

[MJTM 17 (2015–2016)]

BOOK REVIEW

Jayson Georges. *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures*. San Bernardino, CA: Timē, 2016. 80 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-0-692-33801-8. \$8.99.

Jayson Georges, missiologist-in-residence at an unnamed evangelical organization, brings nine years of ministerial experience among different people groups in Central Asia. In this updated edition of his self-published 2014 volume, Georges offers a potentially eye-opening encounter of differing cultural world-views that have influenced the way the gospel is both presented and received.

In the first chapter, the author introduces the need for a properly-contextualized gospel presentation. Georges proposes that sin elicits three distinct moral emotions: guilt, shame, and fear. These responses are built on three major types of culture. Guilt–innocence cultures, which are mostly Western, have individualistic worldviews, seeking justice or forgiveness when laws are broken. Shame–honor cultures, generally in the East, are collectivistic contexts where people seek to restore their honor in response to shame derived from not meeting the group’s expectations. Fear–power cultures, which characterize many tribal groups, seek to attain power over the spirit world through magical rituals. Georges likens the gospel to a multi-faceted diamond, calling readers to open their eyes to the blind spots in Christian theology, as Western Christianity tends to emphasize one aspect of salvation, the forgiveness of sins.

Georges opens chapter 2, entitled, “Culture,” by pointing out that each culture is a unique blend of guilt, shame, and fear. Outlining the next sections by the three types, he presents the common features of each. Guilt–innocence cultures emphasize codes of conduct in an individualistic system. Individualists

derive value from doing, and guilt can be remedied with other actions. Shame-honor societies display a strong group orientation, with a high value on reputation and relationships. Shame, or the inadequacy of an entire person, says, “I *am* a mistake,” while guilt simply says, “I *made* a mistake” (23). In fear-power cultures, people seek to placate capricious spiritual powers, engaging in practices such as incantations, curses, and witchcraft. Georges calls for mission movements to reach people with strategic attention given to their culture, pointing out that most unreached people groups are predominantly honor-shame in orientation.

Chapter 3 offers a brief survey of salvation theology informed by this guilt-shame-fear trichotomy. Georges navigates through the narrative of Scripture with each perspective, and includes a list of key passages for each. After demonstrating how salvation is “3D” in nature, Georges offers a similar treatment of the doctrines of sin and atonement. The atonement is described from three perspectives: ransom theory (fear), satisfaction (shame), and penal substitution theory (guilt).

The fourth chapter proposes ministry approaches to each cultural context. The author uses the structure of the *Four Spiritual Laws* and outlines proposed gospel presentations to each of the three culture types. He then presents a vocabulary list for metaphors of Christian salvation. Terms include *debt* and *pardon* for guilt-based cultures, *disgraced* and *adoption* for shame-based cultures, and *deliverance* and *oppression* for fear-based cultures. Citing how Paul imparted the truth of the gospel in Pisidian Antioch, called on the power of God against the magician in Cyprus, and brought a disgraced jailer’s family to encounter the gospel, Georges offers suggestions of distinct missiological approaches to the three types of cultures, which includes utilizing apologetics for a truth encounter with the gospel, counseling ministries to deliver people from spiritual oppression, and transmitting the gospel via family networks for communities to receive the gospel.

Georges writes for Western-minded readers who primarily identify themselves with a guilt-innocence culture. His ministry experience has afforded him valuable perspective for reaching

different people groups. The content appeals to the average churchgoer, and the book's brevity and clarity offer wide accessibility. Georges writes with a sense of urgency, challenging the reader to broaden one's perspective on how the gospel is presented.

The author's communication skills are best displayed in his clear organization of biblical truth and the distinct language for each cultural approach. He presents the shame-honor narrative especially well, poignantly describing the human problem as dishonor towards God, with the solution that involved an eternally glorious Jesus enduring the shame of the cross to ultimately remove humanity's shame.

The strengths of book must be evaluated with reference to the reader's familiarity with cultural differences. Its content would be the most helpful for a reader who is beginning to explore these dynamics. Perhaps what is best about the book is its potential role as an excellent primer for a Western-minded believer who encounters how culture essentially influences the communication of the gospel. As it introduces the reader to these factors, this book would be an excellent resource for pastors to distribute to congregants, especially to participants in a short-term mission.

This short book is not without its weaknesses, however. First, the author's straightforward explanations of the complexities of culture come at the risk of oversimplification. One must acknowledge that cultures are fluid and complex, and resist strict categorization. Furthermore, Georges sometimes raises some unanswered questions in his theological assertions. For example, if unseen forces bring anxiety to a fear-power culture, how is the God of the Bible different from those anxiety-producing forces? Borrowing Gregory of Nazianzus's response to Origen's ransom theory, if the ransom for Jesus' life was paid to Satan, does Satan's inability to keep the ransom make God a crook? Additionally, Georges leaves the reader without a concrete strategy for evaluating a particular setting for cultural tendencies. While some symptoms are discussed, the brevity of the book does not allow for a discussion of a plan for identification of the particular 3D blend.

The content of the book would be better served if it cited additional sources that are authoritative. The footnotes are sparse where the author could have identified resources for further investigation. Also, the author does make generalizations that could be strengthened by authoritative studies. While he does share some anecdotes from his experience in the mission field, the assertions he makes about the influences of culture on worldviews are largely unsupported.

In the end, Georges offers a helpful resource for the church. He displays a deep desire to equip the reader to contextualize the message so that more will know Christ. For many readers, the book will leave them desiring to explore these cultural dynamics even further. The ensuing discussions will be fruitful, as more believers seek to understand and serve others.

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