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‘Dignified’: An Exegetical Soteriology of Divine Honour

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Abstract

Social scientists in disparate fields are now employing the construct of honour to ameliorate various social problems, such as immorality, failed states, international discord, poverty and mental illness. Moreover, historians of global religion cite Christianity’s shift towards cultures shaped by the values of honour and shame. Despite this growing prominence of honour in social theories and the emergence of Christianity in honour–shame cultures, the notion of honour remains absent from theological discourse. In light of these global realities, we explore how God’s active transformation of humanity from shame to honour can interpret both salvation-history and Christian theology. To this end I first explore the nature of humanity’s problem of shame before God, using anthropological and biblical insights. Throughout the Old Testament, God’s covenant initiatives with Abram, Moses and David, along with the common socio-literary pattern of God exalting a servant from unjust shame, reveals the dignified status God intends for humanity. God’s programme to restore people from shame to honour climaxes in Jesus, who embodies honour in the incarnation, mediates dignity to the marginalised by healings and public fellowship, elaborates God’s new code of honour which reinterprets social stigmas, and procures an exalted status for all peoples by atoning for shame and resurrecting to exaltation. Romans and 1 Peter are interpreted in their socio-historic contexts as apostolic instruments which expound the social implications of God’s honour code. To unify the fractured Romans for the upcoming Spanish mission, Paul confronts social imperialism by replacing false honour claims with God’s status now available by faith through grace in Christ. Meanwhile, 1 Peter assures maligned Christians of their exalted status and outlines honourable social relations. Then, in closing, we examine a soteriology of honour diachronically and systematically. In particular, how: biblical metaphors symbolise believers’ status transposition, group incorporation is key to New Testament soteriology, Eastern Orthodoxy’s doctrine of *theosis* articulates the infusion of divine status, and other theological categories could be interpreted through honour-shame social values. These reflections towards an exegetical soteriology of divine honour are offered as an initial theological platform for addressing social issues where honour values prevail.

Keywords: dignity, honour, majority-world theology, shame, soteriology.

Scholars in disparate fields are calling for a heightened conception and utilisation of honour to ameliorate various social conditions. For example, in *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen*, Princeton philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah argues for the resuscitation and reformulation of honour in spheres such as honour killings in which accepted morality eschews legality.¹ During a distinguished diplomatic career, senior United Nations official Sergio Vieira de Mello advised that the international system would be more effective were it to focus on the dignity of individuals, communities and nations.² And in the sphere of international relations, *Guardian* columnist Stephen Kinzer critiques America's threatening approach to Iran's nuclear expansion for unnecessarily provoking face-saving ripostes and failing to grant Iranians what they are really seeking: respect, dignity and the restoration of historic, Persian glory.³ Furthermore, sociological research conducted by the World Bank revealed that the poor understand their problem as fundamentally social (i.e. shame, humiliation, isolation) and not material, thus elevating the importance of dignity in theories of poverty alleviation.⁴ Even psychological theories and treatments for shame have proliferated in recent decades. The notion of honour, first expounded by post-Second World War anthropologists, now appears in the discourse of philosophers, diplomats, foreign policy experts, sociologists and psychologists as an innovative solution to human issues. Yet honour remains absent from theological discourse, thereby precluding the church from contributing a theological and philosophical framework towards development where honour is pivotal.

Moreover, Christianity's shift away from Western culture towards honour-based societies in the global East and South⁵ further necessitates a theology articulated in terms of honour. To address contextual concern, Christian communities worldwide have formulated soteriologies such as: forgiveness of sins (Western evangelicalism), deliverance from social oppression (liberation theologies, such as black, feminist or Latin American), existential

¹ K. A. Appiah, *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2010).

² Samantha Power, *Sergio* (New York: Penguin, 2010), p. 531.

³ Stephen Kinzer, *Reset: Iran, Turkey and America's Future* (New York: Times Books, 2010).

⁴ Deepa Narayan, *Voices of the Poor* (New York: OUP, 2000), cited in Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), pp. 51–4.

⁵ Lamin Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (Oxford: OUP, 2008); Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (New York: OUP, 2002); Dana Robert, 'Shifting Southward: Global Christianity since 1945', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24:2 (2000), pp. 50–8.

transformation (North Atlantic liberalism) and power over evil spirits (animistic contexts). Even with such theological diversity, the church has yet to conceive of salvation as honour, despite it being the predominant cultural value for the world's non-Western majority.⁶

In light of these global realities, I propose an exegetical theology of divinely granted honour for humanity. Aided by insights from biblical scholars, social anthropologists and Christian psychologists, I argue that God's active transformation of humanity from shame to honour can frame salvation-history and Christian theology. Such a theology positively contributes to human flourishing by aiding social scientists' honour-based remedies to global issues and providing an appropriate theology to emerging, non-Western churches.

First, I outline the concept of honour. Honour is generally defined as 'the public acknowledgement of one's worth to the group'.⁷ It is essentially a positive social rating, or the right to respect. Synonymous terms include glory, prestige, dignity, value, worth, esteem, status, face and reputation; shame and disgrace are recognised as the antitheses of honour. Honour is a social construct, meaning it only exists where humans decide to grant it and for this reason is most prevalent in group-orientated cultures. Since Aristotle, it has been esteemed as the 'greatest of all goods'⁸ upon which one's worth, identity and security depend. The primary sources of honour are social appropriateness achieved by observing proper boundaries (purity), faithfulness to group expectations (loyalty) and public benefaction (power). Once obtained, honour is typically replicated in possessions, postures, clothing, naming, hospitality and lineage and results in acceptance and inclusion into the group as worthy members. Honour-shame cultures (in which transgressions are the violation of relational ideals producing shame, which is addressed with covering or communal reacceptance) are typically contrasted to individualistic justice-guilt cultures (in which transgressions are violations of moral rules leading to a guilty conscience, which is resolved through confession and restitution).⁹

⁶ Theological forays into honour and shame include William Lad Sessions, 'Honor and God', *Journal of Religion* (2007), pp. 206–24; Marilyn McCord Adams, 'Symbolic Value: Honor and Shame', in her *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 106–28; Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), pp. 3–60.

⁷ J. P. Rivers, 'Honor', in D. L. Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 503–11.

⁸ *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.3.9–12.

⁹ Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1946).

The Issue of Human Shame

The application of Pitt-Rivers' model of shame as conduct, sentiment and evaluation to Genesis 3 reveals the depth of humanity's shame.¹⁰ The violation of covenant expectations and disloyalty (conduct; Gen 3:1–6) produces internalised notions of unworthiness (sentiment; Gen 3:7, 10–11) and ultimately warrants a public recognition of Adam's abject status before God (evaluation; Gen 3:24–5). Because of communal dynamics, sin not only besmirches Adam's reputation, but also affronts God's honour. The most common expression of human sin is the construction of false status via religion or social codes. Such social engineering degrades others, rejects the honour God graciously grants and upstages God as true arbiter of honour (Ps 75:4–7; Rom 1:20–32; 2:29b). In sum, sin is the integrated process in which our shameful behaviour invokes shameful feelings, degrades status and dishonours God.

For Israel's prophets, the prophetic imagery of a prostitute (or adulterous wife) most aptly communicates the disgrace of both Israel and her cuckolded husband (Exod 34:15–16; Isa 54:4–6; Jer 2–3; Hos 2, 4–5; Ezek 16, 23). Sexual miscreants are often the deepest symbols of shame, unfaithfulness and defilement in group-orientated cultures since their promiscuity compromises the group's purity and boundaries. Due to covenant violations, Israel was ignominiously separated from her land, temple, monarchy and honour. Because Israel's exile was a shameful curse for disrespecting her Honourable Suzerain (Deut 28:37), the exilic and post-exilic promises are best interpreted as restoration to honour.

Paul's climactic hamartiological statement in Romans 3:23 – 'for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God' – recounts how humanity has 'fallen short' of properly honouring God and so now 'falls short' of the dignified existence God intended. Romans 3:23 references the Jewish theological tradition of Adam being deprived of the glory of God at the fall.¹¹ The prestigious reputation divinely bestowed upon the primal pair is absent. In this light, humanity's error is not 'law-breaking' *per se*, but the 'untruthful distortions of social systems' whereby all peoples redefine what is truly deserving of honour in opposition to God's established code of honour.¹²

Collectively marred with shame, humanity faces exposure, judgement, alienation, degradation and pollution before the Creator and fellow creatures.

¹⁰ Rivers, 'Honor', p. 503.

¹¹ James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns, 1998), p. 93.

¹² Paul Jewett, 'Honor in Argument of Romans', in A. Brown, G. F. Snyder and V. Wiles (eds), *Putting Body and Soul Together* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1997), p. 265.

For this reason, humanity stands in dire need of shame removal and honour restoration. To this end, God has worked repeatedly through Israel and decisively in Jesus to endow humanity with salvific honour.

Honour in Old Testament covenants

God initiates covenants to (re-)establish our dignified status, which in turn secures God's reputation as the all-sufficient benefactor of true honour. Since ancient Near Eastern covenants were social arrangements for establishing a family-like relationship (i.e. 'kinship-in-law'),¹³ honour and shame are central components in biblical covenants.¹⁴ As the basis of Israel's conceptions about God, herself and the world, such covenants establish Israel's foundational theology of 'honour-for-the-righteous, shame-for-enemies'.

The creation narratives (Gen 1:26–2:3; 2:4–25) function as extended declarations of Adam and Eve's divinely granted honour. The non-discursive symbols of their status include: God's image and blessing, the command to fill the earth with progeny, instruction to rule the earth, dominion over creation, unique food, the priestly function of keeping the garden/temple,¹⁵ luxurious living conditions, naming of others, arrangement of a spouse and unashamed nakedness. To underscore the primal couple's privileged status, the creation account concludes that Adam and Eve 'were not ashamed' (Gen 2:25). Later biblical tradition similarly interpreted God's crowning of Adam 'with glory and honour' as the acme of the creation narrative (Ps 8). In the New Testament, Jesus is identified as the true Adam by virtue of his exalted post-resurrection status (1 Cor 15:20–8; Heb 2:5–11), showing that the theological significance of Adam for New Testament writers lay in his original honourable status.

Though rife in the programmatic promises of Gen 12:1–3, honour plays a negligible role in contemporary interpretations of the Abrahamic Covenant. God's covenant with Abraham was an invitation to a life of honour, in the forms of: land, great nation, divine blessing, great name, abundant offspring, royal descendants and being the source of universal blessing (12:1–3; 15:5, 14; 17:2–8; 22:16–18; 26:3–4; 35:11–12). God, as a loyal patron, even covenanted to vindicate Abram's descendants if they were dishonoured by

¹³ Frank Moore Cross, 'Kinship and Covenant in Ancient Israel', in his *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 6–7.

¹⁴ Saul Olyan, 'Honor, Shame and Covenant Relations in Ancient Israel and its Environments', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115:2 (1996), pp. 201–18.

¹⁵ Gregory Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), pp. 66–80. Cf. Num 3:7–8; 18:7.

other nations (Gen 12:3b). As humanity was striving to reverse the Adamic shame by lifting themselves to the heavens and making a name for themselves (Gen 11:4), God descends from the heavens to grant Adam and Eve's role of mediating universal blessing and honour.

The Mosaic Covenant formed at Mount Sinai channels the honourable status once offered to Adam and Abraham to one particular nation in the form of a suzerain–vassal treaty. In calling Israel to be the true Adamic humanity,¹⁶ God continued his resolve to fashion a group of honoured people characterised by divine blessing, abundant descendants, fertile land, prestigious government, divine presence, economic abundance and military peace (Lev 26:3–13; Deut 6–7). By virtue of her special relationship with Yahweh, Israel was honoured as 'a people holy to the Lord', chosen 'to be a people for his treasured possession out of all peoples' (Deut 7:6) and set 'in praise and in fame and in honour above all nations' (Deut 26:19). Israel's right to a position of honour, grounded upon the terms of the Mosaic Covenant, remains a theological axiom throughout Old Testament writings, particularly those mourning the absence of such honour (e.g. Lamentations, Obadiah and psalms of lament).

God focuses his promises of honour upon one family when enacting a covenant with David, the king and representative of Israel (2 Sam 7; 1 Chr 17; Pss 89, 110, 132). For the task of mediating universal blessings, God covenanted to honour David (already lifted from shepherd to prince, 2 Sam 7:8) with a great name (2 Sam 7:9), peace and security (2 Sam 7:10–11), an eternal throne upon which his descendants would sit while enjoying an intimate relationship with God (7:12–16; Ps 89:26), a special position as God's 'firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth' (Ps 89:27), a global inheritance (Ps 2:8) and authoritative rule over other nations (Pss 2, 110) – all symbols of remarkable honour and prestige (cf. Ps 21:5–6). Since the fortunes of Israel, and presumably the entire world, are tethered to the status of the Davidic monarchy, biblical narratives up through the New Testament era are particularly occupied with whether these promises of royal honour are enjoyed by the king and his constituency.

In addition to the covenants, the socio-literary pattern of Old Testament narratives also reveals God's intentions to redeem people from shame unto honour. In such narratives, a chosen servant of average status suffers unjust shame and alienation. After cries to the divine Patron for assistance, God reverses their social position by granting a higher-than-before status with

¹⁶ This reading that God has chosen Israel for a covenant relationship in order to restore the glory of Adam was common at Qumran: 1QS 4:22–3; CD 3:19f; 1QH 17:14–15; 4QpPs 37 3:1–2.

prosperity, peace and power. Examples of this pattern include Job, Joseph, Moses, Ruth, Hannah, David, Daniel, Nehemiah and Esther/Mordecai.¹⁷ The narratives of these national heroes, who embody the character and destiny of the nation as a whole, embody Israel's fundamental kerygma – Yahweh is actively working in history to exalt his people. Their faithfulness amidst shameful alienation exhorts the reader to wait upon God for a renewed status (Ps 62:7).

Against the backdrop of divine exaltation and honouring in Old Testament covenants and narratives, I now explore a soteriology of honour in the New Covenant era of salvation-history.

Honour in the Ministry of Jesus

Jesus embodies, mediates, elaborates and procures the decisive and climactic revelation of divine honour to humanity. I shall reconstruct a christology of honour in the broader context of God's salvific purpose of universal honour.

Jesus Christ perfectly embodied true, divine honour in his pre-existent state, earthly life and heavenly exaltation. As the image of God, he bears the eternal honour of the Creator; and in the image of Adam he reaches humanity's destiny of glory. Jesus' pre-existent status was characterised by prestige and honour (John 17:5; also, Col 1:15–17; 1 Cor 8:6; John 1:1–3), which he voluntarily relinquished in the incarnation (Phil 2:6–8; 2 Cor 8:9). Despite a life of abject ignominy on one level, the four Gospels purposefully present Jesus as inherently honourable in many ways.¹⁸ The honour Jesus possessed during pre-existence and his earthly life continues into the present, as he is the Messianic Lord sitting at God's right hand with authority above every name (Phil 2:9–11; Rom 1:3–4; Matt 28:18; Heb 1–2; Acts 13:32–5; Eph 1:20–2; Rev 5). Not incidentally, the Old Testament texts mostly commonly employed by New Testament authors to interpret the resurrection – Psalms 2 and 110 – speak of the king's exalted status.

As the honourable one, Jesus is also the honouring benefactor who opens new vistas of honour for humanity by personally restoring the dignity of the shamed and reconstructing the code of honour (Matt 4:23). Jesus' subversive interactions with the socially ostracised reveal his mission to restore dignity to the shamed. Jesus' life was spent reincorporating the socially disenfranchised

¹⁷ Timothy Lanaik, *Shame and Honor in Esther*, SBLDS 165 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1998), pp. 7–17. The books of Genesis, Exodus and Judges employ cascading cycles of this literary pattern to express a theology of salvation as honour.

¹⁸ Such as: a noble birth marked by reputable descent and divine portents, mediation of God's benefaction, power over spirits and nature, public defence of opponents' challenges, faithful obedience, purity and holiness, divine affirmation and worship from others.

into the new people of God by removing their stigma and granting a new honourable identity. For those with *ascribed* shame due to their congenital defilement (i.e. blind, deaf, lepers, demon-possessed, lame and crippled and even dead), he miraculously healed them. In the Mediterranean world where bodily purity, honour and group inclusion are interdependent constructs (Lev 11–15; 1 QS_a 2:3–11), Jesus' miracles restored the social dignity, not just physical health, of the maimed and marginalised. 'For a first-century Jew, most if not all of the works of healing, which form the bulk of Jesus' mighty works, could be seen as the restoration to membership in Israel of those who, through sickness or whatever, had been excluded as ritually unclean.'¹⁹ Through public association, Jesus also dignified those bearing *achieved* shame from their own unfaithfulness to cultural norms (i.e. tax-collectors, prostitutes, adulterers and sinners). Because these groups threatened the national purity with their improper conduct, Israelites reckoned them moral lepers outside the covenant community. In this context, Jesus' meals with pariahs erased social taboo and presented a live portrait of participation in the new Messianic community. Salvation from Jesus is, pre-eminently, status transposition of the lowly and their membership into God's community.²⁰ Jesus' miraculous healing and radically inclusive fellowship were central strategies in his redefinition and mediation of God's in-breaking honour.

In addition to bestowal of honour in deeds, the Messiah's life is gospel because it introduces God's code of honour. By subversively redefining the currencies of honour (i.e. conduct, faithfulness and purity), Jesus' teaching restructured the basis of membership into God's people and disclosed the means of God's long-promised honour (Luke 15:11–32). Honourable behaviours in God's eyes are those most associated with cultural disgrace: the loss of wealth, family and reputation due to loyalty to Jesus (Luke 6:20–2); cross-bearing, enslavement, humility and debasement to the last place (Matt 10:38; 18:4; 19:30; 20:27); and forswearing aggressive defence of one's reputation (Matt 5:5, 7, 9, 21–6, 38–48).²¹ Such bearing of social shame reaps honour since it confirms one's trust in God as the sole arbiter of worth. Furthermore, in the face of the Pharisees' symbolic badges of covenantal membership derived from the Mosaic Law, Jesus' ethical teachings function as redefined Torah to mark out his followers as faithful to God (Matt 5:17–20;

¹⁹ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), pp. 191–2.

²⁰ Joel Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), pp. 76–101.

²¹ J. H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), pp. 164–211. Also, K. C. Hanson, 'How Honorable! How Shameful! A Cultural Analysis of Matthew's Makarisms and Reproaches', *Semeia* 68 (1996), pp. 81–112.

6:1–18; 11:28–30; 23:1–36).²² Third, Jesus also revises Jewish purity maps so that holiness now results from association with Jesus, not from proper observance of Levitical regulations. Jesus refashioned around himself Jewish conceptions of sacred time (Matt 12:1–8; John 5:1–15), holy places (Matt 12:10; 21:12–13; 27:51; 1 Cor 3:16–17), clean food (Mark 7:14–23; Acts 10:9–16; Rom 14:14) and acceptable people (see above).²³

Jesus decisively remedied the problem of human dishonour and indignity in two movements. The cross, as a spectacle of grand ignominy and social exclusion, restores God's eroded honour and absorbs our shame (1 Cor 1:23; Heb 12:2; Gal 3:13; Eph 5:25–7).²⁴ The restoration of human status was purchased on the cross with Jesus' honour (τιμῆ, 1 Cor 6:20).²⁵ Jesus' death, as an implicit rejection of false cultural norms of social exclusion, punctuated his life-long commitment to the inclusion and honour of all peoples.²⁶ Then, Jesus' resurrection defeated the shameful powers of sin, death and alienation, thus finally making human honour truly possible. The supernatural resurrection of the most reviled affirms both God's acceptance of those most rejected by culture and God's approval of Jesus' life of dignifying the socially marginalised.

In sum, Jesus embodies true honour in his being, mediates divine honour in his actions, elaborates God's counter-cultural code of honour in his teaching and procures our honour in his death and resurrection. Or, in the words of Hebrews, Jesus, the 'radiance of the glory of God', 'despised the shame' of the cross and was 'crowned with glory and honour' in order to 'bring many sons to glory' (1:3; 12:2; 2:9, 10). I now explore how Romans and 1 Peter instruct their audiences how to rightly embody honour from God.

²² Wright, *Victory of God*, p. 432.

²³ D. A. DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), pp. 279–304.

²⁴ Hence the repeated citations to Psalm 22, a lament of the righteous one's humiliation in which the language of shame is integral, in the Synoptic passion narratives, cf. Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), pp. 1–10. On the restoration of God's honour, see Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 11–15.

²⁵ The standard trans. of ἡγοράσθητε γὰρ τιμῆς (1 Cor 6:20) is 'you were bought with a price'. Τιμῆς, a genitive of means, can be 'price, value' or 'honour, reverence' according to BDAG. The trans. 'you were bought with his honour' accords well exegetically with the subsequent imperative for believers to now honour God with their body, seeing how Christ purchased our honour by enduring shame in his body. This theological interpretation is collaborated by: John's association of glory with the cross, the severe humiliation endured on the cross and the fact that honour is symbolised with the shedding of blood.

²⁶ Mark Baker, 'Atonement', in his *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), pp. 94–5.

Romans: Honourably Accepting Others as God Did

Romans, historically and theologically, is best read as an apostolic explanation and application of the christologically procured honour for a community fractured by false honour claims.²⁷ To prepare the chauvinistic church in Rome for the upcoming mission to the Spanish barbarians (15:24; 1:15), Paul recounts a revolutionary ideology intended to eliminate social imperialism by replacing all false claims to honour with God's honour, which is available by faith through grace in Christ. In Romans 1–3, humanity's problem is its fundamental unacceptability due to a lack of honour and its futile efforts to restore such honour via untruthful perversions of socio-cultural systems;²⁸ all nations, Gentiles by virtue of idolatry (1:20–3) and Jews by their ethnocentrism (2:23–4), have dishonoured God and therefore lack the reputation once enjoyed by Adam (3:23). To rescue humanity from their deserved shame, God has acted decisively through his esteemed Son (1:3–4) to remove shame (10:11; 1:14–16), grant honour (2:7–10; 8:17–18),²⁹ and form a new covenantal community. Only in being honoured by God through Christ's shameful death can humans be integrated into God's community and bear eternal honour.

Having received this honoured status from God, the church is called to a new ethic in which God's freely granted honour plays a central role. Christian ethics is rejecting cultural methods of group engineering and extending honour according to God's righteous code of honour (cf. 1 Tim 5:1–6:2). This includes 'pay(ing) honour to whom honour is owed' (13:7), 'outdo(ing) one another in showing honour' (12:10) and breaking the cultural cycles of human alienation by graciously extending honour to persecutors (12:14–21). Romans 14:1–15:13, the functional climax of the epistle, explicates the new terms by which Christians are to accept ('welcome', or 'honour') others. Instead of abusing dietary regulations to relegate others as dirty, we are to mimic God's honourable welcoming (15:9–12), which overcomes social barriers of shame and endues all with dignity (14:14b; 14:20b; 15:7; and the twenty-one admonitions to 'greet' in 16:3–16). Paul 'breaks through the respected social boundaries and offers a new honour code for the Christian community' in order to remedy

²⁷ Jayson Georges, 'From Shame to Honor: A Theological Reading of Romans for Honor-Shame Contexts', *Missiology: An International Review* 38:3 (2010), pp. 295–307.

²⁸ Jewett, 'Honor and Shame', p. 268.

²⁹ Salvific honour in Christ is communicated through multiple rhetorical expressions in Romans, such as: blessed, heirs, strength, life, sanctified, glorified, the Spirit and adoption.

the arrogance which threatens the upcoming mission to the culturally marginalised Spanish peoples.³⁰

Peter: Maintaining Honourable Conduct amidst Disgrace

When Christians' public reputation was discredited through slander (2:12; 3:16), reviling (2:23; 3:9), maligning (4:4, 14) and suffering (1:6; 2:19–20; 3:14, 17; 4:1, 15, 19; 5:10), Peter relates how Christians have already been conferred with an exalted status. Those who believe in Jesus (the stone rejected by men but 'chosen and honoured' by God) 'will never be put to shame' because 'honour is for you who believe' (2:6–7).³¹ The appellations of 1 Peter 2:9–10 explicate Christians' honoured status as members of 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own possession, (and) . . . God's people' who have now received mercy (2:9–10). In summarising, John Elliott notes, 'As children of God's family they too are honored with Gods' grace/favor, sanctification, rebirth, inheritance, praise, salvation, redemption, life, goodness, blessing, imperishable crown, exaltation, protection and glory – all images of honor.'³²

Graced with honour, Christian 'sojourners and exiles' are instructed how to 'keep their conduct among the Gentiles honourable' (2:12) in an array of social roles: citizens (2:13–17), slaves (2:18–25), spouses (3:1–7) and church leaders (5:1–5). Most significantly, beleaguered believers are to renounce the temptation to defend one's honour with riposte and retaliation and instead follow Jesus' example of non-retaliation, blessing enemies and relying upon God for esteem (2:21–5; 3:8–17; 4:1–19). Despite the prevailing sufferings intended to demoralise and discredit Christians, they are to remain firm until their God-conferred 'praise and glory and honour' are fully manifested 'at the revelation of Jesus Christ' (1:7; cf. 4:13; 5:4, 10). Such a dignified response stems from solidarity with the shamed but divinely honoured Lord Jesus Christ – the exemplar and enabler of all truly honourable conduct.³³

Systematic considerations of honour theology

Salvation involves moving ignominy and disgrace to esteem and dignity. Having been cleansed of all blemish, covered from any exposure, granted a new heart capable of loyalty and empowered to rule over the false powers

³⁰ C. M. Corrigan, 'Paul's Shame for the Gospel', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 16 (1986), pp. 23–7.

³¹ John Elliott, *1 Peter*, Anchor Bible 37B (New Haven, CT: Doubleday, 2000), pp. 425–8.

³² John Elliott, 'Disgraced Yet Graced', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 24 (1994), p. 173.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

of the world, those in Christ are valued in a position of honour accorded by the heavenly court of approval. Having traced God's programme to honour humanity through salvation-history, I now diachronically examine how honour soteriology is articulated in biblical images, group incorporation, *theosis* and other theological categories.

Since honour and shame are abstract social constructs, symbols and images intuitively speak of how God transposes our status. In moving people from shame to honour, God cleanses the defiled, clothes the naked, enriches the poor, returns the exiled, strengthens the weak, heals the sick, raises the dead, exalts the humbled, adopts the orphans, blesses the cursed, accepts the rejected, makes wise the foolish, liberates the oppressed and imprisoned, frees the slaves, reconciles enemies, gives life to the barren, gives citizenship to the foreigner and gives an inheritance to those without a birthright. The honouring replicated in the above images reveals how God actually saves people from ignominy, but also serves as metaphorical depictions of spiritual transformation.

The biblical testimony of incorporation into God's honoured people is of cardinal importance for an honour-based soteriology since honour is ultimately social acceptability. Those in Christ are eternally honoured and accepted as members in the people of God with full rights, privileges and status. This new honoured corporate status is salvation itself. Romans, for example, argues in a sustained fashion that God has acted in history to create his own family of honoured members from all nations, not simply to forgive individual sins.³⁴ Paul employs the language of covenantal membership (3:21–31), descentance from Abraham (4:1–25; 9:7–9; cf. Gal 3:7ff.),³⁵ true Israel (9:1–6) and grafting into the olive branch (11:17–24) to explain Christians' salvific inclusion into God's new, multi-ethnic, glorious covenantal community. Acts 15:1–21, Ephesians 2:11–21 and 1 Peter 2:4–10 likewise speak of God's initiatives to redemptively incorporate those behind shameful social boundaries into a new group – the ultimate badge of honour. Vogue New Testament studies discuss community in relation to ethics, but neglect the biblical writers' tendency to enjoin community with soteriology.³⁶

³⁴ Krister Stendahl, 'The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West', in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), pp. 85–6.

³⁵ Richard Hays, "'Have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh?' A Reconsideration of Rom 4:1", *Novum Testamentum* 27 (1985), pp. 76–98.

³⁶ Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of New Testament* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1996); Richard Hays, 'Ecclesiology and Ethics in 1 Corinthians', *Ex Auditu* 10 (1994), pp. 31–43; N. T. Wright, 'Paul and the People of God: Whence and Whether Pauline Studies and the Life of the Church' (lecture, Wheaton, IL, 18 April 2010) adumbrated how his

Since the Eastern Orthodox soteriology of deification (*theosis*) involves divine grace which restores the image of God along with its accompanying honour, Christopher Flanders proposes *theosis* as a potentially fruitful means of correlating God's honour and man's experience of salvation – 'Salvation from this perspective is about sharing in honour, majesty and glory, the virtues that characterise God. Through Christ, God redeems our faces, restoring them to the original honourableness that was characteristic of the *imago Dei* as it existed in the pre-Fall world.'³⁷ Timothy Ware defines salvation in terms of sharing the riches (2 Cor 8:9) and glory (John 17:22) of divinity.³⁸ Eastern deification – the graceful infusion of divine status – provides a fruitful framework for reconstructing a soteriology of honorification; *theosis* accommodates a theology of *timeosis*.

Since soteriology never stands isolated in theological discourse, other theological categories must likewise be reformulated for the honour-shame cultures of the majority world. Generally speaking, an honour-shame theology is rooted in concepts of relationship and community and is animated by the existential question 'how can I participate in the community accepted by God?'

God interacts with his creation as a faithful benefactor, yet remains uniquely exalted by virtue of his infinite honour, which is manifested in his covenantal loyalty and absence of blemish. As the sole sovereign capable of imparting eternal honour, he is the most respected of all beings. Humanity, once destined for great honour in God's creation, is now defined by inherited shamefulfulness, yet possesses hope of restoration. Sin, inherited from Adam and perpetuated by continual perfidy, means defilement, shamefulfulness and unacceptability. Death is the ultimate state of shame, powerlessness, defilement and rejection which befalls all humans; such vulnerability produces a terrifying sense of worthlessness. The *Torah* functioned as a charter outlining the means to honour for ethnic Israel. The *incarnation* is when the most honoured voluntarily assumed a shameful state to mediate his honour to the shamed. The *kingdom of God* inaugurated by Jesus is the presence of God's newly accessible honour. The *atonement* explores not only how God's wrath is turned away, but how God's opinion of the shameful violator has been reversed.

forthcoming NTPG book on Paul understands the formation of united communities as the central praxis of and main entry point to Pauline theology.

³⁷ Christopher Flanders, 'About Face: Reorienting Thai Face for Soteriology and Mission' (Ph.D. dissertation; Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Intercultural Studies, 2005), p. 355.

³⁸ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 2nd edn (London: Penguin Press, 1993), p. 22.

The *gospel* is the good news that God's long-standing plan to redignify people has climaxed with the incarnation, life and resurrection of Jesus. *Repentance* for the proud is abandoning humanly concocted, belligerent efforts of procuring status and for the marginalised means rejecting the hopeless unbelief of failing to trust God's power to remove one's shame. *Faith* is exclusive trust in Jesus as the new source of divine honour and ongoing loyalty to God as patron. *Grace* is not merely the pardon of violations, but proactive acceptance and welcoming of the shamed. The rite of *baptism* displays the believer's transposition from a state of defilement and blemish to a state of cleanness and wholeness which is suitable for presentation to the holy one.³⁹ The *satan* and his allied forces counter God's purpose by exalting themselves, fuelling cultural systems of false honour, defiling humans with demonic association and crushing human dignity. *Justification*, formulated by Paul to counter the mistaken Jewish notion that covenantal membership was maintained by adherence to particular ethnic badges, signifies how believers are set in right relationship with the Creator and considered true covenant members with restored glory as a divine gift. *Ethics* is how we reject cultural forms of group engineering and extend honour in social relationships according to God's righteous code of honour, regardless of whatever temporary shame is borne. *Mission* is bearing witness, in both word and deed, to the truth of God's honour now available in Christ.

These theological reflections are clearly preliminary. Of particular interest is further articulating the exact nature and extent of the honour received from God, the ethical implications of bearing divine honour and the means of participating in God's mission of human dignification. To be an agent of God's redemptive purposes in current times, the church can follow in the way of Jesus by articulating and embodying true honour.

³⁹ DeSilva, *Honour, Patronage*, pp. 304–7.