

Chapter 1.3: **Why our blind spot about honor and shame?**

Chapter 1.4: **The canopy of biblical truth**

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NOTE: *This excerpt is not the final edited typeset book version,
but from the final manuscript.*

THE GLOBAL GOSPEL

Achieving Missional Impact
in our Multicultural World



WERNER MISCHKE

FOREWORD BY
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Your journey through this book—in four sections

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SECTION 1, CHAPTER 3

Why our blind spot about honor and shame?

We will explore three reasons why it is so easy to miss the pivotal cultural value of honor and shame in the Scriptures. Why this blind spot?

Theologically ignored. The first reason is that, compared to *innocence/guilt*, the matter of *honor/shame* has been largely ignored as a matter of theological inquiry.

New area of study. The second reason is related; it's a relatively new area of study. In the fields of anthropology, theology and missiology—shame and honor have only recently been understood as significant for understanding peoples from the Majority World, or for understanding and interpreting the Scriptures.

Blind spots are common. The third reason is that blind spots are common—they're a part of the human condition. Christians in every society, every culture have theological blind spots, no matter how mature.⁴⁷

Let's explore these three reasons one by one.

Honor/shame is ignored by pastors and theologians

John Forrester writes as a pastor about this blind spot:

We Western pastors have a blind spot. In a word, that blind spot is shame. We don't learn about shame in seminary. We don't find it in our theological reading. We don't recognize it on the pages of Scripture. We don't see it in our people. Shame is just not part of our pastoral perspective.⁴⁸

But why do so many pastors have this blind spot? Because *shame* has not been a subject of theological inquiry.

One way to ascertain the degree of theological importance of a particular word is by looking at theological dictionaries. I went to Phoenix Seminary here in Arizona and did a little research at the library. My question was simple: In the available theological dictionaries, is there an entry for *guilt* and also an entry for *shame*? Here's what I found. The dictionaries are listed in order of the year they were published.

⁴⁷ A fourth reason for this blind spot (but not one explored in this book) is that *shame is taboo*. This reason is more subjective. To study honor and shame implies a personal willingness to explore shame in one's own life and one's own church community. All too often, chronic shame is unintentionally promulgated in the church. It can be uncomfortable for Christian leaders to address these things—causing resistance in studying the matter. See Stephen Pattison, "Shame and the Unwanted Self" in Jewett, Robert; Alloway, Wayne L.; and Lacey, John G., Eds. *The Shame Factor: How Shame Shapes Society* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 9–10.

⁴⁸ John A. Forrester: *Grace For Shame: The Forgotten Gospel* (Toronto: Pastor's Attic Press, 2010), 9.

Title / Editor / Publisher	Year Published	Entry for	
		Guilt	Shame
<i>The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology</i> , Alan Richardson and John Bowden, Editors. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.	1983	✓	
<i>Evangelical Dictionary of Theology</i> , Walter A. Elwell, Editor. Grand Rapids, Baker Book House.	1984	✓	
<i>Dictionary of Christian Theology</i> , Peter A. Angeles, San Francisco: Harper, 1985.	1985	✓	
<i>Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible</i> , Walter A. Elwell, Ed. Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1996.	1996	✓	✓
<i>New Dictionary of Biblical Theology, Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture</i> , T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D.A. Carson, Graeme Goldsworthy, Editors. Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press.	2000	✓	
<i>The Theological Wordbook: The 200 Most Important Theological Terms and Their Relevance for Today</i> , Donald K. Campbell ... [et al.]; Charles R. Swindoll, general editor; Nashville: Word Publishing.	2000	✓	
<i>Global Dictionary of Theology</i> : William A. Dyrness, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Editors. Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press.	2008	Entry for "Guilt" under "Sin"	✓

Figure 1.04: Entries for "guilt" and "shame" in theological dictionaries

This survey shows that it was 1996 when *shame* appeared as an entry in Elwell's redo of his 1984 version. Interestingly, neither of the dictionaries published in 2000 had an entry for shame. The massive *Global Dictionary of Theology* by Dyrness and Kärkkäinen has an extensive entry for *shame*. But (sadly) the vast majority of Western pastors would not likely use a theological dictionary with a global scope.

Perhaps a more profound reason for the blind spot about honor and shame has to do with the study of systematic theology. Most seminary students preparing for the pastorate study systematic theology. Take a look at whatever systematic theology book you may have: When one compares the amount of material concerning sin and *guilt* compared to sin and *shame*—one discovers that sin and *shame* is almost completely ignored.

Evangelical scholar Timothy Tennent has written about this blind spot in the Western church concerning honor and shame. I offer an extensive quote below:

Since Western systematic theology has been almost exclusively written by theologians from cultures framed primarily by the values of guilt and innocence, there has been a corresponding failure to fully appreciate the importance of the pivotal values of honor and shame in understanding Scripture and the doctrine of sin. ...

Bruce Nicholls, the founder of the “Evangelical Review of Theology,” has acknowledged this problem, noting that Christian theologians have “rarely if ever stressed salvation as honoring God, exposure of sin as shame, and the need for acceptance as the restoration of honor.”⁴⁹ In fact, a survey of all of the leading textbooks used in teaching systematic theology across the major theological traditions reveals that although the indexes are filled with references to guilt, the word “shame” appears in the index of only one of these textbooks.⁵⁰ This omission continues to persist despite the fact that the term guilt and its various derivatives occur 145 times in the Old Testament and 10 times in the New Testament, whereas the term shame and its derivatives occur nearly 300 times in the Old Testament and 45 times in the New Testament.

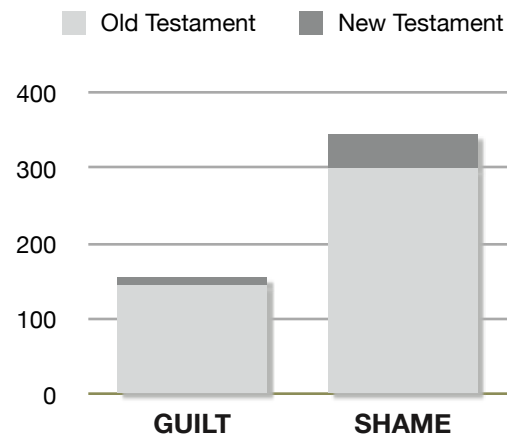


Figure 1.05: Words in the Bible derived from “guilt”—versus “shame”

This is clearly an area where systematic theology must be challenged to reflect more adequately the testimony of Scripture. I am confident that a more biblical understanding of human identity outside of Christ that is framed by guilt, fear, and shame will, in turn, stimulate a more profound and comprehensive appreciation for the work of Christ on the cross. This approach will also greatly help peoples in the Majority World to understand the significance and power of Christ’s work, which has heretofore been told primarily from only one perspective.⁵¹

Honor/shame is a relatively new field of exploration

The second reason for our blind spot has to do with the newness of this field of study. Our awareness of the fundamental differences between guilt-based and shame-based cultures is a recent phenomenon. According to Timothy Tennent, “Ruth Benedict was the first anthropologist to categorize Western cultures as guilt-based and Eastern cultures as a shame-based.”⁵² Benedict’s book was written in 1946. In addition:

⁴⁹ Tennent cites Bruce Nicholls, “The Role of Shame and Guilt in a Theology of Cross-Cultural Mission,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 25, no. 3, (2001): 232.

⁵⁰ Tennent includes the following citation: “See L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941); Henry Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977); Alan Gomes, ed., *Dogmatic Theology by William T. Shedd*, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003); Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vols 1–3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991–1997); Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); James Leo Garrett Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical and Evangelical*, 2 vols., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990–1995); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994). The only systematic theology I found with a reference to shame is a single line in volume 3 of Norman Giesler’s *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2002–), which acknowledges that Adam’s sin ‘brought on him guilt, as well as the shame he expressed in view of it’ (Gen. 3:7).”

⁵¹ Timothy C. Tennent: *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think about and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 92–93.

⁵² Ibid., 79.

- Bruce Malina is credited with being a pioneer in understanding the pivotal cultural value of honor and shame as it applies to the interpretation of Scripture. His book *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* was first published in 1993.
- Jerome Neyrey's *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*⁵³ is a book which I consider a classic in describing both the honor-shame dynamics of ancient Greco-Roman culture—and in explaining how the various features of an honor-shame social system are woven into the structure and fabric of Matthew's Gospel. The book was published in 1998.
- Roland Muller is a cross-cultural church planter who has served extensively in the Middle East. His *Honor & Shame: Unlocking the Door* is a good introduction concerning the vital role of honor and shame in Middle Eastern culture. Muller wrote another book, *The Messenger, The Message, The Community: Three Critical Issues for the Cross-Cultural Church Planter*, which incorporates the former book and provides a comparison of three worldviews: *guilt-innocence*, *honor-shame*, and *fear-power*. It is a useful handbook for missionaries. These two books were published in 2000 and 2013 respectively.⁵⁴
- David A. deSilva has made major contributions in using social science scholarship to understand the New Testament. His books on the subject include *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture*, published in 2000.⁵⁵
- Robert Jewett's massive commentary on the book of Romans, which includes extensive references to the pivotal cultural value of honor and shame, was published in 2007.⁵⁶
- John A. Forrester's *Grace for Shame: The Forgotten Gospel* is both scholarly and useful, especially for pastors.⁵⁷ It was published in 2010.
- Robin Stockitt's *Restoring the Shamed: Towards a Theology of Shame* was published in 2012.⁵⁸ He writes from a European pastor's perspective.
- Edward Welch's *Shame Interrupted: How God Lifts the Pain of Worthlessness and Rejection* is written from the perspective of the Christian counselor. It was published in 2012.
- Timothy Tennent's, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think about and Discuss Theology* (quoted above), was published in 2007. His chapter 4, "Anthropology: Human Identity in Shame-Based

⁵³ Jerome H. Neyrey: *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

⁵⁴ Roland Muller: *Honor & Shame: Unlocking the Door* (Xlibris Corporation, 2000); *The Messenger, The Message, The Community: Three Critical Issues for the Cross-Cultural Church Planter* (CanBooks, 2013).

⁵⁵ David deSilva: *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 159.

⁵⁶ Jewett writes in the introduction, "In the shameful cross, Christ overturned the honor system that dominated the Greco Roman and Jewish world, resulting in discrimination and exploitation of barbarians as well as in poisoning the relations between the congregations in Rome. The gospel offered grace to every group in equal measure, shattering the imperial premise of exceptionalism in virtue and honor." Jewett Robert: *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 1.

⁵⁷ John Forrester, *Grace For Shame: The Forgotten Gospel* (Toronto: Pastor's Attic Press, 2010).

⁵⁸ Stockitt, Robin (2012-02-21). *Restoring the Shamed: Towards a Theology of Shame* (Kindle Locations 2–3). Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition.

Cultures of the Far East” is a brilliant exploration of the theological issues of honor and shame, especially with regard to the atonement.

- Jackson Wu’s groundbreaking book, *Saving God’s Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame (EMS Dissertation Series)*,⁵⁹ integrates Reformed theology with the honor/shame dynamics of Scripture. It was published in 2012.
- Zeba Crook’s book, *Reconceptualizing Conversion: Patronage, Loyalty, and Conversion in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* was published in 2004. The book is considered a definitive study on the honor/shame practice of patronage as it relates to the conversion and ministry of Apostle Paul.
- Brené Brown calls herself a “shame-and-vulnerability researcher.” Brown does not write as a Christian scholar, but as mother, educator, and social science researcher; nevertheless, I believe her work concerning shame resilience is broadly applicable to Christian ministry. Her last two books, published in 2010 and 2012, have popularized the study of shame as a serious field of study.⁶⁰ Her two ‘TED Talks’ have been viewed more than 13 million times.⁶¹

The point here is that the insights and research which these scholars offer is obviously very recent—only since the 1990s—in the overall history of the church.

Theological blind spots are common

The third reason for our blind spot about honor and shame is that blind spots are part of human nature. How can people with all their limitations—spiritually, intellectually and culturally—completely understand an infinite holy God? *Impossible*. I reference Jackson Wu to explain.

In Wu’s book, *Saving God’s Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame*, he offers a diagram to help describe the process of contextualization. In doing so, Wu also explains how blind spots occur.⁶² Let’s consider the various components of this diagram.

The top oval represents *biblical truth*. The left oval represents *theology*. The right oval represents the *cultural context* in which followers of Christ endeavor to communicate the gospel.

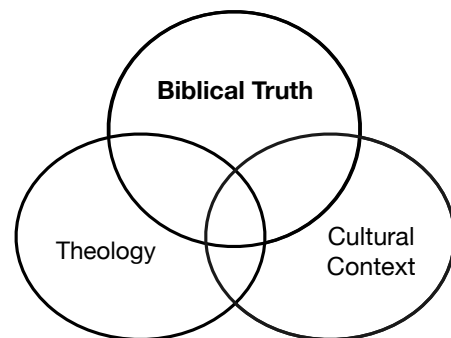


Figure 1.06: Jackson Wu’s Figure 1 concerning contextualization

Notice this important aspect of the diagram: *biblical truth* is larger than *theology*; this is because no matter how refined one’s theology may be, it can never be as comprehensive as the totality of biblical truth. Humans have limited knowledge, but God is

⁵⁹ Jackson Wu: *Saving God’s Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame (EMS Dissertation Series)*, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2012).

⁶⁰ Brené Brown: *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Gotham Books, 2012); *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You’re Supposed to be and Embrace Who You Are* (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 2010).

⁶¹ http://www.ted.com/search?cat=ss_all&q=brene+brown. Accessed 9 August 2013.

⁶² Wu, *Saving God’s Face*, 52–53.

omniscient; humanity is fallen and fallible, but God's Word is holy and infallible. It follows that every theology is smaller than the totality of biblical truth.

The esteemed missiologist Paul Hiebert addressed the distinction between the totality of biblical truth—*revelation*—and *theology*:

The former is God-given revelation; the latter is human understandings of that revelation and cannot be fully equated with it. Human knowledge is always partial and schematic, and it does not correspond one to one with reality. Our theology is our understanding of Scripture in our contexts; it may be true, but it is always partial and subject to our own perspectives. It seeks to answer the questions we raise.⁶³

Now let's consider the numbered spaces in the diagram and what they represent.⁶⁴

- Area 1 is where matters of truths in one's *theology* overlap with *biblical truth*, but they are outside of, or inconsistent with, the *cultural context*; these biblical matters confront the culture.
- Area 2 is where the "culture has accepted biblical categories and values (perhaps unknowingly),"⁶⁵ but which are outside of one's *theology*. This is the area where blind spots occur, which is explained below.
- Area 3 is where values and beliefs are consistent with *biblical truth*, one's *theology* and the *cultural context*.
- Area 4 is where specific values in one's *theology* are accepted by the *cultural context*, but are outside of *biblical truth*.⁶⁶
- Area 5 is where beliefs are part of one's *theology*, but are neither *biblical* nor overlap with the *cultural context*.
- Area 6 is where beliefs and values in the *cultural context* are neither *biblical* nor a part of one's *theology*.

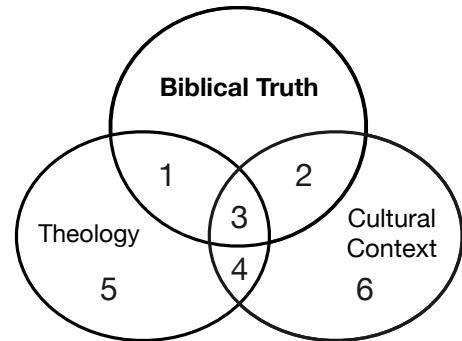


Figure 1.07: Jackson Wu's Figure 1 with numbered areas

Wu explains that proper contextualization of the gospel requires a dialog or conversation—as indicated by the diagram—between the overarching *biblical truth*, one's *theology*, and the *cultural context*. He calls this conversation a "dialogical model" of contextualization.⁶⁷ He writes

⁶³ Paul Hiebert, "The Gospel in Human Contexts: Changing Perceptions of Contextualization" in Stetzer, Ed and Hesselgrave, David (Eds.), *MissionShift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium*. (B&H Publishing, 2010), 93.

⁶⁴ The following bulleted items 1–6 have been slightly reworded from Jackson Wu. The concept is entirely his.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 53.

⁶⁶ Two examples of Area 4 are offered here. The first example is the so-called "Prosperity Gospel," which overlaps with American consumerism but is inconsistent with the overall testimony of Scripture. A second example (and one which is much more extreme) comes from the work of liberal German theologians prior to and during World War Two. So-called scholars from the "German Christian Movement" actually created theology to support the holocaust against the Jews. This group supported the philosophy and goals of Germany's Nazi government, but was obviously completely unfaithful to God's revelation in Scripture. See Susannah Heschel's meticulously researched book, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁶⁷ Ibid., 52.

that all theology is necessarily already contextualized. Wu quotes Lesslie Newbigin: “We must start with the basic fact that there is no such thing as a pure gospel if by that is meant something which is not embodied in a culture. ... Every interpretation of the gospel is embodied in some cultural form.”⁶⁸

Mark Noll makes the same point, “The contrast between the West and the non-West is never between culture-free Christianity and culturally embedded Christianity, but between varieties of culturally embedded Christianity.”⁶⁹

Area 2 is where blind spots occur. Wu writes:

In area 2, the culture has accepted biblical categories and values (perhaps unknowingly). General revelation makes this possible. Nevertheless, the temptation remains for missionaries to reject the culture and press hard the truths expressed in area 1, or in 5 (where one’s theology is neither biblical nor intersects the local culture). ... For example, personal bias may cause him or her to deny uncritically the legitimacy of the culture’s insights.⁷⁰

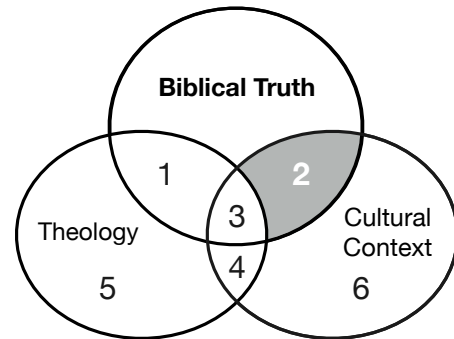


Figure 1.08: Jackson Wu’s Figure 1; area 2 is where blind spots occur

The theological and cultural matter of honor and shame is therefore one example which fits into Area 2. We have demonstrated its biblical prominence. Honor/shame is likewise prominent in the majority of cultures of our world. An estimated 70 to 80 percent of the world’s peoples are collectivistic rather than individualistic,⁷¹ and therefore have honor and shame as a more dominant cultural value than do Western peoples. But honor/shame has been ignored by a majority of Western theologians. The systematic theologies disregard the matter of honor and shame altogether.

Wu adds: “From a Chinese perspective, Western theologians under-stress biblical ideas such as HS [honor/shame], group-identity, idolatry, and familial piety.”⁷²

Concerning African issues, Andrew Walls writes that Western theology is “too small” for African realities of life.

⁶⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 144.

⁶⁹ Mark A. Noll. *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Kindle Locations 399–400). Kindle Edition.

⁷⁰ Wu, *Saving God’s Face*, 53.

⁷¹ “How prevalent are collectivistic societies? In today’s world, Triandis (1989, 48) observes, 70 percent of the world’s population remain collectivistic while 30 percent are individualistic. As a matter of fact, individualism seems totally strange, esoteric, incomprehensible, and even vicious to observers from collectivistic societies. Again, Triandis (1989, 50) notes that what is most important in the United States—individualism—is of least importance to the rest of the world.” Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, SJ: “Ancient Mediterranean Persons in Cultural Perspective: Portrait of Paul,” in *The Social World of the New Testament: Insights and Models*, Malina and Neyrey, eds. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 258. They reference Henry C. Triandis, “Cross-Cultural Studies of Individualism and Collectivism” in *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation 1989: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. Edited by Richard A. Diensbar and John J. Berman. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 41–133. Malina estimates that 80 percent of the world’s peoples are collectivistic in “Anachronism, Ethnocentrism, and Shame: The Envy of the Chief Priests” in Robert Jewett, ed., *The Shame Factor: How Shame Shapes Society*, (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 148.

⁷² Wu, *Saving God’s Face*, 54.

“The truth is that Western models of theology are too small for Africa. Most of them reflect the worldview of the Enlightenment, and that is a small-scale worldview, one cut and shaved to fit a small-scale universe. ... They have nothing useful to say on issues involving such things as witchcraft or sorcery, since these do not exist in an Enlightenment universe. Nor can Western theology usefully discuss ancestors, since the West does not have the family structures that raise the questions.⁷³

But the fact that theological blind spots occur does not merely point to a deficit of theological knowledge. It ultimately points to the possibility of a fuller, maturing experience of Jesus Christ. Walls writes about the cross-cultural proliferation of the gospel as a means to fuller knowledge of Christ:

Each [cultural expression of Christian faith] is to have, like Jew and Greek in the early church, its own converted lifestyle as the distinctive features of each culture are turned toward Christ. The representation of Christ by any one group can at best be only partial. At best it reflects the conversion of one small segment of reality, and it needs to be complemented and perhaps corrected by others. The fullness of humanity lies in Christ; the aggregate of converted lifestyles points toward his full stature.⁷⁴

So to unmask theological blind spots can be a most valuable exploration, for it can lead us to a fuller expression of the life of Jesus in our own lives, our own families, churches and communities. Moreover, to unmask a theological blind spot can be critically important for making Christians more effective in cross-cultural ministry.⁷⁵

In order to better grasp the reality of theological blind spots which are connected to cultural differences, we need to see a paradox: *God’s Word stands in authority above above all cultures, but at the same time, God’s Word can embrace varying cultural ideas and styles, which on the surface seem contradictory.*

We will therefore move to the next chapter, where we will explore this paradox in something called the *canopy of biblical truth*. Let’s take a look.

⁷³ Walls, “Globalization and the Study of Christian History,” Kindle Locations 1379–1385.

⁷⁴ Walls, “Globalization and the Study of Christian History,” Kindle Locations 1342–1345.

⁷⁵ One of the most famous examples of an unmasked blind spot is represented by an article by missiologist Paul Hiebert. Craig Ott writes: “Hiebert’s landmark article ‘The Flaw of the Excluded Middle’ (1982) is an example of how the worldview of Western theologians led to a blind spot regarding the biblical teaching on unseen powers, a teaching desperately needed especially in animistic contexts.” *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland, Eds. (Kindle Locations 6595–6597). Baker Publishing Group, 2006. The Hiebert article referenced is “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle” *Missiology* 10, no. 1 (January, 1982): 35–47. For more on Hiebert’s article and how it relates to the dynamics of honor and shame, see Section 3, Chapter 4 of this book.

SECTION 1, CHAPTER 4

The canopy of biblical truth

As Christians, we believe the Bible is God's Word. God created the universe (Genesis 1:1), therefore he is not a mere tribal god. He is the one God who rules over all nations and peoples. Nevertheless, God has revealed himself inside a particular culture and history, that of the ancient Middle East and of his people, the Jews. We believe Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the story of God's people. As God, Jesus became a man (John 1:14) in a particular historical situation and culture (Gal 4:4).

We believe that God will save and transform at least some from all peoples and cultures into the image of Christ, for we read in Revelation that in eternity future God's people will comprise the diversity of all tribes, tongues and nations (Rev 5:9, 21:24–26). This means that there is a sense in which God affirms all cultures, for the cultural diversity of the *peoples* is somehow preserved in heaven. We also see from Scripture that he stands in confrontation and judgment over all peoples and cultures. It is with this dual dynamic in mind—affirmation and confrontation (or celebration and judgment)—that we can consider the idea of a *canopy of biblical truth*.

Consider the diagram below: "The Canopy of Biblical Truth." The idea of *canopy* may be seen in this Scripture: "The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens!" (Ps 113:4). Like a canopy, God is above all nations, peoples and cultures. His righteousness is *above all nations*. Although his Word is rooted in specific histories and cultures, it is likewise *supra-cultural*. The diagram contains a sample list of contrasts reflected in Scripture. The list consists of ideas, truths, cultural values, or areas of emphasis. The list of twelve 'dualities' is by no means comprehensive; it is truly a mere sampling.

Let's explore in a little more detail these

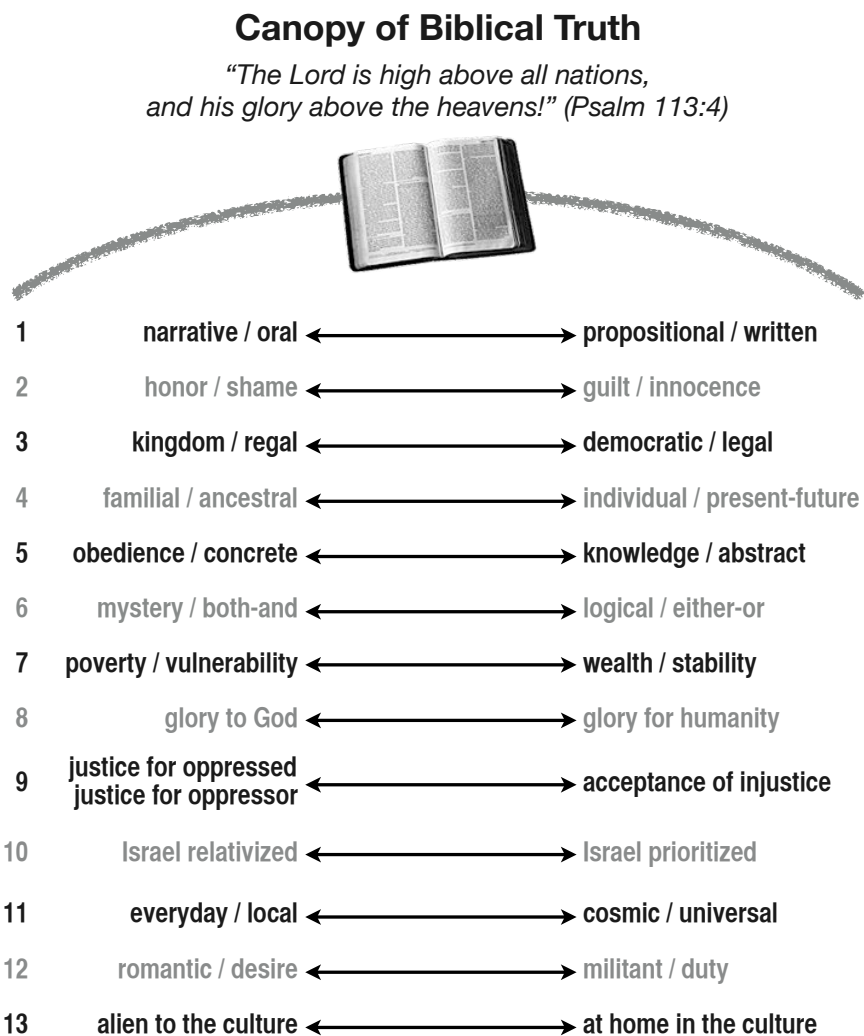


Figure 1.09: Canopy of Biblical Truth

twelve contrasts or ‘dualities.’

1. **Narrative / oral—and propositional / written:** God’s Word contains *narrative* truth in the form of histories, stories, and parables. Sometimes God’s Word and mission are referred to as God’s *Story*. Jesus told many *stories*. Moreover, the people in the Bible were primarily *oral* peoples whose access to books and writing instruments were extremely limited. The stories of Scripture can be read aloud and memorized in order to fit the cultures of oral peoples. In contrast, the Bible also contains *propositional* truth. It is the Book of books—the *written* Word of God. Scripture is rich with *propositional* truth—in the form of declarations, proverbs, and principles, laws, prophetic revelations of the future, or letters explaining theological truth.
2. **Honor / shame—and innocence / guilt:** God’s Word is loaded with material about the *honor* or *shame* of humanity as well as the *guilt* or *innocence* of humanity. Scripture reveals that the gospel of Christ is the remedy for sin/guilt (Lev 5:19, Rom 3:23–25, 1 Cor 15:1–3). The gospel is also revealed as the remedy for sin/shame (Luke 15:11–32, Eph 1:3–11, Heb 12:2).⁷⁶
3. **Kingdom / regal—and democratic / legal:** God’s Word has enormous material about *kings* and *kingdoms* beginning in the Old Testament and continuing into the New; Jesus Christ is the Son of David (Mat 1:1)—the King of Kings whose *regal kingdom* is forever (1 Tim 6:15). In contrast, Scripture is sometimes cited as the foundation for democracy, limitations on the absolute power of kings, human rights, and freedom. Moreover, the laws of God—the *legal* aspects of God’s truth—are widely present in both Old and New Testaments, although generally inside of a relational or covenantal framework.
4. **Familial / ancestral—and individual / present-future:** God’s Word has a huge amount of material about his working through *family* and offspring on behalf of other *families* (Genesis 12:1). There is also much about remembering the past and having regard for one’s *ancestors* (Mat 1:1–17). This may be contrasted with all the material in which God works through *individuals*, and where the orientation is the *present* or *future*. Scripture presents the gospel of salvation as being offered both to *families* and *individuals* (Acts 16:30–31).
5. **Obedience / concrete—and knowledge / abstract:** God’s Word emphasizes the necessity of *obedience* to God and *concrete* action; knowledge apart from obedience results in pride. At the same time, God’s people are commanded to “love the Lord your God...with all your mind” (Mark 12:30) and are warned that they will be destroyed for lack of *knowledge* (Isa 5:13, Hos 4:6).
6. **Mystery / both-and—and logical / either-or:** God’s Word teaches the *mystery* of the Trinity; God is *both* One God, *and* a community of Three Persons. The paradox of God’s sovereignty and human responsibility (both are biblical truths) is also a *both-and mystery*. However, God’s Word also teaches in abundance many truths which are *logical* and *either-or*. “No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). *Either* repent and be saved—or—do not repent and perish.
7. **Poverty / vulnerability—and wealth / stability.** “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20, cf. Mat 5:3). God’s Word speaks favorably to his people in *poverty* and in *vulnerable* conditions. In contrast, God’s Word contains a ‘development ethic’

⁷⁶ The diagram suggests that according to the spectrum of *honor/shame* vs. *Innocence/guilt*, the only two results of sin are *shame* and *guilt*. Roland Muller points to another negative dynamic, that of *power/fear*, which is also a result of sin. This can be seen in the Genesis 3 account of the Fall of Humanity. See Roland Muller, *The Messenger, The Message, Community*, 107–112.

which produces *wealth* for individuals and nations—along with social *stability*.⁷⁷ The book of Proverbs contains many principles for gaining *wealth*.

8. **Glory to God—and glory for humanity:** God's Word teaches that the glory of God is the crux of all reality (Rom 11:36). At the same time, God's Word teaches that human beings are made in the image of a good and glorious God (Gen 1:27), and God shares his glory with those who believe and follow Jesus Christ (John 17:22).
9. **Justice for the oppressed / justice for the oppressor—and acceptance of injustice:** God's Word teaches the good news that God will bring liberty to the *oppressed* (Luke 4:18) and that God will harshly judge the *oppressor* (Isa 14:3–6, Mat 23:1–36, Luke 6:24–28, Rev. 18:19–24). However, God also calls his people to *accept* and endure *injustice* and persecution (Mat 5:10–12, 1 Pet 3:9), following the example of Jesus (1 Pet 2:23).
10. **Israel relativized—and Israel prioritized:** God's Word teaches that “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). The laws and traditions of God's people Israel are to be *relativized* under the Lordship of Christ. At the same time, we see in Paul's letter to the Romans that the gospel is “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16). We see in Paul's letter to the church at Rome that God's people Israel are, in a sense, *prioritized* (Rom 4:16–18, 9:1–5) because the promise of the *all-nations blessing in Christ* came through God's people Israel, whose father is Abraham.
11. **Everyday / local—and cosmic / universal:** God's Word teaches that obedience to God is for the benefit of people right now in the immediate *everyday* and *local* situation. The second half of the Ten Commandments deals with society and the realm of family and human relationships (Ex 20:12–17). The kingdom of God is for today, right here, right now (Mat 6:10). But God's Word also teaches that he is reconciling together *all things* in Christ; this is the *cosmic* and *universal* level (Eph 1:10, Col 1:19–20).
12. **Romantic / desire—and militant / duty:** The Bible presents God as a husband or the people of God as his bride in the Old Testament (Ez 16:1–8; Is 54:5; 62:4–5; Hos 1:2–3) and also in the New Testament (Eph 5:25, 31–32; Rev 19:6–9). This shows that the nature of the relationship between God and his people is characterized by deep affection and *desire*. There is, indeed, a kind of *romance* between Christ and his bride. At the same time, God's Word reveals that his people are under the command of an all-powerful King whose mission is to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). God's people are called in *militant duty* to engage with their Lord through prayer in a battle “against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil” (Eph 6:12).
13. **Alien to the culture / at home in the culture:** The church is an alien community, standing against the idolatries of any political or social status quo (Rev 13) which is a rival to Almighty God.⁷⁸ At the same time, the New Testament also provides support for working within the

⁷⁷ For more about the “development ethic” contained in the Bible see Darrow Miller, *Disciplining Nations: The Power of Truth to Transform Cultures* (Seattle, YWAM Publishing, 1998).

⁷⁸ Dean Fleming does an excellent job exploring the paradox of the church being both *for* and *against* the socio-cultural environment in which it exists. He writes, “Perhaps most striking of all is the tension between Revelation and other New Testament writings in their respective attitudes toward the Roman ‘powers-that-be.’ Revelation's call for Christians to ‘come out’ of oppressive Babylon seems to be a far cry, say, from Peter's advice to ‘accept the authority of every human institution’ and to ‘honor the emperor’ (1 Pet 2:13, 17). And John's parody of Roman power as a diabolical beast (Rev 13) cuts a bold contrast with Paul's teaching that Roman authorities are ‘instituted by God’ (Rom 13:1) and function as ‘God's servants’ for the church's good (Rom 13:4, 6).” See Fleming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission*, 288–289. Kindle Edition.

church's socio-political environment (Rom 13:1–7, 1 Pet 2:13–17) and identifying foreign cultural signposts as entry points for the gospel (Acts 17:22–34, cf 1 Cor 9:19–23).

The point in reflecting on this sampling of contrasts is that God's Word covers a very wide spectrum of human ideas, social situations and cultural styles. Richard Bauckham writes, "The Bible does, in some sense, tell an overall story that encompasses all its other contents, but this story is not a sort of straitjacket that reduces all else to a narrowly defined uniformity. It is a story that is hospitable to considerable diversity and to tensions, challenges and even seeming contradictions of its own claims."⁷⁹ This contributes to our awareness that although the Bible was written in the specific cultural milieu of the ancient Middle East and Roman Empire—and thus reflects the pivotal cultural values of the time—the Bible as God's Word nevertheless stands above all cultures and reveals God's righteousness for *all peoples*.

This also reinforces to us that whatever our own expression of Christianity, the way we communicate the gospel of Christ is by necessity embodied in our own set of values and our own cultural style. As N.T. Wright says in the forward to Scot McKnight's book *The King Jesus Gospel*: "The Christian faith is kaleidoscopic, and most of us are color-blind. It is multidimensional, and most of us manage to hold at most two dimensions in our heads at any one time. It is symphonic, and we can just about whistle one of the tunes."⁸⁰

LET'S TAKE A LOOK

The quote from Lesslie Newbigin bears repeating: "*Every interpretation of the gospel is embodied in some cultural form.*" I was able to observe this more clearly when I prepared a presentation for a conference hosted by ACMI (Association of Christians Ministering among Internationals). My presentation compared the cultural assumptions of two different presentations of the gospel. The first example is "The Four Spiritual Laws" produced by CRU (formerly known as Campus Crusade for Christ);⁸¹ the second is "The Father's Love Gospel Booklet," produced by Mission ONE (and designed by this author).⁸² A free download from this workshop presentation is available on the Internet.⁸³

"The Four Spiritual Laws" contains laws (or principles) ... propositional truth concerning the problem of sin ... verses about the gift of salvation through Christ ... abstract diagrams intended to clarify for individuals how their sin/guilt problem can be solved through Christ ... and what it means to have Christ on the "throne" of one's heart for a "Christ-directed life."

"The Father's Love Booklet" contains the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32) accompanied by drawings to illustrate the story. It has the parable Jesus told about a family, the descent into shame of the younger of two sons, and a father's radical love. Rather than using abstract diagrams, it has pictures illustrating the story; the story's surprising drama sets the

⁷⁹ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 93–94.

⁸⁰ McKnight, Scot (2011-09-20). *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (p. 11). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

⁸¹ "The Four Spiritual Laws" has been renamed "How to Know God Personally." The "laws" have been renamed as "principles." See <http://www.cru.org/how-to-know-god/would-you-like-to-know-god-personally/index.htm>. Accessed 14 September 2013.

⁸² Mischke, Werner. "The Father's Love Gospel Booklet." Scottsdale, AZ: Mission ONE. Accessed 26 September 2013. <<http://thefatherslovebooklet.org>>

⁸³ Mischke, Werner: "Knowing and sharing the gospel of Christ in the language of honor and shame." Accessed 26 Sept 2013. <<http://www.slideshare.net/WernerMischke/contextualization-acmi>> Presentation was made at the ACMI Conference, May 2013.

stage for a gospel message which highlights sin-*shame* rather than sin-*guilt*. The booklet shows how to have one's shame covered and one's honor restored through Christ. "The Father's Love Booklet" does contain propositional truth, but it comes after the presentation of the deeply compelling story. (Note: You can see some of the pages of The Father's Love Booklet" later in this book—Section 3, Chapter 1, page 000).

Let's explore how "The Four Spiritual Laws" is *embodied* in the cultural values of Western evangelicalism:

Western gospel presentation: "The Four Spiritual Laws" ("How to Know God Personally")				
Cultural factors (generally non-western)	✓	Cultural factors (generally Western)	✓	Comment
narrative / oral		propositional / written	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No narrative or story • No mention of Christ as fulfillment of Jewish prophecy • Content is entirely propositional
honor / shame		guilt / innocence	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused exclusively on forgiveness of "sins" • No mention of a gospel that addresses sin/shame
kingdom / regal		democratic / legal	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content entirely based on "laws" or "principles" from Scripture • Legal, rather than regal framework • No mention of a King or "gospel of the kingdom"
familial / ancestral		individual / present-future	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Message for individuals to receive Christ • No mention of the possibility of families or communities receiving Christ together • No value placed on ancestors
obedience / concrete	✓	knowledge / abstract	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on follow-through (obedience) • Has abstract diagrams: <i>bridge over chasm</i> symbolizing Christ as the bridge between God and humanity; <i>chair diagram</i> symbolizing 'throne' of human heart
mystery / both-and		logical / either-or	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nothing mysterious, presented in highly logical approach
poverty / vulnerability		wealth / stability	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assumes reader in economically stable situation • Assumes no poverty or oppression

Figure 1.10: Comparing cultural factors in a Western presentation of the gospel

In the simple exercise above concerning the cultural assumptions of a typical Western presentation of the gospel, we have brought to the surface what otherwise is hidden. Paul Hiebert writes about cultural assumptions as being a part of a culture's worldview, and that these assumptions must be examined in order for genuine transformation to occur: "One way to transform worldviews is to 'surface them'—to consciously examine the deep, unexamined assumptions we have and thereby make explicit what is implicit."⁸⁴ Hiebert quotes Dean Arnold:

Cultural assumptions are insidious, not necessarily because they are wrong, but because they are hidden and affect the way members of a culture see and interpret the world. Cultural assumptions affect what we see and what we believe is true, right, and proper without question. They are so obvious to us that they seem to be universal and are seldom questioned unless they come in conflict with a set of assumptions from

⁸⁴ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, Kindle Locations 6845–6846.

another culture. More frequently than not, we fail to recognize that the values and assumptions that drive our culture are not in the Bible.⁸⁵

Of course, the gospel presentation known as “The Four Spiritual Laws” is not unique in being influenced by Western cultural assumptions.⁸⁶ Every presentation of the gospel—by default—is expressed with its own cultural influences or assumptions.

We acknowledge, of course, that God has used “The Four Spiritual Laws” and other presentations like it. God only knows the multitudes who have made professions of faith through the Spirit-empowered witness of believers who have used and are using these resources.

Referencing “The Four Spiritual Laws” and “The Romans Road” plan of salvation, Timothy Tennent writes, “Both of them are based on scriptural passages and are simple enough for any believer to use. The question is whether this basic approach is adequate for evangelism in the Majority World and whether the gospel story can also be approached from a shame perspective, while yet remaining fully scriptural.”⁸⁷

Roland Muller writes as seasoned missionary who has worked decades among peoples in the Middle East. Speaking of “The Four Spiritual Laws,” Muller writes:

Once again, this method of sharing the gospel is based on a legal interpretation of the gospel message and works well with people who have an understanding of guilt and innocence. I believe that this plan, like The Romans Road, has severe limitations for hearers in a shame-based culture. It requires an understanding of the concept of sin and guilt, and it fails to address the life of the believer after he confesses and believes.⁸⁸

In the quote below, Jackson Wu explains the main contours of Western theology, not to say that it is wrong or unbiblical, but simply to recognize that Western theology is itself influenced by Western culture.

A few features generally typify Western theology. First, typical Western constructions of the gospel are oriented on law, guilt, justification, and judgment. Second, gospel content tends to focus narrowly on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus wherein people find forgiveness from sin and eternal life. This book does not use the term “Western” in a derogatory manner. Using this word does not imply that Western Christianity has been mistaken in its primary forms of theologizing. Instead, this label is used because certain patterns and emphases are especially prominent in Western theology.⁸⁹

Hiebert writes about the negative impact of the West’s secular worldview (often called “modernity”) on the church and theology of the West:

⁸⁵ Dean Arnold: Foreword to *The Fall of Patriarchy: Its Broken Legacy Judged by Jesus and the Apostolic House Church Communities*. Ed. Dell Birkey. (Tucson: Fenestra Books, 2005), viii. As quoted in Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, Kindle Locations 6846–6850.

⁸⁶ The organization Evangelism Explosion has an evangelistic presentation called “Steps to Life.” The organization E3 Partners has a tool called the “Evangelcube.” Not surprisingly, these resources share the same Western cultural influences as “The Four Spiritual Laws” of CRU.

⁸⁷ Timothy Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 82.

⁸⁸ Roland Muller, *The Message, The Messenger, The Community* (CanBooks, 2013), 128.

⁸⁹ Jackson Wu, *Saving God’s Face*, 14. Wu does an extremely thorough job of showing how Western presentations of the gospel contain the assumptions of Western culture, in his Chapter Two: “Theological Contextualization in Practice,” 10–69.

In modernity the gospel increasingly was defined in terms of abstract doctrinal truths, not everyday living. The result was the development of systematic theology as a kind of science based on positivist presuppositions, a grand unified theory that explained everything. ... Truth was to be determined by rational argument and encoded in propositional statements linked by reason. This work of experts assumed that human rationality is based on universal, transcultural, and transhistorical laws of thought.⁹⁰

“Truth was to be determined by rational argument and encoded in propositional statements linked by reason.”

“What could possibly be wrong with that?” I might ask.

As a Christian raised and trained in the West—as one who values logic and propositional truth—it can be deeply challenging (even disturbing) to entertain the idea that my Western assumptions influence—and may actually *limit*—the way I think about and communicate the gospel.

Nevertheless, I must come to terms with the fact that the West’s typical rendition of the gospel of Jesus Christ is *not* without theological blind spots, *not* neutral in its cultural assumptions, *not* universal in its appeal. Rather, the West’s typical rendition of the gospel represents a truncated version of God’s *comprehensive* glorious good news for all peoples, tribes, cultures and nations.

Therefore, I am proposing in this book:

If a Christian’s theology is Western while his or her cultural context is Majority World—Asian, African, Middle Eastern, Latin American (or other honor-shame culture)—then to ignore the theological/cultural matter of honor and shame comprises a blind spot which hinders the missional impact of the gospel.

Conversely, if a Christian’s theology is Western while his or her cultural context is Majority World—Asian, African, Middle Eastern, Latin American (or other honor-shame culture)—then to incorporate the theological/cultural matter of honor and shame will deepen relationships, while improving receptivity of the gospel and increasing its missional impact.

BLIND SPOTS IN THE WEST ARE MORE PROBLEMATIC

Again, the problem of “blind spots” is not unique to Western Christians. All Christians everywhere face this problem. Every expression of the Christian faith has its theological omissions or blind spots, whether Western, Latin American, East Asian, African, Middle Eastern.

However, it is important to recognize the Western expression of the faith has great influence in many parts of the world, and the West continues to hold a leadership role in the enterprise of Christian missions. The wealth of the Christian West also remains dominant relative to the church in the Majority World, and this accrues to undue influence.

⁹⁰ Hiebert, Paul G. (2008-05-01). *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Kindle Locations 4032–4036). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

But that's not all. Many Christians in the Majority World have been or are being trained in a Western theological tradition, so unwittingly, they often carry forward in their ministries the theological biases of the West.⁹¹

This often results in Majority World Christians sharing the gospel in a way that the gospel itself carries Western values to peoples whose pivotal cultural values (frequently, including honor and shame) are quite different from the West's. It's a strange and unfortunate situation, indeed. This is one of the symptoms of what Jackson Wu calls "assuming the gospel."⁹²

A corollary to this is that many theological students in the West receive no training concerning the fact that the church's center of gravity has shifted from the West to the Global South. These students are thus unwittingly deprived—both academically and spiritually. Andrew Walls writes:

All over the Western world, ministers are being trained and future theological scholars are being identified and taken to doctoral level and beyond without any idea of what the church of today, in which they are called to serve, is really like. The way that Christian thought is presented to them implies that it is a Western religion, or at least, if it did not start that way, it has now become one.⁹³

... More seriously, nothing in their theological education has prepared them for intelligent participation in a church that is principally African, Asian, and Latin American in composition or enabled them to realize the changed place of Western believers within that church.⁹⁴

It therefore behooves us to try to recognize the blind spots inherent in Western Christianity—and I contend that *honor/shame* is a major one. It also requires that we look again at Scripture with a greater awareness about *its* culture and the way it intersects with the multicultural complexities of our world. Finally, we need to see afresh how the gospel of Jesus Christ can be communicated with greater impact for greater receptivity. Section 3 of this book explores a variety of approaches.

Having considered the problem of theological blind spots relative to honor and shame, let us now turn to another problem. That problem is the *pathological nature of shame*.

⁹¹ Darrell Whiteman writes about the negative aspects of globalization relative to cross-cultural theological dialog: "The bad news [about globalization] is that people are likely to try to dominate the conversation from a position of power, which in turn creates a new form of ecclesiastical and theological hegemony. Once again, it will look like the West is trying to dominate the world, not with economic structural adjustment policies that create poverty but with theological arrogance." See Whiteman: "Anthropological Reflections on Contextualizing Theology in a Globalizing World" in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, Ott and Netland, Eds. Kindle Locations 1182–1186.

⁹² Jackson Wu, *Saving God's Face*, 51.

⁹³ Andrew Walls, "Globalization and the Study of Christian History," Kindle Locations 1442–1444.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, Kindle Locations 1459–1460.