

DESPISING SHAME:
A CULTURAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION
OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

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The past twelve years have witnessed tremendous growth in the analysis of NT documents in the light of cultural anthropological insights. A particularly helpful development has been the heightening of scholars' sensitivity to honor and shame as "pivotal values" of the Mediterranean world.¹ Reading a first-century Mediterranean text through this lens assists the interpreter to "see as the natives see, . . . value what they value; . . . understand how and why they act the way they do."² Although these are not the only values of ancient Mediterranean society, A. W. Adkins has argued that they are the ultimate values within whose framework other values operate.³ The Epistle to the Hebrews itself calls for an analysis of the author's use of the language of honor and dishonor (and shows itself to belong fully to a culture that evaluates in terms of honor and dishonor) on account of the high incidence of vocabulary and concepts related to honor and dishonor (e.g., δόξα, τιμή, αίσχύνη, όνειδισμός, άξιόω, κρείττω, ύβρίζω, and related forms) and by its frequent, even central, use of comparison and argument from greater to lesser.

G. M. Corrigan and J. H. Neyrey have explored the "scandal of the cross" in terms of honor and shame;⁴ Hebrews opens itself up to an honor/shame analysis also in the figure of the crucified Christ, who "endured the cross, despising shame, and sat down at the right hand of God (ύπέμεινε σταυρόν αίσχύνης καταφρονήσας έν δεξιά τε του θρόνου του θεου κειάθικεν)." How does the author of Hebrews solve the problem of the dishonor of Christ and the dishonor of Christians, thereby permitting honor-sensitive people to continue in Christian activity, worship, and community (indeed, to satisfy their desire for honor specifically through Christian activity)?

¹ Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) 25.

² J. H. Neyrey, "John 18–19: Honor and Shame in the Passion Narrative," forthcoming in *Semeia*.

³ A. W. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960) 156.

⁴ G. M. Corrigan, "Paul's Shame for the Gospel," *BTB* 16 (1986) 25; Neyrey, "John 18–19" 2.

This study endeavors to demonstrate the viability of the following hypothesis: the problem facing the Christian community that received this letter involved the Christians' longing for honor and a place in the society's ladder of status. While the believers were once content to lose their place in society (with the confiscation of their property, their subjection to trial and disgrace, 10:32–34), with the passing of time these longings resurface and pressure some of the believers at least to withdraw from the associations that marginalize them and hinder their efforts to regain honor in society's eyes. For this reason, there is a reluctance on the part of some to identify with the members of a marginal, low-status group, which would undermine their own status in society. This accounts for the withdrawal of some from the gathered worshiping community (10:25) as well as the perceived need on the part of the author to reinforce the importance of showing solidarity with the imprisoned and tortured (10:34; 13:3). The author solves this problem by holding up before the congregation an alternative system of honor—one familiar to them, but with regard to which they require reinforcement—which carries with it the promise of greater and lasting reward for those honored according to its standards. The author seeks to persuade the congregation to disregard the society's evaluation of honor and dishonor and to continue confidently in Christian identity and associations as a means of satisfying their desire for honor (φιλοτιμία).

I. Despising Shame

C. Spicq perceived that the author of Hebrews was a man of honor: "L'auteur a un sens très noble de l'honneur. C'est à ce titre, semble-t-il, qu'il exige qu'on n'abuse pas de l'amour de Dieu, que l'on se rende digne d'être agrégé à la haute assemblée des esprits purs (XII, 22–23) et digne aussi de l'exemple des Pères (XI)."⁵ As this author holds up as the supremely positive model one who "despised shame," however, many members of the Greco-Roman world would not have agreed with Spicq's estimation of the author of Hebrews. "Despising shame" ran counter to the values of Greek culture. Adkins writes of the Homeric culture that "the chief good is to be well spoken of, the chief ill to be badly spoken of, by one's society."⁶ He demonstrates that this is still true for Aeschylus's time.⁷ It is no less true for Isocrates, who advises Demonicus: "Guard more carefully against censure than danger (Μᾶλλον εὐλαβοῦ φόγον ἢ κίνδυνον), . . . good men should dread ignominy during life" (*Ad Dem.* 43). Even in the first century, the value of honor is undiminished.

⁵ Ceslaus Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux* (2 vols.; Paris: Gabalda, 1953) I. 207.

⁶ Adkins, *Merit*, 154.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 155. Adkins acknowledges the importance of other axes of value, but argues forcefully that the evaluation of some act as honorable/noble or dishonorable is a final verdict: "The Chorus says of Apollo's advocacy of Orestes' killing of Clytemnestra that it was performed justly, *dikāi*; to which Electra replies, 'But not honourably,' *kalōs d' ou*. Naturally . . . this settles the matter, for there is no higher term of value to invoke" (Adkins, *Merit*, 185).

Josephus, a spokesperson for the dominant culture, writes that ζῆν καλῶς ἢ τεθνάναι (“to live nobly or die”) are the only options for ἄνδρες ἀγαθοί (*J.W.* 7.8.7 §341). There was a strong tradition of despising *death* as a mark of courage (ἀνδρεία), but not a shameful death, which was the most feared disgrace.⁸ What does our author mean when he holds up as a model Jesus, who ὑπέμεινε σταυρὸν αἰσχύνης καταφρονήσας?

Dio Chrysostom (*Orat.* 7.139) affords the closest lexical parallel to Heb 12:2, αἰσχύνης καταφρονήσας:

Now at this point we must assuredly remember that this adultery committed with outcasts, so evident in our midst and becoming so brazen and unchecked, is to a very great extent paving the way to hidden and secret assaults (ὑβρεων) upon the chastity of women and boys of good family, such crimes being only too boldly committed when modesty is trampled upon (τῆς αἰσχύνης ἐν κοινῷ καταφρονουμένης).

In this passage αἰσχύνη has the sense of “modesty,” “shame” in its more positive sense as that which “makes one sensitive to the honor rating and respectful of social boundaries,” and in the particularly female sense of preserving chastity, the means by which women in this culture retained their own, and their male kindred’s, honor.⁹ As the author of Hebrews is also concerned about the preservation of chastity (Heb 13:4), he cannot be said to recommend the despising of modesty. The lexical parallel does not afford a conceptual parallel. When seen against the background of minority groups which have secured their own identity through establishing an alternate framework of honor and disregarding the opinion of society, the meaning of this phrase becomes conceptually clearer. The author recommends the despising of the honor rating, or “opinion” (δόξα), of the dominant culture.

Aristotle, himself a quite solid citizen of Greek society, introduces the phrase καταφρονοῦσι τῆς δόξης in his discussion of the meaning of “shame” (αἰδῶς): “[People] are not ashamed . . . before those whose opinion in regard to truth they greatly despise—for instance, no one feels shame before children or animals (οὐκ αἰσχύνονται ὧν πολὺ καταφρονοῦσι τῆς δόξης τοῦ ἀληθεύειν)” (*Rhet.* 2.6.23). One only feels shame before those “whose opinion they do not despise (μη καταφρονεῖ τῆς δόξης)” (*Rhet.* 2.6.14–15). Aristotle considered it the exception rather than the rule to “despise opinion,” for only the “shameless” person thought nothing of gaining a bad reputation (cf. Theophrastus, *Char.* 9.1: ‘Ἡ δὲ ἀναισχυντία ἐστὶ μὲν, ὡς ὄρω λαβεῖν, καταφρόνησις δόξης αἰσχροῦ ἔνεκα κέρδους).¹⁰

⁸ See the unknown poet quoted by Epictetus (*Diss.* 2.1.13): οὐ κατθανεῖν γὰρ δεινόν, ἀλλ’ αἰσχροῶς θανεῖν; also see Adkins: “Megara says significantly that death is a terrible thing, but that to die in a manner which would give her enemies the opportunity to mock would be a greater evil than death” (*Merit*, 155).

⁹ Corrigan, “Paul’s Shame,” 23.

¹⁰ Rudolf Bultmann very insightfully interprets αἰσχύνη as the “fear of the αἰσχρόν and therefore

Dio Chrysostom, however, came from a highly honored family (*Orat.* 44.3–4), was himself the recipient of many honors, and still could recommend the “despising of opinion.” Dio confirms the observations of Julian Pitt-Rivers, who says that “public opinion forms . . . ‘the court of reputation’ . . . and against its judgements there is no redress. For this reason it is said that public dishonour kills.”¹¹ Dio compared “reputation seeking” to being on trial every day before judges of every sort who are “not bound by oath, without regard for either witnesses or evidence” (*Orat.* 66.17–18). He argues that it would be better to give up one’s concern for reputation, because it only puts the person in constant jeopardy, which would be as unbearable as being on trial for one’s life every day. He concludes that “unless you bring yourself to look with scorn (*καταφρονῆσαι*) upon all others, you will never end your state of wretchedness (*κακοδαίμονία*)” (*Orat.* 66.24).¹² For Dio, despising the opinion of others was the only way to maintain peace of mind in the honor-seeking and honor-challenging frenzy of Greek society.

Still, Dio offers no alternative system. One either seeks honor in the public court of reputation or one withdraws from the quest. When one enters the world of Cynic/Stoic thought, however, one finds posited alternate, incompatible courts of reputation. Epictetus (*Diss.* 3.2.9) articulates clearly that studying philosophy is incompatible with concern for public opinion: one cannot be worried “μή τίς σου καταφρονήσῃ, καί . . . μή τίς τι περὶ σοῦ λέγει.” The ambition to advance in status (e.g., by means of acquiring positions of power or acquiring wealth) is incompatible with the ambition to succeed as a philosopher: “You cannot wish for a consulship and at the same time wish for this [i.e., the philosopher’s achievement and state of mind]; you cannot have set your heart upon having lands and this too” (*Diss.* 4.10.18). When Epictetus (*Diss.* 1.19.30–32) speaks of those who will not be persuaded by the philosopher concerning the truth of reality as children and advises that the philosopher should treat them and respond to them accordingly, one cannot help but recall Aristotle’s saying, that “[people] are not ashamed . . . before those whose opinion in regard to truth they greatly despise—for instance, no one feels shame before children or animals (*οὐκ αἰσχύνονται ὧν πολὺ καταφρονοῦσι τῆς δόξης*

of one’s δόξα” (“αἰδῶς,” *TDNT* 1. 170). It is regrettable that he did not follow through with this insight in his discussion of αἰσχρόν in the NT and the LXX, where he claims that it carries the thought “primarily of one’s own despair rather than the δόξα of others,” thus moving an inter-subjective experience wholly into the subjective realm (“αἰσχύνω,” *TDNT* 1. 189).

¹¹ Julian Pitt-Rivers, “Honour and Social Status,” in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (ed. J. G. Peristiany; London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966) 27.

¹² Further, in *Orat.* 8.33, Dio introduces an allegorization of the Prometheus legend, in which reputation (δόξα) takes the place of the vulture, “praise” (ἔπαινος) regenerates his liver, and “censure” (φύγος) causes it to shrivel. It was from this sorry bondage that Heracles delivered him. Another of Heracles’ labors involves the correction of concern for reputation or opinion (δόξα): He cleans out Augeas’s stables because “he considered that he ought to fight stubbornly and war against opinion (δόξα) as much as against wild beasts and wicked men” (*Orat.* 8.35).

τοῦ ἀληθεύειν)” (*Rhet.* 2.6.23). The philosopher is not concerned about the opinion of such children.¹³ Indeed, δόξα has become δοξάριον — petty reputation (note the -ριον ending) — which is of no concern to the Cynic (*Diss.* 3.22.13). There appears, rather, a curious reversal of “opinion” and the “court of opinion” in Epictetus’s protreptic discourse on the Cynic. Epictetus poses ironic questions here, which demonstrate how he has restructured status and the estimation of honor. The Cynic (a word etymologically akin to “dog”) is now the one who evaluates the worthiness of others to be his friends (φίλοι) or table fellows:

But where will you find me a Cynic’s friend? For such a person must be another Cynic, in order to be worthy of being counted his friend (ὡς ἄξιος ἢ φίλος αὐτοῦ ἀριθμεῖσθαι). He must share with him his sceptre [or staff] and kingdom, and be a worthy ministrant, if he is going to be deemed worthy of friendship (φιλίας ἀξιωθήσεσθαι). . . . Or do you think that if a man as he comes up greets the Cynic, he is the Cynic’s friend, and the Cynic will think him worthy (ἄξιον ἡγήσεται) to receive him into his house? (*Diss.* 3.22.63, 65)

The Stoic philosophers appealed to the court of their own conscience (Seneca, *Ep.* 81.20) or to the governing principle (Epictetus, *Diss.* 1.15.4), which was related to the deity. On such fulcrums they were able to attach their levers and relativize, indeed despise, the society’s evaluations of honor and dishonor. The complete inapplicability of the society’s standards of honor and dishonor to the philosopher is succinctly put in Seneca, *De Const.* 13:2: “In the same spirit in which he sets no value (*nihilō aestimat*) on the honours they have, he sets no value on the lack of honour they show.”

Turning to the Jewish literature of the period, one finds an even stronger sense of differentiation between the evaluation of the honorable and disgraceful of the “people of God” and that of the Gentile nations (and, of course, between sectarian Jewish groups and the ethnic people of Israel). The court of reputation is now largely transferred to the court of God at the last judgment. Wisdom of Solomon speaks of the shameful treatment of the righteous at the hands of the wicked, who believe that this life is the only one a person may enjoy and find the righteous to be an unwelcome witness to restraint and censure of their lifestyle. Despite the success of the ungodly in subjecting the righteous to disgrace and suffering (*Wis* 2:19–20: ὑβρεῖ καὶ βασάνω ἐτάσωμεν αὐτόν . . . θανάτῳ ἀσχήμονι καταδικάσωμεν αὐτόν), at the last judgment, the righteous are at last vindicated in the sight of their enemies, who realize that they had everything upside down: Οὗτος ἦν, ὃν ἐσχομένε ποτε εἰς γέλωτα καὶ εἰς παραβολήν

¹³ See also Seneca, *De Const.* 11.2–12.1. Seneca notes that one does not take a child’s actions as insulting, because children are inferior, and that “the same attitude . . . the wise man has toward all men whose childhood endures even beyond middle age and the period of grey hairs.” The lack of honor (or outright abuse) shown to the wise person is of no concern to him or her, since it indicates rather the lack of maturity, and hence inferiority, of the offender. The offense of an inferior is no real challenge to honor (see Pitt-Rivers, “Honour,” 37; Malina, *World*, 36).

ὀνειδισμού οἱ ἄφρονες· τὸν βίον αὐτοῦ ἐλογισάμεθα μανίαν καὶ τὴν τελευτὴν αὐτοῦ ἄτιμον. πῶς κατελογίσθη ἐν υἱοῖς θεοῦ; . . . ἄρα ἐπλανήθημεν ἀπὸ ὁδοῦ ἀληθείας . . .” (Wis 5:4–6).

Adkins writes that the “belief in a ‘real’ future existence would make possible a use of the most powerful terms of value in a sense which did not entail success *in this life*.”¹⁴ Nowhere does this become more apparent than in 2 and 4 Maccabees, in which the firm belief in a future life and an accounting before God allows for the uncompromising position of the aged Eleazar, the mother, and her seven sons, and also for the evaluation of their end as honorable rather than disgraceful. The importance of these particular examples for understanding the author of Hebrews’ own construction and support of an alternative system of honor is clear from the explicit reference to the Maccabean martyrs in Heb 11:35b, as well as the influence of 4 Macc 6:9–10 and 17:4 on the phraseology of Heb 12:2 and 3:6, 14.¹⁵ Eleazar endures the tortures, refusing release, with an eye toward God’s judgment: “Even if for the present I would avoid the punishment of mortals, yet whether I live or die I shall not escape the hands of the Almighty” (2 Macc 6:26).¹⁶ In so doing, he is praised by the author as “a noble example” (2 Macc 6:31) and “welcoming death with honor rather than life with pollution” (2 Macc 6:19).¹⁷

Even more striking is the episode of the seven brothers in 4 Maccabees. Before Antiochus IV begins to torment them he offers them a place of honor in Hellenic society: “I encourage you, after yielding to me, to enjoy my friendship (παρακαλῶ συνείξαντάς μοι τῆς ἐμῆς ἀπολαύειν φιλίας)” (4 Macc 8:5), the king’s “friend” being an influential position. He proposes a new patron–client relationship between himself and the seven brothers, replacing that between God and the brothers. “I can be a benefactor to those who obey me (δυναίμην . . . εὐεργετεῖν τοὺς εὐπειθοῦντάς μοι)” (8:6). Finally, he promises to raise them to positions of authority (ἀρχαί, 8:7). Later (4 Macc 12:5; cf. 2 Macc 7:24) he repeats the promise of secular honors to the last surviving brother. The brothers, however, are not impressed by these offers—they do not esteem Antiochus’s honors, and so neither do they regard shameful treatment at his hands a thing to be feared (cf. Seneca, *De Const.* 13:2). They are depicted as

¹⁴ Adkins, *Merit*, 179.

¹⁵ 4 Macc 6:9, ὁ δὲ ὑπέμενε τοὺς πόνους καὶ περιφρόνει τῆς ἀνάγκης, corresponds almost exactly to Heb 12:2, ὑπέμεινε σταυρὸν αἰσχύνῃς καταφρονήσας; 4 Macc 17:4, τὴν ἐλπίδα τῆς ὑπομονῆς βεβαίαν ἔχουσα πρὸς τὸν θεόν, is echoed in Heb 3:6 and 14.

¹⁶ See Halvor Moxnes, speaking about Paul: “It is before God’s court that the final decision on honour or shame is made. Thus the ultimate ‘significant other’ is God” (“Honour and Righteousness in Romans,” *JSNT* 32 [1988] 68).

¹⁷ The contrast posited by the author of 2 Maccabees here—between honor and pollution—provides additional support for the criticism of Unni Wikan that honor and shame do not always appear as a contrasting pair in Mediterranean values (Wikan, “Shame and Honour: A Contestable Pair,” *Man* 19 [1984] 635–52). Moxnes has also demonstrated the correctness of Wikan’s criticism in his study of Romans 6, where he finds holiness, rather than honor, contrasted with shame (“Honour,” 67).

looking forward to the reward of their steadfastness in terms of honor in a life beyond death and their struggles: “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will welcome us, and all the fathers will praise us (ἡμᾶς . . . πάντες οἱ πατέρες ἐπαινέσουσιν)” (4 Macc 13:17). Indeed, from within their own world-construction (which places God and God’s court at the center), they are able to evaluate Antiochus’s own behavior as shameful and as evidence of his own shamelessness.¹⁸ In 4 Macc 11:2–6, the fifth brother chides the tyrant for evaluating wrongly the deeds of the Jews, namely, their reverence for God and obedience to God’s law: “These deeds deserve honors, not tortures (ἀλλὰ ταῦτα τιμῶν, οὐ βασάνων ἐστὶν ἄξια).” Implicit in this claim is a critique of Antiochus’s understanding of what is honorable and what deserves blame. Similarly in 4 Macc 12:11, 13, the youngest brother severely censures (i.e., blames or shames) Antiochus:

You profane tyrant, most impious of all the wicked, since you have received good things and also your kingdom from God, were you not ashamed (οὐκ ἠδέσθης) to murder his servants and torture on the wheel those who practice religion? . . . As a man, were you not ashamed (οὐκ ἠδέσθης), you most savage beast, to cut out the tongues of men who have feelings like yours and are made of the same elements as you, and to maltreat and torture them in this way?

The youngest brother declares Antiochus shameless, not understanding how to repay the benefits he had received from God and showing himself devoid of human modesty in his treatment of the martyrs. The ambition that is lauded by the author and demonstrated by the martyrs is to live life so as to “stand in honor before God.”¹⁹ The hope of the martyrs was for “a better resurrection” (Heb 11:35), or, in the words of 2 Macc 7:9, ὁ δὲ τοῦ κόσμου βασιλεὺς ἀποθανόντας ἡμᾶς ὑπὲρ τῶν αὐτοῦ νόμων εἰς αἰώνιον ἀναβίωσιν ζωῆς ἡμᾶς ἀναστήσει. The appeal to God’s court, and the firm conviction that God’s was the highest court, provided the foundation for the martyr’s behavior, as it would also for the Christians’ behavior.²⁰

Against the background of both the Jewish martyrological literature and the Stoic/Cynic treatment of honor and dishonor, the meaning of Heb 12:2

¹⁸ 18 A somewhat similar situation is described by J. G. Peristiany: “The patronizing attitude of the returned expatriate is seen by the villagers to rest not on an assertion of superiority within, and resting on, the village status system but as the assumption of the inapplicability of the village scale of values to the expatriate who transcends it through his association with the city” (“Honour and Shame in a Cypriot Highland Village,” in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* [ed. J. G. Peristiany; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966] 178).

¹⁹ 4 Macc 17:5: praising the mother, the author says, “you . . . stand in honor before God (ἐντιμος καθέστηκας θεῷ).” The martyrs are remembered as honored (τετίμηται, 4 Macc 17:20), and “deemed worthy to share in a divine inheritance (θείας μερίδος κατηξιώθησαν, 18:3).”

²⁰ Cf. Corrigan: “The world may reject [Paul] and consider what he does folly, but he does not mind for he knows that ‘his praise is not from men but from God’ (Rom 2:29)” (“Paul’s Shame,” 25–26); see also Moxnes: “Paul loosens the granting of honour from the social group. ‘Man,’ that is, the Jewish community, is no longer ‘the significant other, in whose eyes approval is sought.’ That is the prerogative of God alone” (“Honour,” 70).

becomes quite clear. Jesus was not merely “disdaining the shame,” roughly equivalent to braving or being unafraid of enduring the shame, nor stoically disregarding suffering and death.²¹ Rather, he was providing a paradigm for the Christian minority group of counting as nothing the negative evaluation of the outside world, thinking only of the evaluation of God (“the joy that was set before him”). Jesus despised (i.e., considered valueless)²² the disgraceful reputation a cross would bring him in the eyes of the Greco-Roman world.²³ His own vindication came afterward, when he “sat at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:2). While in the public court of opinion, Jesus took the most disgraceful seat—on a cross—in God’s court of reputation, Jesus was worthy of the highest honor.

The author of Hebrews argues forcefully that the ascended Jesus enjoys the highest honor of all beings under God. The author emphasizes Jesus’ present exalted status in order to gain credibility for the claim that despising reputation in the eyes of human society can lead to honor and high repute before God. First, the author presents the “Son,” who is “heir of all things.” Given that wealth is a component of honor, and that the son enjoys the honor that is due his father, Jesus is presented as enjoying the highest possible honor already.²⁴ The frequent repetition of the fact of his session at God’s right hand (Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2) points to his exaltation to the highest honor.²⁵ The *proskynēsis* of the angels (1:6), the anointing of the head of Jesus (“beyond his peers,” 1:9), and the crowning of the head with repute and honor (2:7, 9) are all physical replications of the honor of Christ.²⁶

²¹ These are the views of William Lane (*Hebrews* [WBC 47B; Dallas: Word Books, 1991] 414) and Harold W. Attridge (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989] 358), respectively.

²² Cf. Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.2.3: “Slighting (ὀλιγωρία) is an actualization of opinion (δόξα) in regard to something which appears valueless (μηδενὸς ἄξιον). . . . Now there are three kinds of slight: disdain (καταφρόνησις), spitefulness, and insult (ὕβρις). . . . He who disdains, slights, since men disdain those things which they consider valueless and slight what is of no account (ὅ τε γὰρ καταφρονῶν ὀλιγορεῖ· ὅσα γὰρ οἴονται μηδενὸς ἄξια, τούτων καταφρονοῦσιν, τῶν δὲ μηδενὸς ἄξιων ὀλιγοροῦσιν).”

²³ Interestingly, this comes closest to Theophrastus’s definition of shamelessness (*Char.* 9.1). One might suspect that the actions of Christians, like the actions of Christ, would appear to outsiders as “shameless” in the sense of insensitive to the honor rating of society and disrespectful of social boundaries (cf. Corrigan, “Paul’s Shame,” 23). Christ (and, by extension, the Christian) is not shameless in despising shame, but rather seeking honor and repute in an alternate honor/shame culture. He is still φιλότιμος. “What might be deviant and shameful for one group in one locality may be worthy and honorable for another. Yet all groups are concerned about honor” (Bruce Malina and J. H. Neyrey, “Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World,” in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* [ed. J. H. Neyrey; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993] 26).

²⁴ Sir 3:10–11: “Your father’s dishonor is no honor to you, for a man’s reputation comes from the honor of his father (‘H γὰρ δόξα ἀνθρώπου ἐκ τιμῆς πατρὸς);” cf. also Dio Chrysostom, *Orat.* 44.3–4; 46.3–4.

²⁵ Neyrey, “John 18–19,” 5.

²⁶ Pitt-Rivers, “Honour,” 25; Malina and Neyrey, “Honor and Shame,” 35.

The comparison with Moses, a figure held in highest esteem advances Christ's honor further. At this point, the author appears to be following the advice of Aristotle, who in *Rhet.* 1.9.38 states that in epideictic oratory, "you must compare him [the subject of the encomium] with illustrious personages, for it affords ground for amplification and is noble, if he can be proved better than men of worth." Rather than giving a polemic against Moses, the author relies on the high esteem Moses enjoyed (cf. Sir 45:2: "God made him equal in glory to the holy ones and made him great, to the terror of his enemies") in order to form a positive comparison with Jesus. The involved argument, which accords Jesus the title of high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Josephus notes that the title of high priest is τὸ τιμιώτατον καλούμενος τῶν σεβασμίων ὀνομάτων, "called the most honored of revered names" [*J.W.* 4.3.10 §164]) also aims at establishing the greater honor of Jesus. That Christ as high priest is successful where the Temple priests were for one reason or another unsuccessful enhances Christ's prestige even further; that Melchizedek blessed Abraham and received tithes, in effect, from Levi, enhances the prestige of his successor. Finally, the author includes the expectation of the final subjugation of all Christ's enemies under his feet (Heb 1:13; 2:8; 10:13). Such are the prestige and honor of the one who "despised the shame" of human society, and because the audience would agree with the author's appraisal of the honor of Christ (or else they would not have become Christians in the first place) he can develop his portrayal of the exaltation of Christ encomiastically in order to support his exhortation that the addressees follow in obedience to Christ and in faithfulness to one's fellow Christians, without regard for the potential or actual dishonor one acquires in society's eyes.

The early Greek fathers, much closer in time and culture to the author of Hebrews, understood Heb 12:2 in much the same way. Jesus, as "Lord of Glory," despised the negative evaluation of human beings: οὗτος ὁ τῆς ἐν ἀνθρώποις αἰσχύνης καταφρονήσας διὰ τὸ εἶναι τῆς δόξης κύριος (Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunom.* 3.3.68.9); καταφρονήσας γὰρ τῆς παρ' ἀνθρώποις αἰσχύνης (Origen, *Frag. in Ps.* 37.12.4–5). Jesus' own attitude toward the negative evaluation of the outside world was a pattern for believers who wished to follow him and share in his honor and victory:

ὁ Ἰησοῦς δὲ ποτε ὑπέμεινε σταυρὸν αἰσχύνης καταφρονήσας καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ· καὶ οἱ μιμηταὶ δὲ αὐτοῦ αἰσχύνης καταφρονούντες συγκαθεδόνται αὐτῷ καὶ συμβασιλεύσουσιν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. (Origen, *Exhor. ad Mart.* 37.11–14)

Τί δέ ἐστιν, Αἰσχύνης καταφρονήσας; Τὸν ἐπονείδιστον, φησὶν, εἴλετο θάνατον. Ἔστω γὰρ, ἀπέθνησκε· τί καὶ ἐπονείδιστως; Δι' οὐδὲν ἕτερον, ἀλλ' ἡμᾶς διδάσκων μηδὲν ἡγεῖσθαι τὴν παρ' ἀνθρώπων δόξαν. (John Chrysostom, *In Epist. ad Heb.* 63.13–17, on Heb 12:2)

οὕτω καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν πάθει καὶ ταπεινώσει καὶ ἀδοξίᾳ ἀναστρεφόμενοι καὶ ἕως θανάτου αἰσχύνης καταφρονήσαντες δυνηθώμεν νικῆσαι τὸν διάβολον καὶ λαβεῖν

ζῶν καὶ κτήσασθαι τὸν πολύτιμον μαργαρίτην, ὅς ἔστι Χριστός. (Macarius, *Serm.* 10.1.8.8–10)

Seneca warns in *De Const.* 19.2–3 that “fear of insults” may lead one to “fall short in the doing of many needful things, and, suffering from a . . . distaste for hearing anything not to our mind, we shall refuse to face both public and private duties.” *Mutatis mutandis*, one encounters a similar problem in Hebrews’ recipients, a problem remedied in part by presenting the example *par excellence* of despising insults and disgrace in order to do what is needful in obedience to God.

II. Examples of Despising Shame in Hebrews

The primacy of exhortation in Hebrews has long been recognized.²⁷ “The end [τέλος] of the deliberative speaker is the expedient (τὸ συμφέρον) or harmful . . . ; all other considerations, such as justice and injustice [i.e., forensic language], honour and disgrace [i.e., epideictic language], are included as accessory in reference to this” (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.3.5). The epideictic language in Hebrews is integrally related to the aim of the letter as a hortatory document, for, as Aristotle advises, “praise and counsels have a common aspect; for what you might suggest in counselling becomes encomium by a change in the phrase. . . . Accordingly, if you desire to praise, look what you would suggest; if you desire to suggest, look what you would praise” (*Rhet.* 1.9.35–36).²⁸ Within the deliberative framework of Hebrews as λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως, the encomium on faith in chap. 11, as well as the censure of the wilderness generation (3:7–4:11) and Esau (12:16–17), fill out the picture of the life of faith in which the author urges the addressees to persevere.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are set forward as examples of faith in 11:8–22. Their faith is summarized in their confession that ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοὶ εἰσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.²⁹ Abraham left his homeland and embraced the status of “foreigner” and “sojourner” while awaiting the promise, but in so doing, he, like Christ, despises shame. In the Greco-Roman world, the sojourner or foreigner held a lower status than the citizen, such that, with regard to those who have lost their citizenship (ἐπιτιμία), Dio may claim that “whoever so desires is free to strike them and there exists no private means of punishing him who treats them with contumely” (*Orat.* 66.15). Indeed, sojourning could be considered

²⁷ See C. P. Anderson, “The Setting of the Epistle to the Hebrews” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1969) 201, 202; T. E. Schmidt, “Moral Lethargy and the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *WTJ* 54 (1992) 169; D. R. Worley, Jr., especially stresses the importance of the author’s own designation of the work as a λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως (“God’s Faithfulness to Promise: The Hortatory Use of Commissive Language in Hebrews” [Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1981] 52).

²⁸ Cf. also *Rhet. ad Her.* 3.8.15: “And if epideictic is only seldom employed by itself independently, still in judicial and deliberative causes extensive sections are often devoted to praise and censure.”

²⁹ See J. W. Thompson: “Faith . . . involves living as a stranger and alien to this world” (*The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy: The Epistle to the Hebrews* [CBQMS 13; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1982] 76).

a reproach (Lucian, *Patr.* 8: ὄνειδος γὰρ τὸ τῆς ξενιτείας), and the very terms “foreigner” and “immigrant” (τὸν ξένον καὶ τὸν μέτοιχον) could be used as terms of abuse (Plutarch, *De Exil.* 607 A). But again, “what might be deviant and shameful for one group in one locality may be worthy and honorable for another.”³⁰ While in exile, Dio embraced the life of a philosopher, having neither citizenship nor property in the places where he sojourned. In the eyes of his native Prusa, however, such an endurance of disgrace is viewed honorably, as a proof of his devotion to his πατρίς: “I did not even acquire a house or a plot of ground anywhere else, so that I might have nothing to suggest a homeland (πατρίς) anywhere but here” (*Orat.* 44.6). Just as Dio despised the shame of being an exile, sojourner, and foreigner in order to bear witness to his devotion to his homeland, so Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob disregard the low status of sojourners in the estimation of society in order to bear witness to their hope for the homeland God has prepared (Heb 11:14–16); just as Prusa would have honored Dio for his loyalty abroad, so the author of Hebrews claims that God honors those who live as foreigners and not citizens of the world: διὸ οὐκ ἐπαισχύνεται αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς θεὸς ἐπικαλεῖσθαι αὐτῶν· ἠγοίμασεν γὰρ αὐτοῖς πόλιν. Before God’s court of opinion, the disgrace of living as a noncitizen in the world was far outweighed by the honor of having citizenship in the city of God.³¹ The author will draw on the strength of this example in the concluding exhortations of 13:13–14.

A second prominent example in Hebrews 11 is Moses, who, as υἱὸς θυγατρὸς φαραῶ (11:24), occupies a position of very high social standing. His honor rating by birth is very high, as well as by wealth, since he has access to the θησαυροὶ Αἰγύπτου (11:26). Faith expresses itself, however, not in achieving honor in society’s eyes (of which the advantages are described consistently in the NT as πρόσκαιρον, 11:25), but in achieving honor in God’s eyes. Before God’s court of reputation, the “reproach of Christ” is of greater value than the “wealth of Egypt,” and the person of faith will evaluate the promise of society correctly in the light of God’s reward. Moses’ correct evaluation (11:26: μείζονα πλοῦτον ἡγησάμενος τῶν Αἰγύπτου θησαυρῶν τὸν ὄνειδισμὸν τοῦ χριστοῦ, ἀπέβλεπεν γὰρ εἰς τὴν μισθαποδοσίαν) results also in a choice for ill-treatment now in the company of God’s people rather than temporary enjoyment of safety and security in the unbelieving society (what the author of Hebrews calls πρόσκαιρον ἀμαρτίας ἀπόλαυσιν, 11:25; cf. 4 Macc 15:8). Moses ἐλόμενος συγκακουχεῖσθαι τῷ λαῷ τοῦ θεοῦ becomes a pattern of faith replicated in the community’s past (10:33–34a: τοῦτο μὲν ὄνειδισμοῖς τε καὶ θλίψεσιν θεατριζόμενοι, τοῦτο δὲ κοινωνοί

³⁰ Malina and Neyrey, “Honor and Shame,” 26.

³¹ A similar conception appears in Plutarch (*De Exil.* 607 C–D), who, appealing to Empedocles, indicates that “not he himself merely, but all of us, beginning with himself, are sojourners (μετανάστας) here and strangers (ξένους) and exiles (φυγάδας). . . . As the soul has come hither from elsewhere, he euphemistically calls birth a ‘journey,’ . . . but it is truest to say that the soul is an exile (φεύγει) and a wanderer (πλανᾶται), driven forth by divine decrees and laws, and then . . . imprisoned within the body.” One’s low status as exile in Greco-Roman society is relativized by an appeal to cosmic society.

τῶν οὕτως ἀναστρεφόμενων γενηθέντες καὶ γὰρ τοῖς δεσμίοις συνεπαθήσατε) and held up for the community's imitation for the future, as the author will exhort them in 13:3: μιμησθε τῶν δεσμιῶν ὡς συνδεδεμένοι, τῶν κακουχομένων ὡς καὶ αὐτοὶ ὄντες ἐν σώματι. Following the pattern of Moses, the recipients are called to “draw near” (10:22) to God in fellowship with one another as the mutually reinforcing community of believers (10:24–25) who also choose “ill-treatment with the people of God” as the path of confidence in God (10:32–35).

The author of Hebrews presents another group of low-status examples in 11:35b–38. The connection between those who ἐτυμπανίσθησαν, οὐ προσδεξάμενοι τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν, ἵνα κρείττονος ἀναστάσεως τύχωσιν (11:35b) and the Maccabean martyrs has long been recognized. 2 Maccabees 7 makes clear that the martyrs persevered to the end because of their hope in receiving a new life from God.³² Their importance as examples for Judaism in the centuries around the turn of the era appears in the conscious presentation of Eleazar and the seven as exemplars for imitation in both 2 and 4 Maccabees, as well as in the fact that the author of 4 Maccabees turns to these figures as the examples which prove his thesis that “devout reason is sovereign over the emotions” (1:1).³³ The author of Hebrews shares the basic convictions of these martyrs, namely, that the benefits of honoring God through obedience and dangers of dishonoring God through disobedience outweigh any benefits or dangers society can offer or threaten. Despising the society's system of evaluation of what is honorable and what is shameful follows as a matter of course.

Along with the martyrs, the author of Hebrews holds up other examples of those who have suffered society's disgrace (in the form of physical abuse and torture) and censure:

ἕτεροι δὲ ἐμπαιγμῶν καὶ μαστίγων πείραν ἔλαβον, ἔτι δὲ δεσμῶν καὶ φυλακῆς ἐλιθάστησαν, ἐπίστησαν, ἐν φόνῳ μαχαίρης ἀπέθανον, περιήλθον ἐν μηλωταῖς, ἐν αἰγείοις δέρμασιν, ὑστερούμενοι, θλιβόμενοι, κακουχοῦμενοι, . . . ἐπὶ ἐρημίαις πλανώμενοι καὶ ὄρεσιν καὶ σπηλαίοις καὶ ταῖς ὁπαῖς τῆς γῆς. (11:36–38)

By society's standards, this constitutes a list of sorry examples, a parade of those who were utterly disgraced and had no honor within society. The author of Hebrews, however, introduces the ironic evaluation—ὢν οὐκ ἦν ἄξιος ὁ κόσμος—which subverts the world's system of values and, in effect, disgraces

³² 2 Macc 7:9: ὁ δὲ τοῦ κόσμου βασιλεὺς ἀποθανόντας ἡμᾶς ὑπὲρ τῶν αὐτοῦ νόμων εἰς αἰώνιον ἀναβίωσιν ζωῆς ἡμᾶς ἀναστήσει; 7:11: “I got these [i.e., his hands and feet] from Heaven, and because of his laws I disclaim them, and from him I hope to get them back again (πάλιν ἐλπίζω κομισασθαι)”; 7:14: Αἰρετὸν μεταλλάσσοντας ὑπ’ ἀνθρώπων τὰς ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ προσδοκᾶν ἐλπίδας πάλιν ἀναστήσεσθαι ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ; 7:23: τὴν ζωὴν ὑμῖν πάλιν ἀποδίδωσιν μετ’ ἐλέους, ὡς νῦν ὑπερορᾶτε ἑαυτοὺς διὰ τοὺς αὐτοῦ νόμους; 7:20: “The mother . . . bore the loss with good courage because of her hope in the Lord (εὐψύχως ἔφερεν διὰ τὰς ἐπὶ κύριον ἐλπίδας).”

³³ See, e.g., 2 Macc 6:28: Eleazar intends to leave a noble example (ὑπόδειγμα γενναῖον) of how to die nobly (γενναίως) on behalf of the sacred and revered laws (σεμνῶν νόμων); see also 2 Macc 6:31; 4 Macc 6:19; 9:23; 17:23.

that system.³⁴ This set of examples encourages the addressees once more to accept having no place in society (in effect, “wandering about in deserts and hills and caves”) and to accept the negative judgment of the public court of opinion (even its physical abuse) rather than shrink back from such disgraces and lose the greater reward.³⁵ Even if society ascribes disgrace to the believers, they are to despise a disgraceful reputation for the sake of gaining the honor and citizenship that God ascribes.³⁶

All of these examples of despising society’s negative evaluations for the sake of a positive evaluation by God are prefaced strategically by the author’s use of the addressees themselves as an example of faith in 10:32–34.³⁷ At the climax of Tacitus’s *Agricola*, the general rallies his troops with a speech in which he says: “I would quote the examples of other armies to encourage you. As things are, you need only recall your own battle-honours, only question your own eyes” (*Agr.* 34). One’s own successful past experience was a powerful source of encouragement to repeat an enterprise, and the author of Hebrews makes use of this tactic in his exhortation. The believers’ former conduct—their endurance of reproaches and suffering, their show of solidarity with those thus treated, and their joyful acceptance of the loss of status markers such as property—is precisely that in which the author wants them to continue. Rather than shrinking back, as manifested in those who have ceased to assemble with the gathered church, the addressees are challenged to continue to bond actively with other believers, whether through encouragement in service (10:24) or service itself (10:33–34; 13:3). Their continued “boldness” (παρρησία) and “endurance” (ύπομονή) will lead them to receive the “reward” (μισθαποδοσία) and the promises (έπαγγελία). Their continued rejection of the quest for honor

³⁴ One is reminded again of the similar move by Epictetus, who accords the Cynic the right to evaluate who is worthy of his friendship and thus overturns society’s right to evaluate the Cynic (*Diss.* 3.22.63, 65).

³⁵ See Malina and Neyrey: “Such physical mobility replicates the social behavior that rejects ascribed status and implies a willingness to be deviant within the broader context. Yet the willingness to be deviant itself becomes a value worthy of honor within the group” (“Honor and Shame,” 27).

³⁶ Jerome Neyrey provides some examples of such ascribed shame: “Shame can be ascribed or achieved. A magistrate may declare one guilty and so worthy of a public flogging (2 Cor 11:23–25); a king may mock and treat one with contempt (Luke 23:11). God may declare one a ‘Fool’ (Luke 12:20). Thus elites and those in power may declare one honorless and worthy of contempt: ‘. . . exclude, revile, and cast out your name as evil’ (Luke 6:22). Shame may be achieved by one’s folly or by cowardice and failure to respond to a challenge” (“John 18–19,” 7–8); Malina and Neyrey also develop a discussion of acquired and ascribed deviant status (“Conflict in Luke-Acts: Labelling and Deviance Theory,” in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* [ed. J. H. Neyrey; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991] 101).

³⁷ See Thompson: “The readers are themselves the exemplars of the stance which the author wants to inculcate in chapter 11. . . . Their enduring of όνειδισμός is similar to the experience described in 11:26. Both in chapter 11 and in 10:32–34, the capacity to endure presupposes a relationship to the unseen world” (*Beginnings*, 66).

by society's standards will free them to pursue and achieve honor in the sight of God and of the believing community.

III. Dishonoring God

While the author of Hebrews moves the addressees to "despise shame" by many positive models of those who have scorned society's honor rating for the sake of achieving a positive honor rating from God, he also goads them in that direction through a fearsome presentation of the alternative—despising or slighting God. In the author's mind, one either honors and obeys God at the risk of dishonoring and provoking the world, or one honors and conforms to society at the risk of dishonoring and provoking God. The prominent negative example in Hebrews is that of the wilderness generation (3:7–4:11), which, because of its failure to appreciate God's sufficiency as patron, provoked God to anger, thereby losing the benefits God promised them—a thing highly to be feared (Heb 4:1: $\Phi\omicron\beta\eta\theta\tilde{\omega}\mu\epsilon\nu\ \omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\nu!$).

The author of Hebrews approaches the example of the wilderness generation through Ps 95:8–11. While in the Hebrew Ps 95:8–9 refers to the events at Meribah and Massah related in Exod 17:1–7 and Num 20:2–13, the LXX version relates more closely with the rebellion recorded in Num 14:1–45.³⁸ The oath quoted in Ps 95:11, moreover, refers to the oath recorded in Num 14:21–23. Schmidt sees the wilderness generation primarily as an example of disobedience, but the author of Hebrews focuses both on their disobedience ($\acute{\alpha}\pi\epsilon\iota\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha$) and unbelief (or lack of confidence, $\acute{\alpha}\pi\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}\alpha$)³⁹ Furthermore, the story in Numbers links the themes of honor/dishonor and belief/unbelief in a way that seems to be retained in Hebrews. Num 14:11 reads: "How long will this people despise ($\pi\alpha\rho\omicron\zeta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\epsilon\iota$) me? And how long will they refuse to believe ($\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\omicron\upsilon\sigma\omega\nu$) in me?" The first verb, translating the Hebrew לִשְׂמֹת , is often taken to mean "provoke," yet a study of the passages where $\pi\alpha\rho\omicron\zeta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\omega$ is used to translate לִשְׂמֹת shows that the former's semantic range must extend to cover "despise," "disregard," or "disdain."⁴⁰

The disobedience of the wilderness generation, therefore, may be understood as a challenge to God's honor, specifically God's sufficiency as patron and benefactor. God's response, given in Ps 95:10–11 as wrath ($\pi\rho\sigma\acute{\omega}\chi\theta\iota\sigma\alpha$;

³⁸ Lane, *Hebrews*, 84–86.

³⁹ Schmidt, "Moral Lethargy," 170.

⁴⁰ This is most clear in LXX Ps 73:10 and 18, where $\pi\alpha\rho\omicron\zeta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\omega$ is set in parallel phrases with the verbs $\acute{\omicron}\nu\epsilon\iota\delta\iota\epsilon\tilde{\iota}$ and $\acute{\omicron}\nu\epsilon\iota\delta\iota\sigma\epsilon\nu$, and the object of the verb is God's "name." A name, as receptacle of honor (see Malina and Neyrey, "Honor and Shame," 33), is provoked only after and as a consequence of being despised or regarded with less honor than appropriate for the repute of the name. In LXX Ps 106:11, $\pi\alpha\rho\acute{\omega}\xi\upsilon\nu\alpha\nu$ is set in a phrase parallel to $\pi\alpha\rho\epsilon\pi\acute{\iota}\chi\rho\alpha\nu\alpha\nu$, the objects of the verbs being the "words of God" and the "counsel of the Most High." Words and advice are disregarded, even despised, but not provoked. To despise a person of honor, however, will provoke a response in defense of his or her honor.

ὀργή), is an expression of God's understanding of being slighted, rather than simply being fed up with the Israelites. Aristotle provides a definition of ὀργή that confirms this reading, even relating the emotion to the patron–client relationship:

Let us then define anger (ὀργή) as a longing, accompanied by pain, for a real or apparent revenge (τιμωρία) for a real or apparent slight (ὀλιγωρία). . . . Men are angry at slights from those by whom they think they have a right to expect to be well treated; such are those on whom they have conferred or are conferring benefits (εὖ πεποίηκεν ἢ ποιεῖ) . . . and all those whom they desire, or did desire, to benefit. (*Rhet.* 2.2.1, 8)

God identifies God's Self as the patron and benefactor of the wilderness generation, a benefactor who has fully demonstrated trustworthiness and ability to provide ("they saw my works," 3:9). The Israelites' lack of faith (ἀπιστία), demonstrated in their refusal to attack Canaan as God ordered because they considered the inhabitants too formidable, was an affront to their benefactor—a vote of no confidence.⁴¹ This lack of confidence in God makes the wilderness generation a paradigm of disobedience (ὕποδειγμα τῆς ἀπειθείας), which the author of Hebrews holds before his addressees so that they may not imitate their ἀπιστία, but rather may continue to honor God by exhibiting the faith characterized by the examples given in chaps. 10–12.⁴² The opposite of "turning away from the living God" (3:12) involves living with one's orientation wholly directed toward the living God, in obedience to God and in expectation of God's benefits.

Another feature of the wilderness generation is the irrevocability of their loss: in Num 14:39–45, the Israelites realize their loss, repent, and try to gain Canaan, only to be soundly defeated. Because they have dishonored (outraged) God, God does not appear as their ally in the battle.⁴³ There is no second chance. The example of Esau in 12:16–17 repeats in capsule form the disastrous mistake of the wilderness generation. Faced with the promise of the inheritance, Esau exchanges his birthright for a single meal, trading the eternal promise for temporary safety and satisfaction. In effect, he provides a foil to

⁴¹ See J. D. M. Derrett, who insightfully defines faith as "unquestioning expectation of a benefit from Yahweh" (*Jesus's Audience: The Social and Psychological Environment in which He Worked* [New York: Seabury, 1973] 44).

⁴² The meaning of faith in Hebrews has been much discussed with regard to the interpretation of the letter. "Faith in Hebrews is a moral quality of firmness, fidelity, and reliability as in normal biblical usage" (Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991] 109), and thus "πίστις means steadfastness. It is thus closely related to ὑπομονή and παρρησία, signifying the steadfastness of the one who, despite suffering and disappointment, maintains his orientation toward God" (Thompson, *Beginnings*, 68). For the author of Hebrews, faith is nevertheless also based on the recognition of the honor and trustworthiness of God. Thus to act without faith is not merely to be unreliable, or to be disobedient, but involves an affront to God, whose honor is impugned by lack of faith.

⁴³ See Josephus, *JW* 5.9.4 §377, §403: The deity, whom the Temple desecraters defiled (ἐμίαναντε) and who was not properly revered (ἀσεβηθεῖς), will not be an ally.

Moses, who refuses the *πρόσκαιρος ἀπόλαυσις* in order to gain a better inheritance with the people of God. Like the wilderness generation, Esau has no second chance to evaluate properly. The believers addressed by the author are likewise without possibility of a second chance. The author speaks of them as if they are in danger of dishonoring God, urging them strongly to choose the course of faith that honors God. Within this alternative system of honor, the author can use fear of dishonor to motivate the readers to persevere in their Christian associations and activities (and thus willingly risk dishonor from the society). In 2:3, he argues that the danger of neglecting (*ἀμελήσαντες*) the salvation provided by Christ is more dangerous than transgressing Torah, since Christ's outraged honor would be greater (and hence satisfaction would be more exacting and relentless).⁴⁴ Heb 6:6 posits the impossibility of being restored to repentance after falling away, since that entails the repetition of the public disgracing of Christ crucified (*ἀνασταυροῦντας . . . και παραδειγματίζοντας*).⁴⁵ The strongest statement of this possibility occurs in 10:26–31, where those who “willfully persist in sin” (which, in light of 11:25, appears to be synonymous with withdrawing from Christian associations and activity for the sake of enjoying security and status in the world) are also those who “trample on the Son of God, regard as common the sanctifying blood, and outrage the Spirit of grace” (*τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καταπατήσας, καὶ τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης κοινὸν ἡγησάμενος ἐν ᾧ ἠγάπησθη, καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς χάριτος ἐνουβρίσας* [10:29]).⁴⁶

All three phrases are ironic, almost oxymoronic. The utter inappropriateness of each is calculated to make the addressees shy away from any prospect of fulfilling these violations. The first of these phrases is inversely related to the eschatological expectation of the subjection of all (and of Christ's enemies) under Christ's feet. While it is possible to “trample the Son of God underfoot,” it would not be possible, in the author's world-construction, to escape the satisfaction the Son of God would seek.⁴⁷ Regarding the sanctifying blood

⁴⁴ See Epictetus, who holds that it is as shameful to neglect (*αἰσχρὸν ἀμελεῖν*) the teachings of Chrysisippus as it is shameful to neglect daily business (*Diss.* 1.10.12). He also understands that neglecting the path of salvation provided by God is tantamount to dishonoring God: Epictetus hopes that he will die while occupied with tending his moral faculty, so that he may claim before God: “the faculties which I received from Thee to enable me to understand Thy governance and to follow it, these I have not neglected (*τούτων οὐκ ἠμέλησα*); I have not dishonoured Thee (*οὐ κατήσχυνά σε*) as far as in me lay” (*Diss.* 4.10.14).

⁴⁵ Heinrich Schlier, “παραδειγματίζω,” *TDNT* 2. 32.

⁴⁶ Josephus contrasts the way that the Temple is honored (*τετιμημένος*) by foreigners but trampled on (*καταπατεῖται*) by the Zealots, thus showing the antonymy of the two words (*J.W.* 4.4.3 §262).

⁴⁷ See Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.5.1, 3, 5: “Let fear (*φόβος*) be defined as a painful or troubled feeling caused by the impression of an imminent evil (*κακοῦ*) that causes destruction or pain. . . . Such signs are the enmity and anger (*ὀργή*) of those able to injure us in any way . . . and outraged virtue (*ἀρετῇ ὑβριζομένη*) when it has power, for it is evident that it always desires satisfaction.” Hence, the author of Hebrews sees nothing left after dishonoring God except “a fearful prospect of judgment,” and concludes the section with a declaration that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (10:31).

as unsanctified not only is a poor value judgment but also excludes one from experiencing the sanctification of the disregarded gift. Finally, the Spirit is a Spirit of “favor” or “gift” (χάρις), a benefactor:⁴⁸ Outraging such a being is senseless in a world in which benefaction is a “practice that constitutes the chief bond of human society” (Seneca, *De Ben.* 1.4.2). Such people are deemed by the author χείρονος ἀξιωθήσεται τιμωρίας, “worthy of greater punishment,” than those who transgressed the Mosaic Law. Such punishment would mean ascribed disgrace by the court of God, an honor rating that would stick.

Finally, the author, speaking in the words of Prov 3:11, cautions the readers not to “slight the discipline of the Lord (μὴ ὀλιγώρει παιδείας κυρίου, Heb 12:5).” In effect, he is telling them to value their experience of suffering, marginalization, and shame in a positive light according to the Christian construal of reality. Rather than being indications of rejection, these experiences are interpreted as assurances of inclusion among the children of God (“If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children,” Heb 12:8). Treating these experiences as something to be avoided, in effect, amounts to slighting the parental discipline of the Lord and thinking unworthily of the honor of being a child of God.

In these passages just surveyed, as well as in the negative examples of the wilderness generation and Esau, the author seeks to impress upon the addressees the danger of disregarding or dishonoring God, which is complementary to his positive exhortations (mostly by example) to despise the honor rating of society, to “despise shame.” The addressees are called to step out of the system of honor that belongs to the unbelieving society and cleave fully to care for their honor in God’s sight and in the sight of fellow believers (the alternative court of reputation). In seeking to secure the believers in the path of “faith,” he has made use of both carrot and stick, as it were. The author shows the believers’ situation to be like that of the wilderness generation.⁴⁹ They have been given God’s assurance that they will receive their inheritance and must resist the danger to shrink back (10:39) in the face of society’s rejection, insult, and abuse. For, like the wilderness generation’s rebellion (in the face of Canaanite aggression), such a shrinking back would be an outrage to God, their benefactor and parent, an “actualization of opinion in regard to something which appears valueless” (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.2.3). That is, the congregation’s care for the approval of society or fear of its threats is a sign of their lack of regard for God’s ability to bring them safely to their inheritance in spite of the efforts of a hostile world. Rather, they are called to continue to “draw near” to God and “approach” the throne of grace, forming a supportive community as an alternate court of reputation — encouraging one another to seek honor in terms of what God requires of God’s clients (10:24) and reaching

⁴⁸ Cf. Josephus, *J.W.* 3.8.5 §371: τὸν δὲ θεὸν οὐκ οἴεσθε ἀγανακτεῖν, ὅταν ἄνθρωπος αὐτοῦ τὸ δῶρον ὑβρίζῃ;

⁴⁹ See G. W. Buchanan, *To The Hebrews* (AB 36; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972) 266.

out to those of the community who endure the hardest contest in their quest for honor before God (10:32–34; 13:3).

IV. Securing the Believers' Honor

From within the Christian framework of evaluating honor, the author shows himself concerned in every way to respond to the addressees' φιλοτιμία. He positively reinterprets the signs of dishonor (in the world's eyes) as signs of honor in God's eyes, and thus in the eyes of the Christian group. Thus while he urges them to "despise shame," he also seeks to make that shame a little easier to disregard. From 10:32–34 we learn that the believers' honor in society's estimation had suffered great injury in earlier days—disgraced by reproaches and sufferings, by their freely associating with those so treated (thus bearing their reproach), and perhaps bearing reproach for the name of Christ (cf. 1 Pet 4:14, 16), for following a crucified (wholly disgraced) leader.⁵⁰ Seizure of property also constituted a loss of status (as wealth, and also as the heritage which embodies their family honor).⁵¹ All this, however, the author holds up as exemplary behavior and as a mark of the "confidence which brings great reward" (10:35–39). It is the posture of faith as opposed to that of shrinking back (10:39), the former promising God's benefaction and grants of honor, the latter God's enmity and shame on the Last Day.

In 12:1–4, the author makes use of the language of the athletic contest or race, a figure familiar to both Greco-Roman philosophers and Jewish martyr-ologists.⁵² Sufferings, abuse, insult are all transformed from dishonorable circumstances to an honorable contest. Stoics had long written in this vein. Seneca, arguing that the wise person receives neither insult nor injury, writes that the wise person "counts every injury profitable, for through it he finds a means of putting himself to the proof and making trial of his virtue" (*De*

⁵⁰ See Martin Hengel: "By the public display of a naked victim at a prominent place . . . crucifixion also represented his uttermost humiliation, which had a numinous dimension to it" (*Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977] 87).

⁵¹ It is debated whether this was a legal confiscation or an unauthorized plundering. Josephus (*J.W.* 4.3.10 §168) uses ἀπράγασι ἤρπασσον to refer to pillaging rather than legal confiscation, as does Lucian, *De morte Peregr.* 14, where, with regard to Peregrinus's property in Parium, Lucian writes that "most of his possessions were carried off (διήρπαστο) during his absence (i.e., exile)." It is finally impossible to tell based on the term used by the author, since he might well have used the apparently derogatory term for pillaging to refer to a legal act of confiscation, since the Christians would not have honored the legality of such a resolution. J. Schneider notes that "τιμή has in the first instance a strong material orientation. Odysseus' honour is inseparably bound up with the restoration and control of his possessions, *Hom. Od.*, 1, 117. . . . Here bodily soundness, the undisputed exercise of social influence and unfringed enjoyment of one's property are the basis of esteem" ("τιμή," *TDNT* 8. 170).

⁵² See Thompson: "Both Philo and 4 Maccabees belong to a minority culture which was subject to persecution and acts of violence. Because they identified with this minority culture, the image of the contest was a useful way of giving a positive interpretation of the fate of their people" (*Beginnings*, 64).

Const. 9.3). Dio Chrysostom relates the lifestyle of Diogenes as a contest (ἀγών, *Orat.* 8:11) with hardships (πόννοι, 8:13). Epictetus likewise casts the philosopher's endurance of hardships as an "Olympic contest" (*Diss.* 3.22.52): far from being a dishonoring experience, sufferings, insults, and abuse constitute the training of the philosopher by God to be an Olympic victor (*Diss.* 1.24.1–2).⁵³

The author of 4 Maccabees also makes wide use of this terminology in order to cast the shameful mutilation of the Jewish martyrs as a contest for piety and "devout reason." In 4 Macc 11:20, the tortures are represented as a contest (ἀγών), and the tyrant's hall an "arena" of sufferings (γυμνασία πόνων). The seven brothers are ἀσκήτας—"athletes" of religion—and ἀγωνισταί—"contestants" for virtue (12:11, 14). The endurance of the tortures is called the soul's contest (ψυχῆς ἀγών, 13:15) and a divine contest (ἀγών θεῖος, 17:11). 4 Macc 17:11–16 constitutes an extended athletic metaphor for the contest (now completed in the narrative), and reads like a list of contestants: Ἐλεάζαρ δὲ προηγωνίζετο, ἡ δὲ μήτηρ τῶν ἑπτὰ παιδῶν ἐνήθλει, οἱ δὲ ἀδελφοὶ ἠγωνίζετο· ὁ τύραννος ἀντηγωνίζετο. Finally, reverence for God won the day and crowned (i.e., honored) the athletes who had competed (θεοσέβεια . . . τοὺς ἀθλητὰς στεφανοῦσα, 17:15).

The author of Hebrews constructs a similarly extended use of the figure in order to set the Christians' struggles in a more honorable light. The witnesses of faith—who are also witnesses of despising the reputation granted by the world—are a cloud of witnesses, almost like spectators, around the believers who are called to "run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (τὸν προκειμένον ἀγῶνα). Strategically, the example of Jesus enduring the cross and despising shame is set within this positive interpretation of suffering and endurance (12:2). The opponent in this contest is sin (ἀντικατέστητε πρὸς τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἀνταγωνιζόμενοι, 12:4), which is, again, perhaps best interpreted in the light of 11:25–26.

As noted above, in 12:5–13 the author casts believers' sufferings and privations as God's discipline, not in the sense of punishment but in the sense of instruction (the education of children). The sufferings are recast as proof of the believers' legitimate descentance from (or adoption by) God, and hence of their legitimate share in the honor of God together with Christ.⁵⁴ This is one part of the author's plan to demonstrate the embeddedness of the believers' honor in the honor of God. In 2:11, he reminds the believers that they share a common lineage with Christ, such that Christ may without disgrace own them as kin (οὐκ ἐπαισχύνεται ἀδελφούς αὐτοῦς καλεῖν). In the first-century Mediterranean world the success or advancement of the individual was shared by that individual's family: "the advance of one member of an agnatic family

⁵³ See also *Diss.* 3.22.56: "And is he [i.e., the Cynic] not persuaded that whatever of these hardships he suffers, it is Zeus that is exercising (γυμνάζει) him?"

⁵⁴ See Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.5.5: Noble birth comes through either father or mother; there must be legitimacy (γνησιότης).

would advantage all his kindred through males and even . . . his relations by blood and marriage.”⁵⁵ Christians constitute the “household of God” (οἶκος τοῦ θεοῦ, 3:6; 10:21). As offspring of the highly honored Abraham (2:17), they share in his honor; as partners with Christ (3:14), they have a share in Christ’s success and honor (as the dual meanings of μέτοχοι suggest).

Finally, appealing to people who are φιλότιμοι, the author speaks of the believers’ destiny as δόξα, “glory” or “high repute” (2:10). The plan of God is described as “leading many children to glory” (πολλοὺς υἱοὺς εἰς δόξαν ἀγαγόντα). L. D. Hurst has argued that “‘glory’ (δόξα) picks up the phrase ‘crowned him with glory and honor’ (δόξη καὶ τιμῇ ἐστεφάνωσας αὐτόν) of v. 7.”⁵⁶ The conclusion of his argument is that “the point of the extravagance of chapter one is to lead the readers of the epistle to the glory of mankind foretold in Psalm 8 and explored in chapter two.”⁵⁷ The destiny of the “many children,” defined as the coveted δόξα, is thus a climax of the author’s presentation, an interpretation that fits admirably the context of an honor/shame culture. The believers’ “desire for honor” is in no way truly hindered by perseverance in Christianity; on the contrary, their φιλοτιμία will find its highest fulfillment in the grant of honor that will be awarded in God’s court of reputation.

Because they have such a hope for honor from the higher court of opinion, namely, God’s, the author may exhort them to disregard the opinion of unbelievers, who serve a lower court. The children of God may boldly assemble together for their common worship and show support for the socially disgraced and abused (13:3; cf. 11:25–26), and go “outside the camp,” as it were, to bear the reproach of Christ (13:13).⁵⁸ For the same Christ who suffered reproach but despised the shame will come a second time in judgment of those who reproached him and continue to dishonor and disgrace his sisters and brothers.

⁵⁵ Derrett, *Jesus’s Audience*, 38.

⁵⁶ L. D. Hurst, “The Christology of Hebrews 1 and 2,” in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology* (ed. L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright; Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 154.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁵⁸ See F. V. Filson: “He wants them to show solidarity . . . in regular assembling for common worship. . . . He knows they need to keep the bond of Christian brotherhood strong especially in times when hostility from without actively besets them. They need the inner resources which can come only through common worship and mutual encouragement” (*Yesterday: A Study of Hebrews in the Light of Chapter 13* [London: SCM, 1967] 69); also Worley: “What the author of Hebrews has attempted to do with commissive language is exhort his readers to a faithfulness before God and a dependability in brotherly love in the face of financial and social pressures, as well as a waning of Christian enthusiasms, which threaten the fellowship of the church and the readers’ access to God” (*God’s Faithfulness*, 217). Both authors have hit on an important need of minority cultures, namely, the formation of strong communities that reinforce the group’s alternate constructions of reality, specifically here a consistent body of significant others, an alternate court of reputation.

V. Conclusion

The foregoing analysis of the letter to the Hebrews as a document functioning within an honor/shame culture has, it is hoped, contributed to answering what J. H. Elliott phrased so well as the “manner in which the text is designed through the literary, sociological, and theological strategy of its author(s) to be a specific response to the specific situation of the intended audience as perceived by the author(s).”⁵⁹ The analysis has not fully clarified the situation of the addressees. It has not sought, for example, to determine whether or not the author is responding to the threat of a coming persecution. It has, however, brought into sharp relief some important aspects of their situation by focusing on the use of language related to a central value, namely, honor. Particularly it has enabled us to determine that, irrespective of other circumstances, the very cultural climate of competition for honor would have been sufficient to challenge the Christians’ endurance and create a crisis of commitment.⁶⁰

The author of Hebrews reinforces the decentering of society’s definition of what constitutes the honorable and shameful and the disregarding of its claim to the right to evaluate one’s honor or dishonor. The believers are called to strive for honor in God’s eyes, whose judgment seat is the court of granting reputation/honor. Where an action or endurance of an action is considered disgraceful by the society but honorable by God and the community, the Christian is called to “despise shame,” that is, the estimation of honor by society in favor of preserving or enhancing one’s honor in God’s sight (as defined by the community’s tradition and by revelation). Thus, the believer replicates in his or her own life the struggle of Abraham, Moses, the Maccabean martyrs, and, most honored of all, Jesus. The exhortation to “be imitators of those who by faith and patience inherited the promises” takes on specific content when the document is viewed through this cultural-anthropological lens.

The way to honor is through faithfulness and obedience to God, solidarity with the people of God even in conditions of “reproach,” rejection of the standards of honor of the society, rejection of the quest for honor (e.g., citizenship, property, etc) in the world’s system of honor (since this conflicts with honoring God and achieving honor in God’s opinion). The Christian pursues honor before God and ultimately is promised the fulfillment of his or her

⁵⁹ J. H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Social-Scientific Investigation of 1 Peter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1981) 8.

⁶⁰ Attridge has conceived of the situation of the addressees of Hebrews as “a complex situation, with a variety of factors at work” (*Hebrews*, 12–13). Given the complexity of the document itself, and, indeed, the complexity of maintaining congregational life, it is no doubt better not to attempt to reduce the challenge of the circumstances of composition to any one factor—even the pursuit of honor, to be sure. Nevertheless, this study has sought to demonstrate that considerations of honor and dishonor were at work both in the crisis of commitment faced by the addressees and the strategic response of the author to that situation.

φιλοτιμία by living out a witness to a better city or homeland, choosing suffering in solidarity with the people of God, living in accordance with hope in God as benefactor (not the benefactors of this age), and witnessing to better possessions than those of this world's economy. In a situation in which "the Church had to make up its mind whether its main interest would be to conciliate and conform to the community and its religious and social practices, or insistently preserve its distinctive life regardless of possible reactions against it from pagan neighbours," Hebrews seems to serve the latter goal.⁶¹ Despite its eloquence, its cultured, literary Greek, Hebrews is less interested in making a place for Christianity within Greco-Roman society than Luke or even Paul.

Elliott suggests that it is also part of the interpreter's task to determine "the intended and/or actual effect of the document upon the social condition, constitution, and interests of both author(s) and recipients within their larger social and historical contexts."⁶² With Hebrews, without identifiable author, addressees, date, or destination, a close investigation of its effect is impossible. In a broader sense, however, we can see that the counterdefinitions of honor forwarded in Hebrews and the emphasis on solidarity with believers who are victimized by the outside society became prominent features of the Christian minority group. The journey of Ignatius from Antioch to his martyrdom at Rome, visited, attended, and given hospitality by Christians along the way, shows the willingness of the believers to "remember those in prison as though imprisoned with them." The martyr himself testifies (*Smyrn.* 10): "My life is a humble offering for you; and so are these chains of mine, for which you never showed the least contempt or shame. Neither will Jesus Christ in his perfect loyalty show Himself ashamed of you (οὐδὲ ὑμᾶς ἐπαισχυνθήσεται ἡ τελεία πίστις, Ἰησοῦς Χριστός)." Similarly, he exhorts the Christians, "Let us show by our forbearance that we are their [i.e., the unbelievers'] brothers, and try to imitate the Lord by seeing which of us can put up with the most ill-usage or privation or contempt" (*Eph.* 10) and interprets his own imprisonment and public execution thus: "I have been deemed worthy to set forward the honor of God (ἡξιώθην εἰς τιμὴν Θεοῦ εὐρεθῆναι)" (*Eph.* 21). Finally, in Lucian's famous passage, we find a description of the Christian community in the mid-second century, which would have greatly pleased the author of Hebrews:

The Christians . . . left nothing undone in the effort to rescue [Peregrinus]. Then, as this was impossible, every other form of attention was shown him. . . . From the very break of day aged widows and orphan children could be seen waiting near the prison, while their officials even slept inside with him after bribing the guards. Then elaborate meals were brought in, and sacred books of theirs were read aloud. . . .

Indeed, people came even from the cities in Asia, sent by the Christians at their common expense, to succour and defend and encourage the

⁶¹ Filson, *Yesterday*, 66.

⁶² Elliott, *Home*, 9.

hero. They show incredible speed whenever any such public action is taken; for in no time they lavish their all. . . . These poor wretches have convinced themselves, first and foremost, that they are going to be immortal . . . in consequence of which they despise death (*καταφρονοῦσιν τοῦ θανάτου*) and even willingly give themselves into custody, most of them. Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another. . . . Therefore they despise all things [i.e., material goods] indiscriminately (*καταφρονοῦσιν ἀπάντων ἐξ ἴσης*) and consider them common property. (*De morte Peregr.* 12–13)