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## Book Review: Honor, Shame, and Gospel: Reframing our Message and Ministry Edited by Flanders, C., and Mischke, W.

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## Book Review

### *Honor, Shame, and the Gospel: Reframing Our Message and Ministry*

Edited by Christopher Flanders and Werner Mischke  
William Carey Publishing, 2020

Reviewed by Cameron D. Armstrong, author of *Listening Between the Lines: Thinking Missiologically about Romanian Culture* (2018). Cameron D. Armstrong (PhD, Biola University) serves with the International Mission Board in Bucharest, Romania, where he teaches at the Bucharest Baptist Theological Institute. Cameron's research interests include orality, theological education, and Romania.

The growth of “cancel culture” in North America depicts a world in which everyone is subject at all times to being honored or shamed. No longer a non-Western phenomenon, the opinion of the collective concerning an individual is now ubiquitous. The time for North American Christians to deeply consider honor and shame values has arrived.

In *Honor, Shame, and the Gospel*, Christopher Flanders and Werner Mischke bring together 16 authors with considerable missiological experience in various regions around the globe. The book is a result of the inaugural Honor and Shame Conference, which was held at Wheaton College in June 2017. Interestingly, Flanders and Mischke relate that the idea for the Honor and Shame Conference originally sparked out of an International Orality Network conference in 2014 on the intersections between orality,

honor-shame, and theological education. Flanders and Mischke's goals for the book are twofold: assist current practice and "add energy" to further honor-shame dialogue (xxv).

Before moving into the actual chapters, Flanders and Mischke helpfully offer definitions of shame and honor. Whereas shame is "the feeling or condition of being unworthy or defective," honor is "the positive recognition of or by a group or individual based on some type of excellence or norm" (xviii). In other words, shame is a lingering sense of unworthiness; honor involves public recognition of excellence. According to Flanders and Mischke, the Bible displays God as intimately involved in addressing honor-shame, transforming our shame into honor, as well as calling for his people to honor him. An honor-shame dynamic pervades the Scriptures.

The book is divided into two sections. Section 1 considers honor-shame in "general contexts." The seven authors connect honor-shame with such issues as the glory of God, church history, and biblical interpretation. An impressive chapter by Jayson Georges quotes extensively from eight theologians across church history who used honor-shame language in their preaching, teaching, and writing. Another fascinating chapter on how Jesus was shamed in the Gospel of John, penned by E. Randolph Richards, notes, "Shame protects the boundaries of a group" (74).

Section 2 analyzes honor-shame in "various mission contexts." Eight chapters depict how missiologists are applying honor-shame research in global regions as diverse as San Francisco, Cambodia, Croatia, and the Muslim world. The honest reflections of authors regarding how they stumbled into honor-shame realizations is quite emotional. For example, Audrey Frank's chapter on ministering among Muslim women vividly portrays both their inherent shame and the power of the gospel to turn shame into honor. According to Frank, female honor is the "nucleus of all Muslim life" (199). Any attempt at gospel contextualization, then, must include honor-shame realities.

*Honor, Shame, and the Gospel* possesses at least three strengths. First, the honor-shame conversation is clearly driven by field-tested ministry. Far from being a closed, academic forum behind institutionalized walls, the authors of this volume are

actively involved in real mission endeavors with real people. Second, the wide range of contexts from which the authors' experience comes is commendable. Honor-shame dynamics are shown to not only be something experienced by Asians or Muslims, but also by people in other regions, including North America. Third, the authors deeply engage the Bible. Especially in Section 1 of the book, the chapters by Stephen C. Hawthorne and Jackson Wu both illuminate the Bible's teaching on honor-shame and depict its necessity for the planting and equipping of local churches.

Concerning weaknesses, there are times when the authors contradict one another. One example includes the relationship between the concepts of honor and shame. In Steve Tracy's chapter on how honor-shame addresses abuse victims, he claims, "Shame is the opposite of honor" (103). Yet in an earlier chapter, E. Randolph Richards explicitly states the two are not opposites (74). Further, there seems to be a disagreement between authors concerning whether or not honor-shame is the only alternative to the Western value system of innocence-guilt. Tom Steffen, for example, posits other paradigms, such as power-fear and purity-pollution. Katie Rawson cites power-fear in her chapter on racial reconciliation. Yet these were the only mentions I found beyond honor-shame. While such contradictions indicate the honor-shame conversation is ongoing, a forewarning note in the introduction by Flanders and Mischke that the authors do not always agree could be helpful.

North American readers will be especially interested in the insights found in the chapters by Steve Hong and Katie Rawson. Based on his experience in urban San Francisco, Hong models how attention to honor and shame concepts informs his ministry among pluralists. For example, Hong invited his LGBTQ, atheist, and non-evangelical friends to his fiftieth birthday party, artfully chronicling his life story through photography, music, and dance. Hong maintains that Christian witness among pluralists can be innovatively powerful through vulnerability. Rawson's chapter on the use of honorific language in racial reconciliation provides a stimulating analysis for contemporary North American culture. Rawson's assertion that "personal and historical awareness" can lead to a "healthy shame" (177) of the realities of racism is a point

well taken. The chapter also proves an introductory primer for honor- and shame-promoting behaviors, including the effects of such behaviors on intercultural relationships.

For producing a work of missiology available to both the academician and field worker, Flanders and Mischke are to be commended. This book details how honor-shame conversations are essential for developing and executing mission strategy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At the same time, the chapters humble and challenge readers with stories of how God transforms shame into honor for his glory.