Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials

BOOK REVIEW BY ADAM SIMNOWITZ

by Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016) review by Adam Simnowitz

Introduction:

Jayson Georges and Mark Baker have undertaken a very ambitious goal that extends well beyond trying to help Western Christians understand differences between their cultures with those of other cultures. They clearly state that their "aim is to lead you [the Western Christian reader] in a paradigm shift — to see God’s world and God’s Word through a new lens" (30) in order to "encourage and foster...self-theologizing" among "honor-shame natives" (21). It is this reviewer’s conviction that the unfortunate and devastating result is that Georges and Baker present us with a different theology, a different gospel, and a different way to proselytize and disciple those who accept their "honor-shame" ideology.

This very strong indictment would appear to be unjustified in light of the authors’ much more moderate claim that they are simply highlighting a neglected aspect of salvation due to blind spots within Western culture.[1] Such a qualified claim, however, fails to be convincing. Not only is it at odds with the above quotes, but also with the overall thrust of the book. It is further belied by the authors’ prior and current commitments to persuade others of their “honor-shame” teaching as the operative framework by which the Bible should be understood (see below for more information about the authors and the publisher).

[1] e.g., "Western theology itself is not ‘wrong,’ but simply incomplete and limited by cultural blinders. ...One such ‘blind spot’ in Western theology is honor and shame." [22]; “Western theology’s emphasis on one aspect of salvation truncates other facets of the gospel. So we aim to ‘rotate the diamond’ to examine often neglected aspects of Christian salvation so that readers can see [and proclaim] the gospel in a fuller, more complete manner.” [23].

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His thesis is available on this website Muslim Idiom Translation: Assessing So-Called Scripture Translation For Muslim Audiences With A Look Into Its Origins In Eugene A. Nida’s Theories Of Dynamic Equivalence And Cultural Anthropology.
In an “honor-shame” culture a person who discovers “real” truth...or “lost” wisdom, would not be ashamed to present himself for who he is.

**Brief Overview**

The book contains 291 pages and is divided into acknowledgments, 11 chapters, appendixes, endnotes, and indexes. After the first chapter, which serves as both an introduction to the subject and provides an overview of the book, the subsequent chapters are organized under the following three categories:

- Part One: Cultural Anthropology
- Part Two: Biblical Theology
- Part Three: Practical Ministry

In the following three sections, I provide some basic information about the authors and publisher. I then highlight four areas of concern to provide a framework for better understanding the authors’ arguments. This is followed by my conclusion and an addendum with links to some online critiques of the “honor-shame” ideology presented in this book and in other publications. I have included numerous quotes from the book along with Scripture references for ready reference regarding the authors’ claims.

**Preliminary Background**

Both of the authors are professing evangelicals who have lived and served in other lands with what they define as non-Western cultures. They have taught and written on “honor-shame” and continue to do so (7-9). A very telling example of their commitment to “honor-shame” ideology is found at the end of the book given on an unnumbered page (if numbered it would be page 293):

**HonorShame.com**

The website HonorShame.com offers practical tools and training for Christians ministering in honor-shame contexts. You will find free training videos, evangelism resources, recommended books, journal articles and more. New ideas and resources are introduced regularly, so subscribe at HonorShame.com/blog to stay connected. This site was founded by Jayson Georges in 2013, and in 2016 became the digital hub of the Honor-Shame Network.

**ALSO ON SOCIAL MEDIA:**

Twitter.com/HonorShame
Facebook.com/HonorShame

The advertisement of Georges’ website, the publishing of this and other books for sale, the holding of seminars and conferences, and incorporating this teaching at the graduate level (see next two sections) help the reader realize that this joint collaboration under review is the product of the authors’ previously-established convictions by which they, in greater or lesser degrees, continue to be identified with and financially profit from.
Jayson Georges

Georges is the main person behind this book[2] He has written several other books on “honor-shame”:

- The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures (2014, 1st ed.)
- Ministering in Patronage Cultures: Biblical Models and Missional Implications (2019)

In addition to these books, he has also written a number of articles regarding this topic. As mentioned above, he is the founder of the website: honorshame.com. He holds conferences and seminars on this topic. He has started a series of “honor-shame” paraphrases of Scripture which is problematic in its own right — though he openly acknowledges that they are paraphrases, he is in practice rewriting Scripture to accord with his beliefs. If his “honor-shame” ideology is as biblical as he claims, he should have enough confidence in the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit to bring others to his identical conclusions without coaxing them through slanted paraphrases of it. This undertaking begs questions about his actual belief in the divine inspiration of Scripture as well as the related issue of its perspicuity (i.e. clarity).

Specific information about Georges’ background is scant. Apart from his brief bio on the back cover which lists his having earned a MDiv degree from Talbot, that is. Talbot School of Theology, an evangelical theological seminary of Biola (La Mirada, CA), we know nothing concrete about his church background, current denominational affiliation, where he was a missionary in residence at the time of publication, the missions organization with which he went to Central Asia for nine years, nor the exact country in which he and his family resided (though the mention on page 174 about the Tien Shan Mountains, along with other corroborating details sprinkled throughout the book strongly imply that he was in Kyrgyzstan). On his bio page at ivpress.com it includes the following: “For security reasons after living in Muslim countries, Jayson has asked not to be identified in photos.”

Due to this lack of disclosure, the use of pseudonyms throughout the book,[3] and the odd spelling of his first and last names, it would not be surprising if “Jayson Georges” is a pseudonym. For someone who claims to have found incredible insight and success in operating in the “honor-shame” culture of the Central Asian country in which he spent nine years, it is hard to fathom that he would have done anything to place him and his family in actual danger from the Muslims among whom they lived.

It also implies that these Muslims have an ongoing desire and the ability to harm him and his family though they reside in Atlanta, GA (20). This is highly improbable. A friend who grew up in an “honor-shame” culture as a “missionary kid” (MK) in Iran and who spoke Farsi before learning English, wrote to me regarding Georges’ lack of disclosure:

In an “honor-shame” culture a person who discovers “real” truth...or “lost” wisdom, would not be ashamed to present himself for who he is. It would be honorable to be fully transparent and unafraid to boldly proclaim who he is and his background. To hide and be deceptive would be shameful and demonstrate a lack of trust in his own newfound “wisdom.”

His claim that the use of pseudonyms is for the protection of those in Central Asia is understandable.[4] It is quite common, however, to maintain others’ anonymity without obscuring one’s own identity such as do competent journalists. Because of this, I would be remiss if I did not here mention one of the dirty secrets of evangelical missions — anonymity via pseudonyms is exploited by certain missionaries to avoid being identified and held accountable for unbiblical views and practices, especially to financial supporters and denominational or organizational leaders. One hopes that this is not the case with Georges.

Mark Baker

Baker is a Mennonite who has previously written on “honor-shame.” He has taught this ideology in Honduras, where he was a missionary for ten years (8-9, 26). He currently teaches this at the Fresno County Jail and in his current teaching position at Fresno Pacific Biblical

[2] “I [Jayson Georges] wish also thank Mark for coauthoring this book and mentioning me through the writing process.” (7).
[5] This is not an endorsement for remaining a ‘secret believer.’ The public identification as a Christian, i.e. one who follows Christ, is the individual responsibility of the believer. We need to be patient with those who are reluctant to openly acknowledge their faith in Jesus yet lovingly urge them to obey Jesus’ teaching about not being ashamed of Him (e.g. Matt 10:32-33; Mark 8:38; cf. Ps 116:10 and 2 Cor 4:13).
Seminary (formerly, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary) where he is a professor and the program director of their Theology and Intercultural Studies graduate department. More information can be found on his faculty page. Two of his publications are here noted, both of which are referenced in this book:


The following feedback regarding the Spanish book, which title can be translated into English as, A God of Wrath or a God of Love? How to Overcome Insecurity and Be Free to Serve, comes from a friend who is a native-Spanish speaker from Mexico. I include it because of its relevance to Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures:

It seems (to me, at least) that he sets up a straw man painting God as a tyrant and views Latin America as a special case. He believes that the Christianity that was imposed upon the New World was one that was influenced by Islam through the Moorish occupation of Spain. I don’t believe that to be the case, but this is a main premise of his. Ironically, it seems his view of forgiveness is more Islamic or worldly than a biblically based one. His main idea seems to be that shame is what separates us from truly knowing God and, according to him, God accepts us the way we are so we need to lose that shame and just dwell on the love and acceptance of God through Christ. We know this last part is true (i.e. ‘the love and acceptance of God through Christ’), but the issue of shame and his interpretation are going to be major points of contention. [emphasis added]

The italicized portion in my friend’s email contains a very important clue in helping the reader to understand Baker’s thinking which is consistent with that of Georges. Whereas Georges came to the understanding of his “honor-shame” ideology while living among Muslims, Baker had previously arrived at the same conclusion while living among those whose culture he believes to be heavily influenced by Islam.

This shared ideology therefore represents their reaction as Westerners coming into contact with cultures influenced by Islam and provides the interpretive grid for how they understand the Bible.

IVP Academic (InterVarsity Press Academic)

Some brief comments about the relationship between the authors and the publisher are also in order. This is not the only title that the authors have with the publisher. The following are related publications that promote the authors’ “honor-shame” ideology:

- Recovering the Scandal of the Cross by Mark D. Baker and Joel Green (2000, 2011)

Prior to this book, Baker already had a previous relationship with the publisher; for Georges, it was the beginning of a relationship that has continued. We also learn that Dan Reid, an editor with the publisher, is thanked by both authors for his “encouragement from beginning to end” and his “enthusiasm” as well as “his firsthand knowledge of the subject and passion for the importance of this book” (7, 9).

The decision to publish Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures as an academic title implies that it is an authoritative book, one in which the authors have succeeded in providing sound biblical exegesis for their “honor-shame” ideology. Both the authors and the publisher want this book to be recognized as a scholarly reference for papers and articles as well as a textbook in Bible colleges and seminaries.

None of these things are out of the ordinary. One wonders, however, if Reid’s predisposition towards the authors’ ideology, his mutual friendships with them, and possibly other factors (e.g. “tapping” into the niche market of missiologists and missionaries with a relatively unique topic) have contributed to an environment that is not conducive to provide the kind of necessary critiques regarding the authors’ claims that their “honor-shame” ideology is biblically sound.
Creating a “Western Theology” Straw Man

It does not take long to recognize a discrepancy between the first part of the subtitle, “Biblical Foundations,” and the Table of Contents. Instead of the authors starting with the category of “Biblical Theology” they begin with “Cultural Anthropology” (5).

One would expect the authors to begin with the former rather than the latter to match the first part of the subtitle. This expectation is further heightened because in chapter one, “A World of Shame,” the authors make some very strong claims against “Western theology” that call into question the historic, orthodox beliefs of Christianity and the plain reading of Scripture:

Many Christians tacitly presuppose a Western gospel with its emphasis on the legal aspects of salvation (22).

One must realize even Western theology is itself contextually... All Christian theology is embedded in the values and language of a particular culture. Western theology has skillfully applied God’s truth to the needs of its specific cultural milieu-characterized as individualistic, rationalistic and guilt-based. For example, Augustine and Luther, significant voices in Western theology, wrestled through seasons of introspective guilt. So their experiences of individual pardon and forgiveness shaped their theological formulations and subsequent Western theology (22).

Because of its inevitable cultural constraints, Western theology does not exhaust the full meaning and application of biblical truth. Western theology itself is not “wrong,” but simply incomplete and limited by cultural blinders (22). [This is followed by endnote 26 which reads]: The problem comes when people absolutize this theology contextualized in the West, elevate it to the level of biblical truth and export it internationally, thus leading to a type of theological/cultural colonialism (264).

One such “blind spot” in Western theology is honor and shame (22).

The neglect of honor-shame in Western theology ultimately leads to shallow forms of Christianity, as people trust God for one component of salvation (i.e., forgiveness of sin’s guilt), but then bypass Christ’s work for absolving sin’s shame. Western theology, in effect, keeps one hand of God’s salvation tied behind his back, only allowing him to save in one arena of life (22-23).

But despite the multidimensional nature of salvation in Christ, Western theology’s emphasis on one aspect of salvation truncates other facets of the gospel (23).

We explicitly highlight those [honor-shame] realities in the [biblical] narratives to help Christians develop a more robust, biblical view of Christian theology and God’s mission, for the purpose of joining God’s mission of blessing the shamed with honor (82-83. [emphasis added]

Ironically, it seems his view of forgiveness is more Islamic or worldly than a biblically based one.
Assuming a strictly legal framework for the gospel functionally requires non-Western peoples to understand the gospel in the foreign language of guilt-innocence terms. So consequently, people in honor-shame cultures must adopt a guilt-innocence outlook to properly understand ‘the gospel.’ However, we believe the gospel can be explained and experienced within an honor-shame framework. (163)

The authors have created a “straw man” argument against “Western theology.” By portraying “the legal aspects of salvation” as “cultural constraints” for “individualistic, rationalistic, and guilt-based” milieus that especially draw upon the individual, if not subjective experiences of Augustine and Luther, they are then able to introduce their “honor-shame” ideology as a long-needed panacea to “Western theology.” From the above quotes we highlight some of the more serious charges leveled against “Western theology”:

- It is “incomplete.”
- It is “limited by cultural blinders.”
- It is not “biblical truth” but a form of “colonialism” when “absolutize[d].”
- It is “shallow” due to its “blind spots.”
- It “keeps one hand of God’s salvation tied behind his back.”
- It is “truncated.”
- It is less robust and biblical in its view of Christian theology and God’s mission.
- It is not “the gospel” properly understood but a “foreign language” for non-Westerners.

In addition to these bold assertions, the authors reveal that they fully embrace the relativism presupposed by “Cultural Anthropology” and “Linguistics” from the so-called “Social Sciences” when they write, “All Christian theology is embedded in the values and language of a particular culture.” What is meant by this is that language, as a subset of culture, is bound to that culture. All literal translations from one language to another, therefore, are misleading as it is a form of “absolutizing” one culture over another and thus a form of “colonialism.” It is a clever way of stating that language can never transcend the culture from which it is said to belong. According to this premise, even if truth exists, language can never be the means by which it is expressed. Whether or not it is recognized, such a presupposition precludes belief in the divine inspiration of Scripture.

If the authors truly believe that language is such an imperfect medium, they should be able to express their ideas apart from language (how the authors are able to communicate via language in culturally-transcendent ways is left unexplained). Further, why are they “absolutizing” this “honor-shame” ideology to those whom they say are non-“honor-shame” peoples? According to their own standards, are they not equally guilty of their own “colonialism” for which they condemn “Westerners”?

Is not their “honor-shame theology” just as “contextual” and deserving of the same criticisms that they level against “Western theology”?

Try as the authors may in attributing the “legal aspects” of so-called “Western theology” to “Westerners” such as Augustine and Luther, or that this terminology is a “foreign language” to “non-Western peoples” they cannot escape the fact that Scripture was initially given to Easterners. More importantly, Christians from all cultures use legal language in witness because it is inspired by God. It is not derived from “Western” culture. From the disobedience of Adam and Eve and their resulting punishment to the very reason for the name of our Savior “Jesus”[5]; to the emphasis on sin, transgression, and iniquity and the need for something innocent to be sacrificed for forgiveness (or pardon); to the prominence given to righteousness (or justification); this Eastern book that we call the Bible is replete with such legal terminology. Even more, this legal terminology is made the focal point in both the Old and New Testaments, culminating in the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ for our sins, pardon, and justification.[6] The use of “legal” terminology in witness and teaching is first and foremost, Scriptural. For those who look on “things as they are outwardly” (2 Cor. 10:7), let them consider that this terminology is very “Eastern.”

Culture Determines Theology (and more!)

In keeping with their placement of “Cultural Anthropology” before “Biblical Theology,” the authors repeatedly appeal to culture as the primary determiner for their “honor-shame” ideology. Theology – including

[5] Which means “YH-saves” because “He will save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21).
Missiology and missions — must be developed in response to “honor-shame” culture rather than to a predominantly “white” culture.

Most of the world thinks and lives according to the cultural values of honor and shame. Christians ministering among Majority World peoples encounter this reality in many ways. For this reason, we must use an “honor-shame missiology” — a biblically rooted approach to Christian ministry among the nations that proclaims and mediates God’s honor for the shamed (13). [emphasis added]

Despite heightened attention to honor and shame among social scientists, honor and shame play a negligible role among Christian theologians and missionaries (16). [comment: This assumes that “social scientists” have recognized some essential truth that has been neglected by Christian theologians and missionaries for some 2,000 years and also implies that the language of Scripture is incomplete...]

A biblical missiology for honor-shame contexts is crucial, due to several global realities [sic, should be realities]...Honor-shame is the predominant culture type for most people in the world (18). [emphasis added]

An even more significant reality about the changing face of the global church calls for an articulation of the gospel in honor-shame terms... In 1900, 82 percent of all Christians were white; by 2050, about 80 percent of all Christians will be nonwhite. This rapid shift in global Christianity toward the Majority World mandates fresh theological and missiological reflection (20).

The persistent reality of unreached peoples in honor-shame contexts all highlight the need for a more relevant theology, and a corresponding missiological approach to address honor and shame (21-22).

The call for “fresh...reflection” and “the need [to be] more relevant” with regard to theology and missiology is reason for great concern. The authors’ reliance on this cultural relativism assumes that people’s needs differ according to their culture — what “Westerners” need from God is not what “honor-shame” people need. Such is not the teaching of the Bible. This assumption fully contradicts the explicit teaching of Scripture that the Gospel is for all — Jew and Gentile. Jesus is not just the Savior of Jews but the Savior of the world.[7] The message of salvation from sin is valid for all who believe in Jesus because all have sinned, regardless of their cultural background.[8] It is bewildering that the authors, for all of their learning and experience could be so wrong about something so elementary and fundamental to God’s Word.

It is worth pointing out that these two white Westerners are making authoritative claims about another “culture” as self-proclaimed, “bicultural outsiders” (29).

[8] e.g. Rom. 3: 5:12; cf. Isa. 59.
Since they are cultural outsiders, how can we be assured that they have not misunderstood any given aspect of the "honor-shame" culture? This question is especially relevant because they have based their claims for "honor-shame" on the cultural relativism assumed by Cultural Anthropology. When this assumption is followed to its logical conclusion, all culturally-external analyses are misleading, invalid, and ultimately impossible. Accordingly, the only people who can truly understand a culture are those who are native to said culture. The authors, therefore, are disqualified by the very premise upon which their "honor-shame" ideology is constructed. In spite of this apparently overlooked point, the authors proceed on the unstated assumption that their communication about "Western" and "honor-shame" cultures is exempt from the cultural limitations for which they condemn Westerners with their "Western theology.

Moving on from this irony and inconsistency — if not hypocrisy and contradiction — the authors indicate that the impetus for developing their "honor-shame" ideology comes from their interaction with this "culture."

To bear witness to God’s kingdom and build Christ’s church where honor and shame are the dominant values, we need a new set of tools — a reality we both realized as missionaries (23).

Georges makes it very clear what is meant by "a new set of tools" when he states that emphasis on guilt and forgiveness, which the authors repeatedly attribute to "Western theology," is illogical and unintelligible to peoples from an "honor-shame" culture.

As our work [in Central Asia] continued, two recurring episodes highlighted the cultural prominence of honor and shame. First, unbelievers hardly sensed personal guilt nor desired forgiveness of their sins. They disregarded my traditional evangelistic presentations as illogical or unintelligible. Somehow, my two plus two did not equal four in their minds. Second, the cultural forces of honor and shame regularly influenced Christians… To successfully engage nonbelievers and disciple believers in that context, our ministry team needed to understand honor and shame biblically (24).

The authors would do well to remember that the Law (you cannot get more "legal" than this!) was given in order to prepare people to come to God on His terms (e.g. Gal. 3:21-24). In keeping with this term, "Law," the Greek word, parakletos, used both of the Holy Spirit and Jesus, means a "legal advocate," which encompasses acting as a prosecuting attorney to convince unbelievers of sin, righteousness, and judgment in order that they might come to faith in Jesus Christ (John 16:7-11) and as a defense attorney before the Father on behalf of the sins of believers (1 John 2:1). If people do not recognize their guilt or sense their need for forgiveness this indicates their hardness and dullness of heart which can only be changed by the joint working of the Word of God and of the Holy Spirit. This is true for all people including "Westerners."

**Setting Culture Above Scripture**

The authors' commitment to adapting theology and evangelism to the predominant culture is what they believe to be true of Scripture itself:

So honor, in essence, is inherited from one’s kin. For this reason, the New Testament opens, ‘An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Mt. 1:1) (17). [emphasis added]

Since the cultural milieu of the early church was predominantly collectivistic, we should expect New Testament epistles to show concern for group identity (178). [emphasis added]

This Pauline emphasis on community and relational harmony parallels the moral ideals of honor- shame cultures" (214). [emphasis added]

The Gospel of John uses this language of darkness and light to explain the transformation of honor codes (215).

If Scripture was given in response to or in keeping with the predominant cultures of its times, especially its key terminology, the authors’ call for theology, missiology, and missions to be "biblical" has a very different meaning than that held by those who hold Scripture to be the culturally-transcendent Word of God whose very words are divinely inspired. This brings us to the fundamental question as to the relationship of Scripture to culture — is it like a piece of modern art in which its meaning is open to individual or cultural interpretation or is it the Truth by which all will be judged, regardless of culture? The authors clearly advocate for the former.
By setting culture above Scripture, the authors have paved the way to reinterpret the Bible from the plain reading of its text to that of their “honor-shame” ideology.

Reinterpreting the Bible
As mentioned above, the authors clearly state that their “honor-shame” ideology is nothing less than a “paradigm shift”:

Our aim is to lead you in a paradigm shift – to see God’s world and God’s Word through a new lens. As you see honor-shame in both culture and Scripture, we pray God’s Spirit will lead you to apply God’s salvific honor to various cultural contexts in creative and redemptive ways for the glory of his name (30).

The following quotes reveal the kind of refraction provided by the authors’ “new lens”:

Redemption’ is largely the reversal of status from shame to honor (76).

While Naomi and Ruth were certainly sinful people in need of God’s forgiveness, the central point of the book [of Ruth] is their divine exaltation from shame, and the revelation of a God who honors his people. This “shame → honor” framework interprets God’s salvation in the lives of many Old Testament figures... Adam was raised from dirt and given God’s image to be God’s vice regent (see Gen. 1-2) Abraham...Leah... Joseph...Moses...Hannah...David...Mephibosheth...Esther and Mordecai...Job...Shadrach... Meshach... Abednego... and Nehemiah (81-82).

A key element in understanding the atonement is to recognize the centrality of shame to crucifixion itself (108).

The cross saves God’s face by demonstrating his ultimate loyalty and faithfulness to do what he promised (112).

God’s status-reversing salvation fully saves us from sin (168).

The experiences of the healed people in Mark 5 illustrated the nature of biblical salvation as status reversal (177).

A second motif of salvation in the Bible is inclusion into the group of God’s honored people (177).

Salvation is group membership (179).

One should explain salvation using the conceptual metaphors of family, relationships and community. Sin is fundamentally a relational problem, and salvation is a restoration of broken relationships (180).

Conversion means granting loyalty and allegiance to a new group – God and his people (184).

God’s salvation from shame and unto honor is a predominant motif in the Bible (245).

The above quotes certainly do represent a “paradigm shift” from the plain reading of Scripture! Sin is no longer disobedience to God’s commands or law (1 John 3:4) that results in death (Rom. 6:23; cf. Gen. 2:16-17). “Sin” is stated to primarily be a “relational problem” from which “salvation” reverses a person’s status from “shame” to “honor” by granting the convert “group membership” in which his “loyalty and allegiance” is to “God and his people.” These are startling, highly subjective statements at odds with the very words and overall thrust of Scripture. A closer look at just two of the above quotes will help us recognize some of the more serious implications of what the authors propose.

On page 81 we encounter the outrageous notion that Adam needed “salvation” prior to his sinning:

This “shame → honor” framework interprets God’s salvation in the lives of many Old Testament figures... Adam was raised from dirt and given God’s image to be God’s vice regent (Gen. 1-2).

This quote is extremely problematic in at least the following ways. First, the implication that God created Adam in need of “salvation” completely contradicts the repeated statements that what God made was good and very good (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31) and also implies that God is the author of evil. Second, it introduces the gnostic idea that physical matter is inherently bad (which also contradicts the declarations that what God created was good and very good). Third, by referencing Genesis 1-2 and excluding Genesis 3, it thoroughly dismisses Adam and Eve’s breaking of God’s command (Gen. 3:6), the first
two prophecies of the Messiah (Gen. 3: 15, 21) and the continuing, God-given emphasis on redemption via atonement including the offering of Isaac (Gen. 22), the first Passover in Egypt (Ex. 12: 15, 13), the Levitical sacrifices for sin (Lev. 4–7), the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16), and the ultimate Passover when “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” shed His sinless blood on the cross[9]. Fourth, it disassociates “salvation” from Adam’s disobedience in Genesis 3, reducing his rebellion as something ultimately inconsequential, thus laying a foundation of antinomianism for those who are so inclined to live with no regard for God’s commands.

On page 112 we read the clearest, most succinct statement by the authors’ in their attempt to force Scripture to fit their “honor-shame” ideology:

The cross saves God’s face by demonstrating his ultimate loyalty and faithfulness to do what he promised.

The Bible never uses such language regarding God or the cross. This reinterpretation impugns God’s character as if He is (or could be) concerned about outward appearance which contradicts Scripture (e.g. 1 Sam. 16: 7; Matt. 22: 16); is contrary to the principles by which God commands people to live; and is contrary to His humble, loving nature.[10] If God were truly seeking “save face” He would not have subjected Himself to the cross with its inherent shame[11] (e.g. Phil. 2: 5–8; Heb. 12: 2). The fact that Jesus — who is God incarnate — embraced the cross with all of its shame points to the extent of God’s love for humanity, which is one of the two primary ways in which the cross is described in God’s Word (e.g. John 3: 16; Rom. 5: 8–10; 1 John 3: 16; 4: 9; cf. John 10: 11; 15: 13). The other primary way to describe the cross is through legal terminology given by God the Holy Spirit[12] and its operating principle: “mercy triumphs over judgment” (Jam. 2: 13).

Conclusion
In this review I have chosen to highlight what I feel are some of the more serious problems with this book along with providing some context regarding the authors and publisher. While more could be written, I believe that this review is sufficient to encourage others to think critically about the authors’ “honor-shame” ideology, which is incompatible with the Bible. Even those parts of the book that a biblical conservative might find helpful[13] are marred by their inextricable connection to the flawed foundation of cultural relativism upon which the authors have constructed their ideology (i.e. their Westernized pandering to Islamic thinking, whether directly as in the case of Georges, or indirectly as in the case of Baker). As the Israelites were forbidden to spare the gold and silver from the Canaanite idols but were rather to completely destroy them (Deut. 7: 25); as we are commanded in Jude to hate “even the garment polluted by the flesh” while we snatch some from the fire (Jude 24), there are certain things not worth saving or using because of their contamination with evil. Unfortunately, this book, because of its anti-biblical message warrants such condemnation.

Addendum
For additional critiques of the authors and their “honor-shame” ideology see:


[10] e.g. Is 57: 15; 66: 1–2; Matt. 12: 29; 1 Cor. 15: 4–8; Gal. 5: 22–23; 1 John 4: 8, 16.
[11] i.e “shame” as given in the context of Scripture. It is in no sense a endorsement of the authors’ “honor-shame” ideology.
[12] e.g. Matt. 26: 28; Rom. 5: 8–9; Eph. 1: 7, 2: 16; Col. 1: 14, 20; 2: 14; Heb. 9: 14, 28; 1 Pet. 1: 18–19; 1 John 1: 7; Rev. 15.
[13] e.g. the violation of social taboos (155) third paragraph; Ken’s dog analogy (159–160) recognizing the often unwritten social guidelines of a non-Western culture (160–161); the last and first paragraphs, respectively.)