Chapter 4. Understanding the Honour and Shame Dynamic and its Negative Effect on Peter's Readers

One of the ways for Society to reward or punish its members was by using the perceptions of honour and shame. It would appear as if honour and shame were used to coerce conformity to society.[433] Christians were apparently negatively affected by this dynamic. Before we can understand this concept we need to understand the value and working of the principles behind the honour and shame values, hence this discussion. After the inner workings of these values are understood its negative effect on Peter's readers will be discussed.

4.1 Understanding the Honour and Shame Dynamic

According to Malina and others the pivotal value in first-century Mediterranean society was honour and shame.[434] Malina's calling of this value as "pivotal" is treated with circumspection. It would suffice to say that honour and shame as a value had its place amongst other values in the value system of the above mentioned time period and society. Since the acquiring of honour mostly took place in the form of a contest this society was classified, by some,[435] to be agonistic. Honour can roughly be defined as a claim to worth and the social acknowledgement

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[433] Malina (1986:7).

[434] Malina (1981:26-46)(1996:8); Malina and Neyrey (1991:25-65). For consultation on this topic and especially of the role of the female in honour and shame see Campbell (1974:146-147); Delaney (1987:38-41); Gilmore (1982:195); Love (1993:23,27-29); Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:30-31; 77, 213-214, 241-242, 310-311); Michaels (1988:159-160); Peristiany (1974:183-184); Schneider (1971:17-18).

[435] Campbell (1995:17).

of that worth. Their thinking, reasoning and actions were mostly determined by the acclamation of honour and the avoidance of shame. Society at large determines what actions result in honour or shame. Honour denotes an ascent in esteem by society while shame denotes a descent. Whoever society judges to be honourable, is granted additional social status. People are treated in accordance with their social status. Conversely, society can also dishonour and shame people by rejecting them.[436] Therefore, the honour or shame of people is evaluated in the court of public opinion.[437] First century Mediterranean society was a group oriented society. As such, all groups, whether family or larger groups that might even function as the whole nation, have their collective honour. By dishonouring an individual the honour of the whole group to which he belongs is discredited. A female's honour is maintained in sexual purity.[438]

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[436] To read about the inherent power in society to dishonour and shame people cite Bechtler (1996:121); Pitt-Rivers (1966:72).

[437] Pitt-Rivers (1966:23).

[438] If the female was unmarried then virginity would constitute honour. In the case of married woman exclusivity would constitute honour. If a woman were to lose her honour (virginity or exclusivity) her family would also lose its honour, since her purity and exclusiveness are embedded within the honour of a male (whoever the male is who is responsible to protect her honour)(Bechtler 1996:224). It could be a father, husband, brother or son (Campbell 1995:227). On certain levels there was no such thing as individualism because the specific society was group orientated. On other, limited levels we find individualism. Shyness, blushing and modesty at her nakedness would contribute to her "honour". A woman's honour was seen as positive shame. A wife's main avenue of receiving honour was through the bearing of children. In those times there was no such thing as "children". There were only sons and daughters. The more sons and daughters and the more males the more honour (Campbell 1995:213). If one's daughter or wife became immoral, the man publicly denounced her conduct to preserve his honour. Peter did not want Christian wives to be denounced for

As a result of the dynamic with which honour and shame work, honour has two sides. Firstly, as will be discussed below, a person has "something" (e.g. genealogy, extraordinary feat) with which honour can be earned. Secondly, honour only exists in the eyes of those who bestow the honour as a result of their perception of that "something". Therefore, honour and shame are based on perceptions and thus do not exist outside of the group for which honour and shame are an important orientation point. If however, you should change your orientation towards the group or towards the value, the nature of what constitutes and determines honour or shame also changes. Ironically, the people with the most honour determined what constituted honour and shame. This value was therefore dynamic and changed. The reversal of this value was possible with a change in perspective and / or group.

Three ways in which one could earn honour will receive attention:[439]

a.   By Birth.

By birth you were attributed the same amount of honour as the group you were born into. If you were a Benjaminite you had by virtue of your birth more honour than some other tribes. Similarly, a king's son automatically by virtue of his birth, had honour.

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immorality (being Christian could be seen as immoral). Also see the doctoral dissertation of Bechtler (1996:119-125) especially page 124 on the sexual purity of females as the embodiment of the family's shame.

[439]   Campbell (1995:18).

b.   By Public Debate (and Conduct).

Public debate was sparked with a declaration of equality[440] as only equals could compete.[441] The debate then ensued. Debates had no function regarding honour and shame when they were held in private, for the role of the public was the determination of the winner and the subsequent accreditation of honour to the winner and shame to the loser.[442] This was the most common way to make your way (as a group) to the top. The motivation for proper conduct was the accumulation of honour and not money as with our society. The reputation of the individual was bound in the reputation of the group. If the individual out performed the group they would reject him on the grounds of not being group orientated. If the individual's performance was substandard he would be rejected too. Because of this dynamic everyone in the group had the same status, and everyone worked towards the common accumulation of honour. Their reputation (whether individual or group) was thus seated in the performance during daily conduct and public debate. Since the public judged the performance and debates, accumulation of honour was highly dependent on conformity to culturally expected norms.

c.   By Extraordinary Feat.

Sometimes it happened that an extraordinary feat was accomplished by someone that really pleased the powers that be. They could then ascribe honour to the subject in view of their appreciation.

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[440] Dixon (1989:42).

[441] It was entirely possible for a superior person to affront an inferior without losing any honour, however, the reverse was not permitted (Malina 1981:29-36).

[442] For examples of such accreditation see the argumentative dialogues of Jesus with others (Luke 4:22-30; Matt. 22:23-30).

Since one cannot change the group of birth, and since extraordinary feats are extraordinary, most often people used public debate and / or contests to challenge other peoples' honour. The victor gained the loser's honour.

4.2 Understanding the Honour / Shame Contest

Peter seemed to be utilizing such contests in his rhetoric both to answer his readers' antagonists but also to provide his audience with a different way of thinking. Thus we need to understand how such contests worked to help us understand how Peter used them. Hence, this discussion which is just a short overview.[443] According to certain scholars[444] the honour contest had four stages:

a. The Challenge.

The honour contest could only be a contest if both parties perceived it as such. Therefore the contest was initiated by a challenge.

This challenge could be either positive[445] or negative.[446] A contest could only occur between social equals. The risk for the superior contestant, should he lose to an inferior, was just too

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[443] It is not the purpose of this dissertation to exhaust the topic of first century Mediterranean contests. A brief overview is provided simply because it is essential to understand first Peter.

[444] Campbell (1995:18).

[445] Positive challenges can include praise, requests and even gifts.

[446] Negative challenges can take the form of an insult, trick questions or even physical attack.

great, since he stood to lose a whole lot more than if he had lost to an equal. Everybody expected the superior to win, so if he did, he did not really gain anything. But if the superior should lose the loss would be too great. There was therefore no reason to compete with inferior contestants. An example of such a challenge can be found in Matt. 12:38:

> "Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, 'Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.'"

Note that the Pharisees and teachers called Jesus "Teacher". This was done to validate that the playing field was equal. The contest could then commence.

b.   The Response.

The challengee needed to respond to the challenge. The contest only commenced if the challengee took up the challenge. If the challengee stated his superiority and declined the contest on that basis the challenger would lose honour. This could only be done if the public recognized the challengee as in fact being superior.

c.   Public Scrutiny.

The public would then scrutinize the ensuing contest with the purpose of delivering their judgement. They determined who the winner, and subsequent loser was. Society determined the well established rules and values which served as a guideline to the contestants.

d.   The Judgement.

Following the public scrutiny the spectators made their verdict known. The verdict was not

made in the form of a formal declaration but rather in the form of honour and shame. They would grant the winner honour and treat the loser shamefully.[447] The contestants recognized the verdict as the loser usually walked away from the scene. Sometimes they even withdrew from that part of society.

This whole process of challenge, response, public scrutiny and judgement could well be illustrated by Matt. 22:16-22:

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[447] *An example of this type of contest can by found in 2:11-12 were there is a treat in the form of* παροίκοι καὶ παρεπιδήμοι > τὰ ἔθνη. *The perception is an attack on their self-esteem / established order. The reaction comes in the form of a challenge. The reaction is positive rejection -* ἐν ᾧ καταλαλοῦσιν ὑμῶν ὡς κακοποιῶν. *The response or counter reaction is* ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν σαρκικῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν ... τὴν ἀναστροφὴν ὑμῶν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἔχοντες καλήν. *This is followed by the verdict which in this case is:* ἵνα δοξάσωσιν τόν θεὸν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐπισκοπῆς *(honour for the* παροίκοι καὶ παρεπιδήμοι*).*

Declaration of Equality	"They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. '<u>Teacher</u>,' they said, 'we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are.
Challenge by Question	<u>Tell us then</u>, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?'
Jesus Responds	But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, '<u>You hypocrites</u>, why are you trying to <u>trap me?</u> Show me the coin used for paying the tax.' They brought him a denarius,
Jesus' Counter Challenge	and <u>he asked them</u>, 'Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?' 'Caesar's,' they replied. Then he said to them, 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.'
Judgement and Acceptance Thereof	When they heard this, they were amazed. So they <u>left him and went away</u>."

Note once again the declaration of equality in the salutation "teacher". Then came the challenge in the form of a question. Jesus responded. Public scrutiny was illustrated with the words "when they heard this, they were ...." The judgement was in favour of Jesus since they were amazed at His answer. The challengers acknowledged the judgement by leaving the scene. The above will suffice to serve as illustration of honour and shame contests.[448]

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[448] Other examples of similar contests between Jesus and challengers can be found in

4.3   The Negative Effect of the Honour and Shame Dynamic on Peter's Readers

The honour and shame dynamic gave power to the powerful, as the people with honour determined the criteria of what constitutes honour and shame. It therefore became a powerful tool in the hands of society at large to force compliance. When groups did not comply with what society demanded then this dynamic also became a tool to punish as this dynamic had two sides, both honour and shame. And this, amongst other things, seems to be exactly what society used against Peter's readers, as can be detected from the fact that honour and shame vocabulary that stemmed from the semantic field of the honour and shame contest, permeates first Peter.[449] If we consider only the most obvious terms from the above mentioned field we find:

a.   The δοξ- root fourteen times (1:7, 8, 11, 21, 24; 2:12; 4:11, 13, 14, 16; 5:1, 4, 10, 11).

b.   The τιμ- root six times (1:7 [twice], 19; 2:7, 17; 3:7).

c.   ἔπαινον twice (1:7; 2:14).

d.   And ἀναγεννάω (1:3; 23).

Matt. 22:23-33 and Matt. 22:34-46.

[449] For the arguments concerning the origins of the honour and shame dynamic in the Mediterranean, and for the expounding thereof see Peristiany (1966); Schneider (1971); Davis (1977); Boissevain (1979); Gilmore (1982; 1987); Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers (1992). For the state of the discipline of Mediterranean anthropological studies see Gilmore (1982; 1987). For a synthesis of this material and to articulate an honour / shame model for interpreters of the New Testament see Malina (1993); Malina and Neyrey (1991).

Words to the opposite effect (shaming and dishonouring) that accompany the above quoted words appear several times. Most notably we find:

a.   καταισχύνω *twice (2:6; 3:16)*.

b.   αἰσχύνομαι *once (4:16)*.

The theory[450] is presented[451] that the conflict and subsequent suffering in first Peter can best be seen in the light of the honour contest. Thus, by becoming a Christian you were committing a shameful act seen from a societal perspective. Because Christians were viewed as shameful they suffered, as they were robbed of their honour by society. A further negative spinoff to the loss of honour by Christians was the effect thereof on God's honour. Christians saw themselves as children of God (1:14; 3:6). If the children were shameful their shamefulness negatively impacted on God's honour since they were interconnected.

The verbal hostility directed at the intended readers of first Peter did not only reflect personal insult but rather encompassed a whole lot more as it removed the public respect upon which their existence in society depended.[452] Goppelt designates this as <u>bürgerliche Ehre</u> (public respect).[453]

We have seen examples of honour and shame vocabulary in first Peter. An example of such a contest can be found in 2:12-14. We will see later on how Peter used them to his advantage.

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[450]   Campbell (1995:38) himself makes the acknowledgment that it is only a theory and not a proven fact.

[451]   Campbell (1995:38-42).

[452]   Goppelt (1978:39).

[453]   Goppelt (1978:39).

This section (2:12-15) could serve as an example of an honour and shame contest because the challenge to the believers' honour emanated from the gentiles καταλαλέω (defaming) the addressees by accusing them of being κακοποιῶν (wrongdoers). The fact that ὑμῶν is possessive caused Peter's appeal to be concerned with the social situation of his readers. We know that we are dealing specifically with an honour and shame contest because the emphasis here was on visible conduct that was to be adjudged as καλή (good) even by non-believers in response to καταλαλέω. The issue at stake here was whether the addressees' ἀναστροφὴν (behaviour or conduct) conformed to the ideals of society.[454] Although the kind of conduct was not specified it would seem that the accusers were contrasting two kinds of conducts. The one met the approval of society whilst the other would be met by punishment from the Emperor's prefect (2:14). Peter asked his readers to do good in order that commendation rather than censure would be the result. This would silence the accusers finding their accusations groundless. The counter response by Peter on the καταλαλέω was not only limited to good behaviour but extended into name calling. This was done by means of a negative designation of those outside of their Christian fellowship as τὰ ἔθνη "the Gentiles" (4:3). Traditionally this term referred to non-Jews but Peter then transferred this term to non-Christians.[455] The subject of καταλαλοῦσιν (2:12) is not indefinite or impersonal. The antagonists were the "Gentiles" of the previous clause, in other words, the non-Christians. Furthermore, the accusers were called ἀγνωσία, although not in a derogatory manner but possibly putting them in their place.[456]

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[454] The ideals of society is indeed different from society to society since each society determines and enforces its own set of criteria.

[455] Michaels (1988:117).

[456] To read on the interpretation of this word (ἀγνωσία) see Michaels (1988:128).

Thus we find that society used the honour and shame dynamic to affect Peter's readers negatively. We will still see how these contests were used by society to further negatively affect Christians. Since Peter responded to these contests and used them to reverse the very roles that society had created, we will not be dealing with them here but rather when we deal with Peter's solution to such perceptions.

It was seen that suffering was probably both societal and political. The dissertation went ahead and looked at the political scene followed by the broader social scene (macro level). It was seen how the problems developed. As far as society was concerned it would seem as though they used honour and shame to the detriment of the Christians. Since honour and shame formed part of societal thinking it is not surprising, as will be shown, that Peter also made use of this dynamic in his solution. Before Peter's solution is discussed the household scene, which is part of the narrower social scene (micro level), will be examined. This is the last section of problems that will be discussed.