

UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF ‘FAMILY’ IN MEXICAN AND SOUTH AFRICAN ZULU CULTURES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to provide a different concept and understanding of diverse cultures so that missionaries can overcome cultural barriers and effectively share the gospel. The researcher has narrowed the boundary to Mexican and South African Zulu cultures. The main focus was to provide helpful contextualization insights utilizing the concept of family for both Mexican and Zulu cultures so that missionaries are aided in the process of sharing the gospel. The characteristic of Mexican culture regarding family lies in the concept of *compadrazgo* (godfather) which goes beyond the boundary of blood-ties. African culture relies on a tribal system which carries the opposite meaning of *compadrazgo*. The Bible assumes that the family system was a part of God’s creation. In Galatians, “children of Abraham” was used metaphorically rather than biologically. It is limited to understanding the Biblical family system with *compadrazgo* (client-patron) or a tribal system (blood). However, applying *compadrazgo* to a tribal culture is expected to aid the African natives’ understanding of the redemptive work of Christ. Also, bridging the African understanding of family is an aid to overcome the potential of minimizing the roles of the traditional family.

Key Words: Mexico, Africa, family, *compadrazgo*, ancestor

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I. INTRODUCTION

Richards and O'Brien, who are the authors of "Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes," gives an illustration of how cultural backgrounds can affect the understanding of different people groups. Richards and O'Brien said:

In Indonesia, billiards is considered a grievous sin for Christians. When I (Randy) heard this, I reacted, "That's silly. We had a pool table in my house when I was growing up." My Indonesian friends said nothing. Years later, I found out that they commonly thanked God that he had delivered me from my terrible past. In their mind, I had grown up in a virtual brothel(Richards and O'Brien, 2012: 34).

Billiards can be a good sport in some cultures, but like Indonesia, in some cultures it can be considered an unbiblical activity. In a mission field, mis-presentation of the gospel can happen because of situations similar to the one above. Newbigin said, "If the gospel is to be understood, if it is to be received as something which communicates truth about the real human situation, if it is, as we say, to "make sense," it has to be communicated in the language of those to whom it is addressed and has to be clothed in symbols which are meaningful to them (Newbigin, 1989: 141). Since sender (missionaries) and receiver (natives) have different cultural backgrounds, taking this concept seriously is imperative.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a different concept and understanding of diverse cultures so that missionaries can overcome cultural barriers and effectively share the gospel. Since the topic has a vast scope this researcher has narrowed the cultural boundary to Mexican and South African Zulu cultures. Specifically, the goal of this paper is to aid those who are interested in sharing the gospel to both Mexican and African cultures. As there are endless cultural aspects pertaining to both cultures, this author narrowed it down to one cultural aspect: the concept of family in the Mexican and South African cultures. Family is a universal topic, and every culture has family. Anthropologists concur that "kinship is universal and in

most societies plays a significant role in the socialization of individuals and the maintenance of group solidarity” (Abercrombie and Hill, 2006: 209). Also, the reason that the Mexican and African concepts of family are relevant is that both cultures have uniqueness in perceiving the term. In Latin American culture, including Mexico, the family system is regarded as the most significant relationship (Stephenson, 2003: 52). It is also regarded as the heart, the sustaining warmth, and the driving force to overcome times of trouble (Fuentes, 1999: 347). In the African tribal system, deceased family members are still regarded as family members and revered thusly. Newbigin points out:

We must start with the basic fact that there is no such thing as a pure gospel if by that is meant something which is not embodied in a culture. The simplest verbal statement of the gospel, “Jesus is Lord,” depends for its meaning on the content which that culture gives to the word “Lord.” What kind of thing is “lordship” in the culture in question? . . . Every interpretation of the gospel is embodied in some cultural form. The missionary does not come with the pure gospel and then adapt it to the culture where she serves: she comes with a gospel which is already embodied in the culture by which the missionary was formed. And this is so from the very beginning (Newbigin, 1989:144)

As Newbigin mentioned, “Jesus is Lord” is understood differently according to different cultural backgrounds. How Mexican and Zulu people understand the word ‘family’ in the Bible is influenced differently according to their cultures. Mexicans will think of a *compadrazgo* system while Zulu people will relate family to their hierarchical ancestor worship. Thus, in order to connect the gospel to African and Mexican contexts one must understand the ways that both cultures understand family. The author desires that through this study readers may find helpful contextualization insights for both Mexican and Zulu cultures, and for those who are accustomed to native Mexican cultures to effectively minister in African an context or vice versa.

As indicated above, in this paper the Zulu tribe of South Africa is mainly discussed, whereas the Mexican culture will not be narrowed down to a smaller unit because the

compadrazgo system is found throughout Mexico (Kemper, 1982: 17).

This paper starts by exploring Mexican and African cultures and continues with the biblical concept of family. Interactions with an interview¹⁾ that provides much more detailed and accurate ideas concerning the topic are intertwined in this paper. Afterwards, strengths and weaknesses of each culture are evaluated in addition to unveiling how the two cultures perceive the concept of family.

II. THE FAMILY IN THE MEXICAN CULTURE: THE COMPADRAZGO SYSTEM IN MEXICO

When exploring the concept of family in a certain culture, there always is uniqueness. In some cultures, the concept of tribe²⁾ is a key to understand families, and in some cultures like Korea, the concept of extended family cannot be neglected³⁾.

Likewise, in discussing the concept of family in Mexico, family is emphasized through the concept of the *compadrazgo* system (Condon, 1985: 25). This is an important characteristic for understanding the Mexican culture.

At a practical level, many missionaries who are ministering to Latin Americans are and will have a hard time getting adjusted to the culture without perceiving the

1) The writer interviewed the Korean missionary Seong Ryul Choi. Choi was a missionary to Paraguay from 1991–2002. He is currently a missionary to Mexico, Puebla, since October 2002. He graduated from Kosin Theological Seminary in Korea and currently belongs to the Kosin USA denomination. His main ministry focus is church planting, church building construction, and establishing seminaries and Bible schools.

2) Most African Cultures cannot be discussed without this concept. Tribe itself is a family.

3) Korean society is male dominant, and the culture is based on the concept of extended family. When three or four generations live together the mother's generations are excluded. Only the father's side is considered as the extended family. When a bride gets married, she will leave her original family and join her husband's family, and her official records will transfer to her husband's family. Due to industrialization and globalization, some of the past traditions have changed, but many of these traditions are still in place.

concept of *compadrazgo*. Novice missionaries to rural areas of Mexico have a common initial impression of the natives. That is to say they view indigents as lazy, helpless, and overly dependent on missionaries. Missionaries think that these people always want help from missionaries. Whenever they come across missionaries they are asking for money, shelter, and other goods. On the other hand, they neglect missionaries' requests for help. Missionaries who are from western countries, who are accustomed to the patterns of cause and effect, have a difficult time understanding this situation. What seems to be wrong? Are the natives a lazy and irresponsible people as western missionaries think? No. This is not a matter of lazy people but a matter of ignorance of the *compadrazgo* social system of Mexico.

1. Concept of Family in Mexico

Before studying *compadrazgo*, it is important to grasp the concept of family in the Mexican culture because the *compadrazgo* system derives itself from the notion of family. When the researcher asked Missionary Choi how Mexicans define family he replied:

Family is highly important. It is the base of society and the force that moves the nation. Family is like a first school. In a loving environment, parents provide their children a worldview that helps them to be consistent, righteous, and competent members of society. Like the biblical notion that the family began from the beginning of creation, Mexican people share the same thought. In the Mexican peoples' minds, family is regarded as the foundation of society.

However, there is change in the Mexican family structure. Mexicans, especially young people, sometimes feel more comfortable with close friends than with distant family members. Currently, this way of thinking is expanding and some people now accept friends as family members. How is this possible? The thought that people tend to include close friends as their family members is a result of *compadrazgo*. As

this research explains in the next section, the *compadrazgo* system is a unique family system that is often described as reinforcing strong friendships with people outside their biological family (Novas, 1994: 182).

2. Definition of Compadrazgo

“*Compadrazgo* is best described as a system of fictive kinship, with its origins in the medieval Catholic Church in Europe. It can be loosely translated as ‘godparenthood’” (Scott and Marshall, 2009: 112). “They are considered companion parents who help with the raising of the family’s children” (Barker, 2003: 86). According to Gudeman and Nutini’s⁴⁾ definition of *compadrazgo*, “the Mesoamerican *compadrazgo* system is a syncretic transformation of the European Catholic practice to invite godparents as spiritual sponsors when an individual is accepted as a member of the religious community” (Schnegg and White, 2008: 3). In distinction to kinship relationship, Barker says that it is people who are tied by historical ties instead of tied to a family through a kinship network (Barker, 2003: 86). It is also often referred to as close friendship. In order to reinforce friendship, a *compadre*⁵⁾ or *comadre* relationship is established (Novas 1994, 182).

Missionary Choi relates *compadrazgo* to the concept of family in this way:

There are no possibilities that this will reduce the authority of biological parents. On the contrary, parents regard *compadrazgo* as a good tradition for godparents who will support financially. In the past, there were many godparents among distant relatives, but after urbanization during the 1970s, people from outside the family bond became godparents. People in Mexico feel more necessity for *compadrazgo* as more nuclear families occur in urban areas.

4) See Gudeman, S. 1975. Spiritual Relationships and Selecting a Godparent. MAN 10:221-37, and Nutini, H.G. 1984. Ritual Kinship. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

5) When a *compadrazgo* relationship is established, the biological father and godfather call each other *compadre* (Noble and Lacasa, 1990: 69).

3. Types of *Compadrazgo*

Hugo G. Nutini and Douglas R. White analyzed the types of *compadrazgo* in the *compadrazgo* system in Tlaxcala, Mexico. The result shows that there were thirty one types of *compadrazgo*⁶⁾ (Nutini and White, 1977: 354-356). *Compadrazgo* goes beyond the spiritual realm and has more of a political and economic flavor as Scott and Marshall denoted that “Co-parents with political and economic resources are sought by the biological parents of a child in order to ensure political protection and economic support for the whole family, or perhaps financial support for the child” (Scott and Marshall, 2009: 112).

4. Benefits, Impacts, and Strengths of *Compadrazgo*

The benefit of being a co-parent is like a patron-client relationship⁷⁾. Patron-client relationships, or clientalism, are a dyadic tie whereby a person of higher status provides protection and benefits for a person of lower status who in return gives general support, assistance, or personal service (Scott, 1972: 126-7).

The *compadrazgo* system exerts a strong impact on Mexican kinship. According to the research concerning *compadrazgo* in Beln, Mexico, “among 257 couples forming the cohesive core of the *compadrazgo* network, more are born outside than inside Beln but 43% are born inside” (Schnegg and White, 2008: 12). What this signifies is how influential *compadrazgo* is compared to kinship. “It not only

6) The examples are mainly divided into two categories. One is sacramental, including baptism, marriage, confirmation, the erection of burial cross, first communion, and so on. The other consists of non-sacramental items such as graduation, the erection of a cross at the communal spring celebration of a girl's fifteenth birthday, the setting of a house foundation, the blessing of new cars, and so on.

7) Although the *compadrazgo* system is based on patron-client relationship systems, it should be emphasized that patron-client relationships are not limited to *compadrazgo* (Scott and Marshall, 2009: 112).

integrates people who live in Beln but forms a very well connected ‘invisible community’ extending beyond the physical boundaries of the village” (Schnegg and White, 2008: 12).

The strength of *compadrazgo* is that it “overcomes the limitations of the locally endogamous kinship network” (Schnegg and White, 2008: 12). In other words, the system fills the weaknesses of a kinship relationship. In the Latin American culture, simply being born does not qualify a child as a member of the community so the biological parents must be supplemented by social parents to provide the child or children a social identity (Scott and Marshall, 2009: 112).

In the spreading of the gospel, *compradrazgo* functions as an effective tool. Choi says:

It will be a powerful tool for evangelism. When a missionary functions as a godfather with the love of Christ and helps support them, it will be effective for missionary work in Mexico. Also, as godparents, it will be a good opportunity to build deep relationships with the biological parents which will provide good evangelism opportunities. There were many offers made to me that I should become godparents for them (natives). It would make a good case study to determine if a missionary becomes a godparent whether that relationship can be an effective tool for evangelism on the mission fields.

III. THE FAMILY IN ZULU CULTURE: ANCESTRAL WORSHIP

In the previous section, the *compadrazgo* system was introduced as a distinctive factor in understanding the concept of family in Latin America. In this section, ancestor worship is introduced as a key element to understand the Zulu family. In this section, definition, boundary of ancestors, the roles of ancestors, and a brief process of native ritual to reach ancestors are discussed.

1. Boundary of Ancestors: Worshipping Saints and Ancestor Worship

One may think the term 'ancestors' only applies for African and some East Asian countries. However, if the term is not limited to a biological family system this can be applied to biblical figures and saints in church history.

Protestants viewed saint veneration as an act of idolatry based on Scripture⁸⁾ whereas Roman Catholics perceive saints as ancestors and approve veneration of the saints, as well as the use of images and icons of saints. During the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the Catholic Church approved the use of images and statues in the veneration of saints. In session XXV, which was held in December 1563, they provided the following terms:

Moreover, that the images of Christ and of the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other saints, are to be had and retained particularly in temples, and that due honor and veneration are to be given them; not that any divinity or virtue is believed to be in them on account of which they are to be worshipped, or that anything is to be asked of them, or that trust is to be reposed in images, as was of old by the Gentiles, who placed their hopes in idols; but because the honor which is shown them is referred to the prototypes which these images represent. In such wisdom that by the images which we kiss and before which we uncover the head, and prostrate ourselves, we adore Christ, and we venerate the saints, whose similitude they bear: as, by the decrees of Councils, and especially of the second Synod of Nicea, has been defined against the opponents of images (McGill and Peters 2014:371).

The discussion made during the Council of Trent regarding the veneration of the saints is relevant because this later affected the practices of ancestor worship. For example, when ancestor worship became an issue in Korea in the 1790s, the Roman Catholic Church forbid their worship because it was regarded as an act of idolatrous worship⁹⁾. However, "in 1940 the Korean Roman Catholic Church adopted a rather tolerant attitude toward traditional ancestor worship and declared bowing to a

8) Exodus 20:3–6; Psalm 106:28–29; 1Corinthians 10:21–22.

9) See Choi 2006: 684–246.

corpse, a tomb, or a picture of the deceased; burning incense in front of a corpse or at the ancestral tomb; and preparing and offering foods in memory of the deceased” (Bae, 2008: 88). As a result, the Roman Catholic Church in Korea now permits worshipping ancestor, *chesa*, as well as bowing down before the tombs of ancestors.

The boundary of ancestor is broad and includes biblical figures, saints, and biological ancestors. African ancestors can also include African saints, religious leaders, or the Roman Catholic saints. For this reason, the boundary of the term in this paper is limited to the biological and tribal concepts in Zulu, South Africa.

2. Who are Ancestors?

The definition of ancestors can be made as “departed elders” (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tinou, 1999:61), “the dead progenitors of a family, clan, or tribe,” (Amanze, 2003: 43) or “dead members of a social group as long as the living members of that group pay regular cultic homage to him or her” (Amanze, 2003: 43). Ancestors are considered influential because there are no distinctions made between living elders and deceased ancestors (McCall, 1995: 256). This means that ancestors influence their descendants’ lives and the descendants depend on them (Triebel, 2002: 188). This idea shapes and forms the concept of solidarity. For African people, tribe or community is more important than individuals. Thus, “it is the responsibility of everyone to further and strengthen the life of one’s own community” (Triebel, 2002: 189). In order to fulfill this responsibility, one has to know about the origin of life, that is, the ancestors who are the beginning of life (Triebel, 2002: 189). If one disrespects ancestors, it is not only a sin to them but against the whole extended family (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tinou, 1999: 61). Thus, ancestors in Africa are part of their family as well as the beginning of their life.

3. The Role of Ancestors

The most crucial role of ancestors is as mediators. They are the way to reach the "Supreme God"¹⁰⁾ (Amanze, 2003: 47). This puts African people into obligation to venerate and rely on their ancestors. Another role of ancestors is that "they are the representatives of law and order" (Triebel, 2002: 189). This means that ancestors will punish those who offend them and grant blessings to the ones who follow their orders (Nxumalo, 1980: 10). Punishment and blessing is related to their everyday life. Harvest, misfortune, illness, and death are the typical phenomena that are regarded as everyday life (Triebel, 2002: 189). Many also believe that barrenness (McCall, 1995: 266) and traffic accidents (Treibel, 2002: 190) are impacted by the ancestral spirits.

4. The Process of Ancestor Veneration

The process of ritual varies according to the region but the main points are shared in common. In general, the ritual consists of gathering in a sacred place and making an offering, prayer, and a feast. The sacred place is recognized as the tomb or graveyard of their ancestor. The tomb or graveyard is not necessarily a bush or underground. Nigerian people build houses¹¹⁾ above the ancestor's tomb (McCall, 1995: 260). After entering the sacred place, an animal and alcohol is used for an offering. Normally, "innards such as heart, kidneys, liver and blood" are burned (Triebel, 2002: 191). Afterwards, alcohol is poured for the ritual¹²⁾. Prayer involves

10) There is hierarchy in the spiritual realm; whenever there is a request, it is invoked to the invisible father and he forwards the message to the next ancestor above him (Amanze, 2003: 47).

It also is believed by African people that there is a supreme being who created the universe.

11) To be exact, the living room is built on the grave to discuss family concerns with the buried ancestor.

12) In Nigeria, descendants pour beer through the hole in the middle of the room where the ancestor is buried underground or on the ground of the ritual site as the founder's summon the

calling upon the names of the ancestors. The names of the ancestors are called upwards beginning from the nearest forefather. The prayer consists of invoking, complaint, and petition. When the rituals are done in order, a feast made from the leftover sacrificial meat climaxes in the final stage.

Stinton points out that in the concept of ancestors in the African context “they continue the ties of kinship beyond death, linking together family and clan members in the visible and invisible worlds” (Stinton, 2004: 114). In that sense, “kinship lies at the very heart of ancestral concepts” (Stinton, 2004: 114).

Without recognizing their ancestors, it is impossible to discuss the concept of African kinship or family. In the center of African kinship, ancestral worship functions as a trap, or an obligation. Due to the fact that their ancestors have power to punish or bless them, and they are the way to reach the Supreme Being, it is inevitable to worship their fathers. Also, the fact that the deceased forefathers are regarded as members of the African family fosters ancestral veneration. Thus, ancestral veneration in Africa is involved in everyday family life rather than only a ritual means.

5. Relationship between Mexican and African Kinship

When Missionary Choi was asked about performance of ancestor worship in Mexico, he replied:

During the winter times on November 1st and 2nd, Mexican people celebrate the “Day of the Dead”. These days are times of family gatherings. People decorate the tombstone of the deceased family with orange flowers and celebrate by eating skull-shaped chocolate cookies, bread of the dead, wine, and so on. The bread of the dead normally consists of three layers. The first layer means the physical earth. The second layer is the spiritual realm. That is why a picture of the deceased family member hangs on this layer. The third layer means the realm of the gods. When the day of the dead begins at 12:00 in the morning on November

ancestors to join the feast (McCall, 1995: 260).

1st, people ring a bell 12 times. Then souls of little children come down and eat the chocolate skulls and bread. On the next day, people offer tobacco and wine instead of cookies and bread for the day is the day of adult souls.

One commonality between the Mexican and Zulu cultures is that they both perform ancestral worship. The difference is that Mexican ancestor is based on Roman Catholic tradition following the tradition of All Saints Day.

Choi continues:

It is hard to identify whether the deceased family members have power to grant blessings and curses upon people but one aspect that can be emphasized here is that the bondship of family continues. By the three levels of the realms, one can find that there is hierarchism in the spiritual world similar to the way the African people believe. The different aspect from the African tradition is their emphasis on celebration. African people tend to focus on rituals whereas Mexicans [focus] on celebration, although there are still mystical factors remaining in Mexican tradition.

Interestingly enough, like in the African tradition, Mexican ancestor worship is a hierarchical system. However, it can be noted that the influence of ancestors is less influential than in the African context because the practice is more focused on recreational purposes. Despite the existence of the practice, the *compadrazgo* system is more dominate in Mexico¹³).

IV. BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF FAMILY

The theme of family appears throughout the Bible. According to the *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, "The Hebrew Bible tells the story of one set of families, while the extended household of the Greco-Roman world provides the backdrop to the

13) However, it links the celebration aspect with biblical teachings. Death itself is a curse, but for reborn Christians death is overcome by believing in Christ. Like Christ, the resurrection is a celebrative factor that believers enjoy.

NT” (Drane, 2000: 494). Christians confess that God is their Father, and believers are his children. In relationship to the Trinity, God is the Father, and Jesus is God, the Son.

1. Family in the Old Testament

Genesis is the book of beginnings. The book testifies to the beginning of family. When God created the universe, he created systems too. He created seasons, the weather cycle, and even the system of human society. He created the system of family by a marriage paradigm (Kstenberger, 2004: 32-37). This marriage system in the Bible is based on a covenantal theme. “Just as God draws the elect believer into a covenant relationship with him, Calvin argues, so God draws husband and wife into a covenant relationship with each other” (Tarwater, 2005: 4). When God brought Eve to Adam, they became husband and wife, a family before God. As the witness, God gave them a covenantal command¹⁴). The reason that this command is crucial is that it comes even before the covenant of works in Genesis chapter three. Therefore, what Genesis signifies is that God is the author of family. The family theme continues through the patriarchal times.

Families in Old Testament times were more like a tribe than a modern day family. Kstenberger gives a good explanation:

Unlike the modern western notion of a nuclear family consisting of husband, wife, and children, ancient Israelite households were comprised of large extended families, also including a couple’s married children’s families, any as of yet unmarried sons and daughters, and male and female hired servants and slaves along with their families (Kstenberger, 2004: 94).

Members of family in the Old Testament not only included the direct blood line

14) And God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen 1:28).

but also servants and slaves. Although the social status of slaves and servants remained inferior, they were regarded as members of the family. Hagar¹⁵⁾ was a slave girl but was a wife in a sense that she bore a son to Abraham. As a sign of being a member of Abraham's household, Abraham circumcised Ishmael and all the servants who were born in his house and all who were bought with his money (Gen 17:23). This clearly shows a broader boundary than that of modern families.

During those times, a father's obligation was to protect and provide security for the family and to treat them with dignity while being submissive to the husband's and father's authority was a requirement for wife and children (Kstenberger, 2004: 94-101; Block 2003, 48).

One crucial aspect that should not be neglected in understanding family in the Old Testament times is the concept of the fall. Drane argues:

The fall so disrupted the marriage relationship (Gen 3:16) that men and women were sometimes unable to realize God's intention for it (Gen 2:24), becoming unfaithful to one another. One story after another shows the integrity of the family being threatened by brutality and violence¹⁶⁾ (Drane, 2000: 496).

This theme carries on through the times of kings¹⁷⁾ and exiles¹⁸⁾. The negative aspect of family in the Old Testament functioned as a request to expect the

15) Although Hagar was regarded as a wife she was still considered a concubine of Abraham. There are distinctive factors that divide wife and concubine. Such an example can be found in Genesis 24 where the servant of Abraham pays the bride fee.

16) Drane gives some examples such as Jacob deceiving his brother (Gen 27:1-45) and Jacob's sons selling Joseph (Gen 37:1-36) (Drane, 2000: 496). There are more examples in the Bible of how the fall affected families. To give more examples: In Genesis 4, Cain kills his brother Abel in jealousy that God only received Abel's offering but not his. In Gen 38, Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute to tempt her father-in-law Judah. Jacob's favor on Joseph resulted in his sons selling Joseph to Egypt in Gen 39. In 2 Sam 15:1-37, Absalom rebels against his father David and attempts a coup d'état.

17) See 2 Kgs 8-12.

18) According to Isa 5:8-10, and Am 2:6-8; 4:1-3, the Israelites sold their family as slaves (Drane, 2000: 495).

restoration of family.

2. Family in the New Testament

The concept of family in the New Testament is much broader than in the Old Testament. The book of Galatians uses the phrase “children of Abraham” many times. There are many views on who are the “children of Abraham”¹⁹⁾. Among the diverse views, it is convincing to argue that the concept of the phrase refers to “metaphorical kinship” (Rhoads 2004, 285). In describing the phrase, Paul includes adopted ones, slaves, freedmen, minors, and guardians who are not in blood-bond kinship (Rhoads, 2004: 285). Paul gets this idea from Christ Jesus.

When Jesus was once asked, “Who are my mother and my brother?” Jesus replied, “Behold my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God he is my brother and sister and mother”(Matt. 10:35-37). The text teaches that “family must never stand in the way of following God’s will”(Pinson, 1981: 25). This does not mean that this teaching can be misused to justify doing church works vigorously²⁰⁾. What Jesus meant was an emphasis. Jesus tried to make an emphasis on the superiority of God. According to this principle then, the boundary of family that Jesus is drawing goes beyond the nuclear family, tribal kinship, or a boundary of *compadrazgo*. The statement that Jesus made is a powerful mission calling. Anyone who is doing God’s will, regardless of skin color or biological blood-bond, is God’s family. Through faith, people become one family in God²¹⁾. Moreover, as the

19) Some sociologists argue that the “children of Abraham” is a “fictive kinship relationship” while some argue that it is a “surrogate family,” suggesting that the relationships are an alternative to blood relations (Rhoads, 2004: 285).

20) Jesus loved his mother. One of the last things that he did on the cross was to ask his beloved disciple to take care of her (Pinson, 1981: 25).

21) Abraham was considered righteous because he had faith. Likewise, when people “have faith like Abraham had faith, they can be considered children of Abraham..In this way, Judeans and Gentiles alike who have faith in Christ will have the same status before God (as Judeans and Gentiles) and will be in mutual relationship (as “brothers”) with each other” (Rhoads, 2004: 287).

second Adam, Jesus restored the sinful world. By fulfilling the Law and requirement of God, and by being the substitute sacrificial offering, he gave his life and through faith believers became the new creation. He not only restored our identity but as a new creation, he restored the whole world. He is the way and the truth and the life (Jhn. 14:6). Thus, through Jesus Christ, the fallen nature of family in the Old Testament is restored.

V. EVALUATION AND APPLICATIONS

Both Mexican and African cultures have pros and cons. In Mexican culture, strength can be found in the boundary of family. Mexicans perceive non-biological kinship easily. However, the down side of this aspect is that in explaining a relationship with God, *compadrazgo* can lose the true meaning of God and his people's relationship. It gives an image of a patron-client relationship. People might think that they must show loyalty to God because he is the provider. Another weakness is that the traditional concept of family can be replaced or weakened by *compadrazgo*. Mainly focusing on extended family members has the potential of minimizing the role of the biological father, mother, and siblings.

For the African tradition, ancestral veneration can be regarded as idolatry. It is a sin to treat deceased parents as mediators to reach the Supreme Being. However, the good side of this tradition is that the concept of a mediator, a Supreme Being, the concept of hierarchism, and solidarity are found in the Bible. Jesus is our ancestor, God is the Supreme Being who is the creator of the universe, and at the top of the hierarchy God exists. The concept of solidarity relates to biblical teaching. Humanity fell when Adam fell as the representative of humanity. Likewise, humanity rose up with Christ for he represented humanity. For African people, these factors can be bridged and contextualized.

What then is the common denominator for the African and Mexican concepts of

family? What is the connecting bridge that links the African and Mexican cultures? Though their boundaries and characters might be different, how they regard the importance of honoring parents and family is the same. African tribal rituals for ancestors derive from the honor of their parents. The concept of solidarity shows the importance of family and community. The concept of *compadrazgo* shows the importance that Mexican people place on family and community. Celebrating the “Day of the Dead” also signifies how Mexican people honor and love their family members. In these ways, both cultures do have some connection with biblical ideas of honoring parents²²⁾. Family love and honoring parents are universal aspects of every culture. How this concept is executed varies, but it is human nature to love family members. This concept is a strong connection not only with the biblical principal of family but also a strong connection between Mexican and African cultures.

What is a recommended approach for a Mexican missionary or a person who is accustomed to Mexican culture to effectively reach out to an African culture or someone whose background is a tribal social system? That is to bring some of the aspects from the concept of *compadrazgo* into African culture. This enables them to overcome the boundary of their strong bondage within their tribes. The *compadrazgo* system shows a possible expansion of their notion of family towards non-biological and non-tribal parties. This enables two things. First, it helps African cultures to be equipped with a better understanding of the concept of atonement. Christ has no biological relationship with them, but since He provided eternal life, restoring the lost relationship with God, and giving them citizenship in heaven, it is their responsibility to accept Jesus as their savior and to receive God as their father, worshiping him forever. *Compadrazgo* actually helps them to perceive this concept better than an African tribal system. Another benefit for African cultures is that it helps them to have a better understanding of foreign missionaries. Even though they are from outside of the African tribal and biological system they can still function as

22) Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16; Matt 15:4,6; 19:19; Mrk 7:10; 10:19; Luk 18:20.

their leaders. *Compadrazgo* can establish a father-children relationship. Missionaries can fill both their physical needs and spiritual needs whereas people provide loyalty and cooperation to missionary works.

On the other hand, African's strong family bondage may fill the weakness of *compadrazgo*. Despite the fact that *compadrazgo* has positive missional implications, if the traditional concept of family becomes secondary, it may cause confusion in understanding biblical concept of family. In this regard, the African family concept may work as an effective tool for careful contextualization.

VI. CONCLUSION

In mission fields, without exception, there is one barrier to overcome. That is the cultural barrier. The words, ideas, and concepts in Scripture can be understood diversely due to this barrier. In this paper, aspects of family in Mexican and African cultures were explored. The purpose was to provide a different concept and understanding of diverse cultures so that missionaries can overcome cultural barriers and effectively share the gospel.

For Mexicans, the culture family is perceived more broadly than the traditional family; it extends over the boundary of blood. On the other hand, African culture focuses on the blood line; it even includes deceased forefathers.

Each culture has weaknesses and strengths that connect to biblical standards. However, these two cultures also share common ground. Though the way of expressing family values may be different, the concept of love of family and honoring parents is evident in both cultures.

One suggestion for connecting both cultures with the concept of family is to link the Mexican extended family with the African family system, filling in the weaknesses²³⁾ with the other's strength. An extended family system can help overcome a narrow boundary of a tribal family system. Also, emphasizing the biological family

aspect can help overcome the potential of minimizing roles of the traditional family.

There is no culture in the world that is 100% bad, and there is no culture that is 100% good. Every culture must stand before Christ. One culture can have a more biblical understanding of certain biblical principles. For missionaries, it will be a powerful and effective strategy to use strengths of the cultures to which they are ministering. In addition, it will be even more effective if a missionary can find a common ground that his native culture and the culture that he is ministering share together.

“This article has not been published or applied to publish in other academic journals.”

23) Mexican cultural weakness: potential of minimizing the role of the traditional family. African cultural weakness: Overly emphasizing the concept of blood line that may function as an obstacle to understand the Atonement.

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Internet Resources

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국문초록

멕시코 문화와 아프리카 문화의 ‘가족’ 개념

배아론 (Ph.D. 고신대학교)

본 연구는 다양한 문화 가운데서 일어나는 문화적 측면들을 이해함으로써 문화적 장벽을 넘어 효과적으로 선교지에서 사역을 하도록 도와주는 것에 목적을 두고 있다. 문화적 측면이라는 것의 범위가 광활한 관계로 지리적으로는 멕시코와 아프리카로 한정을 지었고 주제로는 가족이라는 개념으로 한정되었다. 본 글의 주된 관심사는 아프리카와 멕시코 문화 속에 가족이라는 개념을 통해 선교를 할 때 상황화에 대한 통찰을 제공하기 위함이다. 이 개념을 택한 이유는 ‘가족’은 모든 문화에서 발견할 수 있는 보편성을 지닌 개념 중 하나이기 때문이다. 멕시코의 가족 문화를 이해하기 위한 필수인 콤파드라즈고(Compadrazgo) 개념과 아프리카의 조상의 개념을 소개했다. 콤파드라즈고(Compadrazgo) 혈연관계 밖에 까지 가족의 개념이 연장되는 특징이 있고 아프리카(줄루) 문화는 조상숭배를 통해 혈연관계가 극대화된 문화다. 성경적으로 볼 때 가족 시스템은 하나님께서 만드신 것이다. 분명 혈연중심의 가정이 시작되었지만 갈라디아서와 같은 곳에서는 “아브라함의 자녀들”이라는 표현에서 볼 수 있듯이 생물학적인 가족보다는 은유적인 가족(metaphorical kinship) 역시 강조된다. 성경적 가족 개념을 이해할 때 콤파드라즈고(Compadrazgo) 만으로 혹은 아프리카의 혈연 부족적 의미만으로 이해하기는 한계가 있다. 비록 멕시코와 아프리카 각각의 가족이라는 제도 속에 비성경적인 부분들이 있지만 분명한 것은 두 가지 문화적 특성이 어우러질 때에 가족에 대한 풍성한 이해를 할 수 있을 것이다. 콤파드라즈고(Compadrazgo) 개념이 아프리카 문화가운데 보다 혈연을 넘어서는 구속의 개념을 이해하는데 도움을 줄 수 있고 아프리카의 가족적 개념이 전통적 가족의 역할을 덜 중요하게 여길 잠재가 있는 멕시코 문화에 도움을 줄 수 있다.

주제어: 멕시코, 아프리카, 가족, 콤파드라즈고, 조상