Theological Education that Crosses Cultures

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What is culture?

What is culture?

Deeper <u>values</u> and <u>beliefs</u>

- Shared by groups of people living in community

- Shape thought & behavior and determine meaning

- Communicated and perpetuated through language & other outward forms

Cultural values and beliefs often lie below the surface, being assumed or implied rather than stated explicitly

Communicating across cultures

Obstacles to communicating across cultures

1. Monoculturalism – I only know my own culture _deeply_

2. Ethnocentrism – I think my own culture is superior to other cultures

3. Sympathy – "How would I feel in their situation?"

   - Projection of our own mental states onto others

   - The "fundamental attribution error" – when Westerners wrongly attribute the behavior of others to inward, psychological causes

Communicating across cultures

Obstacles to communicating across cultures

1. Monoculturalism – I only know my own culture *deeply*

2. Ethnocentrism – I think my own culture is superior to other cultures

3. Sympathy – "How would I feel in their situation?"

4. False Familiarity – I think I can explain the behavior of others based on my own cultural perspective

5. Overestimating my understanding of another culture

Communicating across cultures

Gaining "intercultural competence"

1. Curiosity and openness

2. Willingness to "decenter" oneself

3. Empathy instead of sympathy: sets aside my perspective to see another person's situation from their perspective

4. Learning the invisible values, beliefs, and cultural conceptions behind the words of others

5. Becoming consciously aware of my own culture

Enlightenment influences

- The Renaissance and renewed interest in Greek literature and thought

- The printing press and cultural literacy

- The Reformation and internalization of religion

- The rise of individualism

- The rise of science, industrialism, urbanism, technology etc.

Most cultures outside the West have only been influenced indirectly by these factors through contact with Westerners.

Worldviews in conflict

Modern West

- Individualism
- Democracy
- Literacy
- Science & naturalism
- Industrial-technological economy

Ancient & majority-world

- Collectivism
- Oligarchy
- Orality
- Spiritism or animism
- Peasant subsistence economy

Worldviews in conflict

- Outside of N. America and W. Europe, much of the world still operates by ancient cultural principles

- Especially cultures in the 10-40 window

The 10/40 Window

Cultural gaps

- **The worldview of the American missionary**
  - *Modern, characterized by individualism, democracy, literacy, science & naturalism, industrial-technological economy*

- **The worldview of non-Westerners (M-W)**

- **The worldview of people in the Bible (ANE)**
  - *Traditional, characterized by collectivism, oligarchy, orality, spiritism or animism, peasant-agrarian economy*

Cultural gaps

The gaps between cultures cause:

- **Miscommunication and misunderstanding**

- **Hinderances to the Gospel**
  - **Cultural offenses**
  - **Unnecessary obstacles to belief**

- **Weak Christians and churches in our ministries**

Communicating across cultures

Which of these causes the greatest obstacle to communication?

Modern West

- Individualism
- Democracy
- Literacy
- Science & naturalism
- Industrial-technological economy

Ancient & majority-world

- Collectivism
- Oligarchy
- Orality
- Spiritism or animism
- Peasant subsistence economy

Individualism vs. collectivism

Ideologies concerning the relationship of individuals to their groups that form the basic orientation of a society

	Individualism	Collectivism
Fundamental unit of society	The individual	The group
Priority	The individual	The group
Personhood (the "self")	Autonomous	Embedded
Distinctiveness	The individual	The group

Individualism vs. collectivism

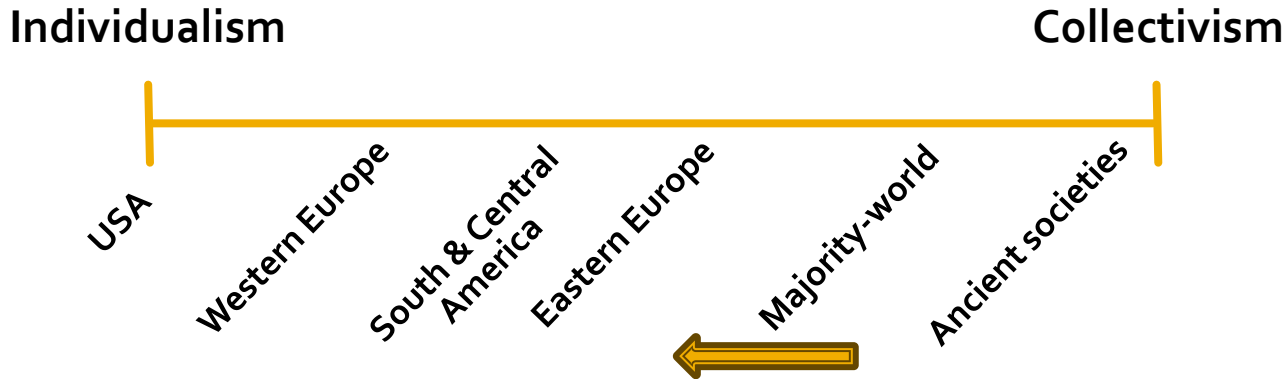## Group participation and boundaries

Individualism

- People join or leave groups based on their personal interests
- Groups and group membership are very fluid (personal autonomy)
- Groups serve the individual's needs
- Group boundaries are porous
- Nuclear families

Collectivism

- People join groups based on blood and marriage, leave them at death
- Lifelong dependence on & loyalty to strongly cohesive groups
- Individuals serve the group's needs
- Group boundaries are defended
- Extended families

Individualism vs. collectivism

Individualism and collectivism are not absolutes but poles at opposite ends of a spectrum

Individualism   Collectivism

USA   Western Europe   South & Central America   Eastern Europe   Majority-world   Ancient societies

Individualism vs. collectivism

Corollaries of individual vs group orientation

Individualism

- Autonomous self
- Egalitarian society
- Self-esteem
- Self-sufficiency

Collectivism

- Group-embedded "self"
- Social stratification
- Honor and shame
- Patron-client relationships

The group-embedded "self"

This **Not This**

These people all belong to a group. What's the difference?
The degree to which they are "embedded" in their group.

The group-embedded "self"

- The self is external; one does not think of oneself apart from family, tribe, and nation

- One's lot in life (survival and fortune) is shared with the whole family

- Therefore, personal goals merge with the family's, and personal ambitions are a threat

- One's central perspective is "we" instead of "I" – What do *we* think? What do *we* say?

- All other people are seen as "we's"

The group-embedded "self"

- One's identity, traits, and sense of worth come from one's family and nation
- A person is known by their groups (nation, clan)
- Stereotypes and prejudice are important

The group-embedded "self"

Biblical examples

- The Israelites' identities united in one family & nation

- Philippians 3:5 : Paul is "…of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee"

- Daniel 9:4–6: Daniel's corporate consciousness of sins that he himself did not commit

- Titus 1:12: "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons!"

The autonomous "self"

- Follow your heart

- I've gotta do what I've gotta do

- You have to stand on your own two feet

- Look out for number one

- "I think that…"

- "Self worth" is the foundation of good mental health

The autonomous "self"

"Just be yourself," expressive individualism

The autonomous "self"

Thinking like others is disparaged as "groupthink"

Doing what others do is mocked as "herd mentality"

Both are viewed as "uncritical" because the person does not place his or her own internal judgment over the thoughts and actions of others.

Defending one's own group is scorned as "tribalism"

Development of the Western self

While every language has words for self-reference and descriptions of reflexive activity, abstracting and formalizing something called "the self" is peculiar to our modern sense of the self as personal agent.
 – Christopher Flanders, *About Face*, 46–47

Development of the Western self

Aristotle's essentialism: investigation into the "essence" of things apart from outside relations

"The self" becomes a discrete thing that one possesses, much like one has a head or arms

Development of the Western self

Augustine's neo-platonic dualism: the inward turn to man's immaterial, rational soul as the path to God, who illuminates man's inner being

"The self" is constituted by a sense of the inward and immaterial—thoughts, ideas, emotions, mental states

Boethius extends Augustine's conception of the inner self to be primarily internal and rational, unrelated, and the seat of individual identity

Development of the Western self

Descartes' radical reflexivism: The individual, rational self of Augustine and Boethius takes on a radically reflexive first-person viewpoint, becoming an autonomous subject and center of moral judgement

What does it mean for "self" to become the *subject* rather than being an *object*?

Development of the Western self

Kant and autonomy**:** the Western individual self becomes autonomous, gaining ascendency in value over community and relationships

The creation of a *knowing* vs *believing* person

Flanders: "This is an idolatrous self, rooted in human rebellion in the Garden of Eden, a self shaped, ironically, by Christian tradition to a significant degree."

Development of the Western self

Nietzsche and self-creation: Freed from the metaphysical myths of religion, human beings must rise to the challenge of artistic self-creation that defies convention

Wilde and the self as performance art: All imitation in morals and life is wrong, and is supplanted by the spontaneous, sexually transgressive, and artistic expression of the self

Development of the Western self

A conclusion by **Reiff**:

These trends lie behind the death of Christian culture in the modern West, which was replaced as the organizing force of human personality by societal disorder and disintegration as the self, the new center, seeks entertainment as the highest good and boredom as the most common evil.

Implications for theological ed.

- Teaching critical thinking requires students from non-Western contexts to change their conception of self from embedded, uncritical believer to autonomous knower and center of judgment.

- Is this dissonant in any way with biblical Christianity?

- How might this affect a student's relationships with family, church, and others in his culture?

- How will he express this in leadership?

Social stratification

The relative value of a person within their community

- Society is not a horizontal plane of supposed equals but a vertical structure of people with greater or lesser worth

- Status comes from access to wealth and power
  - Two main strata: elites (~1-5%) and peasants (everyone else)
  - Elites are defined by their relationship to royalty and religion
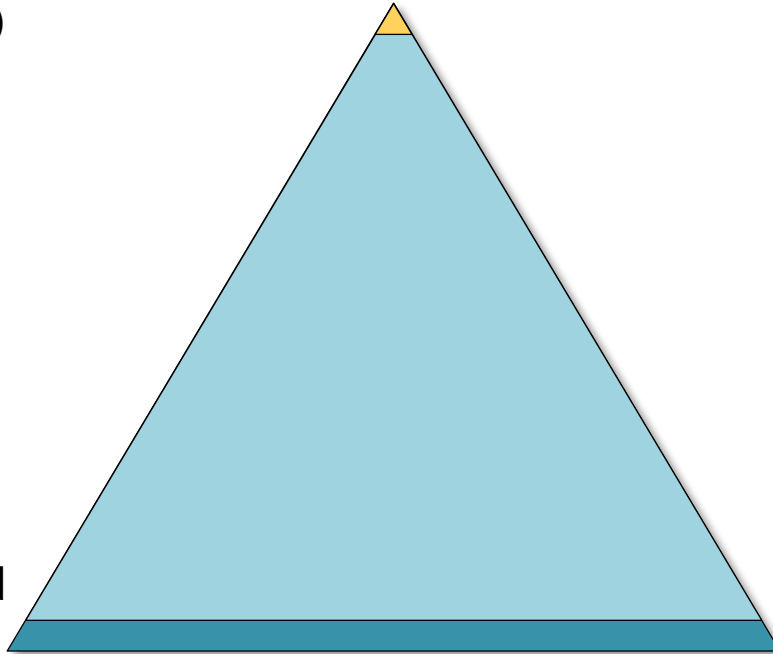
Social stratification

Stratus

Status

Elites (royalty & religion)
- Great power or wealth

The masses
- Little power or wealth

The poor & marginalized
- No power or wealth

Power
Wealth
Men
Elders
Achievements

Women
Children
Handicapped
Foreigners

Social stratification

The relative value of a person within their community

- Society is not a horizontal plane of supposed equals but a vertical structure of people with greater or lesser worth

- Status comes from access to wealth and power

- Status is inherited at birth and seldom changes

- Status must be shown by external status symbols

- Honorable people maintain their status (Rom 12:3), but everyone is open to opportunities to move up

Egalitarianism

All people in society are seen as having roughly the social power and worth

- Everyone should have access to roughly the same opportunities in life

- Wealth and power come from personal achievements

- The saying "It's not what you know but who you know" seems unfair

Social stratification

Biblical examples

- The Aaronic-priesthood and Davidic throne
  - The genealogies and birth narratives in Matthew and Luke present Jesus as of royal descent
- Various courtyards in Herod's temple (holiness & status)
- The garments of the priesthood, Solomon's royal splendor
- Judges 11:1–11 : Jephthah, son of a prostitute, becomes chief of the clan

Honor-shame

Assessment of a person's worth by their community

- Their e<u>val</u>uation of who & what you are and what you do
  - Honor and shame are not primarily feelings
  - They are distributed by the "public court of reputation;" only then are they felt by the person who has been honored or shamed

- Primary metaphors are elevation, name, and face
  - **Honor words:** exalted, worth, good, praise, glory, pride
  - **Shame words:** bowed, worthless, bad, ridicule, humiliation

- Honor is displayed, but shame must be hidden

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is one's own evaluation of one's worth

- "Don't worry about what others think of you"

- Self-esteem is considered to be the foundational of good mental health

- Honor is often internal and reflexive—maintaining a clear conscience by doing what one believes is right
  - "Self-respect"

- Shame is disused in American English, replaced with guilt

Shame vs. guilt

Shame depends on the judgement of others

- Based on the community's sense of right and wrong
- Remorse is felt when a wrongdoing is discovered: "Do not do what you would undo if caught"
- People respond more to the fear of shame

Guilt depends on one's own conscience

- Based on one's own sense of right and wrong
- Remorse is felt at the time of wrongdoing
- People respond more to the fear of punishment

Why church discipline doesn't work in the West and personal counseling doesn't work in the East

Honor-shame

The primary method of social control and the central motivation for behavior

- People aren't motivated by internal aspirations or feelings but by the need to maintain honor and avoid shame
- Shaming protects the values and wellbeing of the group
- Being shamed is a social rather than personal disaster
  - It is everyone else's opinion of you
  - Your honor or shame attaches to anyone related to you (esp. family)
- Therefore, "having shame" is the good sense to avoid it!

Honor-shame

The environment of honor-shame culture

- Closed or close communities
- Open homes
- Privacy is unimportant

The environment of innocence-guilt culture

- Open or melting-pot communities
- Closed homes
- Privacy is important

Honor-shame

Biblical examples

- Exposing sin brings shame (Psa 90:8) while covering it protects honor (Prov 10: 12, 17:9; 1 Pet 4:8; James 5:20)

- 1 Cor 12:12–26: more & less honorable parts

- Luke 14:7–11: picking a seat at the table

- The crowd's response to Jesus (glorifying God) humiliated his opponents (e.g., Luke 13:10–17)

- Phil 2:5–11: God becomes a human slave, then is exalted

Honor-shame

Biblical examples

- Matthew 18:17, 1 Corinthians 5, & 2 Thessalonians 3:14–15: intentionally shaming wrongdoers in the church

- Stoning in the OT and crucifixion in the Roman Empire

Patron-client relationships

<u>Reciprocal</u> exchanges between unequal parties

- **Patron** (powerful): supplies resources or influence

- **Client** (powerless): returns honor, service, and loyalty
  - Gratitude is <u>*shown*</u> (by returning the favor) rather than <u>*spoken*</u>

- **Broker**: Stands in the middle providing his client with access to the resources and influence of his patron

Reciprocal patron-client exchanges are essential to societies with unequal access to limited resources and power

Patron-client relationships

Gratitude is *shown* rather than *spoken*

- What is the Hebrew word for "thank you" among men?

- How often do people say "thank you" to one another in the NT?

- Some modern languages lack a *spoken* "thank you" because gratitude must be *shown* through an act

Patron-client relationships

The giving and receiving of gifts and favors

- A righteous patron gives the gift "freely," meaning generously without demand of a return (Rom. 5:15–16, 6:23)
- But a righteous client knows that a gift demands some kind of reciprocation

Patron-client relationships

Gifts and favors

- Gifts are closely identified with the giver—receiving a favor is to receive the giver himself, creating a mutual bond

- Benefits given cannot be replaced simply by creating more wealth, so they must be paid back by other means

- Accepting a gift or favor starts an <u>ongoing cycle</u> of mutual reciprocation

  - The patron becomes perpetually responsible for his client's well-being
  - The client is perpetually responsible for service and honor to the patron

Patron-client relationships

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Therefore, the ethos and primary value of patron-client relationships is <u>mutual loyalty</u>

Patron-client relationships

Gifts and favors in the West

- Gifts are mostly symbolic (of love, friendship, etc.)

- If something is given with an expected return, it is regarded as fraud, bribery, or corruption

- Gifts are "pure," meaning that they cannot be repaid in any way. If anything is repaid, it ceases to be a gift

- Therefore, gifts are given and received voluntarily with no debt of reciprocation: "no strings attached"

Patron-client relationships

<u>Reciprocal</u> exchanges between unequal parties

- A system of mutual interdependence contrasting the independence and self-sufficiency of the West

- No relationship is voluntary, egalitarian, or independent of one's other relationships

- Each relationship contributes to an interdependent network of relationships—each person you know is a patron, client, or broker connected to the rest of the network through mutual obligations

Patron-client relationships

Biblical examples

- The coronation of David, 1 Sam 30:26–31 and 2 Sam 2:1–4

- People healed by Jesus in the Gospels

- The indicative-imperative pattern of Paul's epistles

- Eph 2:8–10: **8** For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; **9** not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

- The Jewish elders broker a deal between Jesus and a Roman centurion (Luke 7:1–10)

Patron-client relationships

Biblical examples

- In the OT: God's Covenant with Israel and חֶסֶד
  - Exodus 19:4–6

- In the NT: χάρις and πίστις
  - Hebrews 12:28 (KJV)

    Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved [*God's initial act of grace*], let us have grace (χάριν), whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear [*the believer's grace reciprocating God's grace*]

Recommended reading

Cultures of the Bible

- John Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*

- David deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture*

- Randolph Richards & Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*

- Randolph Richards & Richard James, *Misreading Scripture with Individualist Eyes*
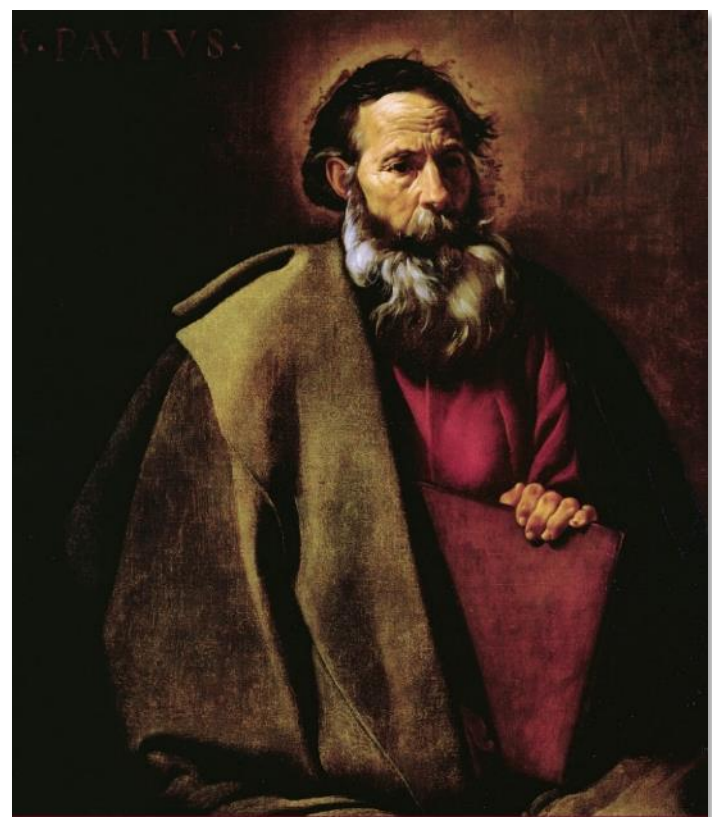
Contemporary majority-world cultures

- Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel*

- Jayson Georges, *Ministering in Patronage Cultures*

- Jayson Georges & Mark Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures*

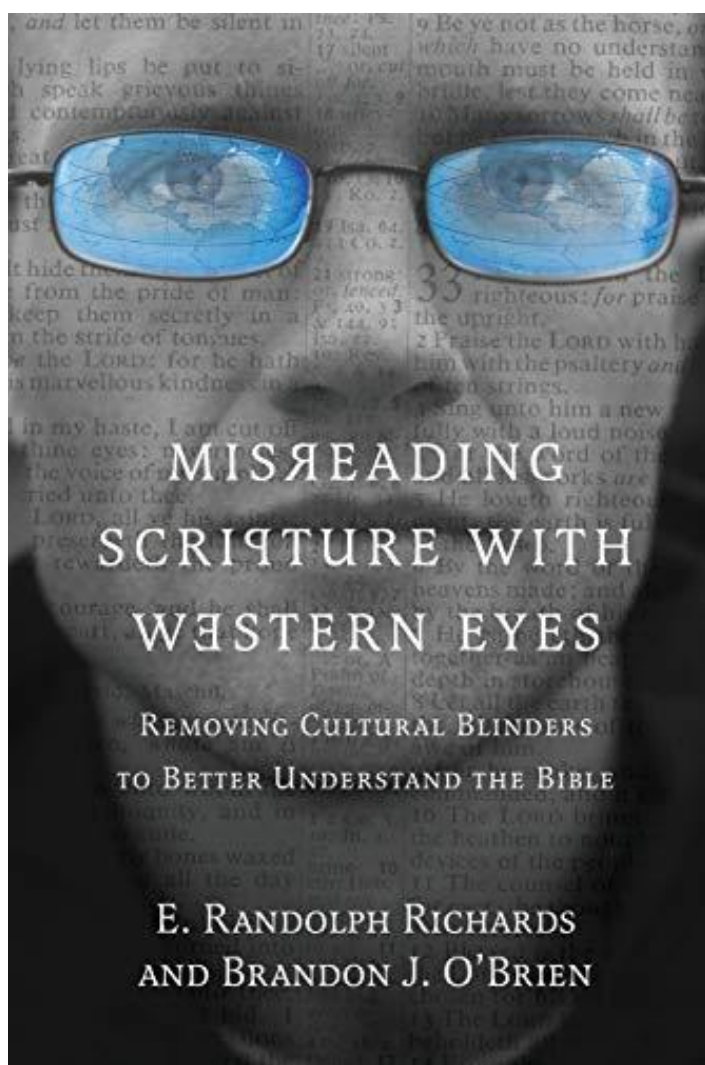**HONOR, PATRONAGE, KINSHIP & PURITY**

Unlocking
New Testament
Culture

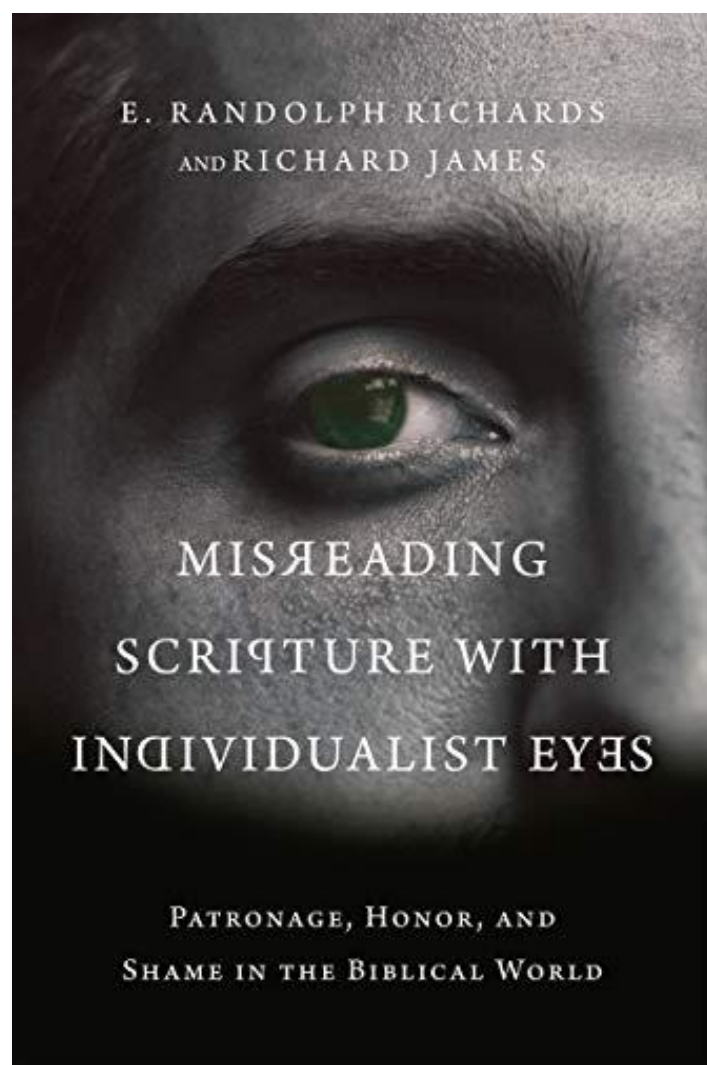DAVID A. deSILVA

· PAVLVS ·

Paul & the Gift

JOHN M. G. BARCLAY

MISREADING SCRIPTURE WITH WESTERN EYES

REMOVING CULTURAL BLINDERS
to Better Understand the Bible

E. RANDOLPH RICHARDS
AND BRANDON J. O'BRIEN

E. RANDOLPH RICHARDS
AND RICHARD JAMES

MISREADING SCRIPTURE WITH INDIVIDUALIST EYES

PATRONAGE, HONOR, AND
SHAME IN THE BIBLICAL WORLD

THE
3D GOSPEL
MINISTRY IN GUILT, SHAME, AND FEAR CULTURES

Jayson Georges

JAYSON GEORGES and MARK D. BAKER

MINISTERING
in
HONOR-SHAME
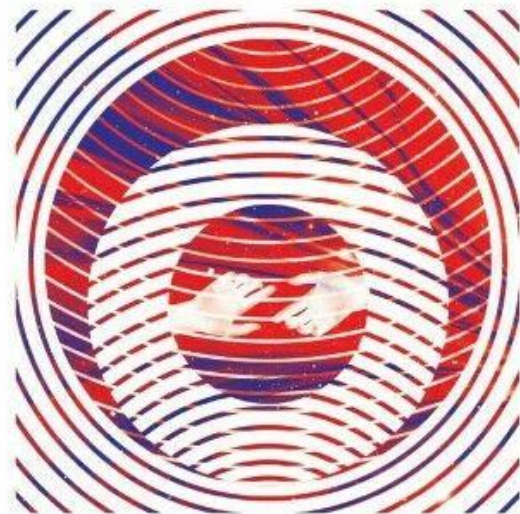CULTURES

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS and
PRACTICAL ESSENTIALS

JAYSON GEORGES
Coauthor of Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures

MINISTERING
in PATRONAGE
CULTURES

BIBLICAL MODELS and
MISSIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Recommended reading

American culture

- Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*

- Edward Stewart and Milton Bennett, *American Cultural Patterns*

- Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*

- Carl Trueman, *Strange New World*

HABITS
OF THE
HEART

Individualism and Commitment in American Life

ROBERT N. BELLAH, RICHARD MADSEN,
WILLIAM M. SULLIVAN, ANN SWIDLER,
AND STEVEN M. TIPTON

UPDATED EDITION WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION
NATIONAL BESTSELLER

AMERICAN CULTURAL PATTERNS

A Cross-Cultural Perspective

EDWARD C. STEWART
AND
MILTON J. BENNETT

REVISED EDITION

Foreword by Rod Dreher

THE RISE AND TRIUMPH
of the MODERN SELF

Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism,
and the Road to Sexual Revolution

CARL R. TRUEMAN