

OUTLINE OF WORKSHOP

Covenant Network

Chicago, November 1, 2013

**I. What do I mean that God is self-shaming? What do I mean by shame? What do I mean by reconciliation? Let's start with the second question: What do I mean by shame?**

**II. Shame in the Bible**

**A. Shame on you. Honor/shame mores. Honor asserted and defended. Defeat of honor is shame.**

**B. To be put to shame. "O Lord in thee have I trusted, let me not be put to shame." Ps. 22. Trust and shame. Betrayal of trust and being put to shame. This is the kind of shame I wish to talk with you about.**

**1. To be put to shame is to be made to feel as nothing.**

**Isaiah 41.11. shall be ashamed/shall be as nothing.**

**2. The emotional affects of being put to shame described in Ps 55**

**My heart is in anguish within me, the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me. (vv.4-5)**

**The catalyst for such trauma lies in the underlying betrayal of a friend.**

**My companion laid hands on a friend and violated a covenant with me. With speech smoother than butter, but with a heart set on war; with words that were softer than oil but in fact were drawn swords. (vv.20-21)**

**3. The aftershocks of being put to shame being felt in the community. Ps 69.6 "Let not those who hope in thee be put to shame through me...Let not those who seek thee be brought to dishonor through me." So the community has an urgent stake in any instances of being put to shame.**

**4. Summary: The axis of trust-betrayal-shame. The devastation being put to shame causes. The threat to community stability from personal shaming.**

### **III. Modern instances of being put to shame.**

**A. "A spouse's trust is betrayed by the partner's adultery. A child is battered or exploited by a parent or relative. A woman is date-raped. A gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or transgendered person is "outed" in a humiliating way. A parent is repudiated and abandoned by an adult child. An employer is embezzled by a trusted employee. A pensioner is defrauded her pension. A parishioner is taken advantage of by her minister. An older worker is fired shortly before becoming eligible for retirement benefits. A veteran is denied medical benefits." (pg. 1 *The Self-Shaming God*)**

### **IV. Biblical stories of being put to shame.**

#### **A. Humans on Humans.**

**1. Rape of Tamar. 2 Samuel 13**

**2. David's repudiation of his troops in the light of grief over Absalom. 2 Samuel 19.5-7**

**B. God on Humans. The complaint psalms. Again remember Psalm 22.5 "I have trusted in you; let me not be put to shame." An appeal to God to honor the petitioner's dependence.**

**"If the Psalmist should experience distress, sickness or the scorn of his community, then that is because God has failed him...An expression of outrage that others do not acknowledge and respond to his or her claims." (M. Odell). (pg. 21 *The Self-Shaming God*)**

**Psalm 73, "All in vain have I washed my hands in innocence."**

**C. Humans on God. Acting Against Expectation**

1. Isaiah 5. “When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?”
2. Hosea 11. The incorrigible son who matches God’s long-suffering care with deepening rejection.
3. Jeremiah 13. Israel pictured as a man’s unsupportive loincloth as an analogy of the refusal of the people to live up to God’s expectation to cling to God as God’s possession, a name, a praise and a glory.

**D. “An ineffably transcendent God who yet communicates dynamically with the created world and is self-exposed to the wounds and limitations of reciprocity with the elect people and with all humanity.” (A. Lewis) (pg. 42 *The Self-Shaming God*)**

**E. Summary: the opening three sentences of my introduction:**

**“Trust is at the heart of healthy relationships. When trust is broken, the victim is made to feel as nothing. The Bible calls this experience of betrayal “to be shamed.” When the victim names God as the betrayer, those who exercise pastoral care in the church are faced with a spiritual crisis of major proportions.”**

**PAUSE “In an Age of Twisted Values” *Glory to God* 345**

**V. God, Accused as the One Who Puts to Shame, Makes a Way Beyond Shame . An Analysis of Psalm 73**

**A. Describe the axis of trust-betrayal-shame**

1. Trust: opening lines
2. Betrayal: the wicked prosper
3. Shame: All in vain!. Renders speaker sub-human, mute

**B. The threat to the community. The community's power to uphold.**

**1. The structural analysis, emphasizing v.15**

**a) “This astonishing remark testifies to the power of a faith community to exert its expectation upon the speaker. The tug of the ‘circle of your children’ still holds when trust in God proves ill founded. Against the force of shame that makes the speaker’s feet slip and stumble, responsibility and obligation to those ‘who trust me’ is more powerful.” (pg. 46 *The Self-Shaming God*)**

**b) The importance of the community in providing motivation to remain engaged with God by whom one feels the shame of being let down cannot be emphasized enough. The power of the community to buttress courage to remain engaged while suffering profound personal conflict is caught up finely in the poem by Howard A. Walter, (1906)**

**I would be true, for there are those who trust me;  
I would be pure, for there are those who care;  
I would be strong, for there is much to suffer;  
I would be brave, for there is much to dare.**

c) “The community and its reference points set a limit to how far shame-talk can go in making sense out of the speaker’s situation. Community understandings operate to make ‘wearisome’ the speaker’s understanding of his/her situation, indicating that the speaker has not yet bought into the position of the wicked. The tug of the community creates a stake for it in the eventual outcome of the speaker’s crisis. The community’s stake looms larger than the individual’s doubt. Corporate affirmations finally trump personal shame and draw the disputing speaker back into the sanctuary.

d) Thus, the commitment to remain true to ‘the circle of thy children’ curbs personal speech about shame and draws one into the sanctuary where God vouchsafes a revelation of nearness. But for the hold of ‘the circle of thy children’ upon the psalmist this revelation might not have occurred.” (pg. 46 *The Self-Shaming God*)

## 2. The resolution in the sanctuary

a) “This revelation effects a reconfiguration of theological reality that operates to reaffirm the validity of the claims of torah-piety.

(1) The conventional assumption that God assigns material goods to those who are upright, having been demolished by the prosperity of the wicked, is now replaced by the notion of goodness as defined by the nearness of God to the believer.

**(2) Indeed, the speaker effects a fundamental devaluing of the power of all things physical to nurture integrity, favoring instead an intimate relationship of God.**

**Whom have I in heaven but you?  
And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you.  
My flesh and my heart may fail,  
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (v.25)**

**b) “In addition to effecting this devaluing, the passage from shame to renewed commitment to the claims of torah-piety also causes profound self-reflection and incorporation of the experience of shame resolved into a new view of the self.**

**(1) The speaker frankly acknowledges that in the throes of the emotive force of shame (soul embittered, heart pricked v.21) a devaluation of his/her status before God occurred (stupid, ignorant; like a brute beast toward you. v.22).**

**(2) Despite his/her descent into sub-human and froward behavior, the speaker confesses to have intimate knowledge of God’s continued faithfulness and God’s continued promise to undergird integrity into the future.**

**(3) This disparity of experience—retrospective negative self-evaluation coincident with a sense of divine faithfulness—the speaker integrates into his/her character through the dimension of awe: ‘Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you.’ (v. 25)**

**c) “Out of this awe, praise to God becomes the linguistic clue that shame has released its hold on the speaker.**

**(1) Indeed, praise to God is the critical indicator that one has passed from the realm of behaving as brute beast and has rejoined the ranks of those who acknowledge their creaturely status before God.**

**(2) Significantly, the confident reaffirmation of the two-ways claim of torah-piety at the conclusion of Psalm 73 ends with the personal commitment to praise, ‘I have made the Lord God my refuge, to tell of all your works.’” (pg. 47 *The Self-Shaming God*)**

**PAUSE: “In Deepest Night” 785 *Glory to God***



## **VI. The Self-Shaming God Who Reconciles**

**A. Let me share with you a theological motto: Only that which God assumes can God redeem. A guiding conviction of early Greek theologians Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil the Great. If God is to make a way for us to live beyond the experience of being put to shame, God has to take on, to assume, the shame of betrayal, and to triumph over it. God has to take on the sin of the betrayer and create a redemption.**

**B. This is where my book deals sensitively and thoughtfully with the experience of Jesus on the cross. Jesus went to the cross prepared to face its torture confident that the profound closeness he had with his Father would stick by him through the bitter end. All the rest of the world would know what it's like to be betrayed by someone in whom you have put your trust, but he would not. But we know from reading the gospel accounts that he cried from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" That is the cry of someone being put to shame. That is God putting Jesus to shame.**

**C. Speaking in a classical Trinitarian fashion, the Godhead takes on shame as the Father abandons the Son and the Son experiences abandonment by the Father. When Jesus cries from the cross, the Father in whom he has trusted has deserted him. The Father puts the Son to shame by deserting the Son. The Father is the cause of shame. Bottom line: At the cross God creates shame inside the family of God. God takes on shame. God is self-shamed.**

**PAUSE: "Lord, Why Have You Forsaken Me" *Glory to God*, 210**

**D. This is the mother of all crises of God's integrity. That there should be deliberate betrayal inside the family of God. And this is allowed to go on for three days, until shame has done its worst. On Easter, God the Spirit calls both Father and Son back from abandonment and betrayal. The family of God is whole again. Jesus rises from the grave, alive beyond betrayal. He lives beyond what the worst of the experience of betrayal can do to victim and perpetrator. God takes on shame and makes a way to live beyond it.**

## **VII. Pastoral Implications**

**A. The recovery of an ancient evangelical message. "The one who believes in Jesus will not be put to shame" is central to the preaching of the early church. (Romans 9.33, 10.11; 1 Peter 2.6). My book revives this ancient piece of good news and makes it urgent for congregations today to preach, teach, and embody in their common life.**

**B. God's solidarity with the shamed as an opportunity for living beyond shame. Biblical examples in the Book of the Twelve and 2 Timothy.**

**C. God's solidarity with the one who bears the guilt of causing shame. The opportunity for reframing your life through confession and deliberate steps toward reintegration into the larger community. Reconciliation as *re-concilium*.**

**D. The elevation of the congregation as a prime setting for recovery of both shamed and shamer.**

**E. Worship as a place for movement beyond shame and as a place for confronting the shamer.**

**PAUSE: "We Cannot Measure How You Heal" *Glory to God*, 797**

