

**Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology** Stephen Pattison, Cambridge University Press, 2000  
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After a great deal of consultation and energy, a modern sculpture of the crucifixion has been hung in my church. The artist, a surgeon by training, represents the cost of the redeeming death. A passer-by on a walk in Warwickshire saw something different: "Why are Christians so fascinated by pain and torture?" A woman was told by her pastor to forgive her husband after discovering that he had been having affairs with several women at work. She felt that the demands of faith (expressed in this shape) were the cause of pain and guilt. Both theology and pastoral care failed to embrace the complex reality of her experience.

What is the nature of religion and what does it generate in people? Is religion good for people and has it the capacity to draw out value, dignity and potential? These are some of the issues that are discussed in this important contribution to pastoral theology. It falls into three parts. Part One provides a theoretical orientation to the phenomenon of shame and considers methodological and epistemological issues that enable the reader to understand the discourse surrounding shame. It is a complex emotion and there is considerable debate about the nature and function of emotions. Shame is variously understood in different academic and clinical discourses. Shame, Pattison demonstrates, is a family of meanings rather than a single definition or experience.

Part Two is more practical and immediately accessible - it considers the experience of shame and makes some distinctions about different kinds of shame. The focus of the work, chronic or dysfunctional shame, is explored and especially the factors that cause shame from early infancy to adulthood. Shame is a powerful force for social conformity and the 'stain of shame' (p 4) is difficult to control, limit and direct. Pattison points out that there appears to be few effective solutions to chronic shame. Shame in these first two parts is understood in terms of non-religious discourses.

Part Three examines the relationship between contemporary Christian thought and practice and shamed groups and individuals. Pattison summarizes a vast body of modern Christian theological responses to shame. Chapter 9 argues that there are Christian ideas and practices that might generate or nurture dysfunctional shame and alienation rather than alienate it. The book concludes with some ways whereby Christianity might begin to change itself, so that its capacity to integrate would be enhanced and its use and exploitation of shame might be diminished. In the end, Pattison concludes that faith is ambivalent in its effects, having the power to heal and to harm. However, in order to achieve integration and minimise alienation, it may have to change its theories about both itself and its practices. Pattison hopes for a transformation and repentances of religion. His analysis raises some fundamental questions for religious thought, organisation and practice.

This book is important for a number of reasons. It establishes itself as a significant contribution to both pastoral theology and psychology. In his grasp of the material Pattison brings his creative force of analysis in a dialogue between these disciplines. He demonstrates

the function of theology to enter into relationship with practice and social reality. He illuminates the importance of religion opening itself up to critical dialogue with other disciplines. In the dialogue the reader is taken into a deeper engagement with reality. This book is a model of pastoral theological conversation for other to follow in the explanation of religion and the way it shapes human experience.

Pastoral theology has some way to go in developing its identity and integrity, both as a discipline and as an interdisciplinary activity. In this volume Pattison continues to be an authoritative voice in shaping the discipline in British pastoral theology. His vigour and analysis are key features of the quality of the writing.

Secondly, in an academic book, Pattison reveals a great deal about his own experience of shame. The use of his own vulnerability and pain is a significant feature of the book. There are important issues for the way practical theology uses experience and Pattison, in disclosing some of his own experience, does not enable the reviewer to fully assess its role and usefulness. The experience here is both limited and edited and the integrity of his struggle is self-evident. It is difficult to know where the author is in relation to therapy, rehabilitation, religion and integration. Pattison is honest about the subject of experience, but there is a sense in which the reader is left with some unresolved questions and issues. How much shame can any of us embrace, and what level of integration is possible given our human vulnerabilities and hurts? Have the scars healed and in what way did religion help?

Thirdly, perhaps, the theological investigation might have gone further and in more practical detail. The arguments for the transformation of theology and practice are radical and convincing. The challenges of pastoral care as a focus of celebrating life in a community, which liberates believers from fear and shame, are very powerful. Pattison's last chapter is one of his most creative and affirming pieces of writing. It is practical but the connections between this thinking and the life of the Churches need considerably more work. Pattison addresses the subject as an academic on the creative margins of the institutional Church - perhaps he is liberated from the Church which has inflicted shame on others as a means of control. Some fundamental and radical change needs to take place if we are to move from harmful theory and practice. The framework needs to be translated into radical transforming theory and care. Is the only liberation from shame to be found outside the Church?

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