.2.3 He trained a few in depth

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<sup>82</sup> 1 Thess. 3:6-7.

<sup>83</sup> Col. 1:28-29.

<sup>84</sup> 2 Cor. 11:2.

<sup>85</sup> 1 Thess. 2:19.

<sup>86</sup> Gal. 3:3.

<sup>87</sup> 1 Cor.3:4-23

Paul selected some to travel with him. These he trained and sent to minister in various places. His selection of who he chose to train may have stemmed from his own personal preferences. He does also seem to have had his favourites. It is likely, however, that these preferences arose because of the individual's commitment to Christ.

I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.<sup>88</sup>

It also seems clear that Paul maintained his leadership over those he trained. He continued to give them directives concerning where they should go, what to bring with them when they come to him<sup>89</sup> and how they should minister. These men were very special, however, to Paul. He did not just use them as tools for the furtherance of his own work. He dearly missed them when they were away from him.<sup>90</sup>

Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said good-by to them and went on to Macedonia. <sup>91</sup>

#### **4.3.3.4 He promoted plurality of leadership**

As we have seen above (4.3.3.3), Paul worked together with others (such as Barnabus, Silas, Timothy, Titus, Luke etc.). Not only did Paul work within a team himself, however, but he also established "group" leadership over the churches he planted. Paul's method of church planting in a particular place appears to be firstly initial evangelism and teaching, secondly to move on to a new area and thirdly to return to the place and appoint elders, or delegate another of his team to make the appointment. Paul writes to Titus:

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<sup>88</sup> Phil. 2:20-21.

<sup>89</sup> see 2 Tim. 4:13.

<sup>90</sup> see 2 Cor. 7:6.

<sup>91</sup> 2 Cor. 2:12-13.

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.<sup>92</sup>

Elders were responsible for leading the local church. The word in Greek is "presbuteros":

comparative of presbus (elderly): a term of rank or office among the Christians, those who presided over the assemblies (or churches) The NT uses the term bishop, elders, and presbyters interchangeably<sup>93</sup>

Within any particular church, every reference to elders is in the plural:

Although "bishop" usually occurs in the singular form, none of these passages indicate that there was only one elder in each congregation.<sup>94</sup>

It is understood, therefore, that the leaders of churches always functioned as a team. There is no evidence to support the idea of a "one-man" leadership, or a single pastor leading a church. This is particularly important in our study of "patron/client relationships" since, in society as a whole, very rarely can two patrons work together.

In his writings, Paul also *taught* that plurality of leadership is the norm for the Christian church. For instance to the church at Ephesus he taught:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers<sup>95</sup>

Paul taught that the purpose for these ministries is:

to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up<sup>96</sup>

Several people, therefore, are ministering to the church at the same time. Paul's teaching lays emphasis on the need for each person to recognise their own limitations and their need to depend upon others. No-one has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit. No-one has all the gifts required for leadership in the body of Christ. No-one has the time to do all the functions required of

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<sup>92</sup> Titus 1:5.

<sup>93</sup> Francis Brown, A Hebrew and English Lexicon, s.v. "presbuteros."

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Eph. 4:11.

<sup>96</sup> Eph. 4:12.

the leaders within the church. As several leaders use their gifts and train others in the use of them, so the body will multiply and grow.

#### **4.3.3.5 He made provision for his team**

It is often overlooked that Paul not only provided for his own needs through his tentmaking but also the needs of his team members.

You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."<sup>97</sup>

Paul was perhaps following the pattern already laid by the Jewish Rabbis of his day<sup>98</sup>, yet as an apostle, he did have the right to expect his financial needs to be met in other ways. He determined, however, to forego that right choosing rather to set an example of giving and service to the believers. In Corinthians, he says that "it was in order to make the gospel free of charge".<sup>99</sup> No doubt the other team members helped in the making of tents, yet nevertheless, it was Paul who established a means by which they could all be supported. Either he saw this as part of his responsibility as a leader, or else it was inevitable that Paul would pave the way in this respect being the most dynamic of the team. In this sense, Paul displayed "patron" characteristics. It must be remembered, however, that Paul did not guarantee an easy life for his team. For instance, on many occasions their accommodation was the local prison<sup>100</sup>. They were subject to shipwrecks, beatings and many other discomforts. Paul did not shield his team from any of them. It was perhaps for this reason that John Mark turned back from him in Pamphylia.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Acts 20:34-35.

<sup>98</sup> In which case a principle of continuity may be observed here.

<sup>99</sup> 1 Cor. 9:18.

<sup>100</sup> e.g. Acts 16:23.

<sup>101</sup> Acts 15:37.



#### **4.3.3.6 He did not seek personal gain**

Paul went to great pains to demonstrate pure motives in his service and leadership. He did not seek exalted position. He did not seek material riches. In Philippians 4:12 he says:

"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."

There is no record of him being accused of accumulating wealth or of seeking power. In fact he was often despised for his weakness in speech and his appearance<sup>102</sup>. Nevertheless, God honoured Paul and put him forward as an example. It is certainly not true in the case of Paul, that God's sign of blessing on his servants is to make them rich. Paul said that he was:

"sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything."<sup>103</sup>

#### **4.3.3.7 He did not exalt himself**

Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ. Positionally, he was one of the foremost leaders in the church of his time. Yet the following is a description he gives of himself to the Corinthian Christians:

It seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.<sup>104</sup>

This description is a very different picture to the image a leader or patron would naturally adopt or portray of himself today. It is a picture of sacrifice, service, disadvantage, vulnerability and humility.

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<sup>102</sup> 2 Cor. 10:10; 2 Cor. 11:6; Gal. 4:13.

<sup>103</sup> 2 Cor. 6:10.

<sup>104</sup> 1 Cor. 4:9-13.

#### **4.3.3.8 He acknowledged his own weaknesses**

Instead of seeking to raise his credibility among his followers by boasting of his own importance or spirituality, Paul actually does the reverse by acknowledging his own sinfulness. In the beginning of his ministry, Paul described himself:

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>105</sup>

Later he said:

Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.<sup>106</sup>

Later still, when he was near to death, he said:

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners -- of whom I am the worst.<sup>107</sup>

#### **4.3.3.9 He made use of position, people, and opportunities**

Paul did not seem to be averse to using position, relationships and opportunities, to further his cause. For instance, he made use of the fact that he was a Roman citizen by birth<sup>108</sup>, despite the fact that he said in Philippians that he counted it as nothing<sup>109</sup>.

Paul worked within the patrimonial system prevalent in the Roman Empire concerning master and slaves. Paul used his own position as a respected leader, for instance, in his letter to Philemon. He wrote on behalf of Onesimus appealing for grace and mercy. Could it be that Paul was making his request as a "return of favour" for previous help given?

Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul -- an old man and now

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<sup>105</sup> 1 Cor. 15:9

<sup>106</sup> Eph. 3:8

<sup>107</sup> 1 Tim. 1:15

<sup>108</sup> Acts 22:25.

<sup>109</sup> Phil. 3:4-8.

also a prisoner of Christ Jesus -- I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. <sup>110</sup>

Paul further says:

So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back -- not to mention that you owe me your very self. I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. <sup>111</sup>

It does appear that Paul saw himself "in credit" with regards to Philemon, so that he could say "charge it to me".

In Corinth, the ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, provided Paul with an open door for effective ministry. Paul made use of this opportunity.

Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.<sup>112</sup>

Douglas J. Moo has an interesting insight concerning Phoebe who Paul commends to the church at Rome as being a deacon in a house church near Corinth.

Perhaps Phoebe's secular status had something to do with her appointment to this ministry, for Paul calls her in v 2b a *prostatis*, a word that often denoted wealthy people who became 'patrons' and sponsors of people and movements (NIV paraphrases this with she has been a great help).<sup>113</sup>

Thayer gives the following possible meanings for the Greek word *prostatis*:

- 1) a woman set over others
- 2) a female guardian, protectress, patroness, caring for the affairs of others and aiding them with her resources<sup>114</sup>

It is refreshing to see how Christians were using their influence and position for good within a society where traditionally patrons were more interested in helping themselves rather than others.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Philemon 8-10.

<sup>111</sup> Philemon 17-20.

<sup>112</sup> Acts 18:7-8.

<sup>113</sup> IVP New Bible Commentary (Oxford: Lion Computer Software Publishing, 1996), s.v. "Romans 16:1-16," by Douglas J. Moo.

<sup>114</sup> Joseph Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Delaware: Marshallton, 1888), s.v. "prostatis."

The ability to make use of one's *position* and *relationships* is an important quality in "Relational societies" where "who a person is" and "who a person knows" is very consequential. Paul appears to have worked within the "relational" and "patrimonial" structure of the first century, especially with those outside the faith. Within the church, however, he sought to redeem this value system, teaching the believers the mind of Christ concerning position and relationships. This discussion will be continued in Chapter Five with relevance to the Thai context.

#### **4.3.2.10 He used his authority correctly**

Finally, Paul sets an example of how to use authority in a biblical manner. "Authority" has been identified as one of the two most important expectations for a leader in the Thai context.<sup>116</sup> It is necessary, therefore, to deal with this aspect of Paul's example and teaching in some detail.

Jesus Christ appointed Paul and gave him authority, as an apostle, to take the gospel to the gentile world.<sup>117</sup> I would like to observe three main points regarding Paul's use of authority.

#### **He used his authority to build up, not to dominate**

Firstly, Paul understood that his authority as an apostle was given in order to build others up, not in order to dominate them. He wrote to the Christians in Corinth:

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<sup>115</sup> Bruce Winter makes the following statement regarding Corinthian society in the first century. "The much-admired civic and personal benefactions and the patronage system of secular Corinth did not have the primary aim of meeting the needs of others; personal advancement came first, and any benefits to others were merely secondary. The radical Christian ethic is spelled out in terms of the good of others and never personal advancement." IVP New Bible Commentary (Oxford: Lion Computer Software Publishing 1996), s.v. "1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1," by Bruce Winter.

<sup>116</sup> Please refer to 2.4.2 (Expectations for a leader), also 5.2.3.1 (Church member's expectations of their leaders).

<sup>117</sup> Acts 13:47; 22:21; 26:16; Rom. 15:16.

For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it.<sup>118</sup>

What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?<sup>119</sup>

Although Paul clearly possessed authority, he sought to avoid being authoritarian. Rather, he consistently used his authority in a positive manner to encourage, convince and exhort others. His method was to "appeal" to his hearers rather than to "command" them.<sup>120</sup> Paul not only practised this positive use of authority himself, but he also taught others to do the same. He exhorted Titus as follows:

Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.<sup>121</sup>

All Christians have a measure of authority according to God's purpose for them. Leaders, by virtue of their appointed office (e.g. apostle, elder, pastor) have additional authority in proportion to their office. They have the right to represent the source of power within the sphere God has appointed for them to influence. It is the Holy Spirit within them who *is* the power of God<sup>122</sup> and it is in this power that they must minister. Leaders must be sure, therefore, that the authority they exert is truly consistent with the name of God, remembering that their authority was given by Him.<sup>123</sup> As His ambassadors, Christians and leaders alike should, therefore, exhibit the authority they have received in a manner consistent with God's nature. Any demonstration of power must be generated by the Holy Spirit and under His

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<sup>118</sup> 2 Cor. 10:8.

<sup>119</sup> 1 Cor. 4:21.

<sup>120</sup> Please also refer to: 1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 5:20; 10:1; 13:11; 1 Thess. 2:3; Philemon 8-9.

<sup>121</sup> Titus 2:15.

<sup>122</sup> Acts 1:8; Rom. 15:19; 2 Tim. 1:7. It should be noted, however, that not only leaders but *all* Christians have the Holy Spirit living within them.

<sup>123</sup> Rom. 13:1. Paul teaches: "For there is no authority except that which God has established."

control. Love, patience, gentleness and self control<sup>124</sup> should, therefore, be hallmarks of the Christian's authority. Authoritarianism is clearly excluded.

John White in his excellent book on church discipline, warns of the dangers of the misuse of authority when dealing with an offending member:

The Inquisition, like the Holocaust, could be perpetrated by most of us under appropriate conditions. Leon Jaworski (Chief Prosecutor, Nazi War Crimes Trials and Watergate) describes in detail the brutal murder of eight U.S. airmen during World War 2. Taken captive after being shot down, the men were on their way to a POW camp; when their train was stopped at Russelsheim, a small town in the state of Hesse. The railway line ahead was being repaired.

A crowd gathered to look at the Americans. Hostile murmurs began. Then as murmurs became shouts and as shouts rose to a crescendo, the men were dragged from the train to be stoned, kicked and battered. A couple of citizens approached the Protestant pastor and the Catholic priest, begging them to intervene. Neither complied.

In a brief space of time two or three unrecognisable, bloody corpses lay on the ground beside the train, while the rest lay at different points along the streets of the town. Even in death they were not left alone, the battering continuing until intestines and inner organs lay exposed to view. What amazed Jaworski was that the perpetrators of the crime were normal, kindly people.

Having made every allowance for the abominable crimes, Jaworski concludes, "As I thought of Joseph Hartgen, the two sisters and the other 'good-hearted' people of Russelsheim, I realised that none of us know what we are capable of doing until we reach such a point. As we cannot envision the heights we can reach by placing ourselves in the hands of God, neither can we imagine the depths to which we can sink without him " And tragically, many of us think we are acting in his name, when the psychological factors playing upon us are precisely those that affected the people of Russelsheim.<sup>125</sup>

From the above, it can be seen that other psychological influences apart from the leading and direction of the Holy Spirit may at any time be influencing our actions. This may be especially so when one is in a position of advantage, or authority, over another. It, therefore, especially behoves leaders, who are in a position to influence and even discipline others, to be sure that they are indeed acting under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

John White further warns:

Terms like covering and umbrella are often used in teaching a form of authoritarianism which has the appearance of godliness, but which is not biblical and which fosters infantilism rather than freedom and growth amongst church members.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> being fruits of the Spirit. Gal. 5:22-23.

<sup>125</sup> John White, and Ken Blue. Healing The Wounded (Illinois: I.V.P.1985), 50.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 75.

Chua Wee Hian in his book "Learning to Lead" also warns against "authoritarianism" amongst leaders:

The problem with authoritarian leaders is that they tend to overstep the mark. They use Scripture or church authority to bolster their own position and pronouncements. They often control and subjugate their members. The latter are forbidden to make important individual decisions without reference to them. Watchman Nee, the founder of the indigenous local church movement in China, taught that whenever Christians disagree with their leaders they *ipso facto* disagree with God<sup>127</sup>. Such teaching breeds fear and a sense of over dependence on leaders.<sup>128</sup>

John Stott further says:

The authority by which the Christian leader leads is not power but love, not force but example, not coercion but reasoned persuasion. Leaders have power, but power is safe only in the hands of those who humble themselves to serve.<sup>129</sup>

Finally, Meno Simons, one of the founders of the Mennonite Church, said:

"Spiritual authority is *never* to make the rebel conform but to enable the obedient person to lead a holy life. Therefore our weapons are prayer, counsel, scripture and power of a holy life."

These quotations all warn of the dangers of leaders overstepping the mark in their use of authority. Leaders, therefore, need to be humble and subject to the Holy Spirit in order to safeguard themselves from some of these abuses.

### **He stayed within the limits God assigned him**

Secondly, Paul understood the principle that "power belongs to God"<sup>130</sup> and that he had been given authority to use that power within a defined limit. His understanding of his need to stay within the boundary God set him is expressed when he tells the Corinthians:

We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> J.Barrs, Freedom and Discipleship (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1983), 45.

<sup>128</sup> Chua Wee Hian, Learning To Lead (Leicester: I.V.P., 1987), 103.

<sup>129</sup> John Stott, Issues Facing Christians Today (Basingstoke: Marshalls, 1984), 335.

<sup>130</sup> Ps. 62:11.

<sup>131</sup> 2 Cor. 10:13.

Paul recognised that his area of influence over the churches was limited to God's purpose for him, no more and no less. In another instance, Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach in the province of Asia.<sup>132</sup>

Christian leaders must be careful not to allow ambition to drive them beyond the boundary God has assigned to them. The only Biblical ambition permissible is that one may be pleasing to God. Desire for higher position and authority for one's own sake is nowhere condoned in the New Testament. Any "authority" would cease to be God's if it was not within God's ordination. If the angels can be taken as a precedent, it appears that by misuse of authority, one may actually move out of the place of the true authority which God gives.

And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home -- these he has kept in darkness<sup>133</sup>

Instead of seeking a larger following for themselves, therefore, leaders need to remain humble and allow God to extend their authority and influence over others as He sees fit.<sup>134</sup>

### **He remained submissive to others**

Thirdly, Paul also understood that although he had authority as an apostle, he still had to submit to other Christians. For instance, he consulted with other Christian leaders in order to verify his message before starting his preaching ministry. This was in spite of the fact that he believed he had received his gospel directly from the Lord Himself.<sup>135</sup> In Acts 15, Paul consulted with other Christian leaders in Jerusalem concerning circumcision

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<sup>132</sup> Acts 16:6.

<sup>133</sup> Jude 6.

<sup>134</sup> 1 Pet. 5:6.

<sup>135</sup> Gal. 1:11-18; 2:1-6.



for the gentiles and then followed their decision. Paul also regularly reported back to his sending church in Antioch, and gave an account of his work.

Paul not only submitted to others himself but he exhorted all Christians to "submit to one another".<sup>136</sup> It must be remembered, therefore, that although leaders have authority over their members, they are not a "law unto themselves". As we have seen from the model of the "body", each member is affected by the other. The leaders must recognise their accountability to the rest of the body. This tends to go "against the grain" in a patrimonial context and therefore must be emphasised. The errant leader is as subject to the correction and discipline of the local church as is the ordinary member.

Biblical authority, therefore, is not "aloofness". Rather it goes hand in hand with humility, vulnerability and transparency. Paul said to the Corinthian Christians:

I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.<sup>137</sup>  
If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.<sup>138</sup>

The leader who is secure in God and is not after personal ambition, does not need to project an image of superiority or any other image than he truly is.<sup>139</sup>

In summary, authority, as modelled by Paul, is not domineering but encourages and builds up. It stems from a godly life, genuine submission to the Holy Spirit, and a willingness to submit to others. Authority of this fashion is one of the principal needs of the church today. Oswald Sanders said:

The overriding need of the church, if it is to discharge its obligation to the rising generation, is for a leadership that is authoritative, spiritual and sacrificial. Authoritative, because people love to be led by one who knows where he is going and who inspires confidence.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Eph. 5:21.

<sup>137</sup> 1 Cor. 2:3.

<sup>138</sup> 2 Cor. 11:30.

<sup>139</sup> This is further discussed in Chapter 5 (5.4.5.2 Image of leaders) and relates to the "I and me" concept of 2.3.3.

<sup>140</sup> Oswald Sanders, Spiritual Leadership (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1967), 16.

Concerning the way to gain such authority, Samuel Logan Brengle said:

It is not won by promotion but by many prayers and tears. It is attained by confession of sins, and much heart searching and humbling before God by self-surrender, a courageous sacrifice of every idol, a bold deathless uncompromising and uncomplaining embracing of the cross, and by an eternal, unfaltering looking unto Jesus crucified. It is not gained by seeking great things for ourselves, but rather like Paul, by counting those things that are gain to us as loss for Christ.<sup>141</sup>

The Christian church needs godly and gifted leaders who will inspire with their vision. Those like Paul, who, in a spirit of humility, will correctly use their authority to lead and build up the church within the sphere God has set them.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

Leaders should work together in a team and should be characterised by a genuine concern for those who they lead. They should have the attitude of a servant, pointing people continually to Christ, and being careful to stay within the bounds of God's authority. They are to be both gracious and truthful. They are to identify with those they lead, admit their own weaknesses, forgive mistakes, and together make provision for the welfare of their followers. It is permissible to work within and conform to the social structures in society as a whole. When necessary, however, there should be boldness to break with customs which are contrary to biblical principles.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 18.

## CHAPTER 5

### Challenges for the Thai Church

#### 5.1 Introduction

As has been already stated in the introduction to this dissertation (chapter 1), whenever the gospel enters a culture and a church is planted, the gospel inevitably influences and changes that culture. Likewise, the culture moulds and affects the style of the church that is planted. The extent to which the gospel is integrated and the culture and cultural values are continued or discontinued is extremely complex and controversial. The following statement by Edwin Zehner, however is invariably true:

One of the persistent themes of the literature on conversion, syncretism, and the like is that the discontinuity with the old is seldom complete and the integration of the new is less than thorough.<sup>1</sup>

John Davis states that:

In fact all expressions of Christianity are in some way culture-bound and therefore by definition syncretistic to some degree. The key is to discern between "legitimate, critically-determined syncretism", and "uncritical syncretism".<sup>2</sup>

It is necessary that the church in any particular culture takes on indigenous *forms* distinctive to that culture. These *forms* may be the style of worship, types and methods of propagation, dress, etc. The *principles* operating behind the *forms*, however, must be biblical for the *forms* to be a true Christian expression. For example, the worship in a rural Thai church, may take the form of sitting on the floor with shoes removed, singing hymns written by the Thai, in the Thai language and set to Thai music. Readings from the Bible in Thai may be done responsively. The preaching may be done from a sitting position using a style of teaching appropriate for the Thai,

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<sup>1</sup> Edwin Zehner, Merit, Man and Ministry, (Draft of a paper later published in *Social Compass* 38 (2): 155-175, 1991, 1988), 3.

<sup>2</sup> John Davis. Poles Apart? (Bangkok: Kanok Bannasan, 1993), 141.

and so on. All these *forms* may vary from place to place. The *principles, reasoning and motivation* behind these acts, however, must be uniformly biblical and may differ from those prevalent in the culture. The worship is an expression of love and devotion towards God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The singing is motivated by a desire to praise and worship God. The teaching or preaching is directed at building up the Christians in their faith in God on the foundation of the Bible. The giving is done as an act of honour to God for the purpose of extending His Kingdom.

Care must be taken, therefore, to implement conformity in the following two areas. Firstly, the *forms and outward style* of Christianity as seen in a local church should be conformed (or adapted) to suit the local culture. Secondly, the culture must be conformed in order that the *principles, reasoning and motivation* behind actions of Christians become biblical. It is possible to fail in both of these areas. Western *forms* and outward expressions of the church are often propagated in the east, making churches in the east look western. In a tribal area, for instance, the Christians may sit in pews and sing hymns written by John Wesley (albeit translated into their own language). In such a case, the *forms* have undergone very little conformity in order to adapt Christianity to the culture. More importantly, there has often been a further failure to recognise when the *principles, reasoning and motivation* from which the Christians are operating are still essentially non-Christian. For example, the practice of giving money to the church (which should be an act of worship with no expectation of merit) may actually be organised (or thought of) as a meritorious act. In this case there has been a failure to conform the culture of the people to the Christian norm. Even if conformity to *form* has indeed taken place but without an endeavour to also adjust culture to fit biblical principles in terms of *motivation* then the Christian faith has only a shallow root within the society.

Our area for consideration is that of relationships and in particular patron-client relationships. As we have seen in Chapter 2, patron-client style of relationships are ingrained within the Thai culture. How should the church respond? To what extent are they a *form* to which the church should conform culturally in order to be truly indigenised? On the other hand, to what extent are the *principles, reasoning and motivation* behind these relationships essentially non-biblical and therefore needing to be changed to be conformed to biblical teaching?

This chapter endeavours to answer some of these questions and to give some guidelines as to how the Thai church should respond and develop in the coming years. The challenge facing the Thai church is to model a structure of relationships which is both appropriate in the Thai context but also thoroughly biblical.

## **5.2 Working within the patron-client system**

### **5.2.1 Introduction**

Working within the patron-client system is inevitable, just as speaking Thai in order to communicate with the Thai is inevitable. It is the basic way things work and to ignore this would be foolish. Indeed my own ministry has been enhanced and opened up through the dynamics of patron-client relationships, albeit unknowingly at times. This has given rise to many sincere and lasting relationships and openings for ministry in various places. Komin notes that:

Deep and long-term relationship result from a process of gradual reciprocal rendering and returning of goodness and favors, through successful experiences of smooth interpersonal interactions. In fact, Thai people are easy to be friends. And deep friendship is not difficult to develop, even across hierarchies and culture, provided that their "ego" are not slighted in the process of befriending.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Suntaree Komin, Psychology of the Thai People (Bangkok: Research Center, National Institute of Development Administration, 1990), 173.

A correct understanding of expectations, roles and reciprocity, coupled with mutual respect, can give rise to strong life-long relationships.

When relationships and structures cross the boundary of biblical principles or biblical ethics, however, the challenge remains for the Thai Church to be transformed by the renewing of the mind.<sup>4</sup> It may take time, however, maybe even generations for a true transformation to take effect. While this transformation is in process, anyone wishing to work in a relevant way must to some extent work within the patron-client system.

### **5.2.2 Role of influential members**

When discussing "patron-client" relationships within the church we are, to a large extent, considering the relationship between church leaders and church members. It must be understood, however, that "power" and "authority" within the Thai church is not necessarily derived from the "position" or "appointment" one may have. Often an important decision cannot be made in a church until a particular person is present. Whether that person is a church leader or not is of little significance. He or she holds an understood position of power or sway. The "influence" exerted is in relation to the extent of "bunkhun"<sup>5</sup> or "baramee"<sup>6</sup> (or barami) they possess over the other members<sup>7</sup>. Even when the person in question does not want or seek this influence, those who feel indebted will naturally "gengjai"<sup>8</sup> (give him or her deference). "Influential people" may be senior in terms of age, more wealthy,

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<sup>4</sup> Rom. 12:2-3.

<sup>5</sup> บุญคุณ Explained in 2.3.3 as indebted goodness, giving rise to obligation as a result of benefits or favors done.

<sup>6</sup> บารมี Defined in 2.4.2 as power and strength derived from respect and loyalty.

<sup>7</sup> Or it may be because this person is perceived as a *potential* source of bunkhun.

<sup>8</sup> เกรงใจ

hold a prestigious job, a former leader in the church or simply someone who has previously done favours for the church or the members<sup>9</sup>.

One Thai pastor with whom I spoke, who leads a team of workers planting churches in the N.E. of Thailand, told me of the danger of "benefactors" having more than their fair share of influence within a church. He particularly stressed the danger of someone giving part of their land for the building of a church. He emphasised the need to compensate the person financially at least to some degree. This, he said, is to avoid the person becoming overly influential.

Wealthy members of the church are particularly susceptible to becoming influential people by virtue of money favours already given, or hoped for. As has already been discussed, the financial needs of poorer members cannot be ignored, yet must be dealt with very wisely<sup>10</sup>.

An employer who attends the same church as his or her employees (such as a factory owner and his factory workers) is automatically an influential person. Employees would rarely dare to disagree or contradict the opinion or wishes of their employer. A clash of loyalty comes if the church leaders encourage the worker to do something contrary to the employer's wishes (or vice-versa). There is great potential for good in this situation, however, if the employer uses their position in a godly and selfless fashion. I have known of employers releasing employees for part time work in the church (at their company's expense), enabling employees to leave work early each day in order to further their education, sponsoring Bible College

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<sup>9</sup> I heard of a non-Christian lady who had previously given a motor-bike to the pastor of the church being the one asked to make the decisions of how to redecorate the church building. It should further be noted that the subsequent redecorating was all done at her expense.

<sup>10</sup> A wealthy member of one church became so tired of being asked for money by members that he asked the church to administer a revolving fund which members could borrow from and then return to. He donated the money to the fund. Several members left the church because of loss of face when they were unable to return the money borrowed. Ill feeling between church leaders and the wealthy "patron" resulted on the way the whole affair was handled.

students through their course or providing suitable jobs for members seeking employment. Infact the network of relationships the church can provide is particularly helpful within the relational society where job opportunities often depend on whom one knows.

Influential members of a godly character may also use their influence for good in the co-ordinating of certain projects within the church. This is particularly so when people need to be mobilised and the job needs to be done quickly and efficiently. Because of the respect they hold, they can more easily motivate people to work together and to liaise or network with those whose co-operation is needed. This will be particularly important when the assistance of a civil servant or other non-church member is required.

Marden St.John writes of the possibility, however, of a wealthy church member taking on a patrimonial leadership role:

The one, or several, wealthy members of the congregation are able to provide funds for church programs and activities, but unlike the traditional patrimonial leader, they do not try to dominate the policies of the church. They are in the same role as all the other members of the congregation. If a wealthy member of the congregation is immature spiritually he/she might fall into the pattern of a non-Christian patrimonial leader, not yet having applied Christian principles to his/her role in society. This, of course, can be countered if the church follows the biblical injunction not to appoint a novice to a position of leadership.<sup>11</sup>

Here we see clearly that the maturity level of the "influential-person" is a major factor in determining whether their influence works for the overall good or harm of the church. More specifically, the key question is whether they seek to dominate the policies of the church?

The wealthy member becomes a member of the body of Christ, the church, with the gift of giving, or showing hospitality, or helping those in need, using whatever gift God may have given him/her without patrimonial concomitants attaching themselves to the role his/her financial status might suggest to him/her. Self-understanding, in such a situation, would need to be altered when the wealthy individual becomes a Christian: not only the self-understanding of the wealthy individual but also that of ordinary church members as they interrelate with him/her.<sup>12</sup>

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31. <sup>11</sup> Marden St.John, Self-understanding Of the Thai (Chiangmai, Photocopied, 1996),

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.



Redefining a wealthy member's place within the body, according to his or her gifts rather than normal patrimonial expectations is a helpful step forward. In my own experience, wealthy members who have practised their gift of generosity within the churches, often anonymously and without seeking to dominate the affairs of the church, have been a tremendous blessing and have greatly helped in the extension of God's Kingdom.

### **5.2.3 Normal expectations within the Church**

As has been seen in Chapter 2, expectations within relationships are quite clearly defined. A younger brother has certain expectations of an older brother. The "nawng"<sup>13</sup> (junior) has expectations of the "pu yai"<sup>14</sup> (senior). Similarly, within the church, members have expectations of their leaders.

#### **5.2.3.1 Church members' expectations of their leaders**

The type of expectations members have towards their leaders depends on various factors. Principal factors are the level of education, the social status and the region of Thailand from which they come. Those with a higher level of education tend to have a greater demand for *teachers* who have credible academic qualifications. Those from a lower social level in terms of economic means, tend to have a greater demand for pastors who will care. With regard to region, members who come from the south of Thailand generally tend to be more self reliant and independent. It is difficult, therefore to generalise. Certain trends, however, can be found to one degree or other in most churches. They are the same two qualities already mentioned in 2.4.1 relating to society as a whole, namely *authority* and *benevolence*. A further quote from Holmes provides a helpful summary:

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<sup>13</sup> น้อง

<sup>14</sup> ผู้ใหญ่

Over the centuries, the kings of Thailand have been feared and adored. Thais have grown to expect a leader to demonstrate a blend of authoritarianism and benevolence. Accordingly, many Thai politicians, civil servants, and corporate executives still model their leadership in the royal mold.<sup>15</sup>

## Authority

The first quality expected of a leader, therefore, is authority (phradet/amnat/sitamnat)<sup>16</sup>. The Thai Christian expects his leader(s) to be credible. A leader who is credible makes those who are followers credible. Someone who carries an air of authority is regarded highly. A leader should be dignified. One who "fools around" or is too casual (or familiar) would generally not be appreciated or respected.

Those in high positions should not lower themselves by arguing or playing the fool with their subordinates for they would be like "gold which is used to rub a tile". The gold itself is damaged.<sup>17</sup>

Even doing manual work can at times lead to a loss of credibility<sup>18</sup>. In some respects, this may derive from the Thai's usual image of a religious leader. The abbot or monk at a Buddhist monastery, for example, would not usually perform manual work. Most Thai Christians do respect, however, a leader who is willing to serve, to do menial tasks, and to be "gan-eng"<sup>19</sup> (at one with) the members. He or she would probably be respected for occasionally helping to wash the dishes after a fellowship meal - but could well lose respect if this became a regular practise.

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<sup>15</sup> Henry Holmes, and Suchada Tangtongtavy, Working with the Thais (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1995), 62.

<sup>16</sup> พระเดช อำนาจ สีทออำนาจ

<sup>17</sup> Navavan Bandhmedha, "Thai Views of Man as a Social Being," in Traditional and Changing World View (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, 1985), 101.

<sup>18</sup> One Thai leader commented after he and I had spent a day painting his house that the neighbour used to call him Ajarn (teacher) and then his name. Now the neighbour just calls him by his first name (without the respect word).

<sup>19</sup> กั้นเอง

The Thais have a very high standard of personal hygiene, outward appearance and dress. The leader's physical appearance is very important - whether it be the clothes he wears or the vehicle he drives.<sup>20</sup> This is as applicable for the foreign leader as it is the Thai. A humble missionary living in a poor house, wearing ragged clothes and riding a bicycle is unlikely to endear people to either himself or his message.<sup>21</sup> Even within the privacy of his own home, a leader wearing casual clothes (such as shorts) would most likely feel embarrassed on the arrival of an unexpected guest.

A young leader from a poor home background will generally try to cover and hide his roots.<sup>22</sup> He is keenly aware that his credibility is tied to his social level. He will be particularly careful to project an acceptable image, especially if he is seeking to work in a church in Bangkok.

Few Thai churches expect democratic decisions to be made by the members. Decision-making by the leaders is generally acceptable and expected. The members, however, will be happy if their opinions were sought first and if the overall decisions are projected as being to their benefit. Norman Jacobs makes the point that generally, the Thai do not see it as immoral to strive for power since they respect power. But one should use it rightly when one gets it. If the leader is using his power for good it does not

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<sup>20</sup> In one village church the church leader also ran a motor-bike taxi service. When he was able to buy a pick-up truck he was ecstatic since this would raise his reputation as a credible leader and promote a greater level of faith in an almighty God (knowing that village people especially measure a person's credibility by outward material prosperity). One can imagine the extreme loss of face he suffered when he lost the vehicle through not being able to keep up with the payments.

<sup>21</sup> A foreign speaker who came to preach at a mid-week meeting in Bangkok wearing a T-shirt, was politely given a long sleeved shirt to preach in. To have continued without changing would have been an embarrassment to both himself and to his hearers.

<sup>22</sup> A cultural blunder was made by a missionary visiting the home village of a Thai leader. He took pictures of the home where the leader grew up and where his parents were still living. To the leader's great embarrassment, the missionary showed the pictures to members of the leader's church.

really matter that he is also promoting himself, since any promotion he receives will further his opportunity to influence for good.<sup>23</sup>

Delegation of tasks is quite acceptable. Normally members would expect their leaders to delegate the carrying out of tasks (especially menial ones). However, they do expect the leader to maintain overall responsibility for the work delegated. "Hands-on" leadership, in this respect is expected. The leader should know how the work is going, the difficulties being encountered or potential problems. He should initiate any changes to the way the work should be carried out. He is expected to "read the signs" of discontent or disagreement, without the member needing to vocalise them.<sup>24</sup> He must be ready to cover for the mistakes, failures or lack of completion of the work<sup>25</sup>. After all, it is *his* work and therefore *his* responsibility.<sup>26</sup> This of-course is not a biblical perception. Nevertheless, it is the perception often held by the members.

Generally speaking, each of the larger churches in Thailand have grown up around a "charismatic" leader who demonstrates authority and is able to inspire. This is a reflection of Thai society as a whole. Norman Jacobs has noted that people will compete to become the clients of a leader who is strong and who can inspire. He states a common concept among the Thais that:

Without a strong man at the helm to make followers tremble and conform, little productivity can be accomplished..... When such leaders appear, as for example, Prince Damrong in the Ministry of Interior in the late nineteenth century, they are hailed as national saviors and men compete to become their clients.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Norman Jacobs, Modernization Without Development (London: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 32.

<sup>24</sup> A Thai leader needs to be a master at understanding human psychology !

<sup>25</sup> Including the person's absence on the day the work was to be done or completed.

<sup>26</sup> In some respects the church itself is seen to be his. Very often people refer to a church as Ajarn (Teacher) X's church.

<sup>27</sup> Norman Jacobs, Modernization Without Development, 29.

When interviewed by Newsweek concerning the political situation in Thailand, Thaksin Shinawatra (ex M.P. and Owner of Shinawatra Telecommunications) said:

"The efficiency of every organization in Asia depends on its leader and his management style. Thailand desperately needs a strong leader who has vision and enough knowledge to run the country".<sup>28</sup>

Thailand has few Christian leaders, however, with the ability to inspire and draw a large following. As has already been mentioned, the larger churches have grown up around those who do have this ability. The dynamics of this shall be further in the section on church growth under Strengths and Opportunities afforded by the patron-client system (5.2.4.7).

## **Benevolence**

The second of the two basic qualities required of a leader is benevolence (meedtaa karunaa<sup>29</sup>).

'To show mercy' is the enduring tradition in the land of Theravada Buddhism. The concept of mercy (meedtaa karunaa - to be merciful, to be kind) is constantly nourished by two distinguished personages: Gotama Siddhattha, the Buddha, and Bhumibol Adulyadej, His Majesty the King. The Buddha taught the people of Thailand 'to be merciful' without concluding that sentence 'as your heavenly Father is merciful'. The king is the Buddhist who practises mercy. In his practice of mercy the royal glory emanates from him. His word is salvific. His presence is blessing. His acts are compassionate. He is actually the *ideal* man. He is religious. He holds supreme authority. He is healthy. He is rich. He has the most beautiful wife. He is the Head of all Thai people in whom 'all things hold together'!<sup>30</sup>

Being a leader in the Thai context is therefore almost synonymous to being a benefactor. As has been seen already concerning authority, having power is regarded as virtuous so long as it is used (or at least seen to be used) for the benefit of others. So too within the church, those who hold a position of authority are expected to use their position for the benefit of the

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<sup>28</sup> Ron Moreau, "The Price Of Power," Newsweek, 25 November 1996, 56.

<sup>29</sup> เมตตากรุณา

<sup>30</sup> Kosuke Koyama, Waterbuffalo Theology (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1974), 7.

members. The benefits expected will range from the material to the spiritual depending on the felt needs of the members.

This combination of authority and benevolence is well expressed by Suntaree Komin as follows:

A successful personality in the Thai cultural context, is often one of competence and substances, but most important of all, has to have a soft and polite appearance, presentation and approach - as best illustrated in the Thai phrase "orn nork khaeng nai"<sup>31</sup> which literally means "soft outward, firm or hard inside".<sup>32</sup>

She goes on to say that those who have too straight forward an approach are generally not appreciated and are blocked from the highest positions.

The pastoral role of the church leader is therefore very important. Members have little difficulty expressing loyalty to a leader who makes them feel secure in his/her care. This care will extend to almost all aspects of the members' lives.

For example, the pastor, in some cases, feels it his responsibility to find jobs for members of the congregation who are just joining the work force or who are jobless. In doing so he thereby assumes the role of guarantor for the individual he places in a job. This is what a patron in the leader class would normally do for one who was his client. There is a difference, however, between the pastor and the patronal leader because the pastor does this as a Christian service free of charge, while the patronal leader receives financial returns for his services.<sup>33</sup>

This expectation can be very demanding on a Christian leader of low financial resources who struggles perhaps to make end meet for himself, let alone those under his care.

In the patrimonial system a leader is also expected to be a source of financial resources. What of the leader in church organizations in this regard? Christian workers are not highly paid. A Christian worker/pastor may have access to financial resources through foreign organizations such as mission organizations and parachurch organizations, through wealthy church members, etc. But whatever his/her resources may be, anyone in the role of a leader in Thai society is expected to have not just power but financial resources. An individual in a leadership position will feel it incumbent upon him/her to search out and find financial resources to promote the purposes of the group which he/she leads. This is part of the self-understanding of

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<sup>31</sup> อ่อนนอก แข็งใน

<sup>32</sup> Suntaree Komin, Psychology of the Thai People, 178.

<sup>33</sup> Marden St.John, Self-understanding Of the Thai, 31.

the leader and followers' view of the leader's role and a church leader is no exception.<sup>34</sup>

It is the "moral support", however, which probably counts more to the Thai than the financial support. I myself have spent much time transporting and visiting the sick, helping members move house, helping members receive justice by representing them at police stations and in court etc. This kind of support is within the ability of most leaders, though again he must distribute himself fairly among the members. Sending a deputy to help someone in need is usually not appreciated. It maybe for this reason that most Thai churches are small, since any one leader can only effectively serve a few people.

Some notable examples of leaders who have successfully balanced authority and benevolence in order to promote church growth shall be mentioned in 5.2.4.7 (Church Growth).

### **5.2.3.2 Church leaders' expectations of their members**

As we have seen already in Chapter two, the basic expectations of leaders towards their followers are honour (gan hi giat)<sup>35</sup> and loyalty (katanyu)<sup>36</sup>. To a certain extent, these are the same two basic expectations within the church.

#### **Honour**

Most leaders would expect (or at least hope) that their members will honour them, both because of the position God has given them, and because usually they have greater experience and knowledge of the faith. The

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>35</sup> การให้เกียรติ

<sup>36</sup> กตัญญู

members should therefore respect and trust them without expecting the leader to answer many questions.

Ed Zehner, writing about one particular church, states:

Naturally an inferior is not expected to comprehend the ways of his leaders any more than a child is expected to understand the ways of adults. It is foolish, therefore to try to participate in decision-making done on higher levels. "If you have a suggestion," said an assistant pastor to a meeting of cell leaders, "we are happy to listen. But don't forget that whatever your suggestion is, the leaders have probably already been thinking about it." Another time an exasperated leader responded to a persistent stream of suggestions proposed by a subordinate for his own unit with the following: "What makes you think you can come up with a (workable) idea that the leaders have not already thought of, when the leaders are spending so much time thinking about how to improve things?".... - and as the Pastor said, there is a channel for receiving suggestions from inferiors, but only if they are offered in a "proper spirit" (winyan thi thuk tong<sup>37</sup>).<sup>38</sup>

This is a particularly strong example and usually words would not be used to express the feelings involved, yet the underlying principle of a junior knowing how to honour those above him/her is basically the same.

In this same church, Ed Zehner suggests that the leader's concept of *anointing* (kan song coem)<sup>39</sup> contributes to the insistence that honour be bestowed upon those in higher positions.

Especially effective church leaders are said to have received a special anointing from God. Dramatic healings, waves of conversions, and the speedy growth of institutions are all said to be demonstrations of the extra portions of divine power (ritdet)<sup>40</sup> that God has bestowed upon his appointed leaders.<sup>41</sup>

In this way, Zehner suggests that the concept of special anointings bestowed on Christian leaders becomes structurally analogous to traditional concepts of the hierarchy of meritorious power.<sup>42</sup> This, as has been noted in chapter two, is synonymous with the store of a person's merit (bun)<sup>43</sup> and is seen as a

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<sup>37</sup> วิญญาณที่ถูกต้อง

<sup>38</sup> Edwin Zehner, *Merit, Man and Ministry*, 24-26.

<sup>39</sup> การทรงเจิม

<sup>40</sup> ฤทธิ์เดช

<sup>41</sup> Edwin Zehner, *Merit, Man and Ministry*, 27-28.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>43</sup> บุญ



justification for him holding the position he does. It should be noted that this understanding of *anointing* would not be held by all church leaders, and in my opinion it is not consistent with the biblical position.

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, however, my interest is in the future trend of Thai churches. In my opinion, there would be cause for concern if churches tend more and more towards honouring their leaders because of special endowments they are perceived to possess. This would be conformity to cultural norms rather than biblical teaching.

## **Loyalty**

Loyalty is required of subordinates. They should serve their masters as well as they can, even at the cost of their lives, and also, they should not "serve two masters". It is difficult for those of lower rank to acquire higher status. They are taught to know their place, not to be too ambitious nor to treat their superiors as equals.<sup>44</sup>

Loyalty is the second basic expectation placed upon followers. The description above relates to society in general, but certain facets are also evident within the church.

Loyalty to the church is usually synonymous with loyalty to the leader and his vision. Because of feelings either of indebtedness or of deference for a senior, a follower would rarely refuse a request from his leader. Natural inclination of the follower towards performing the task is of little consideration. Nor will he/she be guided by his/her conscience. It is expected that the follower will "greng-jai"<sup>45</sup> (to do it in consideration of the other), his loyalty rising higher than consideration of himself or even his conscience. There are of-course limits to the extent to which this takes place. The individual character of both the leader and follower will determine how well and how long the loyalty lasts. It must be understood, however, that anyone working

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<sup>44</sup> Navavan Bandhmedha, "Thai Views of Man as a Social Being," 101.

<sup>45</sup> เกรงใจ

under another in the Thai context must be willing to serve the senior's purposes.

Not only is loyalty expressed through serving, but also through "song seurm"<sup>46</sup> (promoting) the leader. As has already been stated, increased credibility or advancement of the leader increases the credibility and advancement of the followers. They all may rise in importance, influence or recognition together. It is not, however, permissible to advance oneself (or be seen to be advancing oneself) beyond that of one's leader. This would be regarded as *disloyalty* and any working relationship between the two would be greatly hindered.

#### **5.2.4 Strengths and opportunities**

The dynamics of "patron-client" relationships as described above does have strengths and can give rise to various opportunities for extending the church.

Historically, the patron-client system has been used for good, God working through it to enable the church to grow. For instance, John Wesley and other evangelical preachers benefited from the patronage of influential people such as the Countess of Huntingdon.

Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, was the patroness of the Revival. Horace Walpole nicknamed her 'St Teresa of the Methodists'. When evangelical preachers were banned from other pulpits she found them a place in her domestic chapels and drawing-rooms. She made possible the proclamation of the gospel to the aristocracy. In 1768 she founded a theological training college at Trevecca in South Wales. In 1779 she was compelled by law to register her chapels as 'nonconformist meeting-houses'; they became known as 'the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion'.<sup>47</sup>

There have also been times, however, when the patronage system has been abused by Christians.

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<sup>46</sup> ส่งเสริม

<sup>47</sup> A. Skevington Wood, "Awakening," in The History of Christianity (Hertfordshire: Lion Publishing, 1977), 449.

After Charlemagne, the Carolingian Empire was torn by civil wars. The political chaos as well as the prevailing system of church control threatened the independence of the bishops. Laymen controlled churches by means of the 'proprietary' system, providing the land and erecting the church building. Increasingly the lay patrons felt free to choose the clergymen to serve in these churches. Associated with this system there arose the abuse of simony, the sale of church posts, often with little or no regard to the clerical qualifications of the purchaser. These arrangements persisted throughout succeeding centuries, the age of classic feudalism. The church was seriously compromised.<sup>48</sup>

Patron-client relationships are still a feature of many cultures throughout the world today. Delbert Chinchin, director of the African Bible College in Liberia, recently described how the patron-client system may be used as a model of indigenous discipleship.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time, however, there are often counter-productive by-products which force us to ask the question whether the end result is a true biblical expression of the Christian church. In response to Chinchin's article, Rev David Owah Boakai, Pastor of Goodwill Baptist Church, Danane, Cote d'Ivoire, urges a more thorough consideration of both the strengths *and* weaknesses of the patron-client structure.

The following are some of the strengths that I see of the patron-client structure. In 5.3 I shall continue with what I perceive to be the weaknesses.

#### **5.2.4.1 Close lasting relationships**

In my own experience of working as a missionary in Thailand for the past 16 years, I have been able to develop several close relationships, many of which are still bearing fruit today. These have primarily grown up from the need for inter-dependency (as regulated by the patron-client system).

Gary Scheer, writing about working in *relational cultures* says:

In a relational culture, not surprisingly, relationships are primary. They are the joy and delight of the people's lives.. Not only that, more often than not position and wealth come through relationships."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Harry Rosenberg, "The West in Crisis," in The History of Christianity, 232.

<sup>49</sup> Delbert Chinchin, "The patron-client system," EMQ (October 1995): 446-451.

<sup>50</sup> Gary Scheer, "How to communicate in a relational culture," EMQ (October 1995): 470-475.

Thailand would certainly be classified as a relational culture. Whether relationships are always a joy to the people may be questioned but they are indeed the first priority.

A cursory reading of Thai church history shows that various leaders have succeeded in combining their position as patrons with close personal relationships. Indeed their success has been partly attributed to the fact that they encouraged these relationships to form and develop rather than avoided them. Dr. Daniel McGilvary, who worked in Chiangmai from 1867 until his death in 1911, is one such leader.

McGilvary played the patron role well. He had combined the exalted statuses of teacher, healer, exemplary patron, and religious man all rolled into one. He did not hesitate to consult his own "patrons" in the form of the Bangkok authorities and to use the treat of such contact to gain advantage in a crisis. More important, he had a keen sense of obligations and empathy towards his clients. Due to their status and resources, most missionaries in this period would have been perceived as potential patrons by Thai, but few seem to have played the role as well as McGilvary.<sup>51</sup>

McGilvary clearly worked within the patron-client scheme. Zehner continues to describe how:

Thai converts seem to have been able to establish direct person-to-person ties with McGilvary. His home was constantly open to visitors, who might stay overnight.... Furthermore, McGilvary brought converts into the work of the inner core of the mission, effectively making them part of his personal entourage....He acted in such a way as to preserve and even enhance the status of those Thai leaders who worked with him<sup>52</sup>

The extent to which these relationships carried ulterior motives (e.g. prospect of promotion or other favours) is debatable. In my own experience, however, I have found that it is possible to enjoy genuine friendships.

#### **5.2.4.2 Situational discipleship**

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<sup>51</sup> Edwin Zehner, Church Growth and Culturally Appropriate Leadership (California: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1987), 34.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 34,36.

Close relationships can in turn give rise to natural opportunities for making disciples. Teaching can be spontaneous using every-day situations as the classroom rather than set times for instruction. The discipler and the disciple become very close and issues relating to the disciple's life generally come under much greater scrutiny than would be expected in non-relational cultures.

We must ask, however, how open is the relationship? Ten Brummelhuis writes about patients undergoing therapy for stress, in whom it was hoped to develop an open and trusting relationship with the therapist. He states that invariably the obstacle encountered is the inequality between the two people:

"Thai culture has no readily-available model for establishing the trustful transference relationship necessary for a psychotherapeutic alliance. In the western case the essential building blocks for such a relationship are created through the parent-child relationship. In the Thai case, while the intense emotional doctor-patient interaction undoubtedly mobilizes some elements from the parent-child relationship and possibly the teacher-pupil interaction, both are characterized by an essential inequality. This forms an important obstacle in creating the 'psychotherapeutic alliance' with its straightforward demand for total honesty and openness about one's feelings.<sup>53</sup>

I personally would agree with this analysis, and in my own experience I have known of very few instances where the one being disciplined has been able to be totally open and honest with the one discipling. The 'junior' party tends to communicate what he thinks his 'senior' *wants* to hear, rather than what is actually the case. The 'senior' from his side also finds it difficult to be totally transparent for fear of losing his credibility as a leader.

I have personally endeavoured to establish a few transparent relationships and have met with limited success. Primarily success has been among those with whom I have had extended communication and with whom I have been myself transparent concerning my own weaknesses.

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<sup>53</sup> Han Ten Brummelhuis, "Abundance and avoidance: an interpretation of Thai individualism," in Strategies and Structures in Thai Society (Amsterdam, the Netherlands: Anthropological-Sociological Center, University of Amsterdam, 1984), 44.

#### **5.2.4.3 Responsibility and accountability**

As seen above (5.2.3), high expectations of responsibility and accountability are defined by the patron-client relationship. This can act as a "glue" that assists in completing common projects. The extent of responsibility and accountability exercised will depend upon the extent to which the people involved regard themselves as each other's patrons or clients.

#### **5.2.4.4 Generosity**

Anyone who has worked within a relational culture will know the importance and value of small gifts. Although the giving of gifts is not necessary, doing so inevitably leads to increased admiration and respect. Failure to do so can in turn dull relationships. Delbert Chinchin suggests that the "token-gift" is one of the steps involved in forging a patron-client relationship, indicating a serious interest in the relationship.<sup>54</sup>

This, in addition to the benevolence of the patron (as described in 5.2.3.1), gives rise to a general atmosphere of liberality.

#### **5.2.4.5 Grace**

In addition to generosity, grace (or graciousness) is also an attribute of patron-client relationships. Great care is usually taken not to offend the other party. Direct confrontation is avoided at all costs. Disagreement is often cloaked in very palatable phrases. Mistakes are readily overlooked with the accompanying phrase "mai pen rai"<sup>55</sup> (never mind). All of this makes relationships smooth and gracious. In my own experience, one of my main

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<sup>54</sup> Delbert Chinchin, "The patron-client system," EMQ (October 1995): 446-451.

<sup>55</sup> 沒關係

reverse culture shocks when visiting England is to be confronted with such a direct statement as "I don't agree with that".

It does, however, give rise to suspicion, that is suspicion of what the other party really meant or was trying to say. Meanings or intentions are sometimes read into actions or statements which are far from reality. One needs to develop a high level of ability in reading between the lines.

It is interesting that Jesus was described as full of grace *and* truth. In comparing differences between principles of communication in most Western cultures as opposed to those in a relational cultures, Gary Scheer writes:

In a culture where relationships are primary, relationships are also the key to communication. The foundation and goal of relational communication is not merely to pass on truth, but to establish, maintain, and enjoy the fruits of relationships. How different from Western communication, in which reality provides a clearly defined range in which acceptable communication can roam, but beyond which ought not to go. Westerners want to "get to the bottom" of the messages they receive, i.e. to find the truth in what is said. If they find it is detached from reality, the message becomes invalid. A president, for example, whose intent to impress consistently colors his communication so strongly that reality is obscured - and the truth is intentionally misrepresented- is strongly condemned. By contrast, when members of a relational culture "get to the bottom" of things, they delve into the relational foundations and implications of the message. Truth or reality is not their starting point. The relational speaker is not chiefly concerned about reality. His goal is relationships. Finding a message detached from reality does not invalidate it for him.<sup>56</sup>

As the life of Jesus Christ becomes more and more evident within the church, one expects that the Western model will add more grace to its truth and that the relational model will add more truth to its grace.

#### **5.2.4.6 Multiplication**

The patron-client model also gives a structure for the multiplication of future leaders. Those within a leader's entourage will naturally move into positions of leadership as the leader's sphere of influence grows. This will assist the general growth of the church (5.2.4.7).

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<sup>56</sup> Gary Scheer. "How to communicate in a relational culture," EMQ (October 1995): 470-475.

#### 5.2.4.7 Church growth

This is one of the most sensitive, pertinent and controversial of our considerations. It is also an ongoing dilemma for myself in my missionary work. The point is that by using certain dynamics present within the culture, one may see church growth. The dilemma is how far is it permissible to use these cultural norms in order to promote church growth and how far should we insist on rigidly sticking to acceptable biblical standards, methods and ethics (as outlined in chapters 3 and 4). One answer lies in determining what are biblical essentials and what are non-essentials. One may compromise with non-essentials but not with essentials. A problem often lies, however, in agreeing on what is essential and what is not.

The end does not justify the means as far as Christians are concerned. Just because a particular method produces results does not mean it is acceptable. Christians believe that God is as much (if not more) concerned with *how* we work for Him as with what we produce for Him. Paul said in his letter to the Corinthians:

Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.<sup>57</sup>

The product is also often a reflection of the method used to produce it. In such cases we must again ask the question "is what is produced truly biblical and Christian?"

In his paper "Church Growth and Culturally Appropriate Leadership"<sup>58</sup>, Ed Zehner gives examples of three leaders in Thailand whose leadership styles each fitted the cultural expectations of their day, and how that contributed to their effectiveness<sup>59</sup>. His hypothesis is that sustained church

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<sup>57</sup> 2 Cor. 4:2.

<sup>58</sup> Edwin Zehner, Church Growth,

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 3.



growth in Thailand is dependent on leadership that operates along the lines uniquely adapted to the expectations of Thai culture<sup>60</sup>. Two of his examples are Dr. Daniel McGilvary and Dr. Kriengsak Chareonwongsak.

McGilvary made full use of the patron-client system in his church planting work of the latter half of the 19th Century. He was himself both a patron and a client. He was a patron to the church members and emerging leaders but also made use of his own influential patrons when he needed them. One patron to whom McGilvary became a client was the resident Commissioner of Chiang Mai who was representing the south (Bangkok) and seeking to extend Bangkok's influence in the North. It was in his own and Bangkok's interests to help McGilvary when he or the Christians had difficulties.<sup>61</sup> Referring to those from the north as the "Lao", Zehner says:

Therefore, although Lao Christians remained under their formal obligations to Lao patrons, they had in McGilvary a new informal patron of potentially superior influence, and possessing the resources to give them some limited protections. In short, McGilvary had established himself as a new patron in Chiangmai, capable of competing with the local patrons on at least equal terms. The mission's position and resources for playing the role of patron had increased, and they were in a position to provide an even wider range of personal services in a greater number of locations.<sup>62</sup>

Zehner makes the observation that up until 1895 the American Presbyterian mission seemed to be expanding well but then problems arose:

The mission's failures came just when it seemed to be poised on the threshold of success. When we look past the marks of organizational growth, however, we can see that in that very success were the roots of failure. From the Thai Christian leader's point of view, something strange was happening to the friendly face of the mission.<sup>63</sup>

The mission as it gathered size began to be run along American democratic lines. The Thai's direct contact with their "patron" started to be replaced by impersonal subjection to committees.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>61</sup> Daniel McGilvary, A Half Century Among the Siamese and the Lao (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1912), 207-217.

<sup>62</sup> Edwin Zehner, Church Growth, 28-29.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 33.

This personal quality began to disappear, however, as the missionary force grew. The expanded core of missionaries in effect interposed itself between the local Thai leaders and their patron McGilvary. In effect, the new foreigners displaced Thai from his innermost entourage, although not even McGilvary would have read the situation in those terms. Furthermore, because of the relatively egalitarian democratic processes by which the mission conducted its day-to-day business, McGilvary no longer dominated sufficiently to produce the policy exceptions and modifications that a traditional patron would have produced at will in his organization.<sup>64</sup>

A cluster of internal disputes came to a head in 1895 over issues affecting the Thai, such as financial support. McGilvary favoured a combination of both mission and church support for the pastors and opposed sharp cuts in pay to the Thai ministers.<sup>65</sup>

Had the mission been run on the Thai pattern, McGilvary's prestige as founder and senior member could well have caused his views to prevail, but in an American mission his voice was but one among many.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, as the mission expanded, missionaries displaced local Thai leaders from their place in the patron's entourage, demoted their place in the local congregation, and increasingly ignored their personal needs and interests as leaders to an extent that McGilvary would never have done.<sup>67</sup> The overall long term effect was a stunting of the potential for church growth which could have been had the patrimonial structure been maintained.

My own observation would be that it was unfortunate that a western democratic system was introduced rather than a biblical one. A combination of the model of the "body" along with the recognition of special leadership gifts to the church (such as apostleship in the case of McGilvary) could have been incorporated. This could have enabled McGilvary to continue working within what could have been regarded by the Thais as their familiar patronage system, but with the additional security, resource and accountability provided by the rest of the body. There would naturally have been some misunderstandings when McGilvary may have felt he needed to refer to the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 43.

wider body rather than make decisions himself (which would be untypical in the standard patrimonial model). On such occasions, this perhaps would have also slowed down church growth. I believe, however, that a trade off in church growth in order to develop a more biblical (but not necessarily western) pattern of church leadership and structure, would have been justified.

The other example given by Zehner is that of Dr. Kriengsak Chareonwongsak, founder and leader of the Hope of Bangkok Church. Any consideration of church growth in Thailand must include some consideration of the rapid growth of the Hope of Bangkok church under the dynamic leadership of Dr. Kriengsak. The church has grown to over 5,000 members in the past 16 years. In his chapter "Culturally Appropriate Leadership and Church Growth" Zehner cites various places (for instance Korea, and countries in Latin America) where church growth has accompanied culturally appropriate leadership<sup>68</sup>. He also quotes Smalley as saying, "when the church does become truly indigenous, often missionaries do not like the product".<sup>69</sup> No more could this be true, perhaps, than in the case of Dr. Kriengsak. The Chinese-Thai style of leadership and church structure can be overwhelming for even the missionary who has opted to work under Kriengsak.

Missionaries are likely to experience more severe cultural adjustment problems at Hope of Bangkok than they would elsewhere, he noted. In most missions, the forms of the work are relatively Thai, while the organization in which the missionary works is run in a Western style. But at Hope of Bangkok, the forms are Western, while the structures of administration are completely Thai.<sup>70</sup>

What is the secret of Kriengsak's extraordinary success in a land where church growth has been traditionally slow? Zehner suggests it lies in

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>69</sup> William Smalley, (1958) "Cultural Implications of an Indigenous Church," in Readings in Dynamic Indegeneity (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979), 31-51.

<sup>70</sup> Edwin Zehner, Church Growth, 107.

the culturally appropriate style of leadership provided by Kriangsak himself. In particular, Zehner points to the large store of "charisma" (or "barami"<sup>71</sup> in Thai<sup>72</sup>) possessed and passed on by Kriangsak:

Kriangsak's chief resource is his own charisma....A member joining a daughter church does so to join Kriangsak's vision, not that of the local leader. When joining a church or cell, the newcomer is likely to attach his primary loyalty to the head of the system and express it by submissiveness and co-operation with the local representative of the chief. .. the good offered by subordinates in exchange for charisma is submission (in the sense of immediate and unquestioning responsiveness to the orders and requests of the superior) and loyalty (expressed by deference, availability, and personal sacrifice for the leader and his goals) -- the same exchange on which the traditional Thai government administration has been built.

In this situation, the leader and subordinate respond in ways that seem natural and proper to them, in accordance with cultural norms.... The tendency of provincial rulers in the traditional Thai polity to duplicate the forms and administrative arrangements of the royal center (Tambiah 1976:135ff<sup>73</sup>) is at Hope of Bangkok developed towards its logical conclusion with a conscious push for conformity within.<sup>74</sup>

It appears that Kriangsak has maximised his personal abilities and charisma in order to promote church growth. He has successfully utilised the dynamics of charisma, indebtedness, loyalty and deference to produce a growing a tightly knit structure. Zehner points to some direct equivalents in the Hope of Bangkok system (referred in the quotation below as the Christian Church) to that in the (Buddhist) society as a whole.

#### CORRELATIONS

##### ***Ideals for Leaders:***

##### **Buddhist polity**

sak<sup>75</sup> (sacral power)

possession of a store of  
bun<sup>78</sup> (merit), unrequestable

##### **Christian church**

ritdet<sup>76</sup> (divine power)

kan song riak <sup>77</sup>(divine calling)  
and kan song coem<sup>79</sup> (divine

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<sup>71</sup> บารมี

<sup>72</sup> See 5.2.2. Note that "barami" is often used to refer to the "majesty" of Thai royalty

<sup>73</sup> Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, "World Conqueror and World Renouncer," Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology 15 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 135ff.

<sup>74</sup> Edwin Zehner, Church Growth, 92-94.

<sup>75</sup> ศักดิ์

<sup>76</sup> ฤทธิ์เดช

<sup>77</sup> การทรงเรียก

<sup>78</sup> บุญ

but self earned	anointing), requestable but unearnable
meritorious character (e.g. cai bun, barami <sup>81</sup> ) <b>Ideals for Followers:</b>	khvam toep to fai winyan <sup>80</sup> (spiritual maturity)
phung bun <sup>82</sup> (take refuge in the shade of a superior's merit)	rap kan khum khrong chiwit <sup>83</sup> (come under an anointed leader's covering)
khaorop lae chua fang phuyai <sup>84</sup> (respect and obey one's superiors)	khaorop lae chua fang phuyai <sup>85</sup> (respect and obey one's leaders)

**Idealized Leader-Follower Relationship:**

phuyai - phunoi<sup>86</sup> = phuyai - khon yang mai to<sup>87</sup>  
(superior/adult vs inferior) (mature/adults vs. spiritually immature)<sup>88</sup>

So where the traditional polity has elaborated and justified its system in terms of differentials of merit, the Christians have elaborated theirs in terms of differentials of anointing and spiritual maturity. Where the traditional Buddhist leader had sak (sacral power) because of his merit (bun), the contemporary Christian leader has ritdet (divine power) because of his divine calling (kan song riak) and anointing (kan song coem).<sup>89</sup>

It appears that the Hope of Bangkok Church places much emphasis on "anointing" as being a special mark of a leader, giving him credibility amongst his followers.

Effective church leaders are said to have received a special anointing from God. Dramatic healings, waves of conversions, and the speedy growth of institutions are all

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<sup>79</sup> การทรงเจิม

<sup>80</sup> ความเติบโตฝ่ายวิญญาณ

<sup>81</sup> ใจบุญ บารมี

<sup>82</sup> ฟังบุญ

<sup>83</sup> รับการ ค้ำครองชีวิต

<sup>84</sup> เคารพและเชื่อฟังผู้ใหญ่

<sup>85</sup> เคารพและเชื่อฟังผู้ใหญ่

<sup>86</sup> ผู้ใหญ่ ผู้ nhỏ

<sup>87</sup> ผู้ใหญ่ - คนยังไม่โต

<sup>88</sup> Edwin Zehner, Merit, Man and Ministry, 28-29.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 29.

said to be demonstrations of the extra portions of divine power (ritdet<sup>90</sup>) that God has bestowed upon his appointed leaders. Such men are "shepherds", or a "covering" that God offers to the churches and their members to guide and protect them by means of the special wisdom God has granted as part of the anointing.<sup>91</sup>

It is functionally equivalent to the Thai concept of possessing merit. In traditional Thai society, hierarchy and authority were buttressed by conceptions of a hierarchy of stores of merit accumulated in previous lives. The Hope of Bangkok church would not, however, attribute the leader's barami as connected to merit in a previous life, but rather it is a mark of holiness or Godliness and a sign of God's special calling and dispensing of authority. The greater the anointing, the more the deference, loyalty and respect. From ancient times the priests and kings in Israel were ceremonially anointed (with oil) as a sign of official appointment to office, and as a symbol of God's power upon them. Dr. Kriangsak is regarded to be very highly anointed and is therefore highly honoured and respected. A hierarchy therefore clearly exists.

The church's aphibansit<sup>92</sup> (shepherding) system is structurally and functionally equivalent to the sakdina<sup>93</sup> system of the traditional Thai state in that it employs a multi-tiered system for ranking all members, and is used for manpower control. Also like the sakdina system, differences are assumed to indicate differences in supernatural empowering and moral character, for differences in rank are thought to correspond naturally to differences in the personal qualities of individuals.<sup>94</sup>

One of the major criticisms of the Hope of Bangkok Church, infact, is that Dr. Kriangsak is too highly honoured. I personally question the validity of using "anointing" as a justification for uplifting the leader. My understanding of anointing from the New Testament is that an equal anointing is ascribed to all believers by virtue of the indwelling Holy Spirit - being the same anointing that

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<sup>90</sup> ฤทธิ์เดช

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 26-28.

<sup>92</sup> อภิบาลศิษย์

<sup>93</sup> ศักดินา Refer to 2.1 (Introduction to Patron-Client Relationships in Thai Society).

<sup>94</sup> Edwin Zehner, Merit, Man and Ministry, 23.

made Jesus to be called the Christ (the anointed one). Through the agency of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ (and *His* anointing) must be given freedom of expression in and through each individual's life. This in practice may indeed vary in degree from person to person. There are, however, no *specially* anointed ones. Differentials in "gifting" may be more appropriate here, being a prerequisite for effective leadership. No-where do we see "gifting" used in the New Testament, however, as a justification for exalting one's leaders or of regarding them as superior. It is also hard to imagine how, within such a system where honour and deference to one's leader is so entrenched, the leader could truly act as a servant in menial things, or to be transparent, or to admit to any wrong.

An acceptance by Kriengsak of the traditional-rational claims to authority of existing Thai church structures could well destroy the charisma-based authority system that he himself operates.<sup>95</sup>

Another emphasis in Kriengsak's system is that of the follower's need for the "covering" of his leader. This is basically an extension of the benevolence and protection generally expected of leaders and of the loyalty and submission expected of followers. Just as the traditional Thai Buddhist sought refuge in the merit of his superior, so also the Thai Christian is expected to seek the protective covering of the anointed leader. The ideal relationship according to Dr. Kriengsak is expressed in his Christmas card to his followers written in 1987:

My entire life I have surrendered to serve God by looking after (du lae<sup>96</sup>) and protecting (pok pong<sup>97</sup>) you in my status as phu liang<sup>98</sup> (in colloq. Thai, one who raises children, ... dependent beings).<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Idem, Church Growth, 101.

<sup>96</sup> ดูแล

<sup>97</sup> ปกป้อง

<sup>98</sup> ผู้เลี้ยง

<sup>99</sup> Edwin Zehner, Merit, Man and Ministry, 24.

Although I agree that leaders (preferably in the plural... i.e. as a team) should offer covering to their members<sup>100</sup>, I believe an overemphasis or perpetuation of normal cultural expectations, may be harmful in the long term. My own reservations to this form of dependency are expressed in 5.3

### 5.2.5 Summary

There are those who have successfully used Thai forms to promote church growth, particularly those related to patron-client relationships.

Patron-client exchanges in Thai society are built on a non-formalized system of dyadic exchange, with relatively scarce and controllable resources flowing down-wards from a superior in exchange for less scarce resources flowing upwards from a collection of inferior individuals. The scarce resources on which McGilvary's system was built included quinine, Siamese language instruction, access to the increasingly important power center of Bangkok, and a personal charisma of his own. <sup>101</sup>.

We have also discussed Dr. Kriangsak, with his successful use of hierarchy and charisma (barami). The harnessing of cultural forms in order to promote church growth, however, remains controversial. We need to distinguish between finding forms to promote church growth and finding forms to promote true Christian behaviour and thought. <sup>102</sup> Just because something grows, does not mean it is right or healthy in the long term. Cults grow, as do cancers but they are not desirable. As stated already, however, we do need to continuously distinguish between what is essential and what is not essential in respect to what aspects of culture may or may not be assimilated. Historically, the Christian church has reflected the culture and age in which it has grown up. Certain aspects fundamental to Christian belief, however, must not be compromised. The equality of all believers and the freedom of believers to do the will of God, for instance are fundamentals which must be

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<sup>100</sup> Please refer to 3.3.2.3

<sup>101</sup> Edwin Zehner, Church Growth, 91.

<sup>102</sup> For instance homogeneous units have sometimes been promoted as a means of assisting church growth. They are not, however, an adequate expression of the multifaceted Body of Christ, or of the church in a biblical sense. Churches consisting of just one type of person reduce the need to work out one's salvation in a context where one needs to learn to love, honour and respect and to be at one with those who are very different.



upheld, even at the expense of normal cultural expectations (and perhaps to the expense of church growth).

### **5.3 Objections to the patron-client system**

In this section I shall endeavour to summarise what I believe to be fundamental objections to the patron-client system and also to warn of other potential problems it could produce if allowed to influence the Thai church. It is hoped that the Thai church can avoid and rise above these hazards as it develops and grows.

#### **5.3.1 Fundamental objections**

I have two fundamental objections to the patron-client system from a Christian point of view. My first objection is the hierarchical (or unequal) nature of such relationships. The second is the indebtedness such relationships generate.

##### **5.3.1.1 Hierarchy**

Hierarchy and inequality are fundamental to the patron-client system and traditional Thai society. As Jacobs points out:

The differentiation between superordinate, or superior, and subordinate, or inferior, is the cornerstone of Thai interpersonal relations. Consciously or unconsciously, this ideal rather than the ideal of equality pervaded all of Thai social life.<sup>103</sup>

As explained in Chapter 2, the sakdina<sup>104</sup> system of social rankings was established by the absolute monarch and specified for each individual by the king or his subordinates. It was a central feature shaping the administration of justice and of manpower control and was linked ideologically with Buddhist

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<sup>103</sup> Norman Jacobs, Modernization Without Development, 190.

<sup>104</sup> ศักดินา

concepts of a publicly demonstrable hierarchy of merit.<sup>105</sup> This hierarchical system gives rise to certain assumptions and consequences.

An inherent consequence is the common assumption that those of lower status are less reliable, motivated by baser instincts, more selfish, and less caring for themselves and others. Therefore it is the natural duty of those possessing greater merit to guide and protect those who are less fortunate, and it is prudent for those with less merit to seek the benevolent care of their meritorious superiors, for those whose high rank was truly a product of merit possess not only greater power and resources, but also greater wisdom and foresight.<sup>106</sup>

Whilst it is very tempting for Christian leaders to take on the role of protector, provider (or patron), in doing so he is perpetuating a hierarchical system which is not biblical. The equality of all believers is a clear Christian doctrine which must be upheld at all costs. Christians are all brothers and sisters, having only one lord and master, the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>107</sup>

Church leaders should avoid being regarded as superior at all costs. This may not readily be understood by the non-Christian, but fellow Christians need to have their minds renewed in this respect. Leaders need to listen to their members and at times receive instruction from them. Members need to understand that God can as equally speak to them as to their leaders.<sup>108</sup> It is permissible for the leader to do menial tasks, as was displayed by the Lord Jesus Himself in washing His disciples feet. He<sup>109</sup> does not need to protect himself from such tasks for fear that his importance will be diminished. Rather he should trust in God to enable him to command respect through a life that is a display of the character and nature of Jesus Christ Himself.

The instinct for one to infer greater status to those who have helped (or who may help in the future, i.e. patrons or potential patrons) must also be

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<sup>105</sup> Edwin Zehner, Merit, Man and Ministry, 6.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>107</sup> Please refer to chapter 3, in particular 3.3.1 and 3.3.2.

<sup>108</sup> I do believe, however, that God will generally lead His church through the leaders He has appointed. This does not, however, infer that the leader is more important or of higher status than the average member. Nor does it mean that he has a greater natural capacity to hear God's voice.

<sup>109</sup> Or she.

avoided. When help is given, both the provider and the recipient must clearly understand that their relationship remains as one of equality.

Mutual accountability of leader and follower should also be stressed here. Suntaree Komin gives the example in Thai society of political "in-groups" which are major stumbling blocks for any attempt for organisational change and development that is perceived to be incongruent with their own interest. She also gives the example of how they can not be caught by counter-corruption commissions. Those with power and relationship connections, can always get away from the consequences of wrong-doing. This, she says, is an exploitation of the gratitude of the Thai people.<sup>110</sup> These pitfalls must be avoided at all costs within the Christian church. Leaders who do wrong are not above the law. They are accountable to the whole body. Both leaders and members must grow in their recognition of their mutual accountability and dependency in this matter.

As was seen in 3.3.1.2 in relation to the importance of every individual, the poor and weak in society may easily be overlooked. They are disqualified as patrons and can offer little as clients. This must not be perpetuated or condoned within the church. A clear understanding of this great truth of the equality of all believers must permeate and renew every mind.

### **5.3.1.2 Indebtedness**

The Christian mandate to "owe no man anything"<sup>111</sup> is clearly at odds with the fundamental aspect of the patron-client relationship, namely "indebtedness"<sup>112</sup>. One of the foundations of traditional patron-client relationships is "debt". Even simple acts of kindness, even when done "with no strings attached" rarely fail to produce a sense of "indebtedness" in the

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<sup>110</sup> Suntaree Komin, Psychology of the Thai People, 172.

<sup>111</sup> Rom. 13:8.

<sup>112</sup> 'pen ni bun khun' (เป็นหนี้บุญคุณ)

recipient. This is to such extent that, in order to avoid being under obligation, there is often either a reluctance to receive, or else an almost immediate repayment of some sorts. Where for one reason or other a patron-client relationship has developed, however, an obligation on the client is clearly felt and understood. As seen in chapter two, the relationship is referred to as a "bun khun"<sup>113</sup> (favour or goodness) relationship. The client is "pen ni bun khun"<sup>114</sup> (obligated or indebted) to the patron for his or her goodness, protection or other favour.

From a Christian point of view, this is clearly not biblical. It is clearly contradictory to Christ's teaching to give, expecting nothing in return<sup>115</sup> and to Paul's injunction to avoid debt.<sup>116</sup> Dr. Chaiyun Ukosakul writes that Christians should remove the word bun khun from their vocabulary.

*Bunkun* can forcefully compel them<sup>117</sup> to act, as a duty, even against their will in return for the good deeds they have received from their patrons. When *Bunkhun* is obviously involved in the action, the clients do not normally act according to their convictions or out of the sense of appreciation for good deeds, but only as a repayment of the "debt" in fulfilling obligation.... If the members of the same church constantly act on the basis of duty, obligation and propriety (mechanistically), they have failed to understand and observe Christian fellowship according to the biblical principles.....Christians should avoid using the term and mechanism of Bunkhun.<sup>118</sup>

Ukosakul proposes replacing *bun khun* with *pra khun*<sup>119</sup> (grace), which he suggests has a purer motive of giving or helping others. Grace also usually has its effect even though the recipient may not deserve it. Reciprocity works also within the system of grace, but does so through sheer free-will and

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<sup>113</sup> บุญคุณ

<sup>114</sup> เป็นหนี้บุญคุณ

<sup>115</sup> Mt. 6:3; Mt. 10:8; Lk. 14:12.

<sup>116</sup> Rom. 13:8.

<sup>117</sup> i.e. the Thai.

<sup>118</sup> Chaiyun Ukosakul, A Study in the Patterns of Detachment in Interpersonal Relationships in a local Thai Church (Illinois. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1994), 289-290.

<sup>119</sup> พระคุณ

delight, thus building up the relationship. The whole process, he explains, can involve sacrificial love naturally.<sup>120</sup>

All favours done should be done as dispensing grace ("freely you received, freely give"<sup>121</sup>), for the sake of the kingdom of God, and without thought of personal gain, future benefit or other. In no sense should the receiving party feel or be put under obligation to the giver. Suntaree Komin writes of the exploitation and manipulation of the "grateful" characteristic of the Thai. She explains how the desire to please has given rise to exploitation by middle -men of the poor rural. Some will give money first, then when they have the trust of the poor farmer, they take their children into low paid work. Ingrained sense of gratitude and debt also explains why some girls are willing to become prostitutes in order to help their poor parents.<sup>122</sup> It is common for the Thai to feel deeply in debt to their parents for the gift of life and the sacrifices made on their behalf. In the Christian Church, a whole re-learning process needs to take place (both of potential givers and potential recipients) to avoid similar situations occurring.

Komin relates how the concept of being grateful in response to bunkuhn or kindness and favours given, has been the base for good and meaningful relationships in general, and has helped to explain the effectiveness and efficiency of successful completion of jobs and projects which have been accomplished basically through good connections and social relations. On the other hand, this value can be manipulated and exploited by those who are power-oriented, in creating, monitoring, and maintaining of any "power" group, clique, gang...in which "creating gratitude" (saang bunkuhn<sup>123</sup>) is one of the basic means to get things done or get

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Mt. 10:8.

<sup>122</sup> Suntaree Komin, Psychology of the Thai People, 169-171.

<sup>123</sup> สร้างบุญคุณ

business going for one's benefits. Since the Thai in general are too *kreng jai*<sup>124</sup> (considerate) to refuse kindness, the process of "creating gratitude" is often used to establish bunkuhn and power connections. "In-groups" in many circles are thus built and reinforced. And where money and benefits are involved, the connections of "in-groups" are further strengthened and perpetuated.<sup>125</sup> It seems there is a very fine dividing line between debt and gratitude. Any goodness or favour done to another with the purpose of placing the other in debt or under obligation is not correct Christian behaviour. The Christian ethos is one of liberation, not one of enslavement. Likewise, any loyalty or action done from the motivation to repay debt or of obligation is similarly not Christian. Each member of the Christian church must act out of obedience to God, not out of debt or obligation. This does not need to be to the exclusion of basic Christian gratitude. Nor does it exclude the possibility of employing indebtedness (*pen ni bun khun*<sup>126</sup>) in some positive ways, as in the case cited in 4.3.3.9 of Paul and Philemon.<sup>127</sup> My point here, however, is to emphasise that the Christian should reject all aspects of placing another under obligation to him/her.

### 5.3.2 Questionable appropriateness

Apart from the above two fundamental objections to the patron-client system I would like to offer a further consideration, which to my mind brings into question the appropriateness of perpetuating the patron-client scheme. All Christians, and most of all Christian leaders, are to demonstrate the life of

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<sup>124</sup> เกรงใจ

<sup>125</sup> Suntaree Komin, Psychology of the Thai People, 169-171.

<sup>126</sup> เป็นหนี้บุญคุณ

<sup>127</sup> This is an interesting area to investigate further. Also how the Christian should understand his/her own indebtedness to God. For instance C.T. Studd's famous words "If Jesus Christ be God and died for me.. then no sacrifice is too great for me to give to Him" has relevance, so too Paul's idea of obligation (contractual almost) to preach the Gospel to those who have never heard (1 Cor. 9:16).

Jesus Christ. It behoves them to think of what is the best medium to portray the Son of God who was born unpretentiously in a stable, lived a transparent life before His disciples and eventually died upon a cross to the total disillusionment of those who followed him. He displayed human weakness when hungry or tired. He displayed emotions of joy, indignation, sadness. He wept at the graveside of a friend. Within the patron-client system, the leader must project an image of success and superiority. Often he must refrain from revealing his true feelings. Admission of fault, weakness or failure may jeopardise his future credibility.

I, therefore, question the appropriateness of the patron-client model for relationships within the church. Rather, I believe that as Christians develop open and transparent relationships with each other, God will lift up and maintain those he wants in positions of leadership. Just as David trusted God to give him the crown of Israel, so too, prospective leaders may trust God to give them areas of influence, without the need to manipulate a power base themselves.

### **5.3.3 Potential problems**

The following are various areas where I perceive that problems may arise to varying degrees if the patron-client system is adopted within the Thai church.

#### **Discipleship/Dependency**

In the October 1995 edition of the Evangelical Missionary Quarterly, Delbert Chinchen advocates utilising the patron-client system as a model for indigenous discipleship. He argues that relationships are deeper within such a scheme, enabling a freer and deeper flow of values.<sup>128</sup> David Owah Boakai,

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<sup>128</sup> Delbert Chinchen, "The patron-client system," *EMQ* (October 1995): 446-451.

however, responded in the July 1996 edition, cautioning against such a use.

From his own observations in Côte d'Ivoire, he says that:

It creates spiritual and physical dependency where the disciples look up to the patron for everything.<sup>129</sup>

Discipleship should be a means whereby more mature Christians help develop a younger Christian's relationship and dependency to Jesus Christ. It is very likely, however, that if the patron-client system is utilised for making disciples, that the younger Christian will infact become both dependent and a disciple of his leader instead. Zehner makes the point that at the Hope of Bangkok church, with its emphasis on strong leadership particularly that of Dr. Kriangsak:

"the way things really are" is the world according to Kriangsak. While the source is the higher authority of scripture, he is the one who provides the authoritative interpretation. So to accept this world as fully "real" is to implicitly accept his personal and complete authority.<sup>130</sup>

Some Thai leaders I have interviewed have suggested a range of alternatives, from complete rejection of any patrimonial influence towards the young convert to varying degrees of patronage. One leader's method is to initially forge such a relationship but then gradually withdraw from it, rather like a mother weaning her infant. As has already been mentioned in 2.3.3, however, to give help or benefits and then to stop can produce feelings of rejection and sometimes anger. A high level of initial care and interest may indeed be necessary. But for a person, who is looking for a "ti pung"<sup>131</sup> (point of dependency) in their normally insecure life, to find out that the person they thought they could depend upon is no longer available in the same way, can

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<sup>129</sup> David Owah Boakai, "Patron-client relationships," EMQ (July 1996): 268.

<sup>130</sup> Edwin Zehner, Church Growth, 86.

<sup>131</sup> ติ่ง



be a great disappointment. Disillusionment could easily become a cause for stumbling. This is a dilemma with no simple solution.

Another suggestion is to communicate to the new convert from the very beginning the temporary nature of all help and attention so as not to raise expectations unnecessarily. To the new believer (or *potential* new believer), this may either be quite alien to what he (or she) is capable of understanding, or else may make the whole "package" being offered seem far less attractive. It may, however, assist in producing more true disciples of Jesus Christ in the long term.

### **Opportunism**

In 2.2.3, I referred to the Buddhist view of man's subjugation to nature giving rise to "opportunism" rather than "hard-work" as being a root to success. I stated that being successful, or to "achieve" in Thai society, does not depend so much on one's competence as on one's ability to perceive and choose the right means and opportunities that may lead to success.

A basic insecurity is produced by the patron-client system. It is an unwritten, non-contractual agreement. It is uncertain because it depends on the whims and fluctuation of the patrons who are making the decisions from the top. This gives rise to opportunism and causes the individual to have a loose commitment to the joint venture while grasping at opportunities that come his way.

If the church adopts the patron-client system, it must also be prepared for opportunism as one of its bi-products. Initially, this may take the form of false notions of material or social gain in becoming a Christian in the first place. Some personal gain may be hoped for by "latching on to" a Christian "patron" who seems credible and able to offer what they believe to be their felt need. In the past such converts were called "rice-Christians". Later,

opportunism may display itself by a total disregard for what seemed a well-established relationship with the patron when a better opportunity for advancement arises, or when another patron appears who seems to offer more.

Opportunism may also arise outside of the patron-client bond, or else if the patron conflicts with the "ego" or self image of the client. Komin explains that:

The Thai have strong "ego", and when the grateful relationship turns into a "power" dominated relationship, the relationship becomes a "transactional interaction" relationship, where there is no deep psychological bond, the "ego" is kept intact and independent, and the duration of the relationship has no meaning. This is triggered off by the value of being responsive to situations and opportunities when there is no deep psychological bond.<sup>132</sup>

In the church , the problem of opportunism may not be unique to the new believer only. David Owah Boakai also relates (in the Côte d'Ivoire context) that:

The disciple is distracted by the social status of his patron and wants everything - education, luxury, and overseas studies - forgetting evangelism. It leads to proliferation of small, independent ministries out of selfishness or desire to be someone without being patient. The church as God planned is neglected.<sup>133</sup>

I believe that two things will be helpful in the long term. Firstly, consistent teaching that God is our rock, our fortress and foremost means of security. Secondly, to explore and develop structures that will increase the overall certainty and security of each person within the church system, without that security being subject to the whims and fluctuations of those in power. I develop this point further in "From insecurity to security" (5.4.6).

## **Rejection**

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<sup>132</sup> Suntaree Komin, Psychology of the Thai People, 172.

<sup>133</sup> David Owah Boakai, "Patron-client relationships," EMQ (July 1996): 268.

As has already been mentioned under "Discipleship/Dependency"<sup>134</sup>, rejection is a potential fruit of a patron-client relationship gone wrong. I remember one of the first warnings I received as a young missionary from an experienced Thai Christian lady, when I was considering inviting a young Thai Christian to live with me. It was to be always aware that if one stops giving after one has started, then the recipient is likely to be angry. The reason probably stems from a sense of rejection and a reading into the situation by the recipient that they are now regarded either as worthless or unworthy to be a beneficiary. It is possible too, that the patron will be perceived as being insincere, selfish or even a fraud. A Chinese proverb sometimes quoted is, "He has the head of a lion but the tail of a snake", implying the deception of one who begins by making great promises but does not carry them through. It was suggested to one young man that he live in a church sponsored hostel at very low rent. After several months, when the church could no longer afford to maintain the hostel, and after he himself had exhibited some quite inappropriate behaviour, he was told he would have to find other accommodation. The young man was both devastated and angry. One significant phrase he said was "why did you pick me up only to throw me down again?" This kind of attitude may be particularly prevalent in one who has low self esteem (perhaps because of his low social level or else because of his own inability to overcome certain traits, habits or addictions, such as alcohol, drugs etc.). He thinks of himself as totally worthless, even as dust on the floor, until a patron shows belief in him by picking him up, giving him hope for a brighter future. Finally, however, the patron lets him go, for one reason or other. This only reinforces in his mind his own worthlessness and his hopes of ever becoming better are dashed.

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<sup>134</sup> 5.33

The above is, of course, an extreme example. The sense of being "let-down", however, is quite common. A pastor who leaves his church for perfectly legitimate reasons may leave the members with feelings of being "let-down". Missionaries, who have to leave or change their field of work, may perceive similar feelings in those they were near to.

A particular danger is inherent in a church that operates strongly along patron-client lines, or in which there is an overemphasis on shepherding. If ever the Christian becomes disillusioned or disappointed either by the church as a whole or else by his/her immediate "patron", it will be extremely difficult for him to trust himself in relationships in any other church.

I believe it would be better if the church does not adopt a system in which the expectations placed on people are very high and which will most likely will lead to disappointment some way along the line due to the limited resources of the people involved. Rather, it will be helpful if the church develops alternative structures whereby the expectations are in fact lowered. More emphasis needs to be given to constant teaching and patiently channelling people into a closer relationship and dependency on God Himself. He never gives up. He never turns away those who come to him. Only His resources are limitless. Where specific help needs to be given, it would be better to handle the matter jointly as a church leadership rather than individually.

### **Favouritism & Jealousy**

Another offshoot of patron-client relationships is that of accusations of favouritism or feelings of jealousy. David Owah Boakai warns:

Failure to give creates greed, jealousy, envy, and hatred between pastors and disciples, and between missionaries and nationals.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 268.

With limited resources, a patron must choose those whom he is able to support and to what level. Those who are not chosen, or those who receive less support than another, are likely to feel hurt or jealous. This, of-course, may be true in any training situation. The nature of patron-client relationships (i.e. security within the patron's patronage), however, makes the possibility for ill-feelings particularly acute.

### **Lack of Team work / Individualism**

Norman Jacobs explains that a chronic problem of patrimonial authority is the determination to make one's own decisions rather than drawing from the resources outside.<sup>136</sup> This is not just a neglect of resources *outside* the group, but often a neglect of resources (especially in terms of ideas and suggestions) from those *within* the group at lower levels. Suntaree Komin writes extensively concerning the ego orientation of the Thai:

"Since the "ego" of the Thai is so important, it naturally follows that the Thai have the "avoidance mechanism" to fend off unnecessary clashes. And this intricate mechanism is delicately and keenly observed by all parties involved in an interaction"<sup>137</sup>

It is difficult for a leader to accept (or seek) suggestions from others. Since the leader basically wants to be first and beyond criticism, it is therefore difficult to have open honest communication or a willingness to learn from others who may contradict him.

Strong criticism to the expressed ideas, is often automatically taken as criticism to the person holding those ideas.<sup>138</sup>

Han ten Brummelhuis comments on the absence of co-operatives in Thai society, even within the villages. Neighbourhood organisations like those found in Japan are absent. He says that it seems a justifiable generalisation that comparatively little of a Thai individual's energy is directly spent on

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<sup>136</sup> Norman Jacobs, Modernization Without Development, 88.

<sup>137</sup> Suntaree Komin, Psychology of the Thai People, 162.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

upholding the institutions of society. At the same time society hardly lays any inescapable claims on the individual. Social pressures are preferably dealt with by avoidance for which society seldom fails to offer opportunities.<sup>139</sup> He goes on to quote Akin Rabibhadana which also further clarify the way Thai individualism is linked to the wider Thai social context:

Members of a cooperative do not show any ambition to control the administration and management of 'their' association. They do not seem to think that the association belongs to them. In electing representatives their choice is not based on a question like "who will serve or defend my interests?", but on "who they think have the resources to help them". In other words, the association is seen more as providing an opportunity to gain access to privileges than as an instrument for pursuing basic interests.<sup>140</sup>

In practice, Joint ownership of a project, or cooperative, is therefore hard to find. This is exacerbated by those who do reckon themselves to be owner.

The behaviour of those at the top who have access to, and control over, resources is complementary to those in client positions. The leading committee-members of a farmers' association seems to consider the association and its assets as private property, tend to overlook the rights of its members, and are often unable to understand that the association's rules also apply to themselves<sup>141</sup>

Ten Brummelhuis aptly sums up that when the administration of common interests is not impersonally institutionalised but dependent on unpredictable personal factors, a measure of uncertainty prevails which apparently renders long-term strategy for mutual co-operation useless. If a chance arises, then one has to grasp it immediately. Within the hierarchical pattern of relations a direct advancement of one's interests 'does not pay', and indirect manipulative strategies bear better results. Thus, the roots of Thai individualism are in a dominated group without access to political power and without ambition to rule. This ruled majority was mainly interested in isolating

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<sup>139</sup> Han Ten Brummelhuis, "Abundance and avoidance," 48.

<sup>140</sup> Rabibhadana Akin, "Self-help organizations in Thai villages: the question of appropriate policy inputs," in Too Rapid Rural Development Perceptions and Perspectives from Southeast Asia (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1982), quoted in Han Ten Brummelhuis, "Abundance and avoidance," 49.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

an area for undisturbed subsistence.<sup>142</sup> Note that this form of individualism is quite different from the more "getting" and "acquiring" and "controlling of destiny" individualism of the West.

When patron-client structures are adopted by the church, there are inevitable repercussions, therefore, in the ability for leadership to work together as a team. A team may exist on paper, but younger or junior members find it very difficult to give their ideas in case the overall leader does not hold the same view. If the leader has already given his view then it is very unlikely anyone else will suggest an alternative method (let alone contradict what has been said). In terms of team dynamics, it is not so much a problem of getting a client to agree with a patron, rather it is the problem of getting the client to disagree! Particular problems arise for western missionaries in such a context, especially if they have particular expertise (perhaps in some areas they know more than the leader or have more experience or ability) and are used to direct expressions ideas and opinions. They must learn that the first and foremost expectation on them is to assist and promote the *leader*, not necessarily the overall *work*. However good the missionary's ideas, if it is felt that he is contradicting or undermining the leader, then he is likely to find himself marginalised. The Thais know this better than the westerner and is one reason why they find it difficult to work together in the first place. Within the patron-client system, it is impossible for the client to rise above his patron. He is ever there to promote the patron and in so doing, some of the benefits flow down to him. Rising above the patron would be regarded as competition and disloyalty.

The combination of these sentiments makes it very difficult for two competent leaders to work together. A Thai proverb says that two tigers can

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<sup>142</sup> Han Ten Brummelhuis, "Abundance and avoidance," 50-52.

not live together in the same cave.<sup>143</sup> The leader who is slightly inferior will feel that his efforts and work will only serve to assist and benefit the superior "partner" and not himself. Not surprisingly, he will leave and start his own work and seek to form his own power base.

Much work needs to be done, therefore, to develop alternative structures for the church where the emphasis on the body must be maintained. There needs to be much teaching on the Kingdom of God since all work and effort should be done not for personal gain and status, but for God Himself and the promotion of His Kingdom. It must be emphasised again and again that the church belongs to Jesus Christ, not to an individual leader. Unity and co-operation within the church is essential. The resources of Christians needs to be pooled in order for the church to be effective. It should also be one of the greatest joys for a leader to disciple another to the Lord (not to the leader) and even see the one disciplined rise up in prominence even above him/herself. No thought should be given to maintaining control or superiority over subordinates.<sup>144</sup>

### **Discouragement to Initiative**

Loyalty, rather than performance, is the yardstick by which prebends are distributed. High performers, but who do not play the "loyal" line to leaders, or who embarrass the patron are ignored or even charged with disloyalty.<sup>145</sup> In this kind of environment it is hard to envisage how new, original thinkers can survive.

A leader will tolerate deviance from a follower, but he is not apt to tolerate a follower's suggestions. Conformity to the leader's will by the follower generally is passive and of

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<sup>143</sup> เสือสองตัวจะอยู่ถ้ำเดียวกันไม่ได้

<sup>144</sup> An example of this is Barnabas, who graciously allowed Paul to move from a place of "follower" to "leader". Acts 9:27; 11:25-27; 13:1 ff.

<sup>145</sup> Norman Jacobs, Modernization without Development, 86.



a quality which does not necessarily engender productive, cooperative relationships between the two.<sup>146</sup>

Indeed, even in the case of the very active Hope of Bangkok Church, Zehner makes the following comments:

When group planning meetings did occur, they tended to be devoted to announcements, report collection, and a succession of dyadic interactions between leader and specific subordinates.<sup>147</sup>

Creativity in such a system is of little value except at the top.<sup>148</sup>

Subordinates may think they know how to do things better, but it is unlikely that their meagre ideas could match in quality, prudence, and long-term usefulness the suggestions of meritorious superiors. Prudence, then is to await the wisdom from above instead of attempting rash action on one's own.<sup>149</sup>

It will be clear that much work needs to go into creating an alternative environment.

### **Inter-church co-operation**

Lucien M. Hanks has pictured Thai social structures as a series of unintegrated chains linked together at their head.<sup>150</sup> So, says Zehner, a peasant farmer in his village tends to be orientated less towards egalitarian relations with other farmers than towards hierarchical relations with his social unequals. As a result, co-operative action by villagers in, say, improving local irrigation, is most easily accomplished by the intervention of mutual superiors.<sup>151</sup>

It can be difficult for those at the same level to initiate joint action. The reason being:

"It is difficult for an equal to give anything of value to an equal or to command his 'respect' Indeed, he stands as a potential competitor for favors."<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>147</sup> Edwin Zehner, Merit, Man and Ministry, 23.

<sup>148</sup> Idem, Church Growth, 95.

<sup>149</sup> Idem, Merit, Man and Ministry, 13.

<sup>150</sup> Lucien M. Hanks, 1968 "American Aid is Damaging Thai Society," Trans-action (October 1968): 29-34, quoted in Edwin Zehner, Church Growth, 5.

<sup>151</sup> Edwin Zehner, Church Growth, 5.

<sup>152</sup> Lucien M. Hanks, and Herbert P. Phillips, "A Young Thai from the Countryside: A Sociological Analysis," in Studying Personality Cross-Culturally (Evanston: Row, Peterson, 1960), 642.

Therefore, the most effective way to gain co-operation of an individual at or above one's own social or organisational position, says Zehner, is to work upwards through one's own patron's contacts to a level at which negotiation can be made to your own advantage. The effects will then flow back downwards through the other's patrons or superiors.<sup>153</sup>

It is equally difficult for two patrons to work together, since they would suspect each other of vying for their clients. A project initiated by one patron is rarely supported by another. In situations where this is carried over into the church, one can imagine the scenario where one pastor is reluctant to ask another pastor to preach in his church in case the other pastor preaches better than he, thereby losing his people's loyalty. An outreach or church planting project initiated by one pastor, may find it difficult raising support from peers or other churches.

It is important, therefore, that humility and an understanding of jointly working for *God* in *His* Kingdom is developed. These points are further discussed in 5.4.8 (From vertical to horizontal loyalty).

### **Change of leadership**

Generally speaking, within traditional Thai society, an institution will develop, grow or succeed depending on its leader. The monastery, for instance, is very dependent upon the abilities (and often supernatural abilities) of its abbot for its growth. The abbot will also remain the ruler in the temple until he dies. The patronage system would have a similar influence over the change of leadership within the church. For instance, the change of the pastor is particularly climacteric. If the pastor moves, possibly his "clientele" will move with him. If he retires but stays within the church, a younger pastor could find it most difficult to lead. A similar problem arises if

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<sup>153</sup> Edwin Zehner, Church Growth, 12.

there is a transfer of leadership from missionary to national, or from one who initially pioneers the church to the one who takes his place.

### **Manipulation**

Because of the lack of certainty in the patron-client system, one of the only recourses left open to a young leader, seeking to advance him/herself (or at least to have some measure of success) is to manipulate relationships to his/her favour. A common trait is for power-seeking juniors to "cosy up" to those in leadership, and at the same time try and establish a "power-base" among potential clients.

In his book Strategy to Multiply Rural Churches, Alex Smith indicates that there are potentially similar problems within rural Thai churches. He particularly cites the example of fresh Bible School graduates trying to establish themselves in the church they have been assigned to where they are not particularly well respected.<sup>154</sup> To avoid the temptation to manipulate, thought needs to be given as to how more certainty can be added to the whole process of releasing new potential leaders into ministry.

### **Arbitration**

A great deal of diplomacy must be applied in cases of arbitration between a patron and a discontented client. Care must be taken to be just to the client in his genuine grievance, while not losing the confidence oneself of the patron. It is often difficult to find a person in the right position to arbitrate. Those who are under the same patronage would find it difficult to speak directly to the patron and also risk losing the patronage themselves. Those on the same level as the patron are usually either disinterested or else are

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<sup>154</sup> Alex Smith, Strategy to Multiply Rural Churches (1977), 219-220.

seen as a potential threat to the patron (the patron may lose his client to the arbitrator).

### **Church Discipline**

Church discipline is the process whereby erring members of the church may be brought back into fellowship both with God and with other members of the body through acknowledgement of and repentance for their sin and through subsequent restoration.

The example given above (5.3.1.1 Hierarchy) by Suntaree Komin, which shows how those with power and relationship connections can always get away from the consequences of wrong-doing, is relevant to our present discussion. In the church situation, several factors may work against effective discipline of erring leaders. These may include hierarchy (e.g. the difficulty for someone junior to confront someone more senior, or the difficulty for someone senior to respect someone junior), the potential loss of patronage, embarrassment, and a desire to help the erring leader save face and his position of respect. Unsatisfactory solutions may therefore be found but these are inadequate in completing the repentance and restoration process.

It is easier, of course, to approach an erring members, but I have not known of one incident yet in my 16 years in Thailand where church discipline (concerning a "severe" sin such as adultery, stealing or persistent lying) has successfully restored the member to fellowship with other members. Invariably the member is lost, either to another church or falls away altogether. The reasons may include unrepentance, shame (loss of face) and, more importantly in relation to our present discussion, a sense of having been rejected from the cautious circle<sup>155</sup> because of the common

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<sup>155</sup> As explained in 2.3.3 (Social Groupings).

understanding that there is usually no way back in to close relationships after they have been broken.

### **Inordinate demands**

Within the patron-client scheme, inordinate demands may come either from the patron or the client. A study of the expectations of leadership<sup>156</sup> may leave one with the question "how can a leader sincerely serve his people without becoming a benefactor to them?". Within the framework of normal Thai society this may be acceptable, but within the framework of the church as a body of believers where each should play his or her own part in supporting the rest of the body, it is not acceptable. Even the leaders should not be expected to carry more than their fair share of responsibility. In some situations, however, this is not easily worked out. For instance, let us take the example of a new church building project. Unless the church has developed considerably in its understanding of the church as a body, the normal expectation is that the leader will find the necessary money to finance the project.

Marden St.John writes in a similar vein concerning financial expectations:

In the patrimonial system a leader is also expected to be a source of financial resources. What of the leader in church organizations in this regard? Christian workers are not highly paid. A Christian worker/pastor may have access to financial resources through foreign organizations such as mission organizations and para-church organizations, through wealthy church members, etc. But whatever his/her resources may be, anyone in the role of a leader in Thai society is expected to have not just power but financial resources. An individual in a leadership position will feel it incumbent upon him/her to search out and find financial resources to promote the purposes of the group which he/she leads. This is part of the self-understanding of the leader and followers' view of the leader's role and a church leader is no exception.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> As in 2.4 Expectations of a leader, 5.2.3 (Normal expectations within the Church).

<sup>157</sup> Marden St.John, Self-understanding Of the Thai, 33.

It is not only financial expectations which may sometimes be overburdensome. Emotional expectations can also take their toll on the leader. He/she is expected to be an emotional refuge and fortress for his/her clients, helping them to bear the many and varied demands they face. Courtship, weddings, funerals, graduation ceremonies, changes of job, moving house are some of the many situations where the leader is expected to be heavily involved. The strong leader is one who can carry all these burdens (on top of his/her own) without flinching or collapsing under the load. Sending a representative is not usually sufficient and lacks the solidarity and warmth (kwam op oon<sup>158</sup>) which are generally expected.

I am not advocating that the leader shun these responsibilities. Rather, I wish to point out that an understanding of the shared responsibility within the body needs to be further understood in order to avoid becoming leaders totally overwhelmed.

Inordinate demands may also come from the leader to the follower. Because of the leader's store of bun kuhn (merit) over the follower, the "stronger" party has the potential to put the "weaker" party on the spot, giving little or no room to manoeuvre or to refuse a request. Biblically, this is an abuse of power and indicates a lack of respect by the leader towards his junior. As Dr. Chaiyun Ukosakul suggests, the whole concept of bun kuhn should be removed from the Christian's vocabulary and methodology.<sup>159</sup>

## **Ethics**

The leader has the right to define the relationship to his follower as he sees fit, free of restrictions that might be imposed on him either by the follower or by any neutral outsider, either in person or in the form of regularised binding rules. If the relationship were otherwise, it would imply that some neutral person or body of rules superior to

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<sup>158</sup> ความอบอุน

<sup>159</sup> Refer to 5.3.1.2 (Indebtedness).

the relationship had been established in the social order. In Thai patrimonial thinking that, a priori, is inadmissible.<sup>160</sup>

There is an inherent danger within the patron-client system for the leader to see himself above the law, as implied in the above quote by Norman Jacobs. In relational cultures, the law tends to be bent or subjugated to the needs of relationships. For instance we may consider Gary Scheer's example in 5.2.4.5 (Grace) of the president, who, in his desire to impress, consistently colours his communication so strongly that reality is obscured. Is this ethically correct?

According to Christian ethics, biblical principles are binding rules on every Christian, applying equally to all, irrespective of position. Exaggeration, manipulation and abuse of authority are all questionable actions ethically. A junior may be driven into a corner, unable to refuse a request because of the need to repay "bun kuhn" favours previously received. The junior may thus act contrary to his/her own desires or even conscience. Because of the need to return a favour, a whole system of working may be undermined or overlooked in order to satisfy an individual (at the expense of upholding agreed priorities).

### **Church loyalty**

An interesting conclusion one may draw from observing churches in Bangkok is that there is no local church. Despite the horrendous Bangkok traffic, members of a church feel no qualms about travelling from one side of the city to another in order to be with those whom they know. The fact that they may live nearly next door to a church is not a consideration when deciding which church they should attend. Another observation, this time concerning membership of Christian groups or organisations, is that a

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<sup>160</sup> Norman Jacobs, Modernization without Development, 190.

Christian student will generally not feel a particularly strong allegiance to a group such as the Christian Union, YFC (Youth for Christ), Campus Crusade, Navigators etc. He /she would feel free to move between the groups. The common factor in both these examples (no local church and student groups) is that the Thai Christian's allegiance is primarily to a certain person (or certain people) within a group rather than the group (institution) itself. If the person leaves, then they would feel inclined to leave also. Clearly identified strong leaders are required for a group (or church) to have cohesion within this context.

This, I suggest is not a healthy way forward for the Thai church. A Christian's commitment should be to the body as a whole, not to the pastor or other individual (patron) nor to just a select number of individuals. Chaiyun Ukosakul's conclusions concerning relationship patterns in a local Thai church, however, is that detachment is a prominent feature. Detachment is typically observed, he says, by non-involvement, non-committal styles of social interaction and the avoidance strategy of conflict resolution.<sup>161</sup>

Related problems arise when someone becomes a Christian in one part of Thailand through a Christian friend or leader living in another part. Theoretically he/she could be "followed-up" by a church near to the new Christian. This is rarely successful, however, since no previous bonding has taken place with those in the local church. It may be too much to expect the new Christian to immediately digress from his/her cultural norm (although the dynamic of the *new birth* should not exclude this expectation), but the example does serve to show the inadequacy of the patron-client system to integrate a person into an entire group.

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<sup>161</sup> Chaiyun Ukosakul, A Study in the Patterns of Detachment in Interpersonal Relationships in a local Thai Church (Illinois: Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1994), iii.



## **Church elections**

Finally, adoption of the patron-client system is likely to lead to problems in the process of church elections. Leaders need to be primarily spiritually minded, not merely men or women of influence. Wealth and position in society are not primary considerations for suitability to lead a church. The dynamics of patronage and indebtedness, however, could influence members to other preferences in their choice. Even if such persons are not eventually elected, they still have the potential to act as "virtual" leaders as has been mentioned earlier.<sup>162</sup>

## **5.4 The role of the Church in sanctifying the patron-client system**

### **5.4.1 Introduction**

Any change to the patron-client system will be inevitably slow. A major question remains, should it be modified or completely overthrown? Marden St. John writes:

#### **Sanctify Or Democratize It?**

The leader-follower system does not need to be done away with, as was seen in the role of the pastor finding jobs for church members. But it needs sanctification, the services of the leader being performed selflessly, for the follower's advantage, not the leader's financial gain or to build a power base from which to rise higher in the organization.<sup>163</sup>

For the sake of the non-Christian or new Christian (who probably do not understand any other system), Christians must work, to some extent, within the patron-client system. At the same time they should gradually change it. In time to come, Christians may hopefully be able to influence society through demonstrating a biblical model of relationships. It is worth noting that the patron-client system, as it stands, with its tendency for the Thai

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<sup>162</sup> Refer to 5.2.2 (Role of influential members).

<sup>163</sup> Marden St. John, Self-understanding Of the Thai, 32.

to look to one person, rather than a group, has not worked particularly well in Thai society as a whole<sup>164</sup>. It is, for instance, one of the main causes for fragmented governments since no one person is able to adequately unite all under him.<sup>165</sup> Already, multi-nationals and other firms, modelled on western patterns, are beginning to break down the traditional patron-client bonds (especially in urban areas) through alternative security packages (such as medical and life insurance policies for their employees). In fact many younger Thais are preferring to work within a more western system since there is more freedom to voice one's opinions and to be accepted on merit of performance and ability rather than through their relationship with their superiors. Taking away the societal "glue" provided by the patron-client relationship could, however, give rise to greater and greater "independence" (one of the basic natural traits of the Thai).<sup>166</sup>

It remains a challenge for the Thai church to develop a biblical model for relationships. This model may incorporate the strengths and opportunities provided by the patron-client system (5.2.4) but with discontinuity concerning the objections (5.3). To what extent this will be a redeeming or sanctifying of the patron-client system and to what extent it will be an overturning, I am not sure. The following are pointers and emphases, however, which I believe will help the Thai church develop such a model.

#### **5.4.2 From egocentricity to Christocentricity**

As Komin states, the Thai are very "ego" oriented, to the extent that it is very difficult for the Thai to dissociate one's ideas and opinions from the

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<sup>164</sup> Note that in the above quote, Marden St. John appears to take for granted that there would be only one Pastor, whereas I would prefer to advocate for a plurality of leadership.

<sup>165</sup> That is apart from the King himself.

<sup>166</sup> Refer to 2.2.4 (Individualism).

"ego" self.<sup>167</sup> The first and foremost area which must be strengthened is the centrality of Christ and His purposes in the minds of Thai believers. Only then will there be a commitment to change. Only as Christ is central in a believer's life, will he/she have the power and motivation to seek the interests of others, even before his/her own. Only to the measure that Christ is living and administering His grace to the believer will the believer be able to channel that grace to another. This is essential if we are to see a replacement of *bun khun* (returnable favour) with *pra khun* (grace, unconditional favour), as Ukosakul proposes.<sup>168</sup>

Committed Christians, in whom Jesus Christ is clearly pre-eminent and Lord, are the ones who may re-shape relational structures within the body. As they sincerely seek to see God glorified in their relationships within their church, they will be instruments for lasting change.

### **5.4.3 From conditional to unconditional relationships**

Grace is the bonding agent for relationships within the body of Christ. It is the hallmark of every true Christian. Grace is giving to another what he or she does not deserve. It is unconditional on past or future behaviour. It stems from the unconditional love of God.<sup>169</sup> It is motivated by the deep recognition of having received grace oneself.

#### **5.4.3.1 Indebtedness**

Unconditional relationships remove all sense of debt. A "senior" gives to a "junior" without expecting any return. To the best of his (or her) ability he seeks to avoid all insinuations that the recipient "owes him one". The "junior" in turn is free to serve the interests of Jesus Christ, out of pure devotion to

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<sup>167</sup> Suntaree Komin, Psychology of the Thai People, 163.

<sup>168</sup> Please see 5.3.1.2.

<sup>169</sup> "Agape" in Greek.

Christ Himself. This will often express itself in service to the "senior", but not from a sense of duty or in order to discharge debt.

2 Corinthians 3:17 states that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom". Freedom from the debt of bun khun is part of the great salvation that is the birthright of every Thai believer. This needs to be understood and apprehended.

The senior too is free. He is free to give, not because of the pressure of expectations placed upon him by clients, but because of the constraining love of Christ and the impulse of the Holy Spirit. He is also free NOT to give when so led. The junior must learn to give their seniors and leaders that freedom.

The removal of obligation and possible debt, will give rise to greater willingness to enter into relationships. It has been seen already that the fear of becoming indebted or the need to reciprocate is often a cause for detachment in relationships.<sup>170</sup>

#### **5.4.3.2 Christian gratitude**

In contrast to indebtedness, gratitude *is* to be endorsed and is a Christian virtue. Although the repayment of favours must be discouraged, ingratitude must not be condoned. Christian gratitude is a freewill expression of thanks for benefits received. It is not rendered as a repayment of the benefits, but rather as an encouragement to the initial giver. A fine line divides gratitude as a repayment and gratitude as a free-will offering. According to Komin, the rural Thais (particularly farmers) rank gratitude (for Bunkhun) as the most important value of all (higher than those surveyed in Bangkok, who ranked it 4th).<sup>171</sup> It will not be surprising, therefore, if there is

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<sup>170</sup> 2.3.3 (Bunkhun). Jacobs also suggests that Thais avoid relationships that may lead to commitment or reciprocity. Norman Jacobs, Modernization without Development, 93.

<sup>171</sup> Suntaree Komin, Psychology of the Thai People, 169.

much confusion between the two types of gratitude, given the fine dividing line between them. Outward expressions of the two may look identical, yet the inward attitude is very different.

#### **5.4.4 From hierarchy to equality**

One of the fundamental objections to the patron-client system as it stands is its hierarchical nature.<sup>172</sup> Two areas need to be strengthened in relation to this. Firstly the equality of all believers. Secondly, distribution of power.

##### **5.4.4.1 Equality of all believers**

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>173</sup>

A fundamental change in understanding needs to take place in the minds of both leaders and followers, whereby each one regards the other as an equal. In 4.2.1.2 we discussed how a characteristic of Christian leadership is its *servant* nature. In 5.2.3.1, however, we can observe that Church members' expectations of their leaders is somewhat different. In particular, we saw that "authority" was a necessary requirement. A relevant question is "How confusing is it for the follower (client) if the leader (patron) models equality and servanthood?" As with the example of washing the dishes too often, the leader runs the risk of losing his respect if he is too much like everyone else. In some situations, it may even be a stumbling block to members if the "full-time" pastor needs to supplement his income by other forms of secular work. It would be quite taboo, for instance, for the monks in the temple to be employed in secular work. Neither would senior monks do menial manual work. It would not be fitting.

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<sup>172</sup> Please refer to 5.3.1.1.

<sup>173</sup> Col. 3.28.

We need to step carefully here in order to avoid unnecessary confusion and misunderstanding. I do believe there are ways forward here, even within the Thai understanding of leadership. Often the King of Thailand is pictured visiting remote villages, wading through rivers and supervising dam projects and the like. All this increases rather than decreases the respect he holds in the eyes of the people. Consistent teaching, therefore, on the subject of our oneness, equality and brotherhood should help pave the way for a lessening of the hierarchical gap between leader and follower.

Bandhmedha says:

The difficulty in teaching adults may stem from the fact that adults regard themselves to be well equipped with experience and knowledge. A claim such as "I was born before you, therefore I know more", is quite common.<sup>174</sup>

This, however, need not be so for the Christian. I believe true baramee <sup>175</sup> in a Christian sense, should come as a result of the life of Jesus Christ being evidenced in the leader, not through an image which is projected and preserved. Jesus led a transparent life before His followers. They saw when He was tired, hungry or upset. They saw Him with children and the rejects of society. It is true that many stumbled over Jesus through His willingness to be seen as frail, especially in being crucified on a cross.<sup>176</sup> They did, however, see Him just as He really was/is, not an image that was projected. Leaders need to learn, therefore, that it is acceptable to honestly say "I don't know", or "I was wrong", or "I can learn from you". Followers, in turn, need to allow them to do this, understanding that the leader's honesty is a reflection of his/her humility and therefore a reason to respect him more, not less.

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<sup>174</sup> Navavan Bandhmedha, "Thai Views of Man as a Social Being," 94.

<sup>175</sup> บารมี Please see 2.4.2 (Baramee is power and strength derived from respect and loyalty).

<sup>176</sup> The Jews stumbled in their faith in Him at this point. The Greeks saw it as foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23).

On a very practical level, the term used to refer to a teacher or pastor in Thai has sometimes troubled me. The word is "ajarn"<sup>177</sup> (teacher), which may be equivalent to the word "Rabbi" which Jesus commanded his followers *not* to be called.

"But you are not to be called `Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. <sup>178</sup>

Some leaders have endeavoured to be called phi<sup>179</sup> (older brother/sister) instead of ajarn. This has not been particularly successful. It leaves members older than the leader struggling to find a respect term. It is possible that Jesus' prohibition for the use of Rabbi results from the implication that the term Rabbi means someone greater.<sup>180</sup> This is not necessarily implied in the term ajarn. My own conclusion is that there is not a problem with the use of the term ajarn.

Another area where the equality of all believers needs to be worked out in practise is in the area of freedom. Each member must be free to express him/herself. This brings us to our next point, "Towards a sharing of power".

#### **5.4.4.2 Towards a sharing of power**

Hierarchy is still being enforced when members do not feel free to express themselves. Where leaders genuinely respect the ideas and initiative of other members, however, an atmosphere of freedom is generated that more fully reflects equality within the body. This is not to say that leaders should abdicate their God-given responsibility in seeking out God's will, but rather they should recognise that God can speak equally through any

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<sup>177</sup> อาจารย์

<sup>178</sup> Mt. 23:8.

<sup>179</sup> พี่

<sup>180</sup> Rabbi is from the Hebrew root "rab" meaning much, many, great or greater. Francis Brown, S. Driver, and Charles Briggs, Hebrew and Greek Lexicon of the Old Testament, s.v. "rab".

member. As we saw in 5.3.3 (Lack of Team work / Individualism), however, members rarely view themselves as joint owners of an association. Leaders do need to work on helping the members to *feel* joint owners with them. But the expectations of the members themselves to share "power", also needs to be raised. Ten Brummelhuis, refers to Thai individualism as "negative" and "hierarchic" (in contrast to a more "getting", "acquiring" and "controlling of destiny" individualism as found in the West). He describes it as an individualism which withdraws rather than exerts. This grew up historically in a setting of vast fertile land (abundant resources) but where only a few have access to power and control of it.

The roots of Thai individualism are in a dominated group without access to political power and without ambition to rule. This ruled majority was mainly interested in isolating an area for undisturbed subsistence. <sup>181</sup>

A more positive attitude needs to be taught and developed for Christians. They need to be given access to power and each member needs to see that he/she is joint owner (with Christ) not only of the church but of all the resources of heaven.<sup>182</sup>

#### **5.4.4.3 Singular to shared leadership**

Where a single leader monopolises the decision making, he/she should endeavour to share the leadership with others who are suitable. A genuine agreement on the principle of the equality of all believers may lead to a leadership of several "equals". This is in contrast to a single patron who raises certain clients into his close circle, but maintains his role of patron over them. It is also in contrast to political infightings prevalent elsewhere.

The political infighting between patrimonial leaders in the society's social structure as they try to struggle to the top of the patrimonial system could unconsciously be the mental attitude toward leadership roles in the mind of the believer unless Christ's

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<sup>181</sup> Han Ten Brummelhuis, "Abundance and avoidance," 52.

<sup>182</sup> Rom. 8:17.



teaching on leadership being a servant role has been consciously imbibed and put into practice by the leadership and members of the church.<sup>183</sup>

It is true that members will not easily adjust to such a system. They are more used to having one clearly defined leader rather than a team of equals. There is, however, strength in plurality and it is my belief that this is the safest road to travel along in the long term. The absence of a dominant leader will also most clearly exalt Jesus as overall Head of His body.

In the area of the support of needy members, individual patronage may be avoided by the entire team of leaders acting together to discuss and implement help. This is probably most analogous to the system used by the apostles in the early part of Acts.<sup>184</sup> Individual leaders may be limited in their ability to help on the physical side, but together they can organise a system of care and of helps. Together, they are in a position to give help more wisely and to decide what the member actually *needs* to receive, rather than merely giving what he asks.

Having a plurality of leaders and allowing them freedom of expression is also one way to increase the overall development of the church. The Christian church could well adopt Norman Jacob's view that:

In order for Thailand to develop, a system of social stratification must be established that will enable individuals with potentially developmental roles, values, and interests which may well be engendered by the process of modernisation to maximise that potential through the pursuit of their own value and interests, free of the censorial review of a patrimonial leadership which holds a priori notions of which values and interests are right or when and how those class interests and values of which it does approve, may be pursued.<sup>185</sup>

A commitment from the present leadership is needed in order for this to be achieved.

#### **5.4.5 From manipulation to faith**

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<sup>183</sup> Marden St. John, Self-understanding Of the Thai, 32.

<sup>184</sup> Please refer to 4.5.1.11 (Provision).

<sup>185</sup> Norman Jacobs, Modernization without Development, 203.

The challenge for Christians, whether they are leaders or followers, is to move in the direction of faith, rather than manipulating their position.

#### **5.4.5.1 Control of leaders**

Leaders may trust God with their "clients" rather than maintaining a hold on them through a series of favours. It requires faith that God will continue to maintain the commitment of members of the church, without the leaders needing to act like benefactors or needing to exercise a high degree of control.

#### **5.4.5.2 Image of leaders**

As we have seen already, the leaders should not need to project an unreal image of themselves. This too requires faith. Peter exhorts leaders to humble themselves so that in due time they may be exalted.<sup>186</sup> If God wants to raise up a leader, then He will do it in His own way. The leader in turn should concentrate on being obedient to Christ and humbly wait on God, rather than on projecting an image.

#### **5.4.5.3 Opportunism of followers**

The followers likewise need to exercise faith in God. They need to understand that their security is God Himself, not their leaders or a patron. They need to look to God for their basic needs and welfare, not to men. This does not exclude the fact that God may choose to use men in answering the needs. Each person is free, however, to respond as they believe God wants them to, rather than being under obligation.

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<sup>186</sup> 1Pt. 5:4.

#### 5.4.6 From insecurity to security

Faith, as described above, may at first appear to decrease the security factor rather than increase it. It must be remembered, however, that the patron-client relationship as it stands is non-contractual and uncertain.

Marden St. John writes concerning security:

The leader class has access to whatever security exists in the society. Followers, by contrast, receive security from leaders on a patron-client basis, that is, benefits and service are received, on a non-contractual basis (grace), on terms specific to clients on an individual basis, regardless of how rich or poor they may be.<sup>187</sup> The follower's situation and interests can only be improved if the leader takes them up and carries them out. A follower cannot improve his own situation or interests, in terms of how he sees them, and he has no basis for confidence that he can do so.<sup>188</sup>

This is basically an insecure system. Obligations can be broken. Disappointments are common. Christians believe that God is their deliverer, their fortress, their rock and their salvation. It should not, therefore, be inconceivable that they put their trust in Him rather than men.

At the same time, the "loose" system that has grown up around the patrimonial structure could be tightened up. Full-time pastors should be offered realistic remuneration for their services along with considerations concerning health care etc. Members need to see that the "system" rewards effort, faithfulness and gifting, independently of the likes or dislikes of one particular leader. This should help people to avoid the snares of manipulation and opportunism.<sup>189</sup> This is in line with Kemp's suggestion to:

introduce a greater element of commitment and trust into an otherwise competitive and unstable area of social relations.<sup>190</sup>

Jacobs also sees the problem as a lack of rewarding:

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<sup>187</sup> Marden St. John, Self-understanding Of the Thai, 21.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>189</sup> As described in 5.3.3.

<sup>190</sup> Jeremy Kemp, "The manipulation of personal relations," in Strategies and structures in Thai Society (Amsterdam, the Netherlands: Anthropological-Sociological Center, University of Amsterdam, 1984), 67.

Because rewarding, politically relevant, goal-orientated social organization is lacking in Thai society, Thais have responded in various characteristic ways to adjust to this deficiency.<sup>191</sup>

A question remains, however, as to how do we stop institutionalising the church through this kind of development? We do want to propose "faith in God" as the solution, yet this is so easily abused through individuals receiving from other individuals according to patron-client arrangements. Increased "security in the system" and increased "faith in God", however, do not necessarily need to be mutually exclusive. Faith in any individual is not static. It is either increasing or decreasing. Given the present situation, increased security in the system may help serve as a complimentary factor to a growing faith in God.

#### **5.4.8 From vertical to horizontal loyalty**

Lucien M. Hanks's picture of Thai social structures is a series of unintegrated chains linked together at their head.<sup>192</sup> The effect of the clientele system is to encourage vertical loyalty but discourage horizontal co-operation & co-ordination.

One of the effects of the cliental system is that the patrimonial decision makers strive to isolate the members of their respective cliental clique from the members of all other cliques, especially from other potential, patronal decision makers who may try to co-optate their clients.<sup>193</sup>

Zehner similarly observes:

As we might expect, requests for cooperation rarely flow laterally to organizational equals. The word ruammu<sup>194</sup> ("cooperate") in Thai normally carries the connotation of putting oneself at the disposal of another, or under his orders.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Norman Jacobs, Modernization without Development, 94.

<sup>192</sup> Hanks, Lucien M. 1968 "American Aid is Damaging Thai Society." Trans-action October 1968: 29-34.

<sup>193</sup> Norman Jacobs, Modernization without Development, 79.

<sup>194</sup> ร่วมอยู่

<sup>195</sup> Edwin Zehner, Church Growth, 90.

The picture of the church, however, is that of a body, all parts linked to the head but also linked to each other. A member's loyalty is not just to the pastor, but primarily it is to the body as a whole. The body is also not merely the local church to which he/she belongs but a world-wide community. He or she should be responsive and sensitive to the needs and feelings of the wider body. If actions taken by the local body are potentially disruptive to the wider body or to another church, then he/she should feel free to say so. In starting a new church, for instance, special care needs to be taken to consider the interests of other churches which may already exist in that area. Co-operation between leaders probably needs to come first in order to achieve such horizontal loyalties. Distrust needs to be broken down. Repentance needs to take place where there have been past hurts. There needs to be a genuine commitment to seek God's kingdom together.

Members, likewise, may discover that their needs can be met through horizontal relationships, not just through the vertical. Counselling, and the meeting of various emotional needs can be met through the support of peers, particularly when done in small groups.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

The patron-client system of relationships is not a good model for the Thai church. Until more understanding comes, however, Christians in Thailand will inevitably have to work within this system while at the same time they seek to redeem it and change it. Commitment to change, example and teaching are some of the ways to bring about that change. Particular emphasis should be given to teaching on the following subjects: grace, agape love, faith, the Lordship of Christ, the direction of the Holy Spirit, the nature of the body of Christ.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Conclusions**

This study has investigated relationships within Thai society, summarised biblical teaching concerning relationships (in particular between leaders and followers) and then related these findings to the Thai church.

In chapter two it was noted that Thai society is hierarchical in structure. Relationships tend to be fashioned in a "leader-follower", "patron-client", "senior-junior" pattern. Although horizontal loyalties between equals do exist, the bond of such loyalties tends to be weak in comparison to the vertical loyalties between senior and junior. It was further noted that clearly defined expectations exist within these relationships. Leaders are expected to be both authoritative and benevolent, while followers are expected to be deferential and loyal. The strength of relationship between a patron and a client is variable, however. It may fluctuate according to the benefits (or potential benefits) received by each party and according to the extent to which the client is indebted to the patron. The highly individualistic nature of the Thai is also another factor determining the strength of such loyalties.

In chapter three, two biblically models for relationships were considered, the "family" and the "body". Within the "family", all believers are described equally as brothers and sisters, with God as their Father. Intimacy, security, freedom and mutuality are all characteristics of relationships within the family of God. The model of the "body" also emphasises the fact that Jesus Christ is the Head, the members being the various parts of the body each with a specific function. Members are to be interrelated (horizontally) with each other and (vertically) with the head.

In chapter four, the study continued from a biblical perspective, this time considering various aspects of leadership. The examples of Moses and

David from the Old Testament, and Jesus and Paul from the New Testament, were considered. Common themes such as servant leadership, faith in God and team work were identified. It was also noted that Christians have the clear injunction not to be in debt to one other. They are to act towards each other not out of obligation, but freely, as and when the Holy Spirit directs and guides them.

In chapter five, it was observed that the hierarchical nature of Thai society influences and affects relationships within the Thai church. Patron-client dynamics operate to varying degrees. Sometimes these work for good, for instance when a patron "opens doors" enabling the gospel to be preached or for a needy member to find a job (etc.). There are some fundamental problems with the patron-client system, however, which are inconsistent with a biblical understanding of relationships and of the church. Firstly the hierarchical nature of the relationship itself, and secondly the indebtedness and obligation which are associated with these relationships.

Christians must work within the patron-client scheme to the extent that they feel at ease to do so. At the same time they should seek to model and teach alternative forms of relating and supporting each other. One such way is to emphasise the group rather than the individual. Leadership within the church should be done as a team. Problems of members should be considered and dealt with by a group, not by an individual. Horizontal loyalties should be strengthened. On an inter-church level, leaders need to learn to trust each other and work together, not to promote their own "line" but to advance the Kingdom of God together. On the local church level, "support triplets<sup>1</sup>" may be introduced whereby the needs of members can be discussed by their peers, remembering the words of Jesus who said that where two or

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<sup>1</sup> That is three members of similar age, background can meet together to share and pray for each other.

three meet in His name He is there with them.<sup>2</sup> The Headship of Jesus can thus be reinforced as well as raising the expectation that needed help, counsel and support can come from peers (not just down through seniors).

Another emphasis that should increasingly be taught and practised is that of "faith". Leaders need to trust that God will extend their position and following as He wills. The leader does not need to project an image of superiority, neither does he/she need to become a benefactor to would be followers. Followers, likewise, need to trust God for the support and help they need, rather than seeking out someone senior who will "look after them".

More security may also need to be built into the support system of the church especially in relation to the salaries and benefits for pastors. Although this at first may appear to contradict the need for increased faith, an uncertain financial policy may, in fact, increase the temptation for pastors to overly look to individuals (their own patrons) for their necessary support.

I trust that as the Holy Spirit works within the churches, Thai Christians may be able to increasingly demonstrate the unconditional love of God in their relationships with each other. Favours may be done with no expectation that they be returned. Loyalty may be given to leaders and other members alike, not out of indebtedness, but because the love of Christ constrains them.

The challenge for the Thai church is to be so filled and transformed by the nature of Christ that biblical relationships may develop and become the norm. By God's grace I believe this may be so.

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<sup>2</sup> Mt. 18:20.



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