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Honor and Shame

Halvor Moxnes
University of Oslo

1.0 Introduction

Notions about honor and shame exist in virtually all cultures. But in many Western societies these terms play a minor role in descriptions of prominent social values. Indeed, many people today regard "honor" as an old-fashioned word, while we normally associate the term "shame" with the most private aspects of our lives. In both past and present Mediterranean societies, however, honor and shame have played a dominant role in public life.

The goal of this essay on honor and shame is threefold. First, we need to get a deeper understanding of the content and function of honor-shame in the social life of Mediterranean societies. Second, in order to clarify the value of this kind of study we look briefly at examples of honor and shame in the NT. Finally, we highlight recent works in social anthropology that have focused attention on the concepts of honor and shame as a key to the social and cultural systems of the Mediterranean region.

Before beginning, however, we must put the matter in perspective. Since honor and shame have to do with people in *social* settings, they must always be studied within the larger religious, social, and economic context. One implication of this is that understanding honor and shame is crucial for almost every other topic in this volume. For example, it is possible to fathom the Mediterranean kinship system only if one understands that family honor is on the line in every public interaction. Similarly, one can understand the division between public and private space, a separation that often occurs along gender lines, only by recognizing the special roles of

men and women in the honor system. Patronage, slavery, economic practices, purity rules, meal practices, and even the peculiar Mediterranean sense of identity that derives from group membership must likewise be understood in terms of honor and shame.

2.0 What Are Honor and Shame?

What then are the main characteristics of honor and shame as a system? Honor is fundamentally the *public* recognition of one's social standing. It comes in one of two ways. One's basic honor level, usually termed *ascribed* honor, is inherited from the family at birth. Each child takes on the general honor status that the family possesses in the eyes of the larger group, and therefore ascribed honor comes directly from family membership. It is not based on something the individual has done.

By contrast, honor conferred on the basis of virtuous deeds is called *acquired* honor. By its very nature acquired honor may be either gained or lost in the perpetual struggle for public recognition. Since the group is so important for the identity of a Mediterranean person (see ch. 2 below), it is critical to recognize that honor status comes primarily from *group* recognition. While honor may sometimes be an inner quality, the value of a person in his or her own eyes, it depends ultimately on recognition from significant others in society. It is a public matter. When someone's claim to honor is recognized by the group, honor is confirmed, and the result is a new social status. With this status follows the expectation of honorable behavior.

2.1 Challenge and Riposte

In Mediterranean societies interaction between people is always characterized by competition with others for recognition. Everyone must be constantly alert to defend individual or family honor. Such social interaction often takes the form of challenge and riposte, most often verbally, but also with symbolic gestures and even with the use of physical force.

Traditional societies have clear rules for this kind of exchange. A proper challenge can take place only among people who are equal or almost equal in honor. A challenge always implies recognition of the honor of the other person; hence to challenge an inferior or somebody without honor brings shame and humiliation to the challenger. Likewise, when a challenge is issued, it is accepted only if one

considers the challenger worthy of respect. Accepting the challenge of an inferior is shameful. If a challenge is finally accepted, however, a response is necessary. A response in kind usually levels the playing field. One can also up the ante, of course, though not so much that the opponent cannot respond because then the exchange would end. Thus challenge and riposte are played like a game with a set of rules. Exchanges frequently lead to competition. The winner of such a competitive exchange has defended his honor, while the loser experiences shame and his standing in the community is damaged.

It is important to understand that the competitive spirit of challenge and riposte may rule many aspects of life. Not only feuds and wars might be involved, but also competitions in benefactions or in athletic games. When this competition becomes all pervasive, as it was in ancient Greece (as well as other Mediterranean societies in antiquity), we may speak of an "agonistic" culture.

2.2 Relation to Gender Separation

Honor and shame are also related to the typical Mediterranean separation between the sexes and generally reflect the power structures of ancient Mediterranean society. Since men held the dominant public position, a male perspective also dominated public discourse on honor and shame. (It is important to realize that until very recently this perspective has also influenced presentations by social anthropologists, most of whom are male. The viewpoint herein, based largely on the work of Julian Pitt-Rivers, represents this male perspective.) Since women occupied the private or domestic sphere, public discourse on honor gives little account of the way the honor and shame system functioned in the women's world.

Men competed among themselves to defend their masculinity. In order to maintain his honor a man had to be able to defend the chastity of women under his dominance and protection. If they lost their chastity it implied shame for the family as a whole. Women were therefore looked upon as potential sources of shame.

Shame also had a positive side in Mediterranean culture. In one sense it was understood as modesty, shyness, or deference. It was these virtues, often construed as feminine, that enabled a woman to preserve her chastity as well as her obedience to the male head of the family in which she was embedded. (The ancient Mediterranean world was not individualistic. The line between personal identity and family identity tended to disappear. Since family identity usually subsumed personal identity, anthropologists speak of such persons as "embedded" in the family.) In another sense, however, shame was simply social sensitivity and applied to both males and females.

To be "shameless" was to lack concern for one's honor and to be insensitive to the opinion of others.

While this description of honor and shame is rather simple and schematic, it suggests the basic way in which Mediterranean people use honor and shame to express their self-esteem or their esteem for others. As we shall see below, it is fundamental to any understanding of the world of the NT.

3.0 Honor and Shame in the New Testament

With the basic model of honor and shame in front of us, it is appropriate to ask about the importance of these values in the NT. By helping us to formulate the proper questions, the model can aid us in recognizing passages we might otherwise miss where honor and shame play an important role. It is important to ask, for example, What is considered honorable or shameful in the story world or the world of the author? Is honor based on social precedence (ascribed honor, status)? Or on merit (acquired honor), like good deeds? Is the relationship between men and women described in honor and shame categories or vocabulary? Who are the significant others in whose eyes characters seek recognition? A simple example will indicate how we can analyze biblical passages on the basis of these kind of questions.

3.1 Honor and Shame in Luke 13:10–17

Several Gospel narratives portray Jesus together with Pharisees, scribes, or other adversaries in conflicts that involve competition over honor. The immediate reason for the conflict is often an act of healing, assistance, or liberation by Jesus involving individuals or groups of people. The following story in Luke 13:10–17 (NRSV) offers a good example:

> A. Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.
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> B. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day."

> C. But the Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?"
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> D. When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and all the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

In this narrative we see Jesus' skill at riposte. The modern reader understands Jesus' healing of the woman (A) primarily as an act of compassion. But for the culturally informed reader, Luke places the story in a different perspective. The healing took place in a synagogue on the sabbath (B). An opponent is introduced, the leader of the synagogue, who was in charge of the interpretation of the Torah and the rules surrounding the sabbath. He sees the healing not as an act of compassion but as the breaking of a law of which he was the guardian, and thus as a challenge to his authority. He therefore responds by attacking Jesus, albeit indirectly, through rebuking the people present. Jesus takes up the challenge (C) and gives a riposte that unmasks the synagogue leader's objection as hypocrisy. Furthermore, Jesus skillfully shows that he can turn Jewish law and tradition against a defender of the law. No wonder that the people present, who act as judges of the exchange (D), proclaim Jesus the winner. His adversaries are clearly "put to shame."

This is only one of many similar stories about Jesus; throughout the Synoptic Gospels challenge and riposte are a common form of interaction between Jesus and his opponents (cf. Matt 4:1–11; Mark 2:1–12; Luke 4:1–13; 10:25–37).

3.2 New Testament Terms for Honor and Shame

In looking beyond the example cited above, it is useful to know some of the terms used for honor and shame that occur in the NT. The semantic field is a broad one.

3.2.1 Words for "Honor"

Greek words for honor, esteem, recognition (τιμή, *timē;* τιμάω, *timaō*), are commonly used of humans (John 4:44; Rom 2:7, 10; 9:21; 12:10; 13:7; 1 Pet 1:7; 2:7, 17; 1 Cor 12:23–24). They can also be used in praise of God, most commonly together with other terms like δόξα, *doxa* (1 Tim 1:17; Rev 4:9).

Glory (δόξα, *doxa;* δοξάζω, *doxazō*) is mostly used of God and Jesus (John 5:44; 7:18; 8:50; Rev 4:10–11; 5:12–13; Rom 9:23; 1 Cor

2:8). It is especially common in doxologies (Rom 11:36; 16:27). But these terms are also used of human beings in the ordinary sense of honor, fame, and repute (John 5:44; 7:18; 8:50; 1 Thess 2:6).

3.2.2 Words for "Shame" and "Dishonor"

Words for shame (αἰσχρός, *aischros;* and words with the αἰσχ-, *aisch-*, stem) occur frequently (Luke 9:26; 1 Cor 1:26; 11:4–6; Rom 1:16; 5:5; 6:21; 9:33; 10:11). Words for dishonor (ἀτιμία, *atimia;* and words with the ἀτιμ-, *atim-*, stem) are also common (Mark 12:4; John 8:49; 1:Cor 4:10; 11:14; 12:23; Rom 1:24, 26; 9:21).

3.2.3 Words for Seeking Honor

Boasting was often seen as a demand for public recognition of honor. Words for "boast" and "boasting" (καύχημα, *kauchēma;* and terms with the καυχ-, *kauch-*, stem) are common in the NT (Rom 2:17, 23; 3:27; 4:2).

3.2.4 Other Relevant Terms and Situations

In addition to individual words and phrases, a much larger field of patterns and situations is relevant. Examples include honorable relationships such as "sons" or "daughters" (Matt 6:8–9; Luke 13:16), and acts of recognition (Mark 11:1–11; 14:3–9; John 6:14–15) or dishonoring (Mark 15:16–20). The model of honor and shame and the questions cited above will help those interested to identify similar patterns in other biblical passages and narratives. (For a more complete set of NT examples the reader should consult Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992; and Malina and Neyrey 1991.)

4.0 Mediterranean Studies of Honor and Shame: Development of a New Field

Among the scholars who first established Mediterranean studies in the 1960s, British social anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers holds a central position. Two of his theoretical essays are the most important sources for the typology of honor and shame, hence a good place to begin. The first is a concise introduction to honor and shame (1968). The second is a somewhat longer version with more examples from his field work in Andalusia (1966). Also at the introductory level, Pierre Bourdieu (1966) provides an excellent description of the typical patterns of challenge and riposte.

Pitt-Rivers (1961) gives a fascinating picture of life, social relations, and the values that governed social interaction in a Medi-

terranean village in Andalusia in Spain. This and the studies by Pitt-Rivers cited above represent a first attempt to identify and to describe concepts previously ignored by the social sciences. Later studies, some of them by Pitt-Rivers himself, have broadened the picture and made it more complex.

Several important essays by Pitt-Rivers and other scholars from this first period are also in the volume edited by Peristiany (1966). Here they develop the perspective on the Mediterranean, in the words of a later critic, "as united by a pervasive and relatively uniform value system based on complementary codes of honor and shame" (Gilmore 1987b:2).

The establishing of the Mediterranean as a special area of study was based on the hypothesis that this region has a certain cultural and social unity, and that honor and shame are central components of that common culture. Granted that honor and shame are widely used concepts in anthropology, do these concepts have such a special form in the Mediterranean area that they can be used to single out this region as a special unit? These questions were given thorough discussion in a more recent collection of essays edited by David Gilmore (1987c).

In his works Pitt-Rivers had raised an important question: What is the relation between honor as status and privilege on the one hand, and honor as moral virtue on the other hand (1966, 1968)? His critics argued that this tension between honor as social precedence and honor as virtue is found in many cultures, and therefore cannot be a primary basis for establishing the Mediterranean as a distinct area. Moreover, some of them (Herzfeld 1987; Gilmore 1987a) found that in many Mediterranean societies other moral values are as important as honor, especially hospitality and honesty. These values do not necessarily compete with honor; they may rather be correlative. Nonetheless, the discussion concerning what is distinctive about the Mediterranean region concluded that one aspect of honor and shame does indeed remain peculiar to the area: its strong association with sexual roles and gender division (§4.5).

The essays in Gilmore's book (1987c) show some of the changes that have taken place in anthropology since the first collection by Peristiany (1966). One important change is to speak of "culture" rather than "society." Culture here is understood as a "moral" or "symbolic" system that unites people into communities with shared values. Thus there is an important shift away from anthropology conceived of as an empirical science and toward cultural anthropology concerned with the shared "meaning" of a culture.

The most recent, major collection of essays, edited by Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers (1992), moves in a different direction on the issue of a specific Mediterranean notion of honor and shame. Here the collabo-

rators in the 1966 volume, together with some younger colleagues and more female scholars, take a new look at the question of honor. Just as "honor and shame" was a new concept for anthropologists in the 1960s, so "grace" is now a new term in the anthropological vocabulary. It indicates the shift toward more concern with symbolism and religion noted above. The main focus is on grace as divine legitimation, particularly grace mediated through rituals that give legitimacy to honor in terms of social precedence and status. Typical examples are the coronations and funerary rites of kings in medieval France (Lafages 1992). The main contribution of this last collection is to place honor and shame in the center of the traditional religious language of "grace" and the divine.

These latest developments in the study of honor show that the predominantly American scholarship in Gilmore (1987c) has a different emphasis from the British and French scholarship in Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers (1992). The first is more oriented toward social-science theories, sexuality, and gender distinctions, whereas the second leans more strongly toward symbolism and historical studies of political institutions and religion. Between them these various approaches show both the diversity of honor and shame and related concepts, and also their central role in ordering society. In the following sections we look at some of the important issues that have been discussed in this emerging literature; we start with a question about method.

4.1 The Role of Honor and Shame in Social Conflicts

Since honor and shame were "discovered" as an important part of culture in the 1960s, much of later scholarly discussion has been concerned with the relationship between honor and shame and various social realities, including gender relations and other power relations like those between patron and client. For the question of honor and shame in the area of gender relations it has also made considerable difference that more female scholars have been involved, focusing attention on honor and shame from the perspective of women.

Honor and shame are not static, unchangeable concepts, but rather expressions of social and cultural relations. They change with various cultures and within cultures according to sex, class, status, geographic location, and so on. Being central elements in the culture of a society, honor and shame are likewise elements in the conflicts between various groups that seek to influence and dominate a society.

In two studies J. C. Baroja (1966, 1992) has argued that honor and shame on the one hand and society on the other are linked in a dialectical relationship. Different groups and classes struggle over

the definition of honor and shame, and power struggles bring with them continual redefinition of these concepts. For example, Baroja shows how various concepts of honor competed in Spain from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century. First, honor was based on virtue, in accordance with ancient Christian and classical notions. The noble families, however, had a totally different concept based on conquest, competition, and revenge. Finally, with the rise of a merchant and industrialist class, still another concept of honor developed. It centered on "virtue and efficiency in work, utility, and the general good," and implied a criticism of the honor code represented by the old feudal aristocracy. The "older" concept of a competitive honor continued to dominate among the lower classes, however, in some cases surviving in a criminal lifestyle.

Baroja's work shows convincingly how concepts of honor are linked to social situations and conflicts between various groups competing over the right to be honorable. His work provides a wider perspective for the study of honor and shame among the early Christians. For example, we may see Paul's praise of the "shame of the cross" (1 Cor 1:18–31) as an attempt to give a new definition of what was honorable, in defiance of the dominant social elites of the Greco-Roman world and their values. Furthermore, when he criticized Christians for seeking honor (Rom 12), something that was commonly accepted by the Greco-Roman elite, we can assume he thereby wanted to create a separate identity for Christians as a group.

4.2 Honor and Shame in Family and Lineage

Most of us in the Western world live in societies built around individuals. Our social structures are based on voluntary participation rather than family ties. The result is a morality based on general, nondiscriminatory principles that are meant to apply equally to everyone. By contrast, studies of honor and shame in the Mediterranean region introduce us to societies that are based not on individuals but on *families, clans,* and *lineages.* The primary values are invested in these groups, not in abstract or "universal" principles. This creates a different system of values and morals from what we know in Western modern and postmodern societies.

Many of the contributors in Peristiany 1966 (Abou-Zeid, Baroja, Campbell, Bourdieu) focus on this central relation between honor-shame and *family*. They find that a collective honor, based on a system of patrilineal clans, is a common element in traditional communities all over the Mediterranean area, including Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Kayla in North Africa, and among bedouin in

Egypt. Later studies have shown the same to be true even in the modern Mediterranean state of Libya (Davis 1987). In fact, collective honor based on family and lineage is present well beyond the Mediterranean region, as shown in a recent comparison between Catalan and Japan (Asano-Tamanoi 1987).

A series of common elements can thus be described in societies in which honor and shame play an important role:

> A. The central unit of social organization is the family, and beyond that the lineage or clan. The consequences of this central position of the family are important. A person is never regarded as an isolated individual, but always as part of a group, responsible for the honor of the group and also protected by it. Because honor always derives from the group, an individual's conduct also reflects back on the group and its honor.
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> B. Since honor is linked to the family and depends heavily on the way it defends its honor status, the result is an exclusive loyalty toward the family. Thus honor values are *exclusive* and *particularist* and stand in sharp contrast to the *universal* and *inclusive* values of the West. Moreover, the history of the family becomes all-important.
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> C. The family plays a central role in the agonistic character of honor societies. Family honor is on the line in the continual game of challenge and riposte, be it expressed in words, gestures, acts, or ultimately in feuds between families.
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> D. Even if a family or a clan presents a common front toward outsiders, there may be conflicts and tensions within the group. There can be large differences between individual lineages in terms of wealth and status, hence some members of a family can become clients of other more honorable and wealthy ones. There can be fierce competitions between them for the kind of public honors and positions that can become hereditary within the lineage.

Many of these elements are immediately relevant to the study of the NT. Notice, for instance, how important the genealogy of Jesus is to the claim to status made for him (Matt 1:1–17; Luke 3:23–38). Or again, observe how dominant the pattern of the family was in the social world of the first Christians. Even if many of the first followers experienced conflicts with their Christian communities, nonetheless these groups described themselves in terms of "surrogate family" or "fictive kinship" (Mark 3:31–35). The fundamental importance of kinship for identity and status also becomes visible in Paul's arguments. He denounces Jewish claims to a special status on the basis of their heritage (Rom 2:17, 24; 3:5), but he keeps to a Jewish kinship system when he describes the identity of believers: they are all descendants of Abraham (Rom 4; Gal 3).

4.3 Honor and Grace

"Grace" is a term that has largely gone unnoticed in anthropological studies until it was taken up in the collection of essays edited by Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers (1992). There Pitt-Rivers suggests that "grace" and "honor" both "deal with problems in the same field: the destiny of a man and his relations with other people and with God" (1992:240). The relationship of these concepts varies: sometimes they are similar, sometimes complementary, and sometimes even opposite. But even when they are contrary concepts, each contributes to the composition of the other. Grace points toward the divine, especially divine legitimation. Several recent studies therefore focus on rituals that give divine legitimacy to honor in terms of precedence and status, such as the coronation and funerary rites of kings in medieval France (Lafages 1992).

But another aspect of grace points more toward what we might speak of as the sacred side of honor, associated with honor not in an agonistic and competitive sense, but with honor as virtue. "Grace" is first of all a religious concept of great importance within Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. But outside the religious realm, derived notions like "gratuity" also play an important role. Grace "is inspired by the notion of something over and above what is due, economically, legally, or morally. It stands outside the system of reciprocal services" (Pitt-Rivers 1992:231).

When an agonistic competition for honor has been successful, the victor must "show qualities that are the contrary: generosity, moderation, forbearance." Thus one can see in Western civilization "two opposed—and ultimately complementary—registers: the first associated with honor, competition, triumph, the male sex, possession and the profane world, and the other with peace, amity, grace, purity, renunciation, the female sex, dispossession in favor of others, and the sacred" (Pitt-Rivers 1992:242). In other words, Pitt-Rivers sees "grace" as an inversion of competitive honor: one must renounce one's claim to honor as precedence to gain a privileged relationship to God.

We can see such an inversion at work in Paul's retelling of the Abraham story in Rom 4. In Jewish tradition, Abraham, the ancestor of the Jews, was an example of an honorable man who could rightly claim honor ("boast," 4:2). But not so, according to Paul: Abraham remained the honorable man and an example for all believers, but he could not claim any honor of his own making; his status rested solely on *grace* and on the promise of God (4:16).

This introduction of the notion of "grace" into social anthropology is potentially of great importance for the student of the NT. For

one thing, together with studies of concepts like hospitality and honesty, it deepens our understanding of the broader context of honor and shame. We begin to see the noncompetitive aspects of honor and can show that not even in honorific societies is the agonistic side of honor all-pervasive. Moreover, it brings a religious dimension into the purview of social anthropology. In modern societies religion has become a separate sector of society, often reduced to a peripheral role, out of view for students of social structures. Thus they are often unable to recognize the religious dimensions of other cultures in which religion is deeply embedded. By focusing on a term like "grace" we become aware of how much religious beliefs have formed mentalities and social structures.

4.4 Masculinity and Honor

What is an honorable man? Our earlier definition emphasized competition among men in bravery, in their relations to women, and in defending their masculinity. Now Gilmore (1987b, c) has suggested that a contributing factor to this aggressive defense of male honor is an uncertainty among Mediterranean men about their masculine role. Gilmore also finds that there is a development as men age. The young man needs to prove himself to gain honor, often implying antagonistic behavior, whereas what is expected of the mature or older man is honesty and responsibility. The element of competition in sexual performance, so strong among young men, can among older men be transformed into fulfilling his obligations—sexual and economic—toward his wife and family.

Gilmore has further complemented the picture of an aggressive competition for honor with a description of more quiet and less agonistic values based on cooperation. For example, challenge and riposte can take the form of friendly exchange, from the informal and casual exchange of drinks at a bar, to more contractual exchanges of services, to a general solidarity between best friends. But of course even a presentation of gifts represents a challenge and requires a proper response in the form of reciprocity.

Examples like this show that a variety of ideals can be associated with the honorable man. It is important, therefore, not to assume that a single definition of honor can apply to every biblical text. It is necessary to ask how a given text or document describes or thinks of an honorable man and to identify various answers. Notice, for example, how some early Christian authors give different advice about honorable behavior to young men and those who are older (1 Tim 4:12–5:2; 3:1–7; Titus 2:2, 6; 1 Pet 5:1–5).

The importance of the honorific male role, and at the same time the uncertainties and ambiguities surrounding it, is also a theme in studies of classical antiquity. In a patriarchal society the defense of male honor is of paramount importance. In their studies of sexuality and gender roles in ancient Greece, therefore, D. M. Halperin (1990: 88–112) and J. J. Winkler (1990:45–70) show how the moral code for sexual relations between males is based on a concept of male honor. These studies are particularly useful to students of the Bible since they offer examples of applying anthropological perspectives to ancient texts.

Homosexual relations in the form of pederasty, that is, a relation between an adult man and a prepubescent male, were socially acceptable in ancient Greece; here too honor and shame play an important role. Such relations were carefully prescribed with moral rules that had to be followed. It was an absolute prerequisite that the young man should not accept money or gifts that put him in a class with paid prostitutes. If he did that he was judged according to the law of ἀτιμία (*atimia,* "shame") and lost important civic rights. The reason for this public shame was that by accepting payment a young man had acted in a way unacceptable for a free male and thus could not be trusted with the responsibility of public office. He had given up self-control and become like a slave.

Jewish and early Christian traditions were also very concerned to preserve the specific male role. In contrast to Greek culture, Jewish society strongly opposed sexual relations between men. It is commonly believed that there were specific religious reasons for this opposition; and the desire of the Jews, especially in the Diaspora, to distance themselves from the Greeks has often been emphasized. But we can notice how Paul in Rom 1 uses honor and shame language associated with concepts of masculine and feminine roles when he argues against same-sex relations.

4.5 Women's Perspective on Honor and Shame

To speak of women's perspective on honor and shame has at least two different aspects. First, it implies that in social anthropology, as in all other academic fields, female scholars have brought in new priorities as well as new methodological approaches. Some of these have questioned the models of honor and shame provided by male scholars (Wikan 1984). Second, it suggests the importance of attempts to bring into the description women's particular experiences and understandings of honor and shame. These attempts are not without considerable difficulties, however, since ancient literary material is almost exclusively written from a male perspective. Even

today it is often difficult for anthropologists to gain access to the women's world.

Thus this area is in considerable flux, with old theories being questioned and new ones being tried out. While we are in no position to give definite answers, it is nonetheless important to point to some of the questions that are being discussed.

4.5.1 Gender Analysis of Honor

In line with what is happening in other fields, we find a gender analysis of honor and shame, distinguishing between male and female experiences. J. Schneider (1971) and C. Delaney (1987) try to explain the origin of the idea of female chastity or shame. Schneider suggests that the origin of the ideal of female chastity and the accompanying submission to men lies in competition for scarce resources among kinship groups. Delaney finds the basis for the strong link between men and honor on the one hand and between shame and women on the other in cosmological presuppositions. The three main religions that originated in the Middle East, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, share the idea of a male creator god and corresponding ideas of a primary male role in procreation. Women have only a subsidiary role, which makes them inferior and creates a feeling of shame. Maureen J. Giovannini (1987) focuses on female chastity codes and finds that they belong to a common Mediterranean moral system. That chastity represents women's honor or "shame," in a positive sense, is generally accepted. Giovannini wants to bring this knowledge further by analyzing women's chastity in the context of community and class relations.

Such historical reconstructions remain conjectural, but they suggest how concepts of honor and shame are linked with power relations between men and women as well as with ideological traditions and cosmology. Paul's discussion in 1 Cor 11:1–16 is an excellent illustration of the often confusing interrelations between such varying traditions and ideologies.

4.5.2 Women's Experiences: Women's World of Modesty

The division between men's and women's space in the Mediterranean world often makes it difficult for male anthropologists to gain access to the women's world. Here works by women anthropologists play a special role. The best introduction is by Lila Abu-Lughod (1986), a study of a bedouin tribe in Egypt based on her own participation in the women's world. For the positive notion of female shame she uses the term "modesty," which sums up the female moral code of shyness, self-restraint, and a deferential attitude. The central Arabic term is *hashama,* which is translated by "a cluster of

words including modesty, shame, and shyness. In its broadest sense, it means propriety" (1986:105).

Especially important is Abu-Lughod's unraveling of the links between female sexuality, modesty, and the hierarchical social structure. Threats to established bonds of sexuality are threats to the loyalties of this hierarchical society. Modesty codes (e.g., veiling) are a way of denying sexuality and showing acceptance of the existing social structure. For women the primary focus of this deferential attitude is their sexuality, but modesty is also important in other kinds of dependent relationships. For example, members of client tribes are expected to show modesty and deference toward their patrons.

4.6 Is There a Mediterranean Honor and Shame Culture?

The establishing of a special area of Mediterranean studies was strongly linked to the "discovery" of honor and shame as central cultural concepts in this region. It is therefore significant that Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers, in their last collection of essays (1992), dissociate themselves from the "Mediterranean" as a fixed cultural area, and include also western and northern Europe as belonging to "the same part of the world." The focus of several essays is on the relationship between honor as precedence and honor as virtue. That relationship is precisely the aspect of honor that is most universal and least specific for the Mediterranean. Likewise their emphasis on ritual and legitimation of honor on a state level presents a very generalized picture of honor.

So is there no distinct Mediterranean honor and shame culture after all? The growing interest in honor and shame has led to studies that have found that these or similar concepts play an important role also in many other societies. Systems of prestige and precedence are common to many social groups. So far Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers have a point when they find similarities between the Mediterranean and other parts of Europe.

But it is the specific relationship between an honor-and-shame code and male and female roles that has been put forward as distinctive for the Mediterranean region. It is this theory that is at the center of the current discussion. Both linguistically and conceptually, languages in the Mediterranean divide the world into masculine and feminine domains, and "male" and "female" thus become metaphors for other types of divisions. The outcome of this discussion appears to be that the one aspect that qualifies for a separate treatment of the Mediterranean region remains the relationship of honor and shame to masculinity, sexuality, and gender distinctions (Delaney 1987; Gilmore 1987b).

5.0 Honor and Shame in the Classical World

To use anthropological studies of present-day Mediterranean communities in the interpretation of texts from the first century CE presupposes a certain degree of cultural consistency within this region over the centuries. This working hypothesis has been supported by historical and classical studies in which the honor and shame paradigm has proved fruitful.

Most anthropological studies from the Mediterranean are of small communities, both sedentary village communities and migrating tribal groups. The insights derived from these studies are therefore mostly applicable to similar small-scale communities in earlier periods, for example, Homeric society in Greece and tribal and local communities in Palestine in first and second temple periods. These studies are especially helpful to examine honor and shame within the OT and within the village setting in Galilee in the Gospels. The focus here is on honor and shame in groups based on kinship.

5.1 Honor and Competition in the Greek World

There are many points of contact between anthropological studies of small communities with a simple organization and classical studies of Homeric society. In his seminal study, Moses Finley (1979) shows how Homeric society was characterized by a warrior's quest for honor. Moreover, this ideal was of fundamental importance to all later periods of Greek society and ethics.

The aristocratic value system of honor and shame, however, was also supplemented and balanced by "softer" values. A. W. H. Adkins (1960) traces the development of this tradition and its significant changes in later periods. He sees a conflict between society's ideal of the hero warrior who could not be restrained by ordinary men, and society's need for "quieter" values like justice and moderation (σωφροσύνη, *sōphrosynē*). As society became more complex in the Hellenistic period there was a need for less competitive and aggressive values and attitudes in order to keep the city-state (πόλις, *polis*) united.

But the urban Greek culture of the Hellenistic period preserved much of the emphasis that ancient Greece placed on honor. Central to the Hellenistic conception of the city was the notion that the community was a unit and that the individual was first and foremost a part of the community. Honor was closely linked to the upkeep of public life and the financing of common goods through benefactions toward the city.

Such benefactions were ideally made out of goodwill, but in reality there was pressure on citizens to contribute to the city expenses in exchange for honors of various kinds (e.g., public offices). This system became a source of competition for power and influence among the city elites. The system of city honors in exchange for benefactions is well known from ancient sources; the best collection of material on this topic is found in Frederick Danker (1982).

Close to the NT milieu, the Jewish historian Josephus is likewise an excellent source for understanding honor and shame. For example, at one point he gives a description of the wide range of honors that could be conferred. His example, an Athenian decree to honor the Jewish high priest Hyrcanus, also shows that foreigners could receive such honors:

> it has therefore now been decreed . . . to honour this man with a golden crown as the reward of merit fixed by law, and to set up his statue in bronze in the precincts of the temple of Demos and the Graces, and to announce the award of the crown in the theatre at the Dionysian festival when the new tragedies are performed, and at the Panathenean and Eleusinian festivals and at the gymnastic games; and that the magistrates shall take care that so long as he continues to maintain his goodwill toward us, everything which we can devise shall be done to show *honour and gratitude* to this man for his zeal and generosity (*Ant.* 14.152–54; LCL trans., emphasis added).

5.2 Honor, Power, and Precedence in the Roman World

With the expansion of the Roman Empire the period of the free Greek cities in the East came to an end. Although they kept many of the formalities of their former status, and though the elites in them continued with their competition for honor and power, power and honor came ultimately from outside these cities. It originated from Rome and the emperor. For their rule of the eastern provinces the emperors could draw on this Hellenistic system of competition. In a fascinating study of the emperor cult, S. R. F. Price (1984) has pointed out how this cult was an expression not just of political manipulation but also of deeply rooted religiosity and culture in the East. It continued an old eastern tradition of giving divine honors to the ruler and at the same time it was part of the Hellenistic system of competition. Leading citizens used benefactions to compete for priestly positions, and the major cities competed for the privilege to establish temples for the emperor cult.

Whereas Price placed the Roman imperial cult within the Hellenistic system of honor, in two studies of Roman history P. A. Brunt (1988, 1990) has brought forth the distinctive character of honor

within Roman society. There was honor for *the nation,* the Roman people and the empire. It was related not only to individual psychology or to small-group relations, but to the relations between the Roman state and the surrounding states. It became part of official ideology, primarily for the aristocracy and the emperor. "Glory," "honor," and "prestige" (*gloria, laus, fama;* Cicero, *Pro Arch.* 12–32) were first and foremost obtained by war and by making other states subject to Rome's will. One may speak of "the glory of imperial expansion" as an official ideology (Brunt 1990:288–323).

Several NT writers view Roman power from the viewpoint of the eastern provinces and their Hellenistic honor societies. In Rom 13 Paul focuses on Roman rule as a system of honor and prestige as well as of military and political power to impose taxation. He addresses his readers as those who are subject to the authorities and urges them to show honor to and obey their superiors, above all the emperor.

The letter to the Romans reflects a period in which the Christians did not experience oppression from the authorities. The situation behind the book of Revelation, however, must have been very different. There we find none of Paul's positive view of the emperor. The conflict with Rome is couched in honor and shame terminology, but Rome is decried as a fallen Babylon covered with shame (Rev 18). All honor and glory are ascribed to God alone (Rev 19).

6.0 Conclusion

Studies of honor and shame introduce us to a world that is very different from that which most of us know from our daily lives. Those who live in Asia, Africa, or Latin America might recognize many aspects of the Mediterranean honor system, as might those with older relatives who have heard stories about traditional communities in Europe or even in North America. But for most of us in the modern West, this is new territory.

The starting point is to sufficiently immerse oneself in a culture by reading narrative descriptions of honor and shame societies. One might begin with the first collection edited by Peristiany (1966), and with Abu-Lughod (1986). A next step, engaging the reader in more theoretical discussion, is provided by Gilmore (1987c). The volume edited by Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers (1992) widens the perspectives from local communities to the realm of the state and its various institutions.

Historical studies by Finley, Adkins, Price, and Brunt show that the first Christian communities were part of a larger honor and

shame culture in the Greco-Roman world of the first century. They shared many elements of this larger culture, for example, participation in the system of challenge and riposte and the division between women's and men's worlds. But like some other groups, such as the Stoic philosophical schools, they also protested against important aspects of the system. They especially opposed the emphasis on ambition that led to strife and conflict in the community. By using the literature we have reviewed the reader should be able to identify both the shared elements and also the possible conflicts between early Christianity and the social milieu in which it began.

The most exciting and useful part of a learning process is to learn by doing. The ultimate aim is to use some of this literature in studying biblical passages for oneself. But one can also get some help by looking at existing studies that introduce honor and shame perspectives into the interpretation of the NT. For beginners, three such studies are useful: Malina (1993:28–62); Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992); and Malina and Neyrey (1991:25–65).

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