Honor and shame

Evans, C.A.

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Honor and Shame

(Honor and Group Values)

Homoeroticism. See Adultery, Divorce.

Homoerotic Intercourse. See Adultery, Divorce.

Honorable Circle Desser. See Holy Men, Jewish.

Honor and Shame

Honor refers to the public acknowledgment of a person's worth, granted on the basis of how fully that individual embodies qualities and behaviors valued by the group. First-century Mediterranean people were oriented from early childhood to seek honor and avoid disgrace, meaning that they would be sensitive to public recognition or reproach. Where different cultures with different values existed side by side, it became extremely important to insulate one's own group members against the desire for honor or avoidance of dishonor in the eyes of outsiders, since only by so doing could one remain wholly committed to the distinctive culture and values of the group. This struggle is particularly evident in the NT, as church leaders seek to affirm the honor of Christians on the basis of their adherence to Jesus while insulating them from the disapproval they face from non-Christian Jews and Gentiles alike.

1. Honor and Group Values
2. Honor Discourse Among Competing Cultures
3. Honor Discourse in the Early Church

1. Honor and Group Values.

A person born into the first-century Mediterranean world, whether Gentile or Jewish, was trained from childhood to seek honor and to avoid disgrace. Honor is essentially the affirmation of one's worth by one's peers and society, awarded on the basis of the individual's ability to embody the virtues and attributes that his or her society values. Certain of these attributes are ascribed and are frequently beyond the individual's control (e.g., birth into a powerful or wealthy family); other attributes or virtues, such as piety, courage and reliability, are accessible to all, and individuals will strive to achieve honor by pursuing them (Malina and Neyrey 1991b). The definitions of which behaviors are honorable and which disgraceful vary among cultures and over time, but honor remains an abiding concern. In most cultures, male honor and fe-

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male honor are defined differently, with shame (in the sense of modesty and chastity) being presented as a primary female virtue (cf. Sir 26:10-16; 42:9-12; 4 Macc. 18:6-8; Thucydides Hist. 2.45.2; Moxnes 1993).

Honor and dishonor represent the primary means of social control in the ancient Mediterranean world (Aristotle Rhet. 2.6.26: "there are many things which [people] either do or do not do owing to the feeling of shame which [their neighbors] inspire"). A society upholds its values by rewarding with greater degrees of honor those who embody those values in greater degrees. Dishonor represents a group's disapproval of a member based on his or her lack of conformity with those values deemed essential for the group's continued existence. Since people are reared in a world where honor is of great importance to a person's sense of worth, the social group is in a strong position to motivate conformity among its individual members. An individual has self-respect on the basis of his or her perception of how fully he or she has embodied the culture's ideals (Williams); that individual has honor on the basis of the society's recognition of that person's conformity with essential values (Pit-Rivers).

The threat of dishonor supports a society's prohibitions of socially disruptive behavior. For example, *adultery—the violation of the sanctity and peace of a bond that is foundational to society—often carries the threat of disgrace (cf. Prov 6:32-33). Agreement and unity, essential values for the orderly life of a city, are lauded as honorable, while dissensions and strife bring the threat of disgrace for the city (cf. Dio Chrysostom Or. 48.5-6; Phil 1:27—2:4). Similarly, courage in battle, necessary for a city's survival, wins honor and lasting remembrance (cf. Thucydides Hist. 2.35-42). In a society that has as its basic building block the patron-client relationship (Seneca Ben. 1.4.2; see Patronage), the demonstration of gratitude to one's patron is supported by the threat of irrevocable dishonor and therefore exclusion from future patronage (Dio Chrysostom Or. 31; Heb 6:4-8; 10:26-31).

Honor becomes the umbrella that extends over the set of behaviors, commitments and attitudes that preserve a given culture and society; individuals reared with a desire for honor will seek the good of the larger group, willingly embodying the group's values, as the path to self-fulfillment. It is the first principle in discussions of ethics, for "the honorable is cherished for no other reason than because it is honorable" (Seneca Ben. 4.16.2). Ancient collections of advice, from Pseudo-Isocrates' Ad Demoniacam to the more familiar Proverbs, label actions either with the positive sanction "noble" or with the negative sanction "disgraceful." By such means, the author sets before the reader a model of existence that acts always in the best interest of the public trust, honors the established authorities on which the state rests (gods, parents, laws) and restrains the expenditure of resources on that which brings pleasure only to the self and not benefit to others as well. Those who follow such a model are promised society's approval and affirmation, that is, honor.

Greco-Roman manuals on *rhetoric attest to the importance of honor and to the way an orator would play on the audience's desire for honor in order to achieve persuasion (deSilva 1995a; 1995b; 1999). An audience could be won to the orator's recommended course of action (deliberative rhetoric) if the orator demonstrated that it would lead to honor or to greater honor than an alternative course being promoted by a rival (Aristotle Rhet. 1.9.35-36; Eth. Nic. 2.3.7; Quintilian Inst. Orat. 3.7.28; 3.8.1; Pseudo-Cicero Rhet. Ad Herennium 3.2.3). Conversely, showing how a certain course of action would result in dishonor created a strong deterrent. Another rhetorical genre, epideictic rhetoric, was associated with the praise and censure of particular individuals or groups. Orators reinforced society's values by holding up as praiseworthy those people who had exemplified a particular value. Hearing others praised—that is, honored—led the hearers to recommit themselves to the virtue or behavior that led to praise. Similarly, hearing some person censured or reproached would lead hearers to beware of falling into those behaviors that led to reproach and loss of honor. The two genres often work together, as orators, including the NT authors, use examples to illustrate the benefits of following or dangers of departing from the course they promote.

2. Honor Discourse Among Competing Cultures.

The first-century Mediterranean was far from monolithic: within a dominant Romanized Hellenistic culture, one found the ethnic subculture of Judaism, *philosophical schools and the
Christian minority culture, among others. All of these groups defined what was honorable or dishonorable in different ways. Even if groups agreed that piety was an essential virtue and component of honor, different groups defined piety quite differently (respect for the traditional gods and the emperor; worship of the God of Israel through observance of Torah; worship of the God of Jews and Gentiles through obedience to Jesus). Even within groups, there would be differences (e.g., Paul’s conflicts with Christian Judaizers).

In such a world, it became essential to define carefully who constituted one’s group of significant others—those people whose approval or disapproval mattered—and to insulate group members from concern about the honor or dishonor in which they were held by outsiders (Seneca Const. 13.2.5; Epictetus Ench. 24.1; Moxnes 1998). If one seeks status in the eyes of the larger society, one will seek to maintain the values and fulfill the expectations of the dominant (pagan) culture. If one has been brought into a minority culture (e.g., a philosophical school or a voluntary association like the early Christian community) or has been born into an ethnic subculture (such as Judaism), then one’s adherence to the group’s values and ideals will remain strong only if one redefines the constituency of one’s circle of significant others. The court of reputation must be limited to group members, who will support the group values in their grants of honor and censure (Plato Gorg. 46C-47D). Including some suprasocial entity in this group (e.g., God, reason or nature) offsets the minority (and therefore deviant) status of the group’s opinion. The opinion of one’s fellow group members is thus fortified by and anchored in a higher court of reputation, whose judgments are of greater importance and more lasting consequence than the opinion of the disapproving majority or the dominant culture (Plato Gorg. 526D-527A; Epictetus Diss. 1.30.1; Sir 2:15-17; 23:18-19; Wis 2:12—3:5; 4:16—5:8; 4 Macc 13.3, 17; 17:5). Both Greco-Roman philosophers and Jewish authors routinely point to the opinion of God as a support for the minority culture’s values. Both admonish group members to remain committed to the group’s values, for that is what God looks for and honors in a person.

Where the values and commitments of a minority culture differ from those of a dominant or other alternative culture, members of that minority culture must be moved to disregard the opinion of nonmembers about their behavior (Seneca Const. 11.2—12.1; Epictetus Diss. 1.29.50-54). All groups will seek to use honor and disgrace to enforce the values of their particular culture, so each group must insulate its members from the pull of the opinion of nonmembers. Those who do not hold to the values and the construals of reality embodied in the group are excluded from the court of reputation as shameless or errant—approval or disapproval in their eyes must count for nothing, as it rests on error, and the representative of the minority culture can look forward to the vindication of his or her honor when the extent of that error is revealed (e.g., at a last judgment; 4 Macc 11.4-6; 12:11-13).

When, for example, the dominant Greco-Roman culture holds a group like the Jews in contempt, the effect is a constant pressure upon individual Jews to give up their Jewishness and join in those behaviors that will then be greeted as honorable by the members of the dominant culture. Jewish authors will urge their fellow Jews to set their hearts on the opinion of the congregation and the opinion of God and so be able to resist the pull of the Gentile world.

Members of this clearly defined court of reputation must have frequent and meaningful interaction within the group. They must encourage one another to pursue group values and ideals and honor one another on that basis. Those who begin to show signs of slackening in their commitment to the values of the group out of a growing regard for the opinion of outsiders must be made to feel ashamed by the members of the group and thus pulled back from assimilation. Such people will need reminders that the realm outside the group is also outside the sphere of God’s approval (Moxnes 1998). Encouragement within the group must outweigh the discouragement that comes to the individual from outside the group. Relationships within the group—the sense of connectedness and belonging so essential to the social being—must offset the sense of disconnectedness and alienation from the society that, in the case of converts, formerly provided one’s primary reference group. The negative opinion of outsiders may even be transformed into a badge of honor within the group, often through the use of athletic metaphors: insult and abuse become a competition in which the minority culture’s members must endure unto victory (4 Macc 16:16; 17:11-16; 520
Heb 10:32). Group members are still encouraged to fulfill their desire for honor, but in terms of how the group defines honorable behavior. Thus Jews, for example, are encouraged to seek honor through obedience to Torah and enabled to resist the pressure exerted upon them by the dominant culture's contempt (Sir 10:19-24; 25:10-11; 41:6-8; deSilva 1996a).


Honor is depicted in the NT as the result of a life of loyalty to Jesus and obedience to his teachings and example (Mt 10:32-33; Jn 12:26; 2 Tim 4:7-8). Commitment and service to fellow believers (Mt 20:25-28), witnessing to the favor of God in Christ (Rev 20:4-6) and embodying the mind of Christ, which seeks the interest of others (Phil 2:5-11), are promoted as the path to honor. The approval of God and God's Messiah, typically announced at a last judgment but also affirmed in the present by early Christian authors, alone matters for the establishment of one's honor (Mt 25:14-46; 2 Cor 5:9-10). Believers are urged to encourage and honor one another as each embodies the attributes of Christian discipleship (Phil 2:29-30; 1 Thess 5:12-13; Heb 10:24-25) and are reminded frequently of the honor they have inherited as "children of God" (Jn 1:12-13; Rom 8:14-17; Gal 3:26; Heb 2:10; 1 Jn 3:1-2) and "partners of Christ" (Heb 3:6, 14). They were called as well to honor their divine Patron and their Mediator in their lives (1 Cor 6:20) and to take care not to show contempt for the Giver by undervaluing the gift as this would result in their own dishonor before God's court (Heb 10:26-31).

The Greco-Roman society frequently reacts against these communities, often informally by insulting, reproaching, abusing and harassing the Christians (Heb 10:32-34; 1 Pet 2:11-12; 4:1-4). These represent society's attempts to draw the believers back to a life in line with traditional Greco-Roman virtues (e.g., piety, expressions of civic loyalty through cult). Similar pressures could be brought to bear on Christian Jews by the "synagogue (Jn 12:42-43; Acts 5:40-41; Rev 2:9). Christian authors, however, sought to insulate the believers from these attempts at shaming by presenting persecution as expected (Mt 10:24-25; 24:9-10; Jn 16:2-4; 1 Thess 3:3-4), as a contest in which an honorable victory may be won (Heb 12:1-4; Rev 2:26-28; 12:10-11) or as an imitation of the passion of Jesus that held the assurance of the same vindication Jesus enjoyed (Mt 5:11-12; Rom 8:17; Phil 1:29; 2:5-11; 3:10-11; 2 Tim 2:11-12; Heb 12:1-2; 1 Pet 3:18-22; 4:13-14). Close bonds between believers (e.g., as "brothers and sisters") were essential, for relationships within the group had to be of greater importance for the individual than relationships outside the group. Exhortations directed at augmenting love, encouragement and support within the group (1 Thess 4:9-10; 5:11, 14; Heb 3:13; 10:24-25; 13:1-3) aim at making the Christian court of reputation stronger than the opinion of the outside world, so that individual believers might remain committed to the way of the cross.

See also PATRONAGE; SOCIAL VALUES AND STRUCTURES; VICE AND VIRTUE LISTS.


D. A. deSilva

**HOROGRAPHY, ANCIENT.** See HISTORIANS, GRECO-ROMAN.

**HOROSCOPE TEXT (4Q186).** See DEAD SEA SCROLLS: GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

**HOSPITALITY**

Hospitality is a universal phenomenon, practiced to varying degrees by all the world’s cultures (Pit-Rivers). Of the various types of hospitality that existed in the ancient Mediterranean world, five receive emphasis in the following survey. The first is public hospitality, which was practiced by states as part of their foreign policy. The second is temple hospitality, which was designed to facilitate pilgrimages to holy places. The third is commercial hospitality, which enabled travelers to obtain food and lodging for a fee. The fourth is private hospitality, which was facilitated to accommodate strangers. The fifth is theoxenic hospitality, in which the guest is considered a guest friend (philos). In Homeric times the host’s friendly treatment of the guest created a formal bond of friendship between them (Fitzgerald). The establishment of this pact of friendship was cemented and symbolized by a gift that the host bestowed on the departing guest (Homer *Odys.* 1.311-13). The acceptance of the gift obligated the guest to remember the host (Homer *Odys.* 4.589-92; 8.430-32; 15.51-55) and to reciprocate his hospitality and generosity at a later time (Homer *Odys.* 1.316-18; 24.284-86). The resulting alliance between host and guest was transgenerational, so that even descendants of the original guest and host were bound by the obligations of guest friendship (Homer *Il.* 6.119-236). Hereditary ties of hospitality (hostium) likewise existed between prominent Romans and non-Romans (Caesar *B. Civ.* 2.25; Cicero *Rose. Am.* 6.15; Livy *Hist.* 1.1.1; 42.1.10), and both Greek and Roman travelers frequently carried tokens of hospitality (symbola, tessarae hospitales) that served to identify them to former hosts and their descendants as guest friends entitled to hospitality (Scholast on Euripides *Helen* 613; Plautus *Poen.* 958, 1045-55; Gauthier). Only a formal renunciation of the relationship, sometimes accompanied by the breaking of the token (Plautus *Cist.* 503), terminated the obligations of guest friendship (Cicero *Verr.* 2.2.36 §§88-89; Livy *Hist.* 25.18.4-5).

From the beginning, therefore, the practice of hospitality was linked to friendship, serving originally to establish a reciprocal relationship between individuals previously unknown to one another and later extended to nurture both affective and nonaffective associations between