

# Shame



*Alison Skaggs/Shame*

*O loving wisdom of our God!  
When all was sin and shame,  
a second Adam to the fight  
and to the rescue came.*

*'Praise to the Holiest in the Height'*

## Introduction

*Shame is the most toxic of emotions, a stealthy, silent, steadfast poison that keeps people suffering and sick. It is the thing that has the power to destroy perfectly normal, decent humans, the thing that stops them from reaching out and seeking the help they so desperately need.*

*Shame is anger's far more dangerous cousin, insidious, invisible, often lurking behind impressively put together fronts.*

Caroline Flack, the Love Island host, hanged herself after facing trial for common assault on her boyfriend, even though her boyfriend did not support the trial. Danny Cipriani, an ex-partner, said that she died of 'embarrassment and shame'.

Flack herself said in an unpublished Instagram post, 'I've accepted shame and toxic opinions on my life for over 10 years and yet told myself it's all part of my job. No complaining.... The problem with brushing things under the carpet is they are still there and one day someone is going to lift that carpet up and all you are going to feel is shame and embarrassment'.

## What is shame?

Shame is an intensely painful feeling which comes from some thought or action which lowers self-esteem, deepens social separation and eats away at one's sense of integrity and value. It is categorically different from embarrassment which is typically temporary. Shame might arise from doing or saying something improper, stupid or ridiculous, something dishonorable or injurious to others, or arise in response to actions done by another person. Shame can be different from guilt in that one can feel shame if wrongly accused or if no wrong has been committed. Shame can also be felt if people believe that a person has committed shameful actions, even if they have not. Guilt carries a feeling of responsibility for transgression and may be accompanied by remorse and a desire to make restitution. Shame is more intangible and can run deeper and more damagingly than guilt. It can be difficult to shake off or expunge shame and it may permanently affect a person's mental health, decision-making, and development. Shame can attach to communities, people groups or institutions, tainting them, marginalizing them or making them no-go areas, or disenfranchising them entirely. This is seen in many societal structures in which people become 'untouchable' or 'dangerous' or 'invisible' such as the Dalits ('the broken, or scattered ones) in India<sup>1</sup> or the blacksmiths and potters in Dowayo culture.<sup>2</sup>

However, a person or a community can seek to shame another or others.<sup>3</sup> This can be a dominating act of power over others, or a way of forcing people to behave in shamed manner. Shame can stop victims of

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, <http://www.edinburgh2010.org/en/study-themes/main-study-themes/foundations-for-mission/mission-at-and-from-the-margins.html>

<sup>2</sup> Nigel Barley, (2009 ed) *Symbolic Structures: An Exploration of the Culture of the Dowayos*, Cambridge University Press

<sup>3</sup> So in the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 people have undertaken 'quarantine-shaming' -calling out people who are deemed to have contravened government instructions about staying at home or social distancing. See, for example, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-52022743> and <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-52230081>. Similarly, a woman who fell asleep was shamed for not appearing for the 'clap for carers' Thursday night ritual. <https://metro.co.uk/2020/04/26/exhausted-mum-named-shamed-sleeping-clap-carers->

abuse from speaking out, so it can be a way of silencing someone, or perpetuating abuse. While 'calling out' or seeking to shame others, either by words or actions, may be a way of forcing guilt and wrongdoing to surface, it may also feature in acts of revenge, fear or anger and cause psychological and long-lasting wounds.

## **Shame and disgrace in modern society**

We live in a society in which shame and shaming are particularly acute. Conversely, to dominate others, people must act without displaying a sense of shame, acting 'shamelessly'. However, bullying may be a reaction to deep-seated shame or a way of keeping people at bay by shaming them.

For many people, shame attends loss and disempowerment. A person may feel ashamed of losing their job, of marriage breakdown and divorcing, of falling into poverty, having to ask for help, using a foodbank, or even going into hospital, or being bereaved.<sup>4</sup> People may feel shame at being trapped within addiction or because of their personal circumstances, sexual orientation, body shape, school performance or life choices. Sometimes, as with Caroline Flack, death becomes preferable to daily living under a burden of shame. People may kill themselves before trial where their deeds will be exposed, or because they cannot live with the way they look or feel. Shame can be magnified by the anticipation of public opinion or the machinery of the justice system. Some people may feel that the experience of shame is worse than being held accountable or examined by others.

Shaming as an activity, however, is a disagreeable theme in our modern society. We see this particularly with social media. People one disagrees with can be shamed by alleging ignorance, stupidity, or wrongdoing and the act of shaming can turn into persistent trolling. Divisive issues are not debated or shared with sympathy and politeness, but simply used as weapons to shame others into silence or into changing their views.

Power dynamics are associated with embarrassment and shame, so calling out someone publicly for being overweight is 'fat-shaming'. Revenge porn, or sex video sharing is a particularly nasty way of hurting

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[12611114/?fbclid=IwAR3IG8irVyZ94r0mgujclLNxrBn7gdaPY4V1eNMEPxavSoveiXOyKksx110](https://www.facebook.com/12611114/?fbclid=IwAR3IG8irVyZ94r0mgujclLNxrBn7gdaPY4V1eNMEPxavSoveiXOyKksx110). Others have been shouted at for going the 'wrong way' in supermarkets or accidentally stepping over 2m distance lines. Fear and heightened anxiety have an outlet in communal shaming.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the Rev Sally Coleman writes of coming to terms with being being divorced: 'I am writing because I am fed up of living with overwhelming feelings of shame that I have to keep a secret, and because bringing them out into the open will show me and others that while I might be a bit battered and broken that shame does not have a place in my life.' [https://eternalfootsteps.wordpress.com/2016/02/29/on-being-a-mis-fit-the-power-of-shame-divorce-and-other-things/?fb\\_action\\_ids=10153287577436583&fb\\_action\\_types=news.publishes&fb\\_source=other\\_multiline&action\\_object\\_map=%5B1077568208962541%5D&action\\_type\\_map=%5B%22news.publishes%22%5D&action\\_ref\\_map=%5B%5D](https://eternalfootsteps.wordpress.com/2016/02/29/on-being-a-mis-fit-the-power-of-shame-divorce-and-other-things/?fb_action_ids=10153287577436583&fb_action_types=news.publishes&fb_source=other_multiline&action_object_map=%5B1077568208962541%5D&action_type_map=%5B%22news.publishes%22%5D&action_ref_map=%5B%5D)

someone through shame about nakedness, invading privacy, making public what ought to be private and reducing a person to extreme vulnerability and pitching them into perpetual and irreducible shame. Trolling and hurling abuse publicly through social media (such as that experienced by Caroline Flack) can be a particularly horrible way of seeking to shame and to dominate through words. Shaming on Twitter is called 'cancelling' – a means of obliterating the person's presence, of saying that they do not, or should not, exist or have a voice.

But we also talk about disgrace and a 'fall from grace'. This suggests that shame attaching from actions and behaviour can change a person's status and standing in their professions and community. There is a direct relationship between honour (precedence and good standing) and its opposite. Departing from cultural boundaries and unwritten rules can affect not only individuals but also families, family networks and whole communities. Honour can be related to power and is often tied up with female purity or obedience. Loss of honour can be so powerfully felt it can lead to permanent exile from the family or to violence: better dead than dishonoured. Rape victims in honour-shame cultures and communities will often not report the violence done to them because of the dishonour brought upon their families.<sup>5</sup>

Shame and disgrace can also taint and ruin good things in other people's lives. For example, many people have been deeply upset by revelations of sexual transgression by people otherwise previously admired, respected and whose works for charity (and indeed for God) have been mired by these revelations of atrocious and deeply damaging behaviour. When Jimmy Savile and Rolf Harris were convicted of being sexual predators, people who had been recipients of their charitable activities simply did not know what to think about their own memories and sometimes felt shame themselves at having enjoyed meeting them or having received money from them. The L'Arche community is still reeling from revelations about its founder Jean Vanier. Others, who loved and revered Jean Vanier, are finding it hard to accept what this means for their own trust, and ministry. Sam Wells, writes, 'It turns out that while he was doing so many beautiful and true things, he was also doing many deeply ugly and profoundly shameful things'.<sup>6</sup> The ability to dominate, coerce and silence victims of abuse is greatly helped by the implanting of shame in the victims and this has ramifications for the whole community. Irene Tuffrey-Wijne wrote of the concerns about the transfer of shame, 'Learning of Jean's sexually and spiritually abusive behaviour makes us feel deeply betrayed, sickened, confused, ashamed (how could this happen under our noses? Are we ourselves tainted by implication?). Distressed beyond words for the women who suffered...' and further, in her blog post of 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2020<sup>2</sup>, 'Breaking Bad News' she described how the community has shared its way of telling

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<sup>5</sup> For example: 'Asian rape victim highlights 'shame of hidden child abuse'' <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-48622434>

<sup>6</sup> Sam Wells, 'Tell me it isn't true' online at <https://www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org/tell-me-it-isnt-true/?fbclid=IwAR0ZyCSKHjRrainZ4jk3GsrjktjUll4SrnszUIKzF-vJMWxvojG-GRQSAWM>

the community about what is now said about Jean Vanier and allowing them to express their emotions and talk about them in a way that is set up to try and prevent the transfer of shame.<sup>7</sup> L'Arche has to deal with this shame: 'We are grateful for your messages and supportive comments during this sad time. We hope that we can remain united in our mission to build a world where we celebrate the unique gifts of every individual.'

Learning from Tuffrey-Wijne's example of careful inclusion and truth-telling is important, because we often do not have good mechanisms to handle shame and disgrace when the fallout affects the faith and love others have put in those disgraced. Newspapers love a good 'fall from grace' story as they run stories about 'how are the mighty fallen' but as Bryony Gordon notes in her article (as a person who has herself experienced a shaming, chaotic life) 'there, but for the grace of God...'

Some modern politicians (and others) however, seem to be able to act entirely without shame, irrespective of whether they are lying or acting purely in self-interest. The ability to be unashamed despite immorality seems to be an important attribute irrespective of the damage done to marginalized people or communities (Jewish people, immigrants, women, LGBTQI+ people etc). For example, a row about a political adviser who was reported to have opined that black people have inferior intelligence compared with white people, led to stony silence from the government and those who appointed him. Prince Andrew did himself huge reputational damage in an interview where he appeared to have no idea of the impact on victims of sexual assault, referring merely to 'unfortunate' behaviour. To be unashamed might mean to have the courage of one's convictions (it is, after all, a Christian conviction slogan), but it might also mean a refusal to be accountable or a refusal to pay attention to other people's feelings or opinions.

## Shame in Scripture and the anthropology of shame

Shame is a recurrent and powerful thread in Scripture and is related to ethical holiness and to falling out of favour with God, to fall from grace or to become a 'dis-grace'. Shame is a marker for the presence of the corrupting power of sin as damaging to spiritual health and creating offence against God. So for example, public nakedness occasions shame. Adam and Eve, living in bliss, are not aware of their nakedness and feel no shame (Genesis 2.25). After they eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they become self-aware, and aware of each other's bodies. Exposure of the body and its sexual contexts becomes a metaphor for disordered existence as desire is disengaged from obedience and holiness.<sup>8</sup> Adam

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.tuffrey-wijne.com/?p=767&fbclid=IwAR1bA1sM8FsZCY47DB2ghWv86tNv15TEtNhCs61CE1x9jRrKR5wmU\\_jWDa0](http://www.tuffrey-wijne.com/?p=767&fbclid=IwAR1bA1sM8FsZCY47DB2ghWv86tNv15TEtNhCs61CE1x9jRrKR5wmU_jWDa0)

<sup>8</sup> Robert Alter points out that in the Hebrew Scriptures, 'to see the nakedness of' a person can be interchangeable with 'to have sex with'. Hence in the episode of Ham seeing his father Noah's drunken nakedness in Genesis 9.20-26 there

and Eve fall away from God when they experience this shame and seek to deal with it by covering themselves up. This shame and attempt to hide it accompanies the loss of Eden.

To be physically and spiritually ashamed is to find oneself outside the holy community; in dis-grace. However, Robert Alter has pointed out in relation to Leviticus 4.3 that this 'transgression' could happen unwittingly and without malice, but which would have to be recognised, understood and repaired:

'The inadvertent "offense" does not at all imply an ethical transgression but rather the unwitting violation of a prohibition...which, in ancient Near Eastern terms, has the consequence of generating physical pollution that must be cleansed'.<sup>9</sup>

Leviticus therefore offers the holy community different kinds of potential for dealing with shameful experiences, especially around sexual behaviour and bodily functions (eg Lev 18.7), identifying and discharging shame and also reflecting on what these mean by comparing and contrasting with surrounding tribal behaviours. God's call to ethical holiness demands higher standards of care around behaviour otherwise the community's religious distinctiveness would become less acute.

Anthropologically, and in much broader contexts, both modern and ancient communities have often created rituals and processes for the containment of 'pollutants' to their societies and ways of discharging the attendant shame and offence against supernatural powers. Yet these also persist in our modern world but have in places become entrenched into ideas of pollution and danger only, without the tools for reconciliation and repair. This means that things like 'period-shaming' in parts of the world is acute. Recent news reports have demonstrated the refusal to allow girls to cook or even go to school while menstruating. To be considered an object of pollution or contamination through the body is a shame placed on the most vulnerable, - the sick, and women especially. This is problematic in the sense that the relationship especially between sex and shame is embedded in community consciousness and the effects of this are still echoing in some religions and religious behaviour today.

To return to the Hebrew Scriptures, we see a good example of reconciliation and repair in the description of the scapegoat:

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may be a coded reference to some sort of sexual or other physical violation which occasions the curse. Revelation 16.15 says 'Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed.' And compare the 'shameful nakedness' of Revelation 3.18.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Alter, (2004) *The Five Books of Moses*, (Norton) commentary on Lev 4 p 556.

‘Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of someone designated for the task. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a barren region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness’. (Leviticus 16:21-22).

As the goat carries the sins (and the shame before God) of the community away from the people, so they are freed from shame’s spiritual effects and their relationship with God is uninterrupted.<sup>10</sup> This is important because the ancient community recognised the spiritual and psychological effects of shame and the Talmud says that its pain is like a physical wound.<sup>11</sup>

Scapegoating, where something or someone is ritually imbued with the shame of the people is still found in many cultures and in language use is often pejorative. But as in Leviticus, some scapegoat rituals are cyclic, and the ‘shaming’ phase is followed by reconciliation and forgiveness. In some small village areas of West Africa for example, a person or persons who have been discovered acting shamefully (eg in acts of adultery) are taken by the village to the river and covered with the blood of a dog.<sup>12</sup> The dog’s blood is understood as the most shameful degradation of those individuals. The shamed ones are then ritually cleansed in the river (a bit like baptism) and then readmitted to the village, restored and forgiven. Their shame is over and can no longer attach to them. They are expected not to sin again.

Similarly, in some communities in Cameroon, the first menstruation of girls and male adolescence before circumcision are considered shameful and must have rituals to overcome the shame of transition from the innocence of childhood to the experience of adulthood. Girls must stay in a hut during their first menstruation and boys have to be similarly segregated before their circumcision. The symbolic language is of the ‘wet’ becoming ‘dry’. ‘Dry’ equates to ‘beautiful’ and ‘pure’. Rituals, chants, prayers and offerings are designed to offset shame, to prevent the shame tainting the prospects of the community and its dependence on harvest, and to allow the young people to re-enter the villages without shame.<sup>13</sup>

All this suggests that ‘taboo’ and shame are closely linked anthropologically. Contravening taboos is deeply shameful, and much ritual, law and penalty surrounds the idea of attaching shame, avoiding shame and

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Alter talks about the ‘timely man’ of Lev 16.21 as someone chosen especially for the time and the task (Five Books of Moses, p 614). This perhaps suggests the significance of the liminal space between the acknowledgement of shame and the departure of shame. The timely man is the one who carries out the ritual for reconciliation and is the witness to its efficacy.

<sup>11</sup> Bava Metziah 58b. To shame another is like shedding that person’s blood.

<sup>12</sup> Similar perhaps to the sprinkling of blood in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur.

<sup>13</sup> Nigel Barley, as above.

dispersing shame. This perhaps explains why the experience of shame can be so powerfully debilitating and so difficult to remove. And perhaps this also shows why we find shameless people so concerning and disturbing.

In Isaiah 53 3-12, however, we see a profound vision of the human scapegoat, in which the 'timely man' in Robert Alter's phrase is now the carrier of the shame as well as the witness to reconciliation:

He was despised and rejected by others;  
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;  
and as one from whom others hide their faces  
he was despised, and we held him of no account.

Surely he has borne our infirmities  
and carried our diseases;  
yet we accounted him stricken,  
struck down by God, and afflicted.  
But he was wounded for our transgressions,  
crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,  
and by his bruises we are healed.  
All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have all turned to our own way,  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,  
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.  
By a perversion of justice he was taken away.  
Who could have imagined his future?  
For he was cut off from the land of the living,  
stricken for the transgression of my people.  
They made his grave with the wicked



and his tomb with the rich,  
although he had done no violence,  
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain.  
When you make his life an offering for sin,  
he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days;  
through him the will of the Lord shall prosper.  
Out of his anguish he shall see light;  
he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.  
The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,  
and he shall bear their iniquities.  
Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,  
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;  
because he poured out himself to death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors;  
yet he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors.

The prophetic picture of a suffering servant of God is one who bears the shame on behalf of others. It is interesting how much detail is supplied. The servant is rejected/despised/stricken/afflicted/crushed. Physical wounds and psychological rejection are conflated in a torrent of ontological and existential battery. Yet in carrying the sins of the people, the object of shame and rejection is yet rescued and lifted up by God, 'out of his anguish he shall see light'. It is not surprising then that this passage has historically been seen as prophetic of Christ (though may actually refer to Hezekiah).

What is perhaps more pertinent, however, is both the interrogation of the way a person can be made to be an object of shame, but also the fact that that shame does not cut a person off from God's seeing their heart. The servant is known to be innocent, and their 'real' self is known to God. To this extent, we can see the theological roles of judgement, in which God's knowledge of the person is what matters, not what the 'world' may have done to them and also the 'vindication' themes of saints and martyrs who were (and still are) put to shameful and humiliating deaths, but restored in glory by God. Missiologically however, this also might mean that the *missio Dei* includes an eschatological reconciliation in which shame is removed and suffering people are restored. Revelation 21.4 speaks of God wiping the tears from eyes and Revelation 7.14 of the holy ones having washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. Revelation 22.14 suggests that

this washing leads to participation and joy: 'They will have the right to go into the city through the gates. They will have the right to eat the fruit of the tree of life'. Those still burdened with sin and shame remain outside the city gates.

If ultimate freedom from shame is the reconciling work of God, then Christians are under an obligation to take part in that same reconciling work, *releasing* people from the shame put upon them, not adding to it. All of this links to idea of sin and its expiation and the hypocrisy of pointing out sin and shame in others without looking at one's own behaviour (cf Matt 7.5).

## The Church

So if releasing people from shame is something we are called to do, it is all the more distressing that the Church is not immune to causing people to feel shame. Indeed one of the barriers to welcome and inclusion is one of righteousness over those perceived not to make the grade, who have fallen from God's grace and who cannot apparently, whatever they do, find their way back from their shameful state. Shame can be attached to being gay, to being divorced, to being childless, to being old, to being not sufficiently believing, ignorant of faith, being doubters and backsliders or a host of other sins and guilts. Trying to be a part of a Christian community under a burden of shame can be spiritually disabling and destructive and ultimately intolerable. Those made to feel ashamed and incapable of acceptance often simply give up and leave. Worse, feeling the burden of shame may drive people away from their faith altogether. Shame has the capacity to stunt any possibility of spiritual growth and pushes people away from God.

Yet Jesus acts to expose and relieve disabling shame. The Gerasene demoniac, driven out because of his disorder and nakedness is restored to the community clothed and in his right mind. He now has nothing to be ashamed of and becomes a proclaimer of God's grace towards him and towards all. The woman taken in adultery is shamed by the community as she is to be stoned to death, but Jesus saves her and nullifies her shame by presenting her back to herself as uncondemned. Jesus's healing miracles take away the shame and stigma of uncontrolled bleeding, disease, and incapacity. As Rev Dr Mandy Ford has said in a meditation on 'Dirty' bodies for Ash Wednesday, 'The clearest example of this, though there are many, is the incident when he is touched in the crowd by the woman who has been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. As a result, she has been ritually unclean, avoided by her pious neighbours. In desperation, she reaches out to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. This action does not contaminate him, but heals her. She is not only healed in her body, but we might hope, healed from the effects of social

isolation and shame.<sup>14</sup> In seeking out vulnerable, weak, disabled or hopeless people, Jesus goes to the heart of shame and shaming, raising people out of the burden of shame and setting people free to witness to and to glorify God. Conversely, Jesus also addresses the shame of the wealthy, such as tax collectors, allowing them to make reparation for corrupt practices.

Yet Jesus is not above calling others a dis-grace, reserving this for those who prevent people worshipping God or turning worship into a mockery. He calls out Pharisees for hypocrisy; he breaks up the tables of the money-changers. Those are the people who should be ashamed of themselves, but who are not.

*Lord of the cross of shame,  
set my cold heart aflame  
with love for you, my saviour and my master;  
who on that lonely day  
bore all my sins away,  
and saved me from the judgement and disaster.  
Michael Seward*

Ultimately, the cross is an instrument of shame and its use is to pass on that shame to all who see the crucified dying in agony. So Jesus takes upon himself the full weight of shame, powerlessness and nakedness in dying on the cross in the sight of all who gather or pass by. We perhaps do not pause to reflect enough on the transferred shame attaching to the disciples of Jesus at his arrest, trial and crucifixion. No wonder they went into denial and hiding. Yet in the resurrection appearances Jesus is clothed and in his right mind. In appearing to his disciples he sets them free from the shame of his death, since that death is overcome in his resurrection. Pentecost is unashamed proclamation. Witness to the risen Christ is therefore a marker of being unashamed before God no matter who you are or what shame you have borne. Jesus also continues to bear the marks of the shame (shown to Thomas) but these are transfigured to become symbols of victory over 'shameful' death.

So if Jesus has conquered shame, why do we still try to shame others and call them a disgrace?

*O the bitter shame and sorrow  
That a time could ever be  
When I let the Saviour's pity*

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<sup>14</sup> <https://viamedia.news/2020/02/27/dirty-bodies-dust-and-ashes/?fbclid=IwAR3eiTdRI3zgVuCi5NCZnQvAAJptwHBymu3g5wIrUfKkDLHsX60PVqJ6Pss>

*Plead in vain, and proudly answered:*

*All of self and none of thee!*

*Theodore Monod*

## **What can we do about shame?**

Shame is a missiological issue because of its ability to push people out of community and because of its role of dis-gracing people. We need to be alert to the lessons of shame, the way it silences people and the harm it does. Yet shame has a lesson to teach us; that we should not assume people are above sin and transgression, but that everyone falls short and sometimes in ways which brings shame on the Christian faith and on the Church. It is not enough to point the finger, or just think about shame in terms of reputational risk, but to create a missiological discourse of care for the vulnerable, means to apology and lament, an understanding of shared pain and sorrow in the face of shame and a language of hope and clear-eyed reconciliation, in which people who are crippled by the sense of themselves as less than human or of less worth, are lifted up, heard, seen and restored. Missiology is not immune to its own shame, given the history of missions and the lessons which have had to be learned from colonialism and inappropriate, culturally insensitive behaviour. Reverse mission and the global voices of theology offer us the chance to own that troubled history and also to be released from it. The grace of God is always available to the disgraced. The burden of shame can be taken away. We are not ashamed to confess Christ crucified, who died in the place of ultimate shame and whose wounds are transfigured. By his stripes we are healed.