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Tennent Reflection Chapter 4

*Anthropology- Human Identity in Shame-Based Cultures of the Far East*

In chapter four of Tennent's book, he outlines how there is a lack of understanding in the West when it comes to honor and shame cultures, and how the western missiological approach needs to consider how the Gospel can be viewed in light of the shame/honor lens. In eastern countries, family and group identity are more significant than an individual's needs. There is an external authority which moderates an individual, and when that person brings shame upon the family or group, there is a debt to be paid in order to restore honor. Whereas in the guilt / innocence culture of the West, culture is far more individualistic, and people are moderated by internal morality or conscience.

Western theology deals more with the legal language in scripture, talking about personal guilt and need for salvation. However, that framework is likely not helpful for the Majority World. Shame and honor are themes easily found throughout scripture. With the atonement specifically, everything about the cross was shameful and *public*. "The resurrection overturns the shame" <sup>1</sup> and Jesus now sits enthroned with the Father in a place of glory and honor. As Tennent says, "a mere execution would have atoned for guilt, but not for shame" <sup>2</sup>. All of this to say: when Western Christians are approaching relationship or missions with those in the Majority World, their theological approach could and should include the shame/honor motif found in scripture, without ignoring the necessary guilt/innocence. A feeling of discomfort or a certain level of ignorance is unacceptable and shows a one-sided Biblical understanding that ignores the cultural context of today, as well as that of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Eastern world.

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan) 2007, 90

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan) 2007, 91