Shameless and Guiltless: The Role of Two Emotions in the Context of the Absence of God in Public Practice in the Indonesian Context

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Abstract

God is very much present in the public domain in Indonesia. Even so, honesty and integrity are absent in public practices, especially with regard to the high number of corruption cases. Biblical communities show that the two character traits were originally inseparable in a shame-based society when acted out as both personal and public conscience by doing what God wanted them to do. In the development of Christian theology, and also specifically in the Indonesian context, the two emotions became separated. Such separation has led to the evidential lack of both of these emotions and has shown to be inoperative in the convicted corruptors in Indonesia. Anton Houtepen says that we can trace God from operative emotions. The lack of emotions of shame and guilt shows that public religiosity does not correlate with the presence of God in public practices in Indonesia.

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Keywords


God in Public Domain in Indonesia

Religion and God are very much present in the public domain in Indonesia. As a nation, Indonesia decided to embrace religion as a public way of life while accommodating secular principles as well, with a middle way of the so called Pancasila principles. Since the era of local autonomy of 1999 began, some regions have even implemented the sharia law — the Islamic law. This shows that religion and God are present in the public domain. State officials will habitually open their speech with a religious greeting; we can hear the public call for morning prayers everywhere; it is not strange to find prayer symbols in public transportation; and some political jargons will even use religious terminologies such as ‘jihad against drugs.’

Unfortunately, being religious in the public domain does not mean that Indonesia is corruption-free. According to a 2014 Corruption Perception Index, Indonesia is at 107th the place out of 175 countries in the world, with an acknowledged total score of 34.1 Indonesia has seen a slight improvement from a total score of 32 in 2012. How can a nation that is publicly religious be also so corrupt?

In an effort to eradicate corruption, Indonesia established the Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi (KPK — Commission of Corruption Eradication) in waging a war both against corruption and corruptors. One of the ways taken by the Commission is the way of shaming the corruptors, such as making the prisoners wearing bright-coloured jackets with a sign ‘prisoners of KPK’ at the back. They say, ‘We can improve our effort in fighting corruption by shaming

1 Website Transparency International, https://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/results, accessed 1 February 2015. According to the Corruption Perception Index (CPI), the top five least corrupt countries are Denmark, New Zealand, Sweden, Finland, and Norway with the score of 92, 91, 89, 87, and 86 respectively. The CPI-scores and ranks countries / territories based on how corrupt a country’s public sector is perceived to be. It is a composite index, a combination of surveys and assessments of corruption, collected by a variety of reputable institutions. The CPI is the most widely used indicator of corruption worldwide.
the perpetrators.'2 Similar acts of creating a ‘shame’ culture also comes in the form of creating Korupedia.org, which is a kind of Wikipedia website to expose corruptors. The purpose of these acts is to bring back the public ‘shame’ to persons who have been proven guilty. The result is not too promising. Some prisoners are wearing the ‘shame’ shirts and yet still give a big smile and wave towards journalists and visitors. In one case, the prisoner displayed a ‘mix & match’ of the jacket decorated with other accessories. Some even publicly show their religiosity by praying and saying that their conviction is but a test from God.

The case that follows depicts a clear example of such a public display of lack of shame in a corruption case. Nurdin Halid, the ex-chair of the Persatuan Sepakbola Seluruh Indonesia (PSSI — Football Association of Indonesia) did not want to step down from his position despite the legal corruption charges that put him behind bars for two years. In fact, he continued his leadership from prison and stubbornly denied the specific corruption accusations within the Football Association itself. The world football governing body FIFA finally banned him from running for a third term as chair because ‘a convict cannot lead a football organization.’3 Apparently, the public pressure, FIFA’s advice, the establishment of another Football Association at a national level to pressure him — and even the Indonesian President’s comment himself — were insufficient to make him feel guilty, let alone feeling shameful. Instead he said, ‘I will say this once more, Nurdin Halid will not step down because of pressure.’4 By way of contrast, Halid’s stance is completely the opposite of the resignation of the President of Germany, Christian Wulff, following a series of scandals that were not yet proven (2012), and the Japanese Prime Minister, Naoto Kan, following criticism of how he handled the aftermath of the tsunami and the crisis at the nuclear power plant (2011). In both cases, these leaders were not legally proven guilty, yet felt the responsibility to show their honour (the opposite of shame) by stepping down from their posts. Nurdin Halid, like many other

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convicted of corruption in Indonesia, did not feel nor showed any shame even after he had already been convicted as guilty by the court.

Many law offenders in Indonesia — for example: in corruption case mentioned earlier, intolerance cases, and minor cases such as traffic offences — are the very people whom the public considered as religious. In many instances, they will pray publicly and declare their innocence; and when the court did sentence them ‘guilty as charged,’ they will consider it to be a test of faith by God. They do not feel ashamed or guilty of their crimes.

On the contrary, religious education dictates that God is omnipresent, and knows all our wrongdoings, even when other people do not see it. One must feel ashamed or acknowledge guilty when committing an offence toward God’s law. How can religious people disconnect their emotions of shame and guilt from clear and proven criminal offences such as corruption? The contradiction between the displayed religiosity in public domain, and the lack of good action from the people, has left us with a question: how can one act religiously while committing the very act that his / her religion asked him / her not to do? What is the reasoning behind the absence of the expressions of emotions of shame and guilt in the cases of law offenders in Indonesian context? Could it be the case that the absence of shame and guilt show that — although religion is present in the public domain in Indonesia — this implies that God is not present in public acts after all? This paper will use Anton Houtepen’s theory that God can be traced by way of human emotions, and explore the theological basis of shame and guilt as well as their connection to public practice.

Defining Shame and Guilt in Different Contexts

Shame and guilt are considered as part of human emotions. In the field of psychology, Ilona E. de Hooge says that, ‘emotions are thought to arise after an evaluation (an appraisal) of an event as positively or negatively relevant to one’s goals or concerns.’ It is always connected with something or someone and can be divided into negative emotions and positive emotions. Shame and guilt are considered as emotions that come to us after a certain event occurred.

Let us first take a look at the meaning of the words from their linguistic and psychological point of view. The Oxford dictionary explains shame as ‘painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behaviour; a loss of respect or esteem; dishonour; a person, action,

or situation that brings a loss of respect or honour.’6 We take note that shame in the English meaning has a connection with consciousness which demands a concept of moral norms from the self that comes as a result of the interaction with the society.7 Meanwhile, ‘guilt’ means ‘the fact of having committed a specified or implied offence or crime; a feeling of having committed wrong or failed in an obligation.’8

Both terms are often intertwined when it is used to describe emotion. Ruth Leys shows the difference between the two: namely, that ‘guilt concerns your actions, that is, what you do, or what you wish or fantasize you have done,’ while ‘shame is held to concern not your actions but who you are, that is, your deficiencies and inadequacies as a person as these are revealed to the shaming gaze of the other.’9 Daniel Just stresses this difference and says, ‘Unlike guilt, that pertains to one’s actions and intentions, shame relates to one’s affects and emotions.’10 In short, shame is more connected with the self, and guilt is connected with actions.11

Most researchers in psychology agree that shame holds a higher moral level than guilt. Thomas J. Scheff says, ‘In feeling shame, one experiences . . . the disintegration of the self, or its potential for disintegration.’12 While guilt is blaming your action, shame attacks your personality for your mistakes. Kurt April and Boipelo Mooketsi shared their construction about the two terms:

(1) Shame is — as opposed to guilt — a social emotion; (2) Shame is distinctively related to the entire self, whereas guilt is tied to some specific behavior; (3) Shame is linked with ideals, whereas guilt concerns prohibitions; (4) Guilt and shame are internal affective states that often arise from similar situations, but have different effects on the individual; and

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(5) Shame is oriented towards the self, while guilt is oriented towards others.\textsuperscript{13}

We can conclude shame is our realization of the judgment of others, and guilt is measured by a set of rules that were imposed on us with or without the presence of others.

Recent studies have shown that shame and guilt are differently used in different types of society: that is, between the inter-connected society and the individualistic society. Most research about the topic has been done in the USA and as a result, the mainstream models of the relation between shame and guilt are mostly individualistic. The main model considers that shame is when a person is valued by others, while guilt comes from the self, and usually followed by retribution. This means that a moral decision that came from shame is a result of societal pressure, while guilt comes from the self.

Meanwhile, a more collectivistic culture sometimes finds that the two emotions are closely connected. This gives us another type of relational insight. In a society where people are more connected to each other, such as in Japan and South Korea, shame is used more to point out mistakes rather than guilt.\textsuperscript{14} Meanwhile, in individualistic societies such as the European and North American ones, guilt is more effective as a moral regulatory. The reason for this difference is because other people’s approval is needed in shame based society, while in a guilt-based society the values have already synced internally.\textsuperscript{15}

Shame is used more often in a collective society than in an individualistic culture whereas guilt is more often instilled in the character education of the children. For instance, if a child is making a mistake, then the parents in a ‘shame culture’ will be more likely to employ shaming techniques than guilt. Another example of moral values based on shame is that when people did make a mistake, it is most likely that they will think about the honour of the family rather than being afraid of being guilty. Shame produces moral measurement for actions.

To be sure, both guilt and shame are present in a culture or person, and sometimes they both cross each other’s path. In an inter-connected society,\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Kurt April and Boipelo Mooketsi shared their construction about the two terms in ‘Dealing with Guilt and Shame after Breaking the Glass Ceiling: The Case of South African Executive Women’, \textit{Effective Executive Journal} 13/8 (2010), 69-70.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Wong and Tsai, 212-214.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Young Gweon You, ‘Shame and Guilt Mechanisms in East Asian Culture’, \textit{The Journal of Pastoral Care} 51/1 (1997), 57-58.
\end{itemize}
sometimes we cannot separate guilt from shame. A research on the Chinese vocabulary of shame and guilt has shown that some Chinese terms that mean shame are shown with a ‘guilt’ writing character.16

Meanwhile, in Western society, shame is considered more negative than guilt because it attacks the personality and not the action. Moral value should come from the self, and according to the standard model, guilt brings the individual moral value. Sigmund Freud contributed to this opinion. Freud says,

Thus we know of two origins of the sense of guilt: one arising from fear of an authority, and the other, later on, arising from fear of the super ego. The first insists upon a renunciation of instinctual satisfactions; the second, as well as doing this, presses for punishment, since the continuance of the forbidden wishes cannot be concealed from the super-ego.17

It seems that shame only attacks the person without encouraging a change of self or retribution. The research in the Netherlands, by De Hooge, suggests that shame might have an interpersonal function as a moral emotion.18 This would show exactly that Western society still considers shame to be more destructive than guilt, at a personal level. In her research, De Hooge points out why shame is a complex and important emotion. She says,

Shame is perhaps the most important self-conscious emotion, playing a role in many personal and interpersonal aspects such as self-esteem, shyness, eating disturbances, depression, development, and self-regulation. It is an overwhelming emotion that is associated with feelings of worthlessness, inferiority, and of a damaged self-image. Experiences of shame mainly arise after moral transgressions or incompetences and are characterized by confusion in thought, inability to speak, and rumination.19

This shows that shame is very important in forming moral decisions based on the self. This, while guilt is important in distinguishing what is right from wrong based on an agreed-upon set of rules.

16 Wong and Tsai, 212-214. This shows that in Chinese culture guilt and shame are considered to come from the same root.
18 De Hooge, 48.
19 De Hooge, 72.
Comprehending an Indonesian Model of ‘Malu’ and ‘Salah’

In the Indonesian language, shame or *malu* can be described as ‘feeling bad’ or one's self 'looking bad' because of something that was not right; or different from what is customary. It can also be translated as 'hesitant to act out of respect or fear, uncomfortable because of a put down or insult, or displeased.'

We have already looked at the difference between the meaning of the English and the Indonesian word. The Indonesian word concerns that what is customary, that which involves other people and not only the conscience of the person. The Indonesian ‘malu’ shows a different stress when compared to the English word, namely that it that is more relational than individual. This difference has something to do with cultural difference between both societies that we will discuss later on. While Indonesian ‘salah’ means ‘incorrect; made a mistake; doing something that is not supposed to be done; miss’, the Indonesian language understands guilt as a judgment based on set of rules when doing something that is wrong or not supposed to be done.

In the Indonesian language in general, the word ‘malu / shame’ is more relational, while ‘salah / guilt’ involves a more legal sense. Based on the model of its society, Indonesia should be in the category of the inter-connected society, where the value of shame and guilt is inter-connected and shame is used more specifically in moral values than guilt.

Indonesian local ethnic groups do not differentiate between shame and guilt. In fact, some of the local languages in Indonesia only have ‘shame’ and no word for ‘guilt’ in their vocabulary. For instance, in the Javanese language spoken by the largest ethnic group in Indonesia words like ‘isin / lingsem,’ ‘sungkan,’ and ‘wirang’ are referring to shame, but they use the Malay word ‘salah’ for guilt. Children are taught to have and show respect and honour (*wedi*) to the elders, and to have shame (*isin*) when public reprimands are made by their parents. Children are also taught to feel reticent (*sungkan*) towards elders and

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22 In 2011, Indonesia has 514 tribal/local languages. See website Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, http://badanbahasa.kemdikbud.go.id/lamanbahasa/content/ kontribusi-kosakata-bahasa-daerah-dalam-bahasa-indonesia, accessed on 15 January 2015). Ten major local languages are: Javanese, Malay, Sundanese, Madura, Batak language, Minangkabau, Bugis, Acehnese, Balinese, and Banjar. We will not go into the details of linguistic study.
respected people. Wirang is a more destructive shame where the one who feels it will want to escape from the community because of the shame that he/she receives.

In Batak language, another major tribal language, there is no word for ‘guilt’; it only uses maila (guilt) instead. Maila comes up as a realization of shame after one made a mistake. Maila comes not only from the judgment of others but also because one has broken a rule. Shame is the opposite of honour. The purpose of life among Batak people is to receive honour, descendants, and wealth. These three go together. One can achieve honour by having descendants and wealth; and one is wealthy when he has descendant and honour. The virtue of honour is very communally based, and it is the duty of everyone to keep the honour of the family’s name. If one has broken a rule, the community will decide which punishment is suitable to bring the person’s honour back (a tribal court). The law (uhum) is understood as the way to keep the balance of its people. The final goal of uhum is to bring honour to everyone who follows the tradition or culture (adat). The Adat court includes levying sanctions against those who disobey the rule. Shame comes when the adat is not fulfilled.

In 1951, the Indonesian Government took over the role of the adat court as the task of the state, thus leaving adat restricted to cultural happenings such as marriage, burial, birth, etc. The concept of guilt was thereby introduced as belonging to the state, and the concept of shame and honour is thus about communal judgment over cultural arrangements. The local community has no ability in establishing whether the person is breaking the rule or not, shame is now largely confined to an inability to fulfil the demands of cultural happenings.

Originally, the Batak and the Javanese culture — and maybe other Indonesian tribal cultures — understood both shame and guilt as an inseparable unit of moral value in society. However, in the development of emotions, the Indonesian language shows that shame and guilt have become two different emotions. We could argue that the separation came since the establishment

24 In Batak language they are called hasangapon, hagabeon, hamoraon. There have been many writings explaining and criticizing these values in Batak people, especially through the lens of theology.
25 The role of the tribal court or adat court has changed from time to time. See a short explanation of the governmental and political culture of Batak Toba people in Muchtar Pakpahan, Budaya Politik Pemerintahan Desa di Batak Toba, Jakarta: PT BIS 1999.
of the rule of law; guilt is becoming a language of the state, and shame is the language of the local community.

Traces of God in Human Emotions

Emotion has been sidelined since the tradition of rationalism stepped forward. Somehow, emotions have become considered as spiritualistic and anti-rationalistic channels. Emotions have been considered as the source of negative influences in the life of both individuals and of society. However, it has not always been like that. Many Greek philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle’s *eudamonina*, and even earlier ones such as Cicero, Epicurus and Chrysippus were already talking about the connection between emotion and happiness as the ultimate good of the people. Happiness can only be achieved when it is connected with virtue as well as emotion.27

One of the Greek philosophers who talked about shame and guilt at length is Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Rhetoric*. Aristotle explained emotions in his *Rhetoric* as ‘the feelings that alter people’s judgements, and they are accompanied by pain and pleasure’.28 He explains in detail the different types of emotions. However, many of his explanations show that emotions influence our judgments and decisions. Because of this, one should learn to control his/her emotions, especially those that are connected with desire and passion. Virtue, to Aristotle, can only be achieved by true habit and learning, and not through emotions.

For Aristotle in his Greek context, happiness as the goal of a person is connected with honour. He connected honour and nobility, with a statement that noble is ‘… that which is both desirable for its own sake and also worthy of praise; or that which is both good and pleasant because good. If this is the true definition of the Noble, it follows that virtue must be noble, since it is both a good thing and also praiseworthy.’29 Shame is the opposite of honour, and it is considered to be an emotion rather than a virtue. He says that ‘shame may be defined as pain or disturbance in regard to bad things, whether present, past, or future, which seem likely to involve us in discredit; and shamelessness as

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28 Kenny, 76.
contempt or indifference in regard to the same bad things.\textsuperscript{30} The role of others is important in understanding shame, especially from those whose opinions we regard more important than our own.\textsuperscript{31}

Modern and postmodern philosophers have also recognized the importance of emotions as the driving force of the soul.\textsuperscript{32} The field of psychology in the 20th century — starting with Freud — has taken on this quest of finding out what ‘emotion’ really is in field of human development.\textsuperscript{33} This positive turn has brought back a modern interest concerning the discussion on emotions including in the field of theology.

According to Stephen Pattison in his research on the theology of shame, there are a number of possible functions of emotions. First, emotions can encourage people to act or to do something, as well as not to do anything. Secondly, someone experiencing emotions can learn about him/herself, other people, his/her goals and values, and the world. Third, it functions as social communication.\textsuperscript{34}

Anton Houtepen is one of the theologians that brought back emotion to the discourse of God in Western Europe’s rationalistic 21st century. He tries to answer the question of finding traces of God in today’s context by putting the question ‘how can we think this God without fabricating an idea of God which is of human making (\textit{le dieu disponible} of deism), for, as Augustine puts it, \textit{si comprehendis, non est Deus}: if you understand it, it isn’t God.’\textsuperscript{35} He thinks that theology has the task of thinking about God which not only makes God thinkable, but also livable.\textsuperscript{36} It is here that he turns to human emotions in finding the traces of God. He argues that emotion is something that cannot be guided and has not been learned.

Houtepen speaks of the term ‘emotions’ where human behaviour issues a surplus, with a lack of purpose, which nevertheless seems to be utterly purposeful at a deeper level. He also distinguishes emotions from games and dreams.

\textsuperscript{30} Aristotle, 1383b.
\textsuperscript{31} Cua (p. 153) says that, ‘The significant others are those persons for whom the agent has special concern with regard to personal and / or intimate relationships. And these persons have great influence on the agent’s behavior and self-esteem, or, more generally, those persons who greatly affect or influence an agent’s thoughts and feelings.’
\textsuperscript{33} Many think that the interest in these emotions started with Freud. See Pattison, 45.
\textsuperscript{34} Pattison, 29-30.
\textsuperscript{36} Houtepen, 91.
Emotions are more than purposeful instrumental behaviours, for it defines the *difference* between utility and enjoyment. Darwin’s concepts of emotions as no more than useful hereditary or learned habits, were ‘an instrumentalist, rationalist reduction of emotion.’ Emotion is something beyond that, and at the same time is keeping ‘reason’ in a pre-reflexive, pre-active, and as such a passionate domain. In Jewish-Christian tradition, languages have been orientated by emotions. Grace has been the source of emotions. God is in the passion, and in this passion is itself in God. Even the tradition of the gospel itself is a story full of emotions. Even God’s name, the very name — *YHWH* — is connected with human emotions.

According to Houtepen, four basic human emotions, which he calls life-forms, supply the basic metaphors of our belief in God. They are the ways of desire, trust, protest, and forgiveness. He also uses the term life-form in a sense that supposes that there is a complex way of thinking where interaction between virtues and emotions takes place. These four life forms ‘do not deny the positive consequences of secularization and reverse, the profound processes of secularization have not made them impassable as ways to God and ways from God.’

The life-form of desire is the action of God who longs for an association and a bond with the human being who is blessed. ‘It is God who reveals Himself in traces of love between creatures, and this love which keeps alive the song of desire for shalom — peace and justice.’ Houtepen states that this is so because of God’s love; man knows and longs for their needs, even before there were words for it. Believing in God or god is a longing for something greater and beyond us. Nevertheless, our projection of God is not God Himself; it is our own desire that describes God in such a way. It is our incapability of describing God as God. The whole process of desire is actually taken place because God has the pleasure in people. ‘The process of life itself, desire upon desire, which come to consciousness in human beings, is therefore itself rooted in and orientated toward God.’ Prayer then becomes a hymn of humanity, for it expresses human desire towards the Other who supports true longing.

The life-form of trust is the result of a never completed desire. We live in a world that is run on trust. We accept a number of presuppositions, agreements, policies, and language as vehicles of trust. Trust becomes the basic tool of living without fear. When we speak about God, it means that we are taking the

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37 Houtepen, 95.
38 Houtepen, 106.
39 Houtepen, 98.
40 Houtepen, 100.
position of God’s children. As children, we know that God will not leave God’s people. The binding of the covenant is the basis of trust. Trust is the fuel of our rationed life. Houtepen raises an important question in the end of this section of his work:

Shouldn’t this culture of trust, rooted in God, be able to overcome the defeatism and depression of so many people and thus contribute to a real combating of ‘urban stress’ in our urbanized, secularized culture: an antidote to the excessive organization of self-confidence in the culture of autonomy which we have inherited from the Enlightenment?41

When we encounter evil that comes upon people, we turn our desire and trust into protest. We ask God out of pure emotion. We ask Him/Her to put away evil from our life. God keeps this protest going; gives us the criteria of a perfect world, and makes us protesting when we find an imperfect one. The question then is, ‘who other than God can put an end to human rivalry and violence? . . . It is God who reconciles the opponents with one another in the victory over injustice.’42 God is also joining the plea against injustice and violence, and is confiding us in our prayers. Therefore, one’s own scale of values is deepened, internalized and radically changed.

Lastly, the life-form of forgiveness can put to an end the chains of vengeance and violence, and give to one another new opportunities. Human forgives not to be forgiven. Human forgives because God gave us the power of forgiveness and makes the good happen through toleration and forgiveness.43 Only forgiveness can give reparations to perpetrators together with the victims.

In his concluding remarks, Houtepen says, ‘But a present God who keeps the culture of our emotions pure, before whose face we live and who makes us lives graciously — in longing, trust, opposition and forgiveness — in pure quality and gratuitousness, can be thought and above all can be thanked. This God is more in the emotions of humanity than quantity and causality.’44 Like it or not, there are traces of God in this secularized world through human emotions. This is the opportunity for church and theology to take a witnessing place.

41 Houtepen, 103.
42 Houtepen, 104.
43 Compare this to Hannah Arendt’s notion of forgiveness where she also recognizes that Jesus is the discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs, in Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition: A Study of the Central Dilemmas Facing Modern Man, Garden City: Doubleday 1959, 238.
44 Houtepen, 107.
The remarks Houtepen makes about human emotions propose God as the basis of human emotions in desire, trust, protest, and forgiveness. In this secularized world, Houtepen gives an opening to answer the question of God, without describing who God is. For him, God is the one who moved humans through emotions.

We will take Houtepen’s idea further and propose the addition of two new emotions to Houtepen’s list of four, which are shame and guilt. These added emotions, as will be argued later, can also function as a sign of the traces of God in public actions. Theology positions shame and guilt in close connection with forgiveness and conscience. Forgiveness comes after the acceptance of one’s fault/guilt; it is the step that comes after the realization of guilt and/or shame. Guilt and/or shame show that there is an internal/external standard that comes to scrutinize our actions in the form of self-realization or warning from others.

**Finding a Biblical Understanding(s) of Shame and Guilt**

What is the Biblical and theological understanding of shame and guilt? We will try to answer this question with the answer of some theologians, i.e. Bruce Malina, Stephen Pattison, and Lewis B. Smedes, who all have worked on the issue. I will try to expose an array of theological definitions of shame and guilt from Biblical use, social context, and theological discussions, and show how they are used in the social context.

In the context of the Bible shame is always connected with honour. They are the basic virtues of the Old Testament Israelite and the surrounding people. Bruce J. Malina explains,

> Honor is a claim to worth that is publicly acknowledged. “To have honor” is to have publicly acknowledged worth. To “be honored” is to be ascribed such worth or be acclaimed for it. Shame — as the opposite of honor — is a claim to worth that is publicly denied and repudiated. To “be shamed” is always negative; it means to be denied or to be diminished in honor. On the other hand, to “have shame” is always positive; it means to be concerned about one’s honor.45

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In a group, virtue and honour should be preserved and defended by the members of the group. The group will share the values of strength, courage, daring, valour, generosity, and wisdom as honour; and despise the values of weakness, cowardice, lack of generosity, which are associated with shame.\textsuperscript{46} The research of Lyn Bechtel shows how shame is used in the community.\textsuperscript{47}

As God’s people, Israel views shame as the result of God’s rejection and punishment. Jerusalem was often warned by the prophets on their failure to be loyal to God, which resulted in public humiliation\textsuperscript{48} which in turn is God’s punishment (see Jer. 23: 40; Ezek. 16: 36-54; Hos. 2: 10; Nah. 3: 5).\textsuperscript{49} God’s rejection is the ultimate shame, in as much that even other nations that failed to protect them will also be shamed. Isaiah 30: 3-5 describes that shame and disgrace come ‘through a people that cannot profit them, that brings neither help nor profit’ (Isa. 30: 5). Isaiah talks about the inability of other kings (Egypt and Ethiopia) to protect Judea, which will bring shame to both the protector and the protected. On the other hand, Israel will receive its honour back once God returns to them (see Isa. 61: 7).

Jesus introduces new values to the disciples about honour and shame. First, he teaches that loyalty to him is an honourable virtue (Mk. 8: 38). Second, in a discussion about who is the greatest of all, Jesus says that ‘the least among all of you will be the greatest’ (Lk. 9: 48; see also Lk. 22: 26; Matt. 23: 11-12). It seems that honour is now achieved through exemplary servanthood. We can see that Jesus’ new idea of honour is later implemented during the passion. Since the Jews understood that honour can be shown by God’s blessings and

\textsuperscript{46} Malina, ‘Honor / Shame’, 96.
\textsuperscript{48} Public humiliation, in Malina’s theory, belongs to female shame, since most of the ancient Mediterranean cities were considered as female. Jerusalem was shamed because of her infidelity.
accompaniment, Jesus’ public humiliation and death is the clearest example that God is not with him, which made him shameful. However, the resurrection shows God’s approval of Jesus’ values of honour and shame. What the people saw as humiliation and a sign of God’s abandonment became then seen as the approval of Jesus honour, precisely through his humiliation.  

In the New Testament, Paul recognizes the values in Jesus’ new concept of honour and shame, and changes the concept of honour from social status to ethnic, kinship origins and group affiliation (Phil. 3: 5-6) to the gain in following Christ. Paul was against the Greco-Roman culture that saw honour as something that can be gained through competition in all levels, and states the fact that in front of an impartial righteous God, only the people who reflect the ultimate standard of the ‘the glory of God’ can boast of their honour. Since all are sinners (Rom. 3: 23) and none can boast about their status in front of God, glory and honour can only be seen as a gift of God. Robert Jewett who writes about the relation of honour and shame in Paul’s theology says,

Paul’s crucial contention is that in Christ, rightful status is not achieved on the basis of any human effort. The threefold reference in Rom 3: 24 to divine “grace,” to the “gift,” and to “redemption” through Christ makes it plain that no one gains this honourable, righteous status by outperforming others or by privilege of birth or wealth.

On the other hand, Paul connects shame with sin and unfaithfulness to God (see Rom. 3: 3-5). Human disobedience to God is sinful and thus shameful.

First Christian communities are more connected with the ideas of honour and shame instead of guilt. Honour is something that they have to gain from the new family of Christian community itself, and not from the larger society that has cast them out. The Christian communities did not consider the

53 Jewett, 561.
54 Malina mentions, ‘Shameful behaviour, for Paul, includes homosexual relations and all kinds of other sins among Greeks and Romans, allowed by God for their perverting the truth (Rom. 1: 24, 26, 28),’ (‘Honor / Shame’, 100).
larger society’s valuation as important to their concept of honour. For them, the virtues of Jesus are considered higher than the norms of the society at large.

In the later development, Pattison notes that the Western Christian tradition has focused more on guilt and sin. He says,

The Western Christian tradition with its emphasis on guilt and sin rather than shame may also have had an ongoing influence in focusing attention on the former at the expense of the latter. A large contemporary cross-cultural study found that guilt and shame tend to be far less clearly separated as experiences in White, Anglo-Saxon Nordic cultures which have been influenced by the ‘Protestant ethic’. In approaching shame in these cultures, all self-conscious emotions are likely to be tinged with if not wholly transformed into guilt. Kaufman notes that most clinicians and investigators have found it ‘easier and safer’ to explore “guilty” impulses rather than the shameful self.57

Although it seems that Pattison is correct by saying that Western Christian community now focuses more on guilt and sin, a wider research is needed to investigate Pattison’s claim. Further, we also need to explore how this change of focus influences other Christian communities that have honour / shame cultures in their traditional communities, i.e. Indonesian Christian communities in their own tribal cultural settings.

Towards a Theology of Guilt and Shame

One of the fields in theology that has been dealing with the issue of shame is pastoral theology. Many of the writings that dealt with the issue have been largely influenced by psychology for therapeutic reasons. After Pattison’s critique in 2003, that ‘pastoral theology is still ignorant and uninformed about the nature and complexities of shame’, pastoral theology really develops an understanding of shame in a more comprehensive way.58 Shame has since

57 Pattison, 44-45.
been distinguished differently from guilt and has been seen as a significant factor in pastoral theology.

One of the early writers who realized the importance of taking shame seriously in theology is Lewis B. Smedes. From the beginning, he differentiates shame from guilt. The difference of feeling shame and guilt are basically about the object of our emotion. We feel shame for what we are and we feel guilty for what we do.\(^{59}\) Sometimes the two will overlap, but Smedes insists on his definition. Since his book is focused on shame, he then differentiates shame from other feelings such as being embarrassed, discouraged, depressed, and frustrated.\(^{60}\) For him, shame is a very heavy feeling that we do not live to the expectation of who we are capable of becoming. Shame attacks the very being of ourselves.

Shame is not always negative. Smedes believes that shame also encourages us to fulfil our calling. To support his theory, he talks about spiritual shame and social shame. Spiritual shame is about feeling small in front of the Almighty (see Isa. 6: 5). People who are feeling the divine presence should feel in awe. When we are standing in front of the divine humanity, we will feel as if we are standing in front of a mirror looking back at our humanity, at the things that we could have and should have done, but did not. This feeling of awe and sorry is not depressing. It is a feeling of wonder that such humanity and divinity is at the same time embracing my weakness. Smedes concludes that spiritual shame is, ‘a painful feeling of acceptability in contrast to the self I see in the humanity of God.’\(^{61}\) Then the other type of shame is social shame. He defines it as ‘the pain that comes to people who live together and yet despise one another.’\(^{62}\) This emotion is more connected with oneself, with how one project his/herself with the fear of rejection of others. It is associated with an act of rejection by others, but the process is more inwardly.

A healthy feeling of shame will help a person to reach for what he/she can become. We can be guided to a better ‘us’ through shame. Smedes goes further and says that, ‘A healthy sense of shame is perhaps the surest sign of our

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\(^{60}\) Smedes, 11-15.

\(^{61}\) Smedes, 51.

\(^{62}\) Smedes, 59.
divine origin and our human dignity.”⁶³ As we will discover further, this kind of shame can also be recognized as conscience. The early Christian communities had this understanding of shame as we will investigate below. The second type is the unhealthy shame. This type of shame is not based on reality, and kills creativity and joy. It comes from other expectation of who we are and how we should act. Unhealthy shame always makes demands and the society will decide if one is good enough for them.

Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James D. Whitehead, two theologians of practical theology, recognize the positive use of shame and guilt. They write that the benefit of shame is to ‘affirm the necessary boundaries that support our sense of self… one of the roots of personal dignity’, while guilt ‘reminds us of the shape of our best self… often supports our sense of personal integrity.’⁶⁴ Shame is needed at a certain point to help one realize his/her dignity — or a sense of self value, and guilt reminds his/her integrity — as compared to the virtue of the society.

Smedes helps us to see that a healthy spiritual kind of shame acts as a personal reminder of what we do. Nevertheless, Smedes does not clearly explain the difference between healthy and unhealthy shame since the line between spiritual/healthy and social/unhealthy shame is not so clearly cut. When a Christian lives in a Christian community that makes demands on one’s action, would it be considered as healthy or unhealthy? We can also say that spiritual shame also needs spiritual community that reminds each other of what God has asked them to do or not do.

### Shameless and Guiltless

What does the absence of shame and guilt in the case of corruption in Indonesia mean? As a nation with a high level of religiosity in the public sphere, the low points that Indonesia received on the Corruption Perception Index seems contradictory. As we have seen, Christian theology pictures positive shame as personal reminder of what God wants the people to do. If the people are as religious in their public acts as much as the presence of God in public domain, shame could play an important role in keeping the extent of corruption low.

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⁶³ Smedes, 32.
The fact shows that public religiosity does not correlate with public acts of doing God’s will.

The separation of guilt and shame in the Indonesian language context also plays a role in the absence of positive shame. Much like the context of Biblical communities, many Indonesian tribal cultures are not differentiating shame from guilt. The society will act as a social conscience if anyone breaks the rule. When shame is separated from guilt, the society is not in charge anymore in deciding whether someone is guilty. The fact that one is not convicted guilty by the court could be caused by a number of factors including the lack of rule of law and consequently there is no need for him/her to feel shame. The ones who are guilty can still keep their honour when they are rich enough to ‘buy’ respect from others. This situation can allow a person, however religious, to feel shameless and guiltless.

This finding brings another worrying question. If we could not find the emotions of shame and guilt as the traces of God in the people who are convicted, or even the people who corrupt also but did not get caught; does it mean that God does not really exist for them? Of course, we can argue that Indonesia lacks a Christian majority; nevertheless, Indonesian Christians are corrupt too. Doesn’t all religion teach honesty and integrity especially in the case of corruption? Although there are more questions that need to be answered in a larger research of the absence of shame and guilt in the public domain in Indonesia, we can conclude that religiosity in the public domain is not reflected in the public action of honesty and non-corruption.