

## The Church's Other Mission – Ministry to the Shamed:

### Recognising and Responding to Brokenness

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#### Abstract

This paper proposes that the mission of the church is best comprehended as a response to the human condition as it seeks to adequately reflect the grace of God. It will be argued that the landscape of human experience is one that is dominated by shame and that there is a clear link between sin and shame. The mission of the church is often understood in the propagation of the ideal of restored relationship with God made possible through the forgiveness of the guilt of sin. It will be offered here that, while this is a significant part of the mission of the church, it is not the limit of it. Adequate reflection of the grace of God must involve deliberate response to the experience of shame. This paper offers a framework to assist in understanding the complexity of the issues. Additionally, it will argue that God's response to sin has always included a response to shame. If the church is to understand the fullness of its mission then it must embrace the call to offer an effective response to shame.

Encounters with the experience of shame are not difficult to come by. Whether it is the *faux pas* at the office party that leaves one feeling slightly embarrassed, or that overwhelming sense of worthlessness, all too familiar to some, shame is an ever present reality for many. It has been a topic of much discussion in recent years.<sup>1</sup> It seems likely that there are few serious practical theologians that have not encountered the topic at some point in the last two decades. However, as prevalent as the issue may be it remains, even still, an elusive topic to understand. Its impact is likewise often underappreciated. As a result, rarely does a response to shame come to the attention of the church as something to be considered as a legitimate area of ministry focus. However, when considering the nature of the mission of the church it is reasonable to assume that it would reflect the full scope of that which God desires to do in and for humanity. This is often understood in terms of the freedom and joy associated with salvation from the guilt of sin. It is, however, central to this paper that grace does much more than set sinners free from guilt. Grace is equally a response to the shame inherent in a fallen humanity. As the church is to see its mission, at least in part, as the proclaimer of salvation that frees from the guilt of sin, so too it should represent the grace that brings freedom from shame. This article will seek to track recent trends in understanding of shame, highlight the need for a

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<sup>1</sup> For treatments of this issue see the following: Stephen Pattison, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Robin Stockitt, *Restoring the Shamed: Toward a Theology of Shame* (Eugene, Or: Cascade Books, 2012).

comprehensive engagement of the issues therein related, and continue the call for a more thorough going theology of shame that can aid in the releasing of the church to missional fulfilment.

### Understanding Shame

In the early 1990's Donald Capps, then William Harte Felmeth Professor of Pastoral Theology–Princeton Theological Seminary,<sup>2</sup> wrote about a developing social reality identified as a new narcissistic age. The idea of a narcissistic age had become a popular theme, but Capps desired to highlight the church's need to refocus to respond adequately. Here was an age in which individuals lack empathy, possess an excessive sense of self- importance, and persistently imagine that their capacities are far greater than they really are.<sup>3</sup> It is clear that Capps is reflecting on that which rises out of a profound human struggle. Despite the progress of humanity in many areas there persists, even still, a deep struggle that manifests itself in troubled lives and troubled people. Building on the work of Christopher Lasch<sup>4</sup>, Capps continued the development of the idea of the appearance of a “new self” which was emerging in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>5</sup> describing it as the “dominant personality of our time.”<sup>6</sup> Because of this dominance the church needed a redevelopment of its understanding of sin as the age-old association of sin with guilt was lacking in adequacy to respond to the burgeoning phenomenon of generalised narcissism. The narcissist is, apparently, beyond the reach of guilt.

The theory relied heavily upon the earlier work of Heinz Kohut who had, within a psychoanalytical framework, sought to develop an effective understanding of the self. Kohut theorised it was in the process of the development of the self that the potential for shame was established. A child is born with a preoccupation for self needs. As the self begins to develop it forms, what Kohut called, “self-objects.”<sup>7</sup> That is, a child begins to merge, or identify, herself with these objects, mother and father for example, and it is these things that inform her understanding of who she is. Self-objects are broken into two categories: (1) mirroring self-objects, that which confirms a child's sense of their own grandeur and (2) the idealised parent imago presenting the child with a positive image with which she can merge. The former Kohut identified with *the grandiose self* -the narcissistic drive, which is not in and of itself identified as a bad thing; it is the counter point for the latter. To say it another way the former is the context for self-validation, the latter for self-development. <sup>8</sup> For Kohut the place of the

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<sup>2</sup> “Donald Capps” Princeton Theological Seminary accessed October 20, 2014, [https://www.ptsem.edu/index.aspx?id=1916&menu\\_id=72&terms=donald%20capps](https://www.ptsem.edu/index.aspx?id=1916&menu_id=72&terms=donald%20capps), paragraph 1

<sup>3</sup> *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV-TR: Text Revision* (Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2011), 714. Donald Capps, *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 12-14.

<sup>4</sup> See: Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984); idem, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979).

<sup>5</sup> Donald Capps, *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 6-7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 6

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 362

<sup>8</sup> Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders* (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1971), 26.

self-object and the role of parental influence, and the maternal in particular,<sup>9</sup> is imperative. The continual formation of the self is “intertwined” with the attitudes that a parent expresses to the child<sup>10</sup>. This is a theme much treated in Kohut’s work. Mirroring, which may be simply understood as the positive response to the presence and actions of the other, plays an important role in this process. Kohut does not suggest that mirroring – that which Capps defines as “the actual and symbolic role of the adult’s face in the forming of the infant’s emotional life,”<sup>11</sup> – needs to be perfect, but all that is required for the development of a healthy self is “proper mirroring at least some of the time.”<sup>12</sup> Without this mirroring effective development of an integrated self is slowed, stunted, or potentially halted. As Capps reveals, it is at this point that there is a fracturing of the self that occurs and a dualistic nature appears: that of the grandiose self, the apparent narcissist, which comes into conflict with the idealising self.<sup>13</sup> The goals of the idealising self are increasingly ambiguous and seemingly less attainable. Herein lays the development of self-depletion – the locale for shame, worthlessness and humiliation. <sup>14</sup> Capps identifies this reality as the “depleted self,”<sup>15</sup> and this is an apt description. The experience of shame is clearly associated with a sense of depletion and results in a growing sense worthlessness and inadequacy.

The psychoanalytic framework, from which Kohut developed his theory of self, and others including Capps have built upon, places the focus upon narcissism of which shame is a feature. Stephen Pattison identifies the relationship between narcissism and shame as unclear, and even within the field there is some divergent understandings. He does, however, recognise that even while the psychoanalytical construct may in some ways be inaccessible to those working outside of this field it does highlight issues around the phenomenology of shame that are helpful.<sup>16</sup> While there may indeed be a debate regarding the best way to engage and understand the issues facing contemporary culture there is no doubt that shame holds a not insignificant place within it. So while the background for Capps’ understanding of shame is the then current thinking regarding the prevalence of narcissism as a societal phenomenon it is the issue of shame that causes him to call for a renewed theological understanding. His suggestion is that for the church to effectively reach contemporary individuals the focus of attention must be the struggle with shame.<sup>17</sup> The suggestion here is that the issues related to narcissism are less important than those raised around the experience of shame.

While the observations related to narcissism hold considerable merit, it would seem, however, that with relatively little effort, one can identify the impact of shame upon humanity at almost every point in

<sup>9</sup> Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, 1977), 26

<sup>10</sup> Heinz Kohut, “Thoughts on Narcissism and Narcissistic Rage,” in *The Search for the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut: 1978-1981*, edited by Paul H. Ornstein, Vol. 2 (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1978), 617.

<sup>11</sup> Donald Capps, *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 29

<sup>12</sup> Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, 1977), 188.

<sup>13</sup> Donald Capps, *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 28.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Used in the title and throughout his book to apply to the shame bound condition.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Pattison, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2000), 49.

<sup>17</sup> Donald Capps, *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 70-100.

history. Shame, it could be argued is less of a contemporary issue, than it is a human issue. Perhaps the expressions of shame may change but the reality of its presence does not. The advantage of seeing shame as a human struggle rather than a contemporary one is that God's response of grace to the human condition might be supposed to include a response to shame. Indeed from the very first the impact of shame and God's response forms a central part of the Biblical narrative as can be seen in the second and third chapters of Genesis.<sup>18</sup> It then follows that such a response would lay the foundations for the mission of the church to include a similar focus.

In order to come to grips with how the church may respond to shame it is necessary to consider ways in which shame can be identified. In recognising the marks of shame an increased capacity to respond to shame is realised.

### The Marks of Shame

In coming to grips with the issues of shame it will help to establish a generalised framework describing the condition. From this framework it becomes possible to more clearly articulate the scope and impact of its presence. Shame impacts an individual's sense of being. When shame is at work an individual sees themselves as less than they ought to be. Wemberly equates the experience of shame with the loss of those identifiable societal expressions of worth and identity, that which it is perceived makes an individual lovable, so that one is left with a sense of worthlessness.<sup>19</sup> Pattison likewise suggests that shame is: "a perception of the self as being judged to be inferior, defective, incompetent, undesirable, or unlovable."<sup>20</sup> Shame can be experienced in a passing moment or as an unrelenting sense of inadequacy, but it will always be experienced as a sense being less than should be, in some way.

It is important to recognise that shame does not have a singular form or expression. This diversity can contribute to the uncertainty regarding the problem, or effective responses to it. However, Pattison responds to this issue by employing a concept, which originates with the work of Wittgenstein, which suggests that related concepts may not have essential content and meaning, but are linked because of a network of factors that give a "family resemblance."<sup>21</sup> Obviously, to belong to a family does not require the sharing of an essential nature, but that there are many things, in many contexts, that have commonality. Pattison finds this approach liberating for no longer is it necessary to search for a single essence or definition, but it is possible to accept that there is a "legitimate plurality of concepts and approaches."<sup>22</sup> This approach allows one to see the clear markings of shame at work.

<sup>18</sup> Robin Stockitt, *Restoring the Shamed: Toward a Theology of Shame* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 9-21.

<sup>19</sup> Edward P. Wemberly, "No Shame in Wesley's Gospel," in *The Shame Factor: How Shame Shapes Society* ed. Robert Jewitt, Wayne L. Alloway and John G. Lacey (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 105.

<sup>20</sup> Shane Pattison, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2000), 76.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 64.

Neil Pembroke, in using Pattison's work, has helped clarify five members of the shame family. To identify these members will assist the shedding of light upon the networked connections that exist between them.<sup>23</sup> Importantly in identifying the various examples of shame it becomes increasingly easy to understand how the church may effectively respond to the issues surrounding shame.

The first family member, and one that helps locate shame for most people, is that of "situational shame."<sup>24</sup> Situational shame is that twinge of discomfort that one may feel when one yawns while talking with another in an important conversation, or that stabbing pain that one might feel when publically ridiculed for making a genuine mistake.

Another form many can identify with is what is called "aesthetic shame."<sup>25</sup> Here the impact of shame is to feel less than that which is perceived as society's ideal physical standard. Again it may range from the discomfort one might associate with not being dressed appropriately to a profound sense of self-loathing over disfigurement. Pattison, in describing the extreme end of the shame of disfigurement, tells the story of Lucy Greely. Greely who suffered from a permanent disfigurement is quoted as saying, "I was my face, I was ugliness."<sup>26</sup> Pattison comments, "Greely lived a diminished, less than human life because she internalised a negative image from others."<sup>27</sup>

"Inherited identity shame" originates from an individual's social context.<sup>28</sup> For many this is a source of pride, but for some this can bring shame. It is the impact of racial slurs, or the sense of being ostracised because of one's financial capability, or that of one's parents. It is the pain of rejection because one was born in the "wrong place", at the "wrong time", to the "wrong people." Each of these is a pejorative concept. Pembroke identifies this shame with what James Fowler calls "ascribed shame."<sup>29</sup> Fowler recognises that such shame has very little to do with personal merit of an individual, or their family, but is almost completely about a social "dis-valuing" of certain traits over which the individual has no control. His list of such traits includes: "socioeconomic class", "race", "religion" and "gender."<sup>30</sup>

Shame can be identified with feelings of inadequacy, incompetence, or generally lacking in comparison with the perceived capacities, abilities, or attributes of others. This is understood as

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<sup>23</sup> Neil Pembroke, *Pastoral Care in Worship: Liturgy and Psychology in Dialogue* (London: T & T Clark International, 2010), 30.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Pattison, *Saving Face: Enfacement, Shame, Theology* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 65.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>28</sup> Neil Pembroke, *Pastoral Care in Worship: Liturgy and Psychology in Dialogue* (London: T & T Clark International, 2010), 27.

<sup>29</sup> James W. Fowler, *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 119.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

“inferiority shame.”<sup>31</sup> This form of shame arises out of an individual’s personal experience and personal evaluation of that experience. This is one of the important points for Capps to highlight. While shame has been traditionally located in reference to societal expectations, Capps asserts that it is primarily about our personal expectations.<sup>32</sup> An individual’s sense of inferiority, while obviously related to others, and their expectations, comes from self-evaluation. It is important to note that other experiences of shame can merge with inferiority shame. The effect is that while shame may begin at any point, once it is impacting the person’s worth and leading to a sense of inferiority it is becoming toxic, a destructive reflection of the “depleted-self.”

The final member of the shame family identified by Pembroke is “moral shame.”<sup>33</sup> It is with moral shame that a potential positive side may be identified. Honour, a sense of freedom, and self-worth may all be derived from acting in accord with principles that are consistent with appropriate standards of behaviour. Failure at this point brings about a sense of shame that reflects not just upon the deeds committed, but on the individual committing them. Pembroke identifies that within moral shame are the notions of “discretionary shame” and “disgrace shame” developed by Carl Schneider.<sup>34</sup> Fowler has elsewhere elaborated on these concepts. He identifies “discretionary shame” as guarding an individual’s sense of self-worth.<sup>35</sup> It develops, and maintains, the connections between people and their communities. Discretionary shame is the motivation, for “tact, sensitivity, and respect for others.”<sup>36</sup> Fowler identifies, in addition to these, the esteeming of shared values between the self and those with which an individual is in community.<sup>37</sup> The important point to take into consideration is that discretionary shame, in Fowler’s words, is “premonitory and anticipatory.”<sup>38</sup> It is a sense that goes before a choice or an action that gives one reason to adjust in an appropriate way. “Disgrace shame”, however, has little capacity for redeeming a situation. It is an emotion of pain associated with a failure to meet set standards. As such it may very well be associated with moral issues, but is not exclusively so. Therefore that which is experienced as moral shame, which may very well have an appropriate regulating factor to it, may feel the same as many other experiences that have nothing to do with the morality of a situation.<sup>39</sup> Thus a person is led down the road of confusion between what is guilt and what is shame. This confusion is implicated then in how one seeks a spiritual solution. An individual seeking to find forgiveness for sins, for which they are unaware, in an attempt to deal with a sense of “wrongness” may, in fact, be seeking to respond to the impact of shame upon their life. It is important to note that expressions of judgment on the performance of others, often couched in terms of morality, have the potential for direct connection to the experience of “disgrace shame.” The distinction

<sup>31</sup> Neil Pembroke, *Pastoral Care in Worship: Liturgy and Psychology in Dialogue* (London: T& T Clark International, 2010), 28.

<sup>32</sup> Donald Capps, *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 72.

<sup>33</sup> Neil Pembroke, *Pastoral Care in Worship: Liturgy and Psychology in Dialogue* (London: T& T Clark International, 2010), 30.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>35</sup> James W. Fowler, *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 104.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-106.



between guilt and shame is not limited to a theological one. Indeed June Tangney has identified the same error in the work of many psychologists.<sup>40</sup> Tangney in analysing the research suggests that the primary distinction between the two is seen in the reality that guilt relates to what we do and shame to who we are.<sup>41</sup> Pembroke endorses this distinction and adds that where guilt needs forgiveness shame needs love.<sup>42</sup>

Pembroke identifies six characteristic components of shame: “exposure, hiddenness, incongruence, threat to trust, contempt for self, and the involvement of the whole self.”<sup>43</sup> Exposure” is that sense that one’s flaws are being seen. It may well lead to someone avoiding situations that will lead to this experience. “Hiddenness” is the corollary of exposure. It is the resultant response that people may have to feelings of being exposed. It may well be seen in an individual’s disconnectedness from the emotion or their inability to express it. Shame generally involves “incongruence” – the gap between what is “done” and what is perceived as expected. It is that pang, or pain, when one comes to the realisation that she is not what is expected for the situation. While it may simply be that a person does something innocuous that is experienced as inappropriate, it is internalised as “I am inappropriate.” Often the experience of shame will include a “threat to trust.” An individual, formally seen as supportive and nurturing, or perhaps hoped would be, has become the dispenser of inadequacy. For example a child may attempt to clean her room and present it to her parent as a finished project only to be scolded for failing to see dirty clothes upon the floor. Shame results in “*contempt for self.*” Shame, for Wurmser, is less the sense that one is not loved, but that one is “unloveable.”<sup>44</sup> Finally shame is the “involvement of the whole self.”<sup>45</sup> It is a self-assessment of inadequacy between the expectation and the achievement. It is the sense that, “I am not enough, “I am worthless,” “I am a failure,” or the like.

In considering the breadth of impact that is revealed in these characteristic it is not difficult to understand why Capps identifies the experience of shame as being a total human experience.<sup>46</sup> Shame does not simply reflect the inadequacy of an action it speaks to the inadequacy of being. Wurmser describes the impact of shame in terms of the “broken-self.”<sup>47</sup> While his focus, at this point, is upon the psychoanalytical concept of parental relationships, he notes that the broken self is fractured in “love relationships.”<sup>48</sup> By this he would suggest that the brokenness of the self,

<sup>40</sup> June Tangney, “Perfectionism and the Self-conscious Emotions: Shame, Guilt, Embarrassment, and Pride,” in *Perfectionism: Theory, Research, and Treatment*, ed. G.L. Flett, & P. L. Hewitt (Washington DC: American Psychological Association 2002), 5-31.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 200.

<sup>42</sup> Neil Pembroke, “Pastoral Care for Shame-based Perfectionism,” *Pastoral Psychology* 61 (2012): 245-258.

<sup>43</sup> Neil Pembroke, *Pastoral Care in Worship: Liturgy and Psychology in Dialogue* (London: T & T Clark International, 2010), 30-34.

<sup>44</sup> Léon Wurmser, *The Mask of Shame* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1981), 92-93.

<sup>45</sup> Neil Pembroke, *Pastoral Care in Worship: Liturgy and Psychology in Dialogue* (London: T & T Clark International, 2010), 35.

<sup>46</sup> Donald Capps, *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 74

<sup>47</sup> Léon Wurmser, *The Mask of Shame* (Baltimore, ME: John Hopkins University Press, 1981), 169-171.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 171.

experienced in shame, is identified within the context of the failure of relationships intended to express love. The issue of the connection between love, relationships, and worth on the one hand and shame on the other begins to form the context in which the church can be seen as a place of effective response to shame.

It can be seen then that shame is an experience that can have deep and profound impact upon the sufferer, but is also one that most people experience in some form or another, from time to time. However, Pattison observes that shame is like a “miasma or slime”; it has the capacity to slowly engage a person’s most basic sense of worth and lead to ultimately “threatening their global sense of self.”<sup>49</sup> It is at this point that it becomes appropriate to consider shame as toxic to the self. This then leads to the understanding that shame is an experience of identity. The capacity for shame to shape our identity should not be underestimated. As it is an experience that may be considered ubiquitous in its impact it is not unusual to see it described in terms such as those used by Michael Lewis. He says that shame is universal and to experience shame is “to be normal.”<sup>50</sup> While it may not be possible to claim categorically that no one escapes shame, it seems self-evident that few, if any, cannot identify with the experience. The destructive impact of shame upon the identity of an individual would suggest that the church, representing the grace of God, needs to continually consider its response. While a person may find resolution to many issues in their lives by simply reshaping their understanding of them, the impact of shame is to shape the identity of the individual as a shame identity. By that is meant that the one that has experienced the shaping effect of shame interacts with the world with the influence of shame ever present. Nothing but a re-shaping of identity, as Pembroke has suggested, will suffice for the restoration from shame.<sup>51</sup>

### The Relationship between Shame and Sin

Capps’ book begins with the question: “Whatever happened to sin?”<sup>52</sup> It is his observation that sin has become an increasingly unpopular subject of discussion regardless of faith perspectives. He suggests that those in the pastoral care community have deliberately turned away from anything that could seem condemning in order to pursue positive responses to the human condition. Capps recognises that pastoral care has primarily focused on acceptance and valuing individuals not judging them. A discussion on sin, he says, may cause concern with some that believe such a discussion would represent a move back toward the dark ages and a focus on condemnation and guilt.<sup>53</sup> It is not that, by and large, within the Christian community, there has been a loss in recognition of the sinfulness of humanity, but that such language seems inapplicable when there is little sense of sin in the broader

<sup>49</sup> Stephen Pattison, “Shame and the Unwanted Self,” in *The Shame Factor: How Shame Shapes Society* ed. Robert Jewitt, Wayne L. Alloway and John G. Lacey (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 17.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Lewis, *Shame: The Exposed Self* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 12.

<sup>51</sup> Neil Pembroke, *Pastoral Care in Worship: Liturgy and Psychology in Dialogue* (London: T& T Clark International, 2010), 34.

<sup>52</sup> Donald Capps, *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 1

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 2-3.



culture. Within a culture becoming increasingly narcissistic experienced guilt has increasingly less meaning or significance. Capps argues that the traditional Western constructs of sin place guilt as first and foremost in God's redeeming purposes. However, guilt has little meaning for the narcissist. And yet the narcissist is very aware of shame. It is the position of this paper that the issues of shame go beyond those related to narcissism, however, in identifying the relevance of shame to the narcissist Capps has also identified the broader issue of the impact of shame upon all. Where guilt may not be clearly seen, or limited to specific incidents, shame impacts the whole person. Capps offers that the presence of shame in the experience of sin is at least as real as guilt, if not more so.<sup>54</sup> To recognise this reality and seek to understand the relationship between sin and shame more fully becomes an increasingly important endeavour as the church seeks to find ways to represent the grace of God.

Pembroke endorses Capps' evaluation and contends that the sin that is most prominent around the experience of shame is the failure to live an "authentic life."<sup>55</sup> That is the reality of the isolated, disconnected, evasive life that goes along with shame is a reflection of the sin condition. Pembroke well says that in truth sin is best understood in the context of relationships.<sup>56</sup> Sin is a concept that only has real meaning as it pertains to God. God creates in a relational way so that there is a right and proper way of relating to others, ourselves, to nature, and to God. God is love and love defines these relationships. To live in ways that are outside of that way, the way of love, is to experience sin,<sup>57</sup> and shame closely follows. It is not difficult to grasp that if the design is love then there is, in fact, a draw to love that is deeply personal. The self that is complete longs to love. Nothing could be more central to our being than love, and to live outside of love is to experience shame. That is to say that love speaks to the whole person. Love by its very nature validates; love brings honour and establishes worth. Shame speaks to the whole person in ways that devalue and suggest worthlessness. The tragedy is that the nature of God, which is love, and effective relationship with God is the remedy, but shame drives the person from the very one that brings the healing as can be seen in the Genesis story of the garden.

Capps' observations regarding the story of creation and the fall are of interest at this point.<sup>58</sup> The creation story reminds us that God created and saw that it was good.<sup>59</sup> Capps suggests that the story of the fall, which begins with the prohibition against eating the specified fruit, is a plot device to establish the focus of the early chapters of Genesis – which is the human condition. The focus of this story is the experience of shame.<sup>60</sup> This seems a reasonable assertion given the description of what they experienced as a result of their actions. Their first action following their sin was to cover their

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 2-5.

<sup>55</sup> Neil Pembroke, *Pastoral Care in Worship: Liturgy and Psychology in Dialogue* (London: T & T Clark International, 2010), 35.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 35-36.

<sup>58</sup> Donald Capps, *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 85.

<sup>59</sup> Gen 1:1-31.

<sup>60</sup> Capps, *Depleted Self*, 85

nakedness. Where once they were not ashamed their actions indicate their sense of inadequacy and inappropriateness.<sup>61</sup> The markers of shame are present throughout the story. The human condition is a shamed condition. So, while shame has been a focus of study only relatively recently, it has always been understood to be front and centre of the human experience, whether or not it was named as such.

The depiction of the first sin, as it appears in the Genesis account, reveals the truth that humanity's existence has been distorted by its presence. No longer is the intended full and loving relationship between God and humanity available as a natural state. Identity, designed to be forged in the loving embrace of the creating God, is shaped instead by this loss. Into this diminished state seeps the presence of shame.

### **The Church and Shame**

No understanding of the church and its place in the world is complete if it does not embrace an understanding of an adequate response to shame. To fashion such a response has less to do with programmes and agendas and more to do with the nature of God and faith. Robert Jewett expresses the way forward for the church is to be found in an understanding of what constitutes "good religion."<sup>62</sup> He uses this term borrowed from the heart cries of those ensnared in the shame of slavery in 19<sup>th</sup> century in the U.S.A.<sup>63</sup> The bad religion focused on in the New Testament, according to Jewett, was an attempt to use an honour-shame dichotomy to cause the masses to conform to a particular expression of sectarian faith for the purpose of social domination. Such expressions of faith received attention and condemnation by both Jesus and Paul.<sup>64</sup> Jewett explains that the various sects of Jewish faith each held the belief that their particular understanding of their faith was essential for the ushering in of the future Kingdom of God. Their public expressions of faith were of utmost importance in their understanding of their role in the future of Israel. In an honour-shame society, as this was, public opinion of one's merit is essential if they are to be persuaded of the superiority of a certain perspective. The possibility of the ushering in of the Kingdom of God hinged upon broad public acceptance of specific sectarian views and practices.<sup>65</sup>

Jewett offers that a central theme in Jesus' ministry, the idea that the Kingdom of God is a present reality not a future hope, is of crucial importance in understanding the nature of God's response to shame. <sup>66</sup> Jesus' representation of the Kingdom is not one of exclusion through inadequacy but of acceptance through the grace of God. Time and again the shamed are noted as being accepted in

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<sup>61</sup> Gen 3:7.

<sup>62</sup> Robert Jewett, "Got Good Religion: The Misuse of Piety to Earn Honor," in *The Shame Factor: How Shame Shapes Society* ed. Robert Jewitt, Wayne L. Alloway and John G. Lacey (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 187-205

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 187-188.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 200.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 199-200.

this Kingdom.<sup>67</sup> James Fowler offers a similar reflection when identifying Jesus' response to women, considered culturally to be near worthless and thus very aware of their shameful state.<sup>68</sup> Jesus responds directly to their need in each instance recorded. Jesus claimed that the loving Abba Father offered free entrance into His Kingdom for all and this stood in direct opposition to the idea of merit through pious actions.<sup>69</sup> The goal of honour-shame behaviour revealed in these actions has less to do with communion with God than to impress both God and humanity. Jewett suggests: "While seeming to act with integrity in relation to God, they were really acting to impress others with their piety and finally to demonstrate the superiority of their sect."<sup>70</sup> This is what marks the difference between "bad religion" and "good religion." The former emphasises the difference between shame and honour the latter overcomes shame through love and acceptance. The church then becomes a healing community by a dedication to an adequate reflection of kingdom values.

At the core of the church's response is the very nature of God and His kingdom. Neil Pembroke picks up on this theme and highlights the place of compassion in the Hebrew community.<sup>71</sup> While the *Torah* consistently called the community to a "strict and stringent code," there was a consistent reflection of "love and mercy."<sup>72</sup> Yahweh, was demonstrably compassionate to all people but most particularly "the poor, the sojourners, the widows, and the orphans."<sup>73</sup> These are the shamed of society but as Yahweh showed compassion so must those who are considered his people. Like Jewett, Pembroke highlights the reality of Jesus redefining membership in the Kingdom of God.<sup>74</sup> There is only one criterion for belonging to this community of faith: "repentance of sin and acceptance of divine grace."<sup>75</sup> All are invited to belong. "The Son of Man comes as a host of a heavenly banquet in which all are invited to share in the love and goodness of God. Moreover, it is especially to the marginalized lot that the compassionate heart of God is opened."<sup>76</sup> Compassion, acceptance, worth and dignity, lie at the very heart of God's engagement with humanity. Such become the defining qualities of His people and the way they relate to each other and to the world beyond.

## Conclusion

Shame has a pervasive presence. Its effects can be seen wherever there are people. It has always been this way, for at the heart of shame is the gulf between God, and sin impacted humanity. God,

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 200.

<sup>68</sup> James W. Fowler, *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 143.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Jewett, "Got Good Religion: The Misuse of Piety to Earn Honor" in *The Shame Factor: How Shame Shapes Society* ed. Robert Jewitt, Wayne L. Alloway and John G. Lacey (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 204.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Neil Pembroke, *Moving Toward Spiritual Maturity: Psychological, Contemplative, and Moral Challenges in Christian Living* (New York, NY: Hawthorne Pastoral Press, 2007), 121-128.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>75</sup> Neil Pembroke, *Moving Toward Spiritual Maturity: Psychological, Contemplative, and Moral Challenges in Christian Living* (New York, NY: Hawthorne Pastoral Press, 2007), 126.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

who is both love and the source of love, seeks to call all people to Himself in direct contradiction to what a sense of shame might suggest. The essence of the gospel is that grace is freely available to all and none has sufficient merit to qualify on that basis alone.

The church, the community of faith, while it seeks to reflect the grace of God must also wrestle with the reality that it is made up of those who have been scared by sin and, as a result, shame. Responding effectively to shame does not take place by simply wanting it to be so, and it certainly does not take place where there is ignorance of the depth of the struggle. Effective response is the result of a deliberate choice to minister the grace of God. The capacity of the church to effectively minister the grace of God is bound up in its willingness to embrace the grace of God that He might heal the effects of shame at both a corporate and personal level. To reflect the values that lie at the core of His Kingdom -compassion, acceptance, worth and dignity – remains the ever-present privilege and responsibility of the church. In this alone is an adequate response to shame revealed.