

**Christopher Flanders and Werner Mischke, editors, *Honor, Shame, and the Gospel: Reframing Our Message and Ministry* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Publishing, 2020). xi + 221 pp. \$17.99 paperback; \$9.99 ebook.**

In *Honor, Shame and the Gospel* editors Christopher Flanders and Werner Mischke have assembled fifteen essays that grew out of a 2017 conference of the same title. Because this is an edited book with essays from a wide range of authors, Flanders and Mischke's introductory chapter serves the critical function of explaining the purpose of the book and provides some foundational background for thinking about honor and shame. We learn there that the 2017 conference had its roots in a 2014 conference on orality and that it was the orality movement that saw how the biblical worldview filled with honor and shame serves as a linking point from the first century to the current century (xix). The subtitle to the conference and the book, *Reframing Our Message and Ministry*, reveals the underlying premise that global mission from cultural settings that are less focused on issues of honor and shame will benefit from the recovery of this aspect of biblical worldview and that such a renewed understanding will impact both theology and practice (xix-xx). The stated goal of the book is the hope that gaining insight into the dynamics of honor and shame will help cross-cultural workers to reframe the way they do ministry and communicate the Gospel as well as stimulate the ongoing honor-shame conversation (xxvii).

The introduction offers definitions for honor and shame (xx) and a series of ten statements that show how this topic relates to Christian ministry (xxi-xxiv). In Velli-Matti Kärkkäinen's brief forward and the introduction by Flanders and Mischke we learn that there are multiple value polarities in human societies and different cultures will prioritize them in different ways (xiv, xxiii). This clues the reader in that honor-shame and other value polarities such as guilt-innocence, fear-power, and purity-pollution, are not just concepts to be drawn upon but are dimensions of human culture that shape the way we view the world. Flanders and Mischke remind us there is no such thing as a culturally neutral gospel or version of our faith. Thus, the recovery of the honor-shame worldview of the Bible, particularly for those embedded in individualist, consumer, guilt-innocence cultures will help us see the

Gospel in new ways and influence our hermeneutics, missiological and theological work.

The book is structured in two parts with the first seven essays looking at honor-shame in general contexts and the second set of eight essays doing the same in very specific mission contexts. The general context essays broadly make the points that honor-shame is central to the biblical worldview and is prominent in history of theology (chapter 2); we can better grasp the grand narrative of Scripture when we discern the interplay of cultural value systems like honor-shame along with others (chapter 3, particularly 44-50); and we understand the gospel (chapter 1) and the work of Jesus on the cross (chapter 6) better when we take into consideration honor and shame dynamics. The final eight essays look at the contributions of an honor-shame perspective in specific contexts that include Asian culture, Muslim societies, oral learners, urban pluralistic contexts, Syrian refugees displaced by war, victims of sexual abuse in the Congo, and racial reconciliation.

Whether a person is new to this topic or has kept up on the growing list of publications in this emerging field, this book is a treasure trove of interesting insights, thought provoking ideas and concrete examples that elucidate the dynamics of honor-shame and show how it is implicated in the life of God's people as they live and serve in societies that prioritize this cultural value. For myself it is the kind of volume that I mark up, annotate and then keep on hand as a ready reference for definitions, insight into Scripture passages, methods for understanding the Bible, and suggestions for drawing upon honor-shame dynamics in ministry settings. For readers who like to work through a book in detail there are valuable nuggets scattered throughout the essays. The endnotes to the chapters provide an excellent introduction to some of the foundational literature on this area of missiological study and tucked away in chapters are history trails about the rise of honor-shame research (45-46), perspectives from the Church Fathers (22-23, 92-93, 103-105), patron-client dynamics (161-162, 166-168) and a chart covering the whole of the Bible on peacemaking through showing honor (181). The topical and Scripture indexes are an added bonus for tracking down specific themes and texts and the annotated descriptions of the 15 essays make it easy to find articles of interest. All of this increases its value as a reference tool when working with issues of honor and shame.

Those who do take their time with the book are going to run into a few things that may puzzle them or raise questions. In part this stems from some of the limitations of any book composed of a wide variety of essays from multiple authors. For instance, on the first page of the introduction the editors say that the compendium is made up of sixteen articles from the 2017 conference participants, but there are only fifteen chapters. The bulk of the introduction features a “top ten statements” list about honor, shame and the gospel without any indication where those statements came from, making one wonder if this is material from the missing paper. While these statements are interesting, my feeling as a reader is that a substantive introductory essay that lays out the diversity of views and definitions of honor and shame would have better prepared readers for the fifteen essays that are the core of the book. In addition to definitional work, such an essay could have provided an overview of the other related cultural value polarities followed by an argument that expands upon the importance of honor-shame for understanding the biblical worldview and many societies of the contemporary world. It also would have allowed them to expand on why understanding honor-shame is important to hermeneutics, biblical studies, theology, and missiology. A more robust introductory chapter would have allowed them to streamline some of the repetition in the papers that revisit honor and shame definitions and eliminate or at least explain some of the disagreement found between the authors. The essays could then have been edited to move more directly into their subject matter without feeling the need to define and explain their terms.

A minor structural point is that it seems that two or three of the essays are in the wrong section. Steve Tracy’s article “Abuse and Shame” is in section 1 with general contexts and yet it is set in post-war Congo and has excellent practical ministry suggestions for people working in situations where there is sexual abuse. Conversely, Nolan Sharp’s essay on the book of Samuel as a tool for reconciliation is found in section 2 with specific contexts and would have matched up much better with the other biblical material in the general contexts part of the book. For me personally, Jackson Wu’s article on cultivating honor and shame in a collectivist church fits better in the specific contexts section because its focus is on helping people in strong individualist cultures to regain a collectivist sense of the church. That would have left articles in the

general contexts section that deal explicitly with Bible and theology in some way while the specific contexts section would look at applications for particular places.

Again, due to the diversity of the material, in my view a final essay by the editors to highlight how the conceptual side developed in the introduction impacts us in our theology and practice and summarizing/clustering some of the larger practical applications would help readers sort out the large amount of excellent information found in the essays.

Different readers are going to have different favorite essays. For me the biblical material standouts were Steven Hawthorne's essay on the honor and glory of Jesus, Nolan Sharp's work on the book of Samuel and Tom Steffen's Clothesline Theology providing tools to discern the grand narrative of Scripture that frames the gospel. Steve Tracy's work on the role of the cross in transforming shame and his practical applications with survivors of sexual abuse opened my eyes to using both the objective and subjective aspects of the atonement and how important the latter is to those who have experienced deep shame. As a person raised in an individualist culture but who has spent adult life in a collective culture, Jackson Wu's essay "Saving Us from Me" challenged me and made me think hard about these two dimensions. He left me wanting to find ways to hear the challenge of the gospel to each of these arenas.

*Honor, Shame and the Gospel* succeeds in its stated goals by giving practitioners conceptual food for thought and examples that help them in the ministry practice and providing energy to the ongoing study of honor and shame. I look forward to further exploration on this topic, particularly where the church exists in societies that prioritize honor and shame but live out their faith using very foreign forms that often do not fit well with the honor-shame dimensions of their own culture.

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