

Disgraced Yet Graced. The Gospel according to 1 Peter in the Key of Honor and Shame

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Abstract

Honor and shame constituted pivotal values of ancient Circum-Mediterranean societies, including the biblical communities. After summarizing relevant research on this phenomenon by both anthropologists and exegetes, this study focuses attention on the honor/shame vocabulary of 1 Peter and its broader semantic field. The thesis is advanced that the author of this letter perceived and interpreted this conflict between the Christians of Asia Minor and their detractors as one over honor denied and honor claimed, and in so doing also transposed the issue of honor and shame, grace and disgrace, into a theological key.

A poignant and exquisitely moving moment of United States history was recounted in a recent issue of *Christian Century* (Oct. 26, 1994, pp. 982–83). Writing on missing elements in just war theory, the author, Michael J. Schuck (1994: 982–83) began with an account of the surrender of the Confederate army to the Union forces on April 12, 1865, at the Appomattox courthouse and the role that honor played on that solemn occasion.

Commander Joshua L. Chamberlain, Schuck recalls, had been selected by General Grant for the daunting task of formally receiving the surrendering army.

Only days before, the two armies had been at each other's throats. The potential humiliation was almost intolerable for the Confederates, and the opportunity for venting pent-up rage and ridicule was almost irresistible for the union.

At nine o'clock in the morning on April 12, on a hilltop overlooking the Appomattox courthouse, the Confederate soldiers began falling in for their march to surrender. The troops moved forward without band or drum; they were exhausted, dirty, wounded. At their head was Major General John B. Gordon, astride his horse with head bowed.

The significance of the occasion impressed Chamberlain. He had already decided to mark the moment by saluting his former enemies.

Schuck continues the story by quoting from the recent study of Alice Trulock, *In the Hands of Providence: Joshua L. Chamberlain and the American Civil War* (1992):

As Gordon reached the right of the Federal column where Chamberlain and his officers waited, a bugle sounded. Immediately, the whole Union line snapped to attention, and the slapping noise of hands on shifting rifles echoed in the stillness as regiment after regiment in succession down the

Union line came to the old manual of arms position of 'salute' and then back to 'order arms' and 'parade rest.'

... When Gordon heard the sounds of the drill, he instantly recognized their significance and wheeled to face Chamberlain. As he did, his spurs touched the sides of his horse, causing it to rear, and as his horse's head then came down in a bow, the gallant young general dropped his sword point to his boot toe in a graceful salute to the man whom he would call 'one of the knightliest soldiers of the Federal army.'

Turning to his men, the Confederate leader gave an order, which was repeated through the ranks, and the large Confederate banner dipped. The men of the vanquished army then answered with the same salute given them as they marched by, 'honor answering honor,' as Chamberlain described it.

Chamberlain, Schuck continues, later explained his salute order as

one for which I sought no authority nor asked forgiveness. . . . Before us in proud humiliation . . . stood the embodiment of manhood. . . . Men whom neither toils and sufferings, nor the fact of death, nor disaster, nor hopelessness could bend from their resolve; standing before us now thin, worn, famished, but erect, and with eyes looking level into

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ours, waking memories that bound us together as no other bond.

“Such,” Shuck concludes, “is the spirit of honorable surrender.”

This generous and noble sense of honor seems to have waned considerably in the last century and a half. But the scene at Appomattox reflects a code of honor and shame with an enormously long pedigree, going back as far as the first centuries of our era and beyond.

Since the pioneering work of Julian Pitt-Rivers (1954, 1968, 1977) and Jean Peristiany (1965) and their collaborative effort (1965), specialists in the anthropology of the Circum-Mediterranean, female as well as male scholars of varying nationalities, have noted the manner in which a set of pivotal values of honor and shame in this culture basin are related to and expressive of key aspects of the social system. These include the system’s structure and stratification, gender differentiation, masculine embodiment of honor and machismo, feminine embodiment of shame and chastity, gender division of labor and space into male and female domains, honor codes underlying social dispute and conflict, and the labeling and stigmatization mechanisms employed in contentions between ingroups and outgroups (Campbell 1964; Bourdieu 1966; Pitt-Rivers 1965; 1968; Schneider 1971; Herzfeld 1980; Blok 1981; Abu-Lughod 1987; Delaney 1987; Creighton 1990). The 1987 study edited by David Gilmore, *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* offers a useful summary of the discussion thus far, and the still more recent work of Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers, *Honor and Grace in Anthropology* (1992) contains insightful essays exploring the association of honor and shame and the realm of the sacred, the link between honor and grace, from the past to the present.

Classical scholars likewise have long noted the central importance of honor and shame in everyday life and social interaction from the world of Homer to the Tragedians to the Greek and Roman moralists to Late Antiquity and beyond (Adkins 1960; Dodds 1967: 28–63; Redfield 1975; Friedrich 1977; Knoche 1983; Lloyd-Jones 1987; Cairns 1993; Williams 1993; Steward 1994).

In the exegetical domain, it is Bruce Malina who has been primarily responsible for introducing a current generation of scriptural students to the manner in which these pivotal values of honor and shame shaped and informed the perceptions, behavioral patterns, and teaching of the biblical communities and their literature. His initial essay in *New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (1981:25–50) has spawned a raft of exegetical studies exploring evidence of the honor-shame code and its ramifications in a variety of First and Second Testament texts (Marshall 1983; Dewey 1985; White 1986; May 1987; Malina and Neyrey in Neyrey 1991: 25–65; Moxnes 1988a, 1988b, 1993,

1994; Gowler 1991; Pilch 1991a, 1991b; Stansell 1992; Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992; Plevnik 1993; Desilva 1994). For earlier studies see DeVries 1962; Harrelson 1962; Klopfenstein 1972; Daube 1973, 1982; Kee 1974; Vorster 1979.

These studies also make it clear that honor and shame not only reckoned in relations among human beings but served the conceptualization of the divine-human relationship as well. Not only are worthy or despicable persons described as honorable or shameful, but God as well is envisioned as the Honorable One par excellence (expressed especially in the numerous biblical doxologies) and the ultimate dispenser of honor and shame (e.g., Ps 4:2; 8:5; 71:21; 112 [111]:9; 119 [118]:31, 46, 116; Isa 28: 16; Sir 10:19–20). Those who seek to shame the righteous will themselves be put to shame by God (Ps 6:10; 31:1, 17 [30:2, 18]; 34:5 [33:6]; 35 [34]:4, 26; 37 [36]: 18–19; 40 [39]: 14–15; 57:3 [56:4]; 70:2–3 [69:3–4]; 71:24; 83:16–17 [82:17–18]; 109 [108]:28–29; 119 [118]:78; 129 [128]:5; 132 [131]:18, etc.). God puts to shame not only the ungodly (Ps 53:5 [52:6]), but also a faithless people (Ps 44 [43]:13–16; 89:45 [88:46]). For the lexicographical analysis of honor/shame terms and concepts in the Second Testament, the lexicon of Louw and Nida (1988, esp. the entries on “Status” [87] and “Shame, Disgrace, Humiliation [21.189–25.202]) affords a useful point of departure; on the shame word field see also Vorster 1979.

Honor and Shame in the Biblical World

While numerous biblical writings illustrate how sentiments of honor and shame operate simultaneously at both social and theological or ideological levels of discourse, there are few in which the issue and language of honor and shame are as prominent and pervasive as the letter of 1 Peter. As the data in the Appendix illustrate, this writing, prompted by a bitter conflict involving its addressees and their hostile local neighbors, is unusually rich in honor-shame and related terminology. My aim in what follows is to examine this language and what it reveals about the nature of the conflict and the weapons by which it was waged. What we shall see is that the author of this letter perceived and interpreted this conflict between the Christians of Asia Minor and their detractors as one over honor and shame, grace and disgrace, and in so doing also transposed the issue of honor and shame into a theological key. Before turning to 1 Peter, however, let us first review some basic aspects of honor and shame in the biblical world.

The particular subcultures of the Circum-Mediterranean basin ancient and modern are distinguishable in numerous regards (geographical location, history, language, etc.), including the ways in which the general concepts of honor and shame are concretized, as the anthropologist

Michael Herzfeld (1980) has stressed and as historians are also inclined to note. There are, however, at least four features that they all share as elements of the conceptual framework of honor and shame.

First, as "shame cultures," they differ from industrialized "guilt cultures" in that their members are group-oriented and governed in their attitudes and actions primarily by the opinion and appraisals of significant others. In contrast to "guilt cultures" with their developed sense of individualism, an internalized conscience, and an interest in introspection, in "shame cultures" what "other people will say" serves as the chief sanction of conduct. This means that honor and shame, as all other virtues, are primarily assessed by the court of public opinion and in accord with prevailing stereotypes of persons and groups, their natures, characters, and propensities. Thus Plato observed: "He who has a feeling of reverence and shame about the commission of any action fears and is afraid of an ill reputation" (*Euthyphro* 12B). On Hellenic (and Hellenistic) shame culture as contrasted to guilt cultures and the other-directedness of the former see Gouldner 1969: 78–90; Malina 1993: 63–89; Neyrey 1993: 3–7, 17–20; for the theory that shame and guilt are present and complementary in all cultures see Augsburg 1986: 114–43.

Second, in these honor and shame cultures, social relations are viewed as essentially conflictual in nature, with life itself constituting one challenge or conflict after another. This crucial feature of Hellenic (and Hellenistic) culture and its bearing on contests over honor and shame is admirably described by the sociologist Alvin W. Gouldner, whose brilliant study, *The Hellenic World: A Sociological Analysis* (1969), deserves closer attention from biblical scholars than previously accorded. On the Greek "contest system" and the quest for honor see Gouldner 1969: 41–132; cf. also Arthur Adkins 1960. From wars on the battlefield to athletic contests to challenges in the market place, honor was one of the prized commodities over which persons contended and fought. This ongoing struggle over honor, moreover, was "a zero-sum contest" (Gilmore 1987: 90), so that one person's gain meant another's loss. Persons achieve honor not only by acts of bravery and beneficence, but also by successfully challenging others and calling their honor into question. Ignoring this challenge and failing to publicly defend one's honor and reputation results in shame.

Third, in such cultures where the division of labor and related spheres of life is determined along gender lines, males are seen to embody the honor of the family and females, the family's shame. While the women are viewed as the weaker gender, biologically, intellectually, and morally, they are also "paradoxically powerful because of their potential for collective disgrace" (Gilmore 1987: 90), thus leading to their

seclusion, restriction to the realm of the household, and protection by vigilant related males.

In these three aspects present Mediterranean societies differ little from their ancient forebears, as a host of anthropological studies have made clear. One representative work is the now classic study of John Kennedy Campbell, *Honour, Family, and Patronage* (1964). Studying the workings of the honor code in a Greek mountain community, Campbell notes the same conception of daily life as conflict that Gouldner documented for the ancient Greeks. He also calls attention to a fourth feature of honor, shame, and conflict: namely, the role that kinship systems play in distinguishing the actors on the stage of conflict, who then interact in terms of the honor code.

'Kinsmen' and 'strangers' represent opposed but complementary categories of persons . . . the community from the viewpoint of each individual is divided into kinsmen and non-kinsmen, 'own people' and 'strangers.' The division is unequivocal; kinsmen inspire loyalty and obligation, strangers distrust and moral indifference [1964: 148].

Culturally Contextual Meanings

These four features, which characterized the preoccupation with honor and shame in the world of the biblical communities—orientation to the group and the appraisal of others, the perceived conflictual nature of social relations, the male embodiment of honor balanced by the female embodiment of shame, and the contestants differentiated as kinsmen vs. strangers—complemented and reinforced each other. Conflict was outer-directed and carried on by males against others (non-kin, strangers) in terms of the ideals of honor and shame. One looked to others, not the self, for affirmations of honor and accusations of shame, and honor and shame were chief values over which persons and groups, kinsmen and strangers, competed and fought.

But what do these values of honor (*timê*, *philotomia*, *doxa*, etc.) and shame (*aischynê*, *aischynô*, *kataischynô* etc.) themselves signify, and what other concepts do they embrace? Honor and shame, on the whole, are expressions of the social standing of a group and its members and paramount indicators of their credit rating. "Honor" is a claim to worth (on the part of an individual, family, or group) accompanied by the public acknowledgment of, and respect for, that worth (Prov 3:4; 20:3; 21:21; Demosthenes, *Or.* 2.15; 3.24; Josephus, *Vita* 274, 422–29). Honor was a matter of one's *fama*, one's reputation, social standing, and status rating in the eyes of others. "Honor," Aristotle comments (*Rhet.* 1.5; 1316A), "is the token of a man's being famous for doing good." It was the function of epideictic rhetoric in particular to celebrate such honor. As synonyms for honor, Pollux (5.158) lists *kleos*, *doxa*, *phêmê*, *onoma*, *euphêmia*,

polyphêmia, *lamprotês*, *eudoxia*, *eudokimêsis*, *zêlos*, *eukleia*, and *mnêmê*. As a further equivalent of *timê* Plutarch (*Mem.* 3.12.4) also mentions *charis*. Latin equivalents include *honor*, *gloria*, *fama*, *dignitas*, *claritas*, etc.; cf. Vermeulen 1981. Such honor can be rooted and symbolized in one's distinguished lineage, bloodline, and good name (Sirach 41:12–13), one's wealth and generosity (Gen 31:1; 45:13; Prov 14:31; Philo, *Op.* 79; *Leg. All.* 2.107; *Ep. Arist.* 227), one's power (Ps 63:2; 96:7; Dan 2:37; 5:18), and one's moral virtue (*aretê*).

Preoccupation with honor, *philotimia*, was everyday, first order business. "Wealth, fame, official posts, honors, and everything of that sort," Philo comments (*Abr.* 264), are the concerns "with which the majority of mankind is busy." The striving for honor, according to Plutarch (*Hiero* 7.3), separates humans from animals and brings them close to divinity. And as Dio Chrysostom puts it, linking honor and the sacred: "What is more sacred than honor?" (*Orat.* 31.37). Small wonder that of the myriad inscriptions surviving from antiquity, so many are records of public recognition, praise, and honors bestowed! (Danker 1982, *passim*). Indeed, according to Isocrates (5.134), the memory of one's honor and one's name was a guarantee of immortality.

"Shame," the correlate of honor, is, in a positive sense, concern about one's honor rating, possession of a "sense of shame." "Shame" in a negative sense results when the honor, character, or good name of a person or group is successfully challenged through insult, disparagement, reviling, or other form of attack or when a person fails to protect and extend the reputation of one's group through appropriate personal behavior. In the "agonistic," conflict-ridden culture of ancient society, this credit rating was under constant scrutiny and challenge. Defending, maintaining, and enhancing personal or group honor, on the one hand, and avoiding being publicly degraded, demeaned, disgraced, insulted, scorned, and humiliated (i.e., "shamed"), on the other, were universal and persistent preoccupations of the ancient Mediterraneans in their informal interactions. The operative word here is *informal*, implying a conflict over custom rather than law, as Plutarch (*Orat.* 76.4) makes clear: "For the laws inflict punishment upon men's bodies, but when a custom (*ethos*) is violated, the consequent penalty has always been shame (*aischynê*).

Being disgraced and shamed by failing to maintain, defend, and enhance one's honor had dire consequences for oneself, one's family, and others with whom one was associated. To be "shameless" is to lack this sensibility and thus to be beyond the moral pale altogether, as in the case of gross deviants and strangers. Where, as in the biblical world, society was a network of kinship and ethnic groups, "kinsmen" and "strangers" often represented opposed but complementary categories of persons. Kinsmen, as Campbell

noted, "inspire loyalty and obligation, strangers distrust and moral indifference" (1964: 148). Within the category of kinsmen, moreover, "the only stable solidary group is the family" and "the mutual opposition of family groups is expressed through the concept of honour with its connotations of exclusiveness" (1964: 148). This demarcation between kinsmen and strangers and the household as the basis of honor is especially noteworthy because it is present in the scenario of 1 Peter as well.

Concern about honor (generally embodied in males and the family "name") and shame (generally embodied in females and the blood) affected all aspects of behavior and social interaction and was given expression in a wide range of vocabulary and topics. The idiom of honor and shame and the polarities of honor/dishonor, grace/disgrace, respect/disrespect, repute/disrepute, worthiness/unworthiness, prestige and exaltation/baseness and degradation provided a basic way of conceptualizing and expressing matters of status, roles, behavior, social differentiation, social control, and social appraisal.

In Jewish and Christian circles, the books of Proverbs and Sirach, illustrative of conventional wisdom, abound with instruction concerning honorable and shameful behavior, particularly in regard to familial conduct (see, e.g., Prov 9:13; 10:5; 13:5; 18:3; 25:10; Sir 13:7–14; 41:14–42:14). Transcribed into a theological or ideological key, the cultural script of honor and shame likewise provided an idiom for distinguishing kin from strangers, the honorable House of Israel from the shameful or shameless Gentiles, as well as an idiom for describing God and praising God's honor, glory, mercy, and mighty acts (1 Chron 16:29; Ps 29:2; 144–50; Matt 15:31; Luke 1:46–55, 68–79; 7:16; Rev 4:9, 11; 5:13; 7:12). Indeed, "the highest form of honor," the letter of Aristeeas (234) observes, "is honoring God . . . with purity of heart and of devout disposition, as everything is ordained by God and ordered according to his will." Shaming too is ultimately God's prerogative, especially the shaming of the disobedient and godless (Ps 132:18; Isa 28:16; Jer 23:40; Hos 4:7; Nah 3:5; Rom 9:33; 10:11; 1 Cor 1:27; cf. 2 Cor 7:14; 9:4).

With this sketch of the honor-shame script in mind, we turn now to 1 Peter.

The Case of 1 Peter

In a document such as 1 Peter, which addresses a confrontation over matters of social order, alleged misconduct, and all manner of public insult resulting in suffering, it is hardly surprising that so much of its content is expressed in the idiom or key of honor and shame, those pivotal values of ancient Mediterranean culture. In the Appendix are listed the explicit occurrences of the terms *honor* and *shame*, which

often appear as contrasts in the same context, as well as further terms belonging to the semantic field of each. The prominence of explicit honor and shame vocabulary in 1 Peter, coupled with the abundance of synonymous honor and shame language, illustrates how the author envisions the struggle between the Christians of Asia Minor and their hostile neighbors as one over honor denied and honor claimed.

As the author describes the scene, the addressees had been the targets of various kinds of verbal abuse directed against them by their Anatolian neighbors. They had been slandered (*katalalein*) as persons supposedly engaged in wrongdoing (2:12; 3:16), insulted (*loidoria*, 3:9b), disparaged (*epêreazein*), and maligned (*blasphêmein*) for dissociating from Gentiles and their dissolute conduct (4:4). It was this ongoing process of abuse that resulted in the undeserved suffering with which this letter is so concerned (1:6; 2:19–20; 3:14, 17; 4:1, 15, 19; 5:10). The Greek terms denoting this abuse are those typically employed to describe the process of verbal attack, ridicule, and public shaming (see, for instance, Plutarch's treatise, *How to Profit by One's Enemies* (*De Capienda ex inimicis utilitate*, *Mor.* 86B–92F) and Josephus' recounting of pagan attacks on the Jews (*Against Apion*).

In the case of 1 Peter, the reproach and maligning leveled against the believers by nonbelieving outsiders appears prompted not only by ignorance (2:15), but also by suspicions of deviant behavior. Judging from the areas of conduct covered in the letter, this could have involved their supposedly not demonstrating proper respect for order and authority in civil and domestic realms (2:13–3:7; 5:1–5a), not maintaining harmony and tranquillity in marriage (3:1–7), and possibly engaging in murder, theft, wrongdoing, and meddling in others' affairs (4:15). Allegations of this kind were typically leveled by natives against strangers in their midst, and the Christians as "strangers and resident aliens" (1:1, 17; 2:11) would have been no exception to such charges. Differences in customs and traditions, behavioral codes, forms of worship, and the God or gods worshipped, coupled with a stance of aloofness, invariably generated suspicions of deviant, immoral behavior, disrespect of the gods, and endangerment of the well-being of the community. As the offspring of the House of Israel, which itself was often regarded and treated by its neighbors as strangers and aliens, the messianic sect eventually was also subjected to the same defamation to which the Judeans fell victim: accusations of "superstition," "atheism," sexual immorality, strange practices (e.g., Sabbath observance, abstention from blood), and social aloofness, an action expressly encouraged in 1 Pet (1:14–19; 2:11; 4:2–4) and indicated as the immediate cause of Gentile surprise and resentment (4:4).

Thus in the case of 1 Peter, outsider ignorance of the alien Christians had led to suspicion, and suspicion to slan-

der, reviling, maligning, and reproach of the *Christianoi*, "Christ sycophants," as *kakopoioi* (2:12; 4:15), persons engaged in wrongdoing and modes of behavior at variance with local ancestral traditions and the *mos maiorum*. The nature and weapons of the attack on the Christians is a classic example of public shaming designed to demean and discredit the believers in the court of public opinion with the ultimate aim of forcing their conformity to prevailing norms and values.

The social dynamics of honoring and shaming have been studied by Pierre Bourdieu (1966) and others and have been described as a process of challenge and riposte involving four steps: (1) a claim to honor, (2) a challenge to this claim, (3) a riposte to the challenge, and (4) a public appraisal by the onlookers (Malina 1993:34–37; Malina & Neyrey in Neyrey 1991: 29–32, 36–38, 49–51). In the Second Testament, such exchanges are especially evident in most of the conflict stories of the Gospels, for example (Malina & Neyrey 1988: 2–67). 1 Peter leaves it unclear how and to what extent its addressees may already have responded to their detractors. This may be the case because the patent aim of the letter is to propose a specific course of action.

Few avenues of redress of grievance were open to this minority community. Conformity to Gentile norms would result in nothing less than the disappearance of the movement altogether. This was undoubtedly clear to the author, who repeatedly reminds the addressees of their distinctive holy identity (1:2, 14–19, 22; 2:5, 9; 4:10; 3:2) and forcefully urges them to resist (5:8–9) and stand fast (5:12) against pressures to conform. Sociologists who have studied procedures taken across cultures to deal with grievances, conflicts, and disputes have identified seven main options: namely, adjudication, arbitration, mediation, negotiation, coercion, avoidance, and finally what is called "lumping it" (Nader & Todd 1978: 9).

Of these options all but the last two were unavailable to the messianic sect. At this early stage of its development it lacked the numerical size, social standing, and influential patrons necessary for defending itself in a court of law. So their options were reduced to either avoidance or simply "lumping it." Avoidance according to social theorists "entails withdrawing from a situation or curtailing or terminating a relationship by leaving" or breaking off the social relationship between antagonists (Nader & Todd 1978: 9). Now, while the petrine author indeed urged that the addressees separate both from Gentile modes of behavior and from the Gentiles themselves (4:2–4), he of course was not advocating a geographical withdrawal from society as was undertaken, for example, by the Qumran community. His proposal was rather to dissociate but to stay engaged and in fact,

where possible, to even attempt to win detractors to the faith (2:12; 3:2).

The Christians thus were left with only one feasible option, and that was to “lump it.” “Lumping it,” as defined by social theorists, “refers to the failure of an aggrieved party to press his claim or complaint.” The grievance, conflict, or dispute is left unresolved “because one of the parties chooses to ignore the issue in dispute, usually basing his decision on feelings of relative powerlessness or on the social, economic, or psychological costs involved in seeking a solution,” and the relationship is continued (Nader & Todd 1979:9).

This does not mean, however, that the issue is ignored among the aggrieved themselves. In the case of 1 Peter this is clearly not the case. The author tackles the problem of suffering head on and when stuck with lemons makes lemonade—in several significant ways, all of which involve recasting a predicament of shame and social disgrace into one of honor and grace.

The Petrine Strategy

First, the addressees are warned not to engage in the usual spitting match of riposte and retaliation. They are not to return “injury for injury” or “insult for insult” (3:9; see also the proscription of slander in 2:1), just as Jesus when insulted did not retaliate (2:23, echoing Isa 53:7 and details of the passion narrative [Mark 14:61/Matt 26:63; Mark 15:5/Matt 27:12–14; Luke 23:9; John 19:9]). Rather they are urged to bless their insulters (3:9c) and to disprove their slanderers with honorable and irreproachable modes of behavior within and beyond the community (2:12), for actions speak louder than words (3:1–2).

The advice is akin to that of Plutarch in his discourse on *How to Profit by One's Enemies* (*De Capienda ex inimicis utilitate*; *Mor.* 86B–92F). He quotes Diogenes' statement: “How shall I defend myself against my enemy?” “By proving yourself good and honourable” (*autos kalos k'agathos genomenos*)” (*Profit* 4; *Mor.* 88B) and then goes on to observe:

If you wish to distress the man who hates you, do not insult *loidorei* him as lewd, effeminate, licentious, vulgar, or illiberal, but be a man yourself, show self-control, be truthful, and treat with kindness and justice those who have to deal with you [*Profit* 4; *Mor.* 88C]. . . . There may be, then, so much that is profitable and useful in insulting (*loidorein*) one's enemy; but no less profit lies in the alternative of being insulted oneself (*loidoreisthai*) and ill spoken of by one's enemies . . . men have need of true friends or else of ardent enemies; for the first by admonition, and the second by insulting (*loidorountes*), turn them from error (*hamartanontas*)” [*Profit* 6; *Mor.* 89B]. . . . But it is more imperative that the man who is ill spoken of by an enemy should rid himself of the attribute in question . . . and if anybody mentions things that are not really attributes of ours, we should

nevertheless seek to learn the cause which has given rise to such slanderous assertions (*hê blasphêmia*), and we must exercise vigilance, for fear that we unwittingly commit some error either approximating or resembling the one mentioned [*Profit* 6; *Mor.* 89D–E].

The petrine author in similar vein, in a key statement (2:11–12) introducing the exhortation that follows, charges his addressees “as resident aliens and visiting strangers to abstain from the deadly cravings that wage war against life” and to “maintain honorable conduct among the Gentiles so that when they slander you as those who do what is wrong, from observing your good deeds they may glorify God on the day of visitation.” This honorable conduct is then spelled out in further detail in the remainder of the letter. The addressees are to behave honorably in both the civil (2:13–17) and domestic (2:18–3:7) realms, showing respect for order and authority and honoring all persons, including the emperor (2:17). The situation and conduct of slaves, like that of Christian wives, has paradigmatic significance for the entire community (Elliott 1990: 205–08). In the case of the former, their subordination, and enduring of suffering for doing what is right without retaliation is motivated not only by reverence for God and awareness of the favor (*charis, kleos*) God confers (2:18–20), but also christologically by the model of Jesus Christ, who himself suffered innocently and honorably (2:21–25).

Informing this depiction of Christ is the fourth servant song of Isaiah (52:13–53:12) portraying a suffering servant of God insulted, mocked, and publicly shamed but ultimately vindicated (Elliott 1985). Christian wives (3:1–6) embodying the vulnerability of honor and the family's sensitivity toward shame are likewise urged to show respect for social order by subordinating themselves to their husbands and adorning themselves with the interior virtues of modesty and a “gentle and quiet spirit” (3:4; cf. 3:16, of all the believers), a demeanor that is not only consistent with society's expectations but is also “precious in God's sight” (3:2–4). Christian husbands, in turn, are to honor (*aponemontes timan*) their wives, not simply because of their weakness but primarily because together they are “co-heirs of the grace of life” (3:7). And all the faithful are directed not to return evil for evil or insult for insult but on the contrary to bless so that they may also inherit a blessing (3:9).

The remainder of the letter addresses the issue of suffering resulting from reproach in more detail but along similar lines. In 3:13–17, believers who, despite their upright conduct (3:14) are slandered and disparaged (3:16) nevertheless are said to be “honored” by God (*makarioi*, 3:14) and are again directed to see in the suffering and resurrected Christ not only an exemplar but also an enabler of their own vindication (3:18–22; 4:1). Though maligned by Gentile unbelievers for separating from them and their dissolute

conduct and though judged in the flesh by these Gentiles, the addressees, both the deceased and those still living, will nevertheless be vindicated by God and will live in the spirit (4:4–6).

4:12–19 continues this line of thought. Though they are reproached and caused to suffer by being labeled with the contemptuous name *Christian* (4:14a, 16a), this is no cause for shame but paradoxically a means for glorifying God (4:16bc). Already honored by God (*makarioi*, 4:14b; cf. 3:14b), they should honor God with this name and entrust their lives to their faithful Creator while persevering in doing what is right (4:19; cf. 5:7). The exhortation of elders (shepherds, 5:1–5) contains one final honor and shame contrast in its proscription of leadership for “shameful gain” (*aischrokerdōs*, 5:2) and its promise of an honorable “crown of glory” at the appearance of the Chief Shepherd (5:4). And the letter concludes with a final assurance of the glory and honor that awaits those who persevere (5:10).

Honor and Shame in a Theological Key

This recipe for responding to insult and slander is similar in one point to that of Plutarch: namely, countering abuse with irreproachable and honorable conduct. But there the similarity ends. For the petrine strategy is undergirded with an impressive array of distinctively Christian arguments and warrants.

First, the essential criterion of honorable conduct is not simply public opinion but the “will of God” (2:15; 3:17; 4:2, 19) and reverence for God (2:17, 18; 3:2, 16; cf. also 2:14 [“because of the Lord”]; 3:4 [“in God’s sight”] and “mindfulness of God” [*syneidēsis*, 2:19; 3:16, 21]). Those who revere and obey God have no cause to fear harm or intimidation (3:5, 13).

Second, it is Christ who is held up as the paramount exemplar and enabler of such honorable conduct (2:21–25; 3:18–22; 4:1). Shaming and suffering should come as no surprise to those who in faith are one with the shamed and suffering Christ (4:12–16).

Third, the author is concerned with the winsome effect of honorable conduct. In the case of wives (3:1–2) as well as the community as a whole (2:12), it could and should lead not simply to silencing detractors but actually winning them to the faith and leading them from shaming Christians to glorifying and honoring God.

Fourth, suffering itself is cast in a positive, honorable light. The addressees are urged to regard suffering as a divine test of the probity of their faith and commitment (1:6–7; 4:12). As conventional wisdom knows, moreover, innocent suffering in the flesh is a physical experience that disciplines the body and aids in ceasing from sinning (4:1).

More important, in suffering innocently for doing what is right, believers are one with their innocent suffering Lord, and his vindication and honoring by God will be theirs as well (2:4, 21–25; 3:18–22; 4:1, 13; cf. also 1:6–8, 11; 5:1, 10). In this same vein the author exclaims, “How honored [*makarioi*] you are if you should suffer for doing what is right” (3:14; cf. Hanson 1989). And again, “how honored [*makarioi*] you are, if you are reproached in the name of Christ, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (4:14). Reproach by outsiders and suffering for bearing the label of “Christian” is not a reason for feeling shamed, but, to the contrary, is a means for glorifying, that is, honoring God (4:16). On this point Gouldner’s (1969:82) observation is particularly relevant:

In a society having a shame culture . . . a man may feel ashamed even if he has not actually done something *wrong* but simply if this is the common opinion concerning his deeds, or concerning what has been done to him or done to (or by) someone with whom he is closely associated.

The name *christianos*, originally a label employed by outsiders to ridicule a follower of the crucified Christ as “Christ-lackeys” (Elliott 1990:73–74, 95–96), in a grand and ironic reversal of status becomes a badge of honor for followers of the exalted Christ (3:18, 22). Those who bear this badge of honor, whether deceased or alive, though they are maligned and judged in the flesh according to human standards, will live in the spirit according to God’s standard (4:6). This theme of divine reversal was sounded earlier in connection with Christ (2:4; 3:18, 22; cf. also its implication in the combination of “sufferings and glory” [1:11; 5:1]) and recurs again in connection with the believers in 5:5b–7): “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Allow yourselves, therefore, to be humbled under the powerful hand of God so that at a propitious time he may exalt you.”

For unbelievers, on the other hand, this divine reversal can result in their eternal shame. Those who call to account the believers (3:15) whom they slander and seek to shame (3:16) will themselves be called to account by God (4:5). Those who are won to the faith by the irreproachable conduct of the believers will join them in glorifying, and receiving honor from, God (2:12; 3:2). But those who persist in their abuse and disparagement of the believers will be shamed, disgraced, and condemned by God at the final judgment (3:16; cf. 2:7b–8; 4:17–18). In his perceptive study of the response of subordinate groups to the dominant culture, James Scott (1990:166–82) refers to this strategy as one of “symbolic inversion” and presents numerous examples of such “world-upside-down” fantasies and images of reversal in the traditions of subordinated classes.

(In its discussion of both the conditions of and responses [covert as well as overt] to domination, Scott’s study offers a useful model for analyzing the situation of early Christian-

ity in general. William Herzog makes imaginative use of a predecessor to this work, Scott's *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* [1985] in his admirable study, *Parables as Subversive Speech* [1994]).

As a more demonstrative gesture, whose encouragement in 1 Peter can only be surmised, Scott cites the well-known Ethiopian proverb: "When the great lord passes, the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts" (1990: v).

Finally but most important, the author has set the stage for this exhortation to an honorable way of life and honorable endurance of suffering by assuring the beleaguered readers in the opening section of the letter (1:1–2:10) of the several related ways in which they have already been honored by God, the ultimate conferrer and arbiter of honor and shame. As recipients of God's grace and favor they have been called, elected, and sanctified as God's endtime covenant people and incorporated into the household of God (Elliott 1966: 16–49, 129–218; 1982; 1990: 165–266). As children of God's family they too are honored with God's grace/favor, sanctification, rebirth, inheritance, praise, salvation, redemption, life, goodness, blessing, imperishable crown, exaltation, protection, and glory—all images of honor conferred by God (1:2–3, 3–12, 18–19; 2:3, 4–10, 19–20, 24–24; 3:7, 9, 10–12, 14; 4:13, 14, 16; 5:4, 5–6, 7, 10, 13). On Paul making a similar point about God as the "ultimate significant other" deciding on honor and shame (Rom 2–4, 9–11; see Moxnes 1988: 68, 70, 71).

Elevation to Theological Sphere

The pivotal passage with which this opening section of the letter ends, 2:4–10, involves a particularly graphic example of honor and shame transposed into a theological key and lays the basis for their theological appropriation in the remainder of the letter. Adapting Isa 28:16 (cited in 2:6) both christologically and ecclesiologically, the author declares God to be the ultimate conferrer of honor and shame and one's relation to Jesus Christ to be the ultimate determinant of honor and shame. As Christ is the "living stone," elect (*eklekton*) and honored (*entimon*) by God (2:4), so those who believe in him have themselves become "living stones" (2:5), an elect (*genos eklekton*) and holy people (*ethnos hagian*) identified by the honorific predicates of the covenant people of God (Exod 19:5–6; Isa 43:20–21). "To you who believe," says the author, "belongs this honor" (2:7a). The paramount locus of honor in society, the family (*oikos*), becomes here the honor basis of the community as the household of God (*oikos pneumatikos, oikos tou theou*, 2:5; 4:17); see Elliott 1966: 149–59; 1991: 165–266. The collective task of its members is to declare publicly the praises and honor (*aretai*) of the One Who has called them from darkness to light (2:9).

Shame, on the other hand (2:6c), awaits those who have rejected and dishonored Jesus Christ (2:4c, 7b). Because of their rejection of Christ and their disbelieving of the word (2:8), they themselves will be rejected and put to shame by God (2:6, citing Isa 28:16; cf. also 3:16; 4:5).

Thus at the outset of the letter, the shaming and suffering that believers experience is set within the conceptual frame of the honor and shame that God confers on the basis of one's relation to Jesus Christ. It is this divinely conferred honor and membership in the family of God that establishes the basis for the exhortation to an honorable and holy way of life that follows. The letter's conclusion (5:10–11) completes this conceptual framework by assuring the believers one last time of the glory, grace, and honor to which they have been called despite their suffering, with the postscript (5:12–14) recalling the grace (5:12; cf. 1:10, 13; 3:7; 4:10; 5:5, 10) and election (5:13; cf. 1:1–2; 2:4–10) by which God has honored the addressees as well as the senders of the letter. So honored by God, the addressees are thus fully equipped to ignore the futile shaming strategies of their adversaries, resist pressures urging conformity and assimilation (symbolized as the "lion seeking to devour you," 5:8–9), and to stand fast in the true grace of God (5:12).

For this magnificent outpouring of grace and honor, the author repeatedly stresses throughout the letter, God is to be honored, praised, and glorified (1:3; 2:5, 9, 12; 4:11, 16; 5:11). Indeed, a Christian's entire life, the author notes, is to be lived to the honor and glory of God—a petrine idea admirably captured in the mottos of the Order of St. Benedict, "Let God be glorified in all things," and of the Society of Jesus, "to the greater glory of God" (2:12; 4:11). From the commencement to the close of this letter, it is thus evident that issues of honor and shame play a central role in defining both the social struggle of the believers and their hostile neighbors and the role that God plays in human lives as the final source and arbiter of honor and shame, grace and disgrace.

Conclusion

In the bitter struggle between the Anatolian Christians and their local neighbors portrayed in 1 Peter, the chief weapon of attack employed by the latter was a barrage of verbal abuse designed to shame, defame, demean, and discredit the believers as social and moral deviants endangering the common good. A strategy of public shaming was employed as a means of social control with the aim of pressuring the minority community to conform to conventional values and standards of conduct. This unrelenting abuse resulted in undeserved suffering on the part of the believers and if unchecked could have led to their demoralization, despair, or even defection.

The response to this situation that the letter's author recommends is not the conventional one of returning insult for insult but rather engagement in honorable conduct, which could have three possible consequences: the silencing of ignorant detractors, winning them to the Christian cause, or, if the slander continued, the exposure of the slanderers to the judgment of God, who would put the shamers to shame.

To move the beleaguered believers to this course of action, the author reminds them of the dignity and honor they already enjoy as a result of their baptismal incorporation into the household of God and their solidarity with their shamed but divinely honored Lord Jesus Christ. This honor from God is to be manifested in an honorable way of life in society. To be reproached in the name of Christ (4:14) and to suffer as a Christian, a Christ-lackey, is no cause for shame but to the contrary an opportunity for glorifying and honoring God (4:16). Their honorable conduct, like that of Christ, will ultimately be vindicated by God, the final arbiter of honor and shame.

In the Jewish and Christian transposition of honor and shame into a *theological* key, honor ultimately is ascribed not by blood and birth, as convention would dictate; nor is it achieved by any heroic act of valor and *andreia*, that is, manliness or courage. It is rather conferred through an act of divine grace, through the favor of a God who removes the mighty from their seats and exalts those of low degree, a divine patron who liberates slaves and raises them to the status of sons and daughters, who covenants with a lowly house of Jacob and exalts it to the status of God's very own special possession, his elect and holy people, and who incorporates disgraced strangers and aliens into a graced family of God.

On the one hand, 1 Peter illustrates how much of the struggle between early Christianity and its social environment was a battle over social standing and social rating, honor disputed and honor paradoxically claimed. On the other hand, the letter also illustrates how honor and shame provided the idiom for conceptualizing the relationship of the social and the sacred, the experiencing of the countervailing grace or honor conferred by God in the face of social disgrace and shame. In Christian communities at odds with their environments and pressured to conform and assimilate, honor and shame are theologically redefined and reckoned according to a calculus of divine reversal preeminently expressed in God's honoring of the shamed Messiah and those who share both his innocent suffering and his glorious vindication.

Appendix

Honor and Shame Terminology and Their Related Semantic Fields in 1 Peter

1. Terms of the "honor" family:

timê ("honor," 1:7 with *epainos* ["praise"; cf. 2:14]; and *doxa* ["glory"]; 2:7—all regarding believers; 3:7, husbands honor wives)

timaô ("show honor, respect," 2:17 [to emperor and to all persons])

enimos ("honored, precious," 2:4, 6, with *eklektos* and modifying Jesus Christ)

polytimoteros ("very honorable, precious," 1:7 modifying faith/loyalty)

2. Terms of the "shame" family:

kataischynomai ("be put to shame" [by God], 2:6; 3:16 [of nonbelievers and opponents])

aischynomai ("feel shamed," 4:16 [by the name *Christian*]; opp. "glorify God"; cf. 2:12, "slandered/glorify God")

aischrokerdôs ("greedy for shameful gain," 5:2 [not to characterize Christian leaders])

3. Synonyms for "honor, to honor, to be honored," honorable virtues and related images (honor semantic field):

confer or receive grace, favor, credit (*charis*, 1:2, 10, 13; 2:19, 20; 3:7; 4:10; 5:5, 12; cf. *charisma*, 4:10; *kleos*, 2:20)

confer or receive glory, glorify (*doxa*, *doxazô*, 1:7, 11, 21, 24; 4:11, 13, 14; 5:1, 4, 10; 1:18; 2:12; 4:11, 16)

have and display power (*dynamis*, 1:5; 3:22; *kratos*, 4:11; 5:11; cf. *krateia*, 5:6), strength (*ischys*, 4:11)

be father (*patêr*, 1:2, 3, 17; cf. *anagennaô*, 1:3, 23; creator/founder (*ktistês*, 4:19; cf. *ktisis*, 2:13); judge (*krino*, *krima* 1:17; 4:5, 6, 17)

be superior to other authorities (*hypotagenton autoi aggelon kai exousiôn kai dynamôn*, 3:22)

show mercy, clemency (*eleos*, *eleeô*, 1:3; 2:10)

render impartial judgment (*aprosôpolêmptôs*, 1:17)

execute praiseworthy deeds (*aretai*, 2:9)

praise (*epainos*, 1:7; 2:14)

bless, confer blessing, be blessed (*eulogeô*, *eulogia*, 3:9; *eulogêtos*, 1:3; *makarios*, 3:14; 4:14)

raise (*egeirô*, 1:21); exalt (*hypsoô*, 5:6)

make alive, confer life, be alive (*zôopoieô*, *zôê*, *zaô*, 1:3, 23; 2:4, 5, 24; 3:7, 10, 18; 4:5, 6)

be called by God (*kaleô*, 1:15; 2:9, 21; 3:6, 9; 5:10)

be a cornerstone (*akrogôniaios*, 2:6; "head of corner," 2:7)

be ascribed honorific predicates (2:4, 5, 9, 10)

be in light (*phôs*, 2:9)

be at right hand (*dexios*, place of honor, 3:22)

receive an inheritance, inherit a blessing (*klêronomeô*, *klêronomia*, 1:4; 3:9; cf. "co-heirs" [*synklêronomoi*] of the grace of life, 3:7)

receive a crown (*stephanos*, 5:4)

lead an honorable and attractive way of life (*anastrophe kale*, 2:12; cf. 1:15, 17, 18; 3:1, 2, 16)

show respect for authority, order and social status (*hypotassô*, 2:13, 18; 3:1, 5, 22; 5:5; as citizens 2:13–17; as slaves 2:18–20; as wives 3:1–6; as husbands 3:7; as elders 5:1–4 and younger persons 5:5a, who behave honorably in accord with their ascribed statuses and roles)

show God awe and reverence (*phobeô*, *phobos*, 1:17; 2:17, 18; 3:2, 6, 14, 15)

be obedient (*hypakouô*, *hypakoê*, 1:2, 14, 22; 3:6)

obey God's will (*thelêma*, 2:15; 3:17; 4:2, 19; cf. *syneidêsis theou*, 2:19; 3:16, 21; *kata theon*, 5:2)

abstain from selfish desires (*epithymia*, 1:14; 2:11; 4:2–3)

not sinning (*hamartanô*, *hamartia*, 2:20, 22, 24; 3:18; 4:1, 8)

avoiding evil (*kakopoiêô*, *kakia*, *kakos* 2:12, 14; 3:9, 10–12, 17; 4:15) and vices (2:1, 12; 4:2–4)

doing good (*agathopoiêô*, *agathopoiia*, *agathopoiios*, *agathos*, 2:14, 15, 20; 3:6, 10, 11, 13, 16, 17, 21; 4:19; *kala erga*, 2:12; cf. 1:17)

be just, righteous (*dikaios*, *dikaiosyne*, 2:24; 3:12, 14, 18; 4:18)

be holy, pure, blameless (*hagios*, *hagiasmos*, *amômos*, *aspilos*, *katharos*, 1:2, 12, 15, 16, 19, 22; 2:5, 9; 3:2, 5)

show familial loyalty (*philadelphia*, *philadelphos*, 1:22; 3:8; cf. *agapaô*, *agapê*, 1:8, 22; 2:17; 4:8; 5:14); maintain loyalty (*pistis*, *pisteuô*, *pistos*, 1:5, 7, 8, 9, 21; 2:6, 7; 4:19; 5:9, 12)

be silent (3:1), gentle (*praus*, 3:4; *prautês*, 3:16), and quiet (*hêsychios*, 3:4).

be humble (*tapeinos*, *tapeinophrosynê*, *tapeinophrôn*, 3:8; 5:5)

be like-minded (*homophrones*), compassionate (*sympatheis*), tender-hearted (*eusplangchnoi*), thereby maintaining group solidarity

not seeking retribution, 3:9 or defense of honor, 3:9 because honor is conferred by God

be alert (*nêphô*, 1:13; 4:7; 5:8)

exercise sound judgment (*sôphroneô*, 4:7)

be hospitable (*philoxenos*, 4:9)

serve one another (*diakoneô*, 4:10–11)

bear suffering (*paschô*, *pathêma*, *lypê*), courageously and steadfastly (1:6; 2:19–20, 21–23; 3:14–18; 4:1, 13–19; 5:10; *hypopherô*, *hypomenô*, 2:19, 20)

prize one's name (*onomos*=*christianos*, 4:14, 16)

emulate honorable exemplars (Jesus Christ, 2:21–24; 3:13–4:6; 4:12–16; Sarah, matriarchs, 3:5–6; Noah and family, 3:20)

4. Synonyms for "shame, to shame, to be shamed" and shameless behavior (shame semantic field).

A. Outsiders shaming the believers and Christ

slander, defame another's honor and good name (*katalaleô*, 2:12; 3:16; cf. *katalalia*, 2:1, proscribed for Christians)

insult, revile (*loidoreô*, 2:23; *loidoria*, 3:9; cf. *antiloidoreô*, 2:23, not by Christ)

disparage (*epêreazô*, 3:16)

malign (*blasphêmeô*, 4:4)

reproach (*oneidizô*, 4:14)

cf. also harm, abuse (*kakoô*, 3:13)

B. Forms of shameful behavior

do what is wrong (*kakopoiêô*, *kakia*, *kakos*, 2:12, 14; 3:9, 10–12, 17; 4:15)

be unjust (*adikos*, 3:18) and deal unjustly (*adikôs*, 2:19)

sin, violate social and religious norms (*hamartanô*, 2:20; *hamartia*, 2:22, 24; 3:18; 4:1, 8; *hammatolos*, 4:18)

be impious (*asebês*, 4:18) and engage in lawless acts (*athemitos*, 4:4)

be driven by selfish craving (*epithymia*, 1:14; 2:11; 4:2, 3)

engage in various vices and dissolute behavior (2:1; 4:2–4)

be ignorant (*agnôia*, 1:14; *agnôsia*, 2:15), and act without good sense (*aphronôn*, 2:15)

be offended at someone honorable (*proskoptô*, *skandalon*, 2:8)

be caused to fall, scandalized, 2:8; cf. crucified Christ as source of scandal, 1 Cor. 1:23)

be in darkness (*skotos*, 2:9)

be crucified (a means of extreme public shaming—*xylon* [tree=cross, 2:24; cf. Heb 12:2; shaming treatment, Mark 10:33–34; 15:16–32 par.)

be proud and arrogant (*hyperêphanos*, 5:5; cf. 5:3)

For Second Testament fields of honor and shame see Louw & Nida (1988). Honor: 87.4–87.18; Shame: 25.189–202; 53.60; 60.12; 88.127, 149–51. See also the list assembled by Malina and Neyrey (1991: 46).

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