Between Clinical and Biblical Conceptualizations of Guilt and Shame: Luke 7:36–50 as a Case Study

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Abstract

The distinction between guilt and shame is well established in psychology. Research suggests that shame-proneness correlates with problematic outcomes, while guilt-proneness is more likely related to adaptive behaviors. Consequently, shame is considered an unhealthy moral emotion, while guilt is seen as an adaptive response to one's failures. Biblical stories appear problematic in this regard. The Story of the Sinful Woman in Luke 7:36–50 exhibits strategies for inscribing not just guilt but also shame as a proper reaction to sin. As such, it appears to engender an unhealthy moral emotion. Careful analysis, however, reveals that the evocation of shame is framed by a relationship with God, whose forgiveness re-creates the shamed self. The narrative accommodates shame by working it into thoroughgoing relational transactions of sin and forgiveness. Those committed to facilitating psychological healing using biblical stories can benefit from considering the distinct scriptural configuration of moral emotions.

Keywords Shame · Guilt · Biblical emotions · Luke 7:36–50 · Pastoral care

Shame and guilt have received much attention in recent clinical theory and research. Since the 1980s, as psychology has grown interested in moral emotions (Haidt, 2003), joy, happiness, remorse, vengeance, veneration, and even sadness have been shown to be connected with moral issues (Turner & Stets, 2006). Still, the vast majority of research has focused on shame and guilt (Tangney et al., 2006). As adverse feelings are likely to arise when we err or transgress, shame and guilt influence our perception of our actual and anticipated behavior. They represent key elements of our moral and emotional apparatus and invite theoretical considerations and empirical findings.

One of the key psychological findings is the difference between shame and guilt. Explored seminally by Lewis (1971), the difference has been empirically confirmed by multiple studies (for a review, see Tangney & Dearing, 2002). What emerges from work conducted in psychoanalytic, clinical, social, personality, and developmental psychology is a theoretical and clinical distinction between guilt and shame. Even though often coinciding, they are two different emotions that correlate with distinct adaptive and maladaptive functions. In general, guilt is a beneficial emotion, while shame tends to hinder one's flourishing.

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Intriguingly, in Tangney and Dearing's influential book on shame and guilt (2002), the first chapter opens with Tangney's reminiscences of her religious upbringing. The message that, as a child, she gleaned from Sunday sermons and religious education classes was this: "To be a good person, you have to feel really bad." Since good people inevitably sin, their closeness to God is measured by how bad they feel about those sins. Good people, therefore, feel "a painful, grinding self-scrutiny and denouncement of the self" (p. 1). Tangney admits that this was not part of the official Catholic doctrine, but it was the message she received. Later in life, her research taught her something else: "Moderately painful feelings of guilt about specific behaviors motivate people to behave in a moral, caring, socially responsible manner. In contrast, intensely painful feelings of shame do not appear to steer people in a constructive, moral direction" (p. 1). Rather, "[S]hame often motivates denial, defensive anger and aggression" (p. 1).

Many biblical stories depict painful feelings of shame. When Adam and Eve, for instance, are described as afraid, naked, and hiding from the gaze of God (Genesis 3:10), they are best understood as experiencing shame after eating the forbidden fruit. Other passages, however, not only depict but also inscribe shame. These call for careful consideration. In what follows, I will attend to one such story, namely, the Story of the Sinful Woman narrated in Luke 7:36–50. After identifying the distinct configurations of guilt and shame in contemporary clinical theory and research, I will inquire about their reflections in the Lukan text. In the process, I shall elucidate the literary dynamics by which the Lukan story can be said to promote shame. More importantly, I shall bring forth the distinct profile that the emotion of shame receives in the Lukan text. Understanding how the ancient narratives structure moral emotions is crucial to their skillful employment in promoting psychological healing.

Clinical constructs of shame and guilt

Shame and guilt have been classified as negative self-conscious emotions evoked by self-evaluation (Haidt, 2003; Tangney et al., 2006). Shame and guilt differ from the category of the other-condemning moral emotions such as contempt, anger, and disgust. In shame and guilt, as in embarrassment and pride, the object of self-conscious emotions is precisely the self. Self-conscious emotions, in particular shame, can remain hidden under other more readily perceived emotional responses (Morrison, 2011). They can have a consequential and anticipatory character; that is, they can arise in relation to one's past actions or to what one considers doing (Tangney et al., 2006). In fact, individuals can exhibit dispositional tendencies to experience these self-conscious emotions (shame-proneness or guilt-proneness) across various situations (Tangney, 1990).

In common parlance, the distinction between shame and guilt is often blurred or nonexistent. Much data, however, shows that they are two distinct emotions. The core distinction was defined by Lewis (1971) as a difference between a global negative feeling about the self and a negative feeling about a specific behavior. In shame, it is the state of the whole self that is flawed, defective, or bad. In guilt, the negative evaluation refers to a specific action. An example offered by Dearing et al. (2005) is helpful:

A shame-prone individual who is reprimanded for being late to work after a night of heavy drinking might be likely to think, "I'm such a loser; I just can't get it together," whereas a guilt-prone individual would more likely think, "I feel badly for showing up late. I inconvenienced my coworkers." (p. 1393)

Tangney et al. (2006) list five research areas where experimental and correlational studies have confirmed the distinction between shame and guilt. First, shame and guilt lead to contrasting action tendencies. While shame leads to hiding and denial, guilt corresponds to reparative actions. Second, when related to empathy, guilt correlates with an emphatic concern for others, while people experiencing shame tend to focus on their own distress. Third, correlated with anger, guilt-proneness shows a direct inverse relationship to aggression, while shamed individuals tend to externalize blame and turn angrily toward others. Fourth, in relation to psychological symptoms, guilt remains generally unrelated to psychological problems, while shame is associated with multiple maladaptive processes. Finally, shame is linked to risky, illegal, and otherwise inadvisable behavior, while guilt motivates socially responsible behavior in the wake of transgression. Regarding the last shame/guilt distinction area listed above, Gilliland et al. (2011) studied the interplay of shame and guilt in maintaining hypersexual behavior. Their findings showed significant positive relationships between shame-proneness and hypersexuality and between guilt-proneness and the motivation to both change and preventive behaviors.

As experimental studies continue to explore differing correlates of guilt and shame, they confirm the conceptualization of shame and guilt as distinct emotions. They also identify shame as an emotion difficult to cope with. Morrison (2011), for instance, working from a psychodynamic perspective, identifies various defensive means of concealing the painful feeling of shame. He lists anger, contempt, envy, depression, grandiosity, and withdrawal among shame's controlling mechanisms. The Compass of Shame Scale (CoSS; Elison et al., 2006a, b) was developed to assess the use of the four shame coping styles described by Nathanson (1992): attack self, withdrawal, attack other, and avoidance. These styles describe various ways individuals react to shaming experiences without addressing their source.

As reflected in the studies discussed above, clinical constructs of shame and guilt view shame as the more noxious of the two. Accordingly, shame reduction strategies have been developed in therapeutic settings to help clients deal with shame. For clinicians treating sexual addiction, Adams and Robinson (2001) offer five general suggestions for reducing shame. First, clients need to understand the origin of shame and its function within their behavior. Second, the distinction between guilt and shame needs to be made. Third, the defenses used to deny the painful feelings of shame need to be identified. Fourth, in therapy, specific shame reduction strategies need to be implemented, such as establishing rapport whereby clients see that they are not their behavior, education on the effects of shame (including the ineffectiveness of previous strategies to address shame), facing the feelings behind shame, and using guilt to make amends. Finally, the negative core beliefs behind shame need to be changed.

Highlighting the value of exploration and acceptance in shame treatment, Morrison (2011) states: "As the patient gradually recognizes that the therapist finds the patient's shame relevant, interesting, and tolerable, he or she can begin to identify with the therapist's acceptance of his or her shame and of the aspects of self that generate it" (p. 33). Similarly, Thomas and Parker (2004) note that the shame-inflicted self must be first nurtured and strengthened before it can become stable enough to differentiate itself from its actions and move away from global self-condemnation.

To summarize, shame and guilt have been conceptualized as two distinct negative self-conscious emotions. Guilt is constituted by one's negative evaluation of one's behavior, while in the middle of a shame experience the focus is on a bad self. This difference sets the stage for distinct patterns of states and behaviors. Guilt-proneness is generally unrelated to psychological problems, while shame has been correlated with many dysfunctional

outcomes. Guilt is addressed through the wrongdoer's reparative behavior, while shame treatment requires an accepting and nurturing relationship with the therapist.

Finally, it is important to note that "it may not be the experience of shame per se, but rather how one copes with shame, that leads to problematic outcomes" (Elison et al., 2006b, p. 61). In this regard, a recent attempt to recover the good name of shame needs to be mentioned. Against the consensus that views shame as a morally problematic emotion, Deonna et al. (2012) have mounted an argument in defense of shame. In the course of their analysis, they introduce careful distinctions between shame and shaming, sense of shame and shame-proneness, and short- and long-term action tendencies. Finally, they distinguish between rational and irrational forms of shame. This conceptual finesse allows them to isolate a healthy core of shame. Shame brings to light one's incapacity to live up to the demands imposed by one's values. So conceived, it can motivate the self to reform. For shame to initiate self-reform, however, the self must retain its moral agency. It cannot remain paralyzed by negative self-evaluation. This is why Deonna et al. (2012) argue for shame as a negative self-evaluation that is profound but not all-encompassing.

Deonna et al. (2012) demarcate one set of conditions under which shame could be morally healthy. Their approach also illustrates how shame and moral emotions remain open to different conceptualizations. In the next step, I inquire about the kind of guilt and shame that can be detected in the story of the Sinful Woman.

Guilt and shame in Luke 7:36–50

The story of the sinful woman in Luke 7:36–50 weaves together the themes of repentance, forgiveness, and love. Neither shame nor guilt are named. Emotions, however, do not have to be named to be referenced (Taylor & Mbense, 1998). In fact, a narrative enactment of the workings of repentance, forgiveness, and love can be expected to display, arouse, or even intellectually analyze a number of moral emotions. Is shame one of them? And if yes, is it the same shame as the one identified in modern clinical discourse?

Before proceeding, two remarks are in order. First, it is natural to expect significant differences between the dynamics of guilt and shame in the first-century Greco-Roman and the twenty-first-century Western worlds. The differences, however, need to be carefully weighed. For instance, it is often noted that modern Westerners live in an individualist culture while first-century persons were shaped by a collectivist culture (Malina & Neyrey, 1996). Studies by Williams (1993) and Cairns (1993) demonstrate, however, that this crude dichotomy between the modern autonomous and ancient heteronomous self does not fit the evidence encountered in the Greek literary world. What the evidence suggests is that the individual's sense of shame may be affected but not completely determined by what is expressed by others. "By the later fifth century the Greeks had their own distinctions between a shame that merely followed public opinion and a shame that expressed inner personal conviction" (Williams, 1993, p. 95). My goal is to bring forth the distinct emotional patterns encoded in the Lukan text while avoiding anachronistic impositions and facile schematizations.

Second, asking about the emotions evoked by an ancient Greek text is not superfluous to its interpretation. In his introduction to a collection of essays on Greek emotions, Chaniotis (2020a) declares: "From its very beginning, Greek literature made emotions the center of its observation and treatment" (p. 11). Recent explorations of emotion constructs in the Greco-Roman world (Cairns & Nelis, 2017; Chaniotis, 2012, 2020b; Chaniotis & Ducrey, 2013;

Konstan, 2003, 2006) confirm that our comprehension of the ancient world is incomplete without an understanding of the ancient emotion concepts. The growth of emotion research in biblical studies (see Elliott, 2006; Inselmann, 2016; Kazen, 2011; Kruger, 2004; Mirguet, 2016; Moore & Koosed, 2014; Spencer, 2017b) is similarly driven by the realization that “emotion, however delineated, matters a lot in human experience and can never be excised from sense or meaning making” (Spencer, 2017a, p. 27). To ask about shame and guilt is, then, to search for an essential meaning-making component in Luke 7:36–50. In Ricoeurian terms (Ricoeur, 1981), it is to search for the possibility of being opened up by the Lukan configuration of moral emotions.

Luke 7:36–50 is structured around the dramatic triangle of Jesus, Simon the Pharisee, and the nameless woman. As the woman anoints Jesus’ feet and as Simon takes offense, Jesus offers a parable of the two debtors and a creditor—a parabolic dramatic triangle within the narrative dramatic triangle—and declares her sins forgiven. Since the narrative fails to explicate causal relations between the woman’s loving gestures, Jesus’ declaration of forgiveness, and the parable of the two debtors, commentators continue to debate whether the woman’s gestures of love are a fruit of already received forgiveness or the reason why the forgiveness is granted (see Fitzzymer (1981); Bovon (2002) for a list of ancient and modern representatives of diverse views). Two possible translations of verse 47 capture this ambiguity well: “Her many sins have been forgiven, because she loved much” or “Her many sins have been forgiven, thus she loved much.” The woman is showing a love-filled repentance or a loved-filled gratitude. Either way, the question remains: What kind of negative self-conscious emotion has now been channeled into the gestures of repentance or the loving gratitude for received forgiveness? Has it been guilt or shame or both? Does the text permit an answer to this question?

As is often the case in the Gospel of Luke, the answer is to be found in the authoritative speech of the main character, Jesus. It is Jesus’ parable of the two debtors and a creditor that conveys a sense of sin and forgiveness that bears directly on the question of the negative self-conscious emotions disclosed by the Lukan text. To uncover this, I need to attend to a particular feature of Jesus’ language, namely, its metaphorical mode of expression. Anderson’s (2009) study of the biblical notion of sin proves crucial to this task.

First, Anderson (2009) shows it is impossible to understand sin and forgiveness in the Bible without concentrating on the metaphors in which these concepts are embedded. Metaphors are not merely literary ornaments; they structure the way we think, perceive, and act (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Ricoeur, 1967). Second, Anderson (2009) shows that although there are many metaphors for sin in the Bible, there is a history of how they came to dominate biblical authors’ thinking. “During the early periods one particular metaphor dominated, that of sin as a weight. But at the beginning of the Second Temple period a new metaphor emerged that would take center stage, that of sin as a debt” (p. 13). I will follow Anderson’s lead and concentrate on these two metaphors.

The sin as a burden metaphor draws from the experience of lifting and carrying physical objects to create an understanding of sin and its consequences. It stands behind many biblical sayings, such as “Anyone who curses God shall bear the sin” (Leviticus 24:15 NRSV) and “The LORD is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving [literally, ‘lifting’] iniquity and transgression” (Numbers 14:18). It also stands behind the Day of Atonement ritual of the scapegoat, in which the animal is thought to carry the weight of Israel’s sins into the wilderness (Leviticus 16:21–22).

Now, keeping in mind that language is constitutive of emotion experiences and perceptions (Lindquist et al., 2015) and that emotion concepts often reflect a metaphorical pattern of thought—that is, they arise from embodied experiences in different cultural settings

(Kövecses, 2000)—I will attempt to decipher the shame and guilt experiences encoded in the sin as burden metaphor. As already noted, the sin as burden metaphor is capable of highlighting the reality of sin as something concrete and heavy as well as the condition of the sinner as someone burdened with the weight of sin. From the point of view of the distinction between guilt and shame, it can attend to both the negative quality of the behavior and to the negative quality of the self. It can thus structure emotional responses of both guilt and shame. The latter is clearly seen in some poetic texts where a metaphor expresses the sinner's doomed state: "For my iniquities have gone over my head; they weigh like a burden too heavy for me" (Psalms 38:4) and "I am utterly spent and crushed" (Psalms 38:8). Summarizing the view of the sinner that emerges through the metaphor of sin as burden used in such contexts, Lam (2016) states: "Whether weighed down by sin or having it brought down upon his head, the sinner is imagined as powerless—or at least submissive—before the forces that determine his legal and moral status" (p. 74). The powerless and crushed self is not too far from what Martens (2005) describes as shame: "A fearful and chaotic sense of an irresistible and eerie revelation to self, of vulnerability in one's nature that, by indicating one's moral incompetence, isolates and humbles one in the face of what one regards as a sacred community" (p. 400).

The sin as debt metaphor might seem more optimistic. At least on the surface, it suggests that once the notion of sin is embedded in the language of economic exchange, there is an opportunity to repay the debt and even to accumulate merit. This indeed is what many biblical texts express. For instance, the physical punishment of exile serves as a payment for sin in Isaiah 40:1–2, while almsgiving is engaged in to redeem sins in Daniel 4:27. From the perspective of the shame/guilt distinction, the sin as debt metaphor appears more conducive to guilt than to shame as a response to sin. To use the description proposed by Tangney and Dearing (2002), the self conveyed by this metaphor is "decentered," that is, "focusing on a negative behavior somewhat separate from the self" (p. 82). Still, there are contexts in which even this metaphor seems to expand the focus to include the self. Such is the case with Luke 7:36–50.

In Jesus' parable of the two debtors, one owed 500 denarii and the other 50. Neither of them, however, was able to pay. In the world of debtors' prisons (Eubank, 2018), this metaphor expresses the sinners' condition as not much different from the state of someone crushed under the burden of sin and unable to rise. Five hundred denarii equals 500 days' wages of a laborer (Fitzmyer, 1981). Although this amount is not as extravagant as the 10,000 talents that a servant owed his king in Matthew 18:24, it is nevertheless an amount that exceeds the servants' capacity to repay. This point is made very clear: "when they could not pay" (Luke 7:42). Jesus, of course, does not neglect the negative evaluation of the woman's sins. He states that her sins, which have been many, have been forgiven her (Luke 7:47), which is arguably a depiction of her negative behavior as somewhat separate from her. The parable, however, centers on her as unable to repay. The focus is on the incapacitated and bankrupt self. The text can be said to structure a negative self-conscious emotion best described as shame.

If we accept the conclusion that the story of the sinful woman reflects not just guilt but also shame, we must immediately note a dramatic reversal that defines the shamed self. This surprising twist is again revealed by Jesus. Not only are the two debtors gratuitously forgiven, but the one to whom more is forgiven loves more (Luke 7:47). Forgiveness is so thoroughgoing that it re-creates the self. The sinful woman's lavish gestures show her to be someone who has found great love and now lives it out. Many characters in Luke's Gospel experience this kind of rebirth as they accept forgiveness. The forgiven paralytic is told to rise and walk (5:24), the prodigal son was dead and has come to life (15:32), and the good thief is made a companion of Jesus in paradise (23:43). In the Lukan scheme of things, the shamed, incapacitated self is forgiven and therefore transformed.

Secondly, if we agree that shame is inscribed by the Lukan story, we must note its thoroughly relational framing. Both the woman's debt and its cancellation are framed as functions of her relationship with the creditor. The two competing interpretations of the story—she is forgiven because she loved, or she loves because she has been forgiven—share the fact that, whether in her repentance or in her gratitude, she continues to relate to the divine creditor. Between the fully autonomous self who, motivated by guilt, remedies its errors and the self who, paralyzed by shame, loses its autonomy, Luke posits the self-in-relation-to-God. For the self-in-relation-to-God, the sin touches the core of the self, expanding guilt into shame. At the same time, for the self-in-relation-to-God, the sin is always redeemable, allowing for the transformation of the self.

Notably, as explicated by some feminist interpretations, the divine transformation of the shamed self into the loving self is inscribed here in the female body of the nameless woman. Following Bae (2009), readers first register this inscription when they trace the shaming tactics of Simon the Pharisee. In assuming that a true prophet would not allow himself to be touched by a sinful woman, Simon the Pharisee “dissociates women and female bodies from the realm of the sacred and the respectability” (Bae, 2009, p. 44). However, against Simon's view, Jesus' acceptance of the woman's gestures means that “the denigration of the female body and the prohibition of its contact with the holy are overcome” (Bae, 2009, p. 45). From Jesus' authoritative point of view, the gift of the woman's sensual touch is shameful neither to him nor to her. As Bae (2009) notes, “[E]ven when a gift is wrapped in female sensuality and sexuality, it is neither feared nor despised, neither avoided nor grasped” (p. 45). The woman enters a reciprocal exchange of forgiveness and love. As a partner in mutual giving and receiving, she stands as liberated and empowered. Reid (2016) goes as far as to call the woman an icon of Christ in that she pours out her love for him just as he will pour out his love for his friends on the cross.

In the dramatic triangle of Jesus, Simon the Pharisee, and the nameless woman, the woman is the one who has been forgiven more and therefore models—“Do you see this woman?” (Luke 7:44)—a path to greater love. She models it for both Simon the Pharisee and the reader. Simon the Pharisee, who denounced the woman as a sinner and shamed Jesus for receiving her ministrations—“If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner” (Luke 7:39)—is now shown his lesser love—“you gave me no water for my feet... you gave me no kiss... you did not anoint my head with oil” (Luke 7:44–46). Will he acknowledge his bankruptcy? Will he enter the path of greater love? The narrative leaves these questions unanswered, effectively forcing readers to ponder them for themselves.

Not everyone will agree with the reading of Luke 7:36–50 advanced above. Suppose Knust's (2017) analysis of John 7:53–8:11, conducted from within a framework of queer narratology, were applied to Luke 7:36–50. In that case, one wonders if the same challenge would not be raised; in the triangle between Jesus, the Pharisees (in John) or the Pharisee (in Luke), and the woman, “[T]he woman functions as a passive ground upon which male law is affirmed” (Knust, 2017, p. 416). In such a reading, even if this law demands mercy rather than vengeance, it is an ostensibly male law negotiated between Jesus and the Pharisee. Similarly, the interpretive perspective advanced here would be questioned by Ipsen (2014). Reading Luke 7:36–50 from the liberationist standpoint of sex workers, she considers the nameless woman an unrepentant prostitute, thus challenging the normativity of the moral law assumed in our interpretation. No doubt, these readings conceive of the shame encoded in Luke 7:36–50 differently. And yet, they are right to note and confront the insidious links between exclusion, oppression, and shaming.

Conclusion

When the clinically significant distinction between shame and guilt informs our reading of Luke 7:36–50, the Lukan text reveals the self that not only feels guilty but also experiences shame. This seems to be the case when the sin as debt metaphor expands to depict an unpayable debt. The biblical narrative, however, depicts the bankrupt self in a framework that assumes a foundational and ongoing relationship with God, who remakes the shamed self. Forgiveness and acceptance are not just modifying but rather remaking the self. A new self is made “who loves more.”

Recently, DiFransico (2018) analyzed emotional responses encoded in Psalm 51 in light of the clinical distinction between shame and guilt. Her reading brings forth the elements constitutive of guilt and argues that the feelings of shame are less dominant. Her interpretive effort aims at separating the healthy from the unhealthy moral emotions. My reading of Luke 7:36–50 uncovers a different path. It indicates that between unhealthy shame and healthy guilt there is a third way on which the emotion of shame is constructed in a distinct manner, accommodated, as it were, through thoroughgoing transactions of sin and forgiveness. For the self that is constituted by its relationship with God, sin assaults the very core of the self, effecting a shameful ruin. But the very fact of being constituted from without leaves the self open to being re-created by the one who overflowingly forgives.

Finally, it needs to be acknowledged that this engagement with clinical and biblical conceptualizations of guilt and shame grows out of a concern shared by many pastoral and theological authors. In recent decades, as the distinction between guilt and shame has become better established, Christian theology has recognized its responsibility to attend to the reality of human shame. Many compelling voices have been raised calling for a reconfiguration of the Christian message beyond the traditional schemes of sin-guilt-forgiveness now seen as inadequate in the face of the complex and pervasive reality of shame. Albers (1995), for instance, has called for a creation-based anthropology that acknowledges and accepts human finitude and for a reinterpretation of grace as acceptance rather than forgiveness: “God has declared to you that you are a person of value and worth” (p. 101). McNish (2004) has advanced a reflection on shame, noting that “the central figure of the Christian faith suffered the worst imaginable shame—the public exposure and shame of the cross—and was transformed (i.e., resurrected) in and through that experience” (p. 4). Stockitt (2012) has reread the biblical tradition as the divine work of overcoming exclusion and exile, culminating in the inclusive ministry of Jesus. A fuller account of incarnation and atonement, beyond a narrowly conceived substitution theory, has been advanced by Jamieson (2016) to show how Christ fully takes on what we are, including our shame. Pattison (2016) has articulated a need for the type of pastoral theology that helps those who have lost their face—those living with shame—to regain it under the loving gaze of God. The work of Arel (2016) has centered on Augustine, Niebuhr, and the Ash Wednesday ritual to construct a theological anthropology capable of acknowledging and disinterring shame and attenuating it through empathic connections. Nash (2020) has helped the church see and confront the shaming practices often at work in church communities.

This list of authors and their shame-attenuating strategies is not exhaustive, but it is sufficient to bring up just one more observation about Luke 7:36–50. In the story of the Sinful Woman, Jesus suffers shame (“if this man were a prophet”) and confronts shaming practices (“Simon, I have something to say to you”) so that through his loving gaze (“turning toward the woman”), empathic connection (“she has not stopped kissing my feet”), and acceptance (“she has shown great love”) he can disinter her shame (“her sins, which were many”) and transform it (“go in peace”).

Declarations

Ethical approval This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

Conflict of interest The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

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