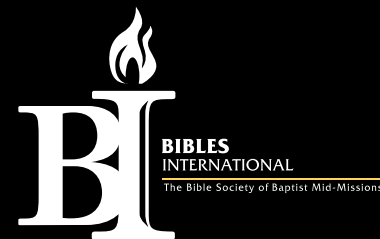




# Understanding people from majority-world cultures

Pastor's Toolbox – April 2024

Michael Carlyle  
Scripture Engagement  
Bibles International





These people have moved into our neighborhood. What differences in culture might hinder our efforts at evangelism and discipleship among them?

**What is culture?**



# What is culture?

## Deeper values and beliefs

- 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 are invisible and often assumed or implied rather than being stated directly or explicitly

# Communicating across cultures

## Obstacles to communicating across cultures

1. Monoculturalism – I only know my own culture *deeply*
2. Ethnocentrism – I believe that my own culture is better than other cultures

Both of these result from a strong commitment to my own culture and my tendency to prioritize it over the culture of other people.

But, what is the Apostle Paul's attitude in 1 Cor 9:19–23?

# Communicating across cultures

## Obstacles to communicating across cultures

1. Monoculturalism – I only know my own culture deeply
2. Ethnocentrism – I believe that my own culture is better than other cultures
3. False Familiarity – I can explain the behavior of others based on my own cultural perspective
4. Sympathy – “How would I feel in their situation?”

# Communicating across cultures

## Gaining “intercultural competence”

1. Curiosity and openness
2. “Decentering” oneself
3. Empathy instead of sympathy
4. Learning the invisible values, beliefs, and cultural conceptions behind the words of others
- 5.





# Communicating across cultures

## Gaining “intercultural competence”

1. Curiosity and openness
2. “Decentering” oneself
3. Empathy instead of sympathy
4. Learning the invisible values, beliefs, and cultural conceptions behind the words of others
5. Becoming consciously aware of my own culture

# *News flash!*

Nothing like America's culture and society existed in world history prior to the Enlightenment of the West.

You see things radically different than traditional cultures in the world today.



# Enlightenment influences

- The Renaissance and renewed interest in Greek literature and thought
- The printing press and a culture of 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 not been affected by these factors or have only been affected indirectly through contact by 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



# Cultural gaps

- **The worldview of the American pastor**
    - *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*
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# Cultural gaps

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The gaps between cultures cause:

- Miscommunication and misunderstanding
- Unnecessary hinderances to the Gospel
- Weak Christians and churches in our ministries



# Communicating across cultures



## *Modern West*

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

## *Ancient & majority-world*

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

*Which of these causes the greatest obstacle to communication?*

# Communicating across cultures

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The greatest obstacle to intercultural communication and conflict is...



# Communicating across cultures

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The greatest obstacle to intercultural communication and conflict is the individualist versus collectivist divide.



# Individualism vs. collectivism

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

	<u>Individualism</u>	<u>Collectivism</u>
<i>Fundamental unit of society</i>	The individual	The group
<i>Priority</i>	The individual	The group
<i>Personhood (the "self")</i>	Autonomous	Embedded
<i>Distinctiveness</i>	The individual	The group

# Individualism vs. collectivism

## Group participation and boundaries

### *Individualism*

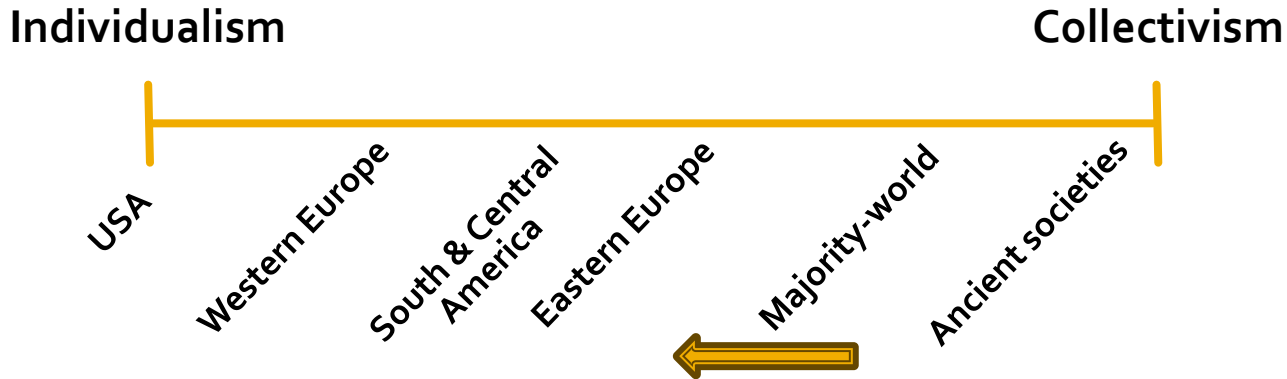
- People join or leave groups based on their personal interests
- Groups and group membership are very fluid (personal autonomy)
- Groups serve the individual's needs
- Group boundaries are porous
- Nuclear family

### *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 family

# Individualism vs. collectivism

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



# Individualism vs. collectivism

## Problems caused by the individualist-collectivist divide:

- Different values and meaning
- Different motivations for behavior
- Different ways of thinking
- Different ways of communicating

# 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 group-embedded “self”

- One does not think of self 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”
- All other people are seen as “we’s”

# 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...”

# The group-embedded "self"



# The group-embedded “self”

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



# The autonomous "self"



"Just be yourself," expressive individualism

# The group-embedded “self”

Socially rather than psychologically minded

- Personal motivations & goals are merged with the group's or at least support the group
- Personal opinions align with the group's opinions
- Speech and behavior conform to the group's
- Be true to one's family rather than true to oneself

# The autonomous “self”

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Thinking like others is disparaged as “groupthink”

Doing what others do is mocked as “herd mentality”

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



# The autonomous “self”

“Parents can only give good advice or put them on the right paths, but the final forming of a person’s character lies in their own hands.” – Anne Frank

“The only person you are destined to become is the person you decide to be.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson

# The group-embedded “self”

## Biblical examples

- The Israelite’s identity merged with one family & nation
- Phil 3:5 : Paul is “of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee”
- Dan 9:4–6: Daniel’s corporate consciousness of sin
- Titus 1:12: “Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies!”

# 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

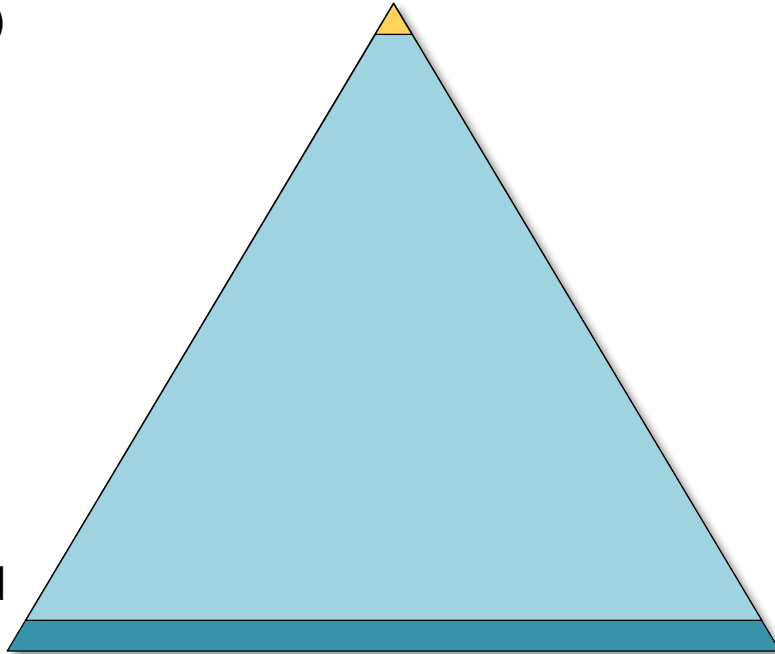
# Social stratification

## Stratus

Elites (royalty & religion)  
• Great power or wealth

The masses  
• Little power or wealth

The poor & marginalized  
• No power or wealth



## Status

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**

- The saying “It’s not what you know but who you know” seems unfair
- Everyone should have access to the same opportunities in life
- Wealth and power come from personal achievements

# 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 evaluation of who & what you are and what you do
  - Honor and shame are not primarily feelings
  - They are distributed by “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

# Honor-shame

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

- Not the individual's internal aspirations or feelings but maintaining honor and avoiding shame before others
- 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

- Matt 18:17 & 2 Thess 3:14–15: shaming wrongdoers in the church
- Stoning in the OT and crucifixion in the Roman Empire

# Patron-client relationships

## Reciprocal exchanges between unequal parties

- **Patron** (powerful): supplies resources or influence
- **Client** (powerless): returns honor, service, and loyalty
  - Gratitude is shown (by returning the favor) rather than spoken
- **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 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

## The giving of 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 ongoing cycle 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

## The giving of 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 ongoing cycle of mutual reciprocation

*Therefore, the ethos and primary value of patron-client relationships is mutual loyalty*

# 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

## Reciprocal exchanges between unequal parties

- A system of mutual interdependence rather than the independence and self-sufficiency of the West
- No relationship is voluntary, egalitarian, or independent of other relationships
- Each relationship contributes to an interdependent network of relationships in which each person is either a patron, client, or broker connected to the whole network through mutual obligations

# Patron-client relationships

## Biblical examples

- The coronation of David, 1 Sam 30:26–31 & 2 Sam 2:1–4
- People healed by Jesus in the Gospels
- The indicative-imperative pattern of Paul's epistles
- 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  $\tau\upsilon\tau\eta$ 
  - Exodus 19:4–6
- In the NT:  $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$  and  $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$ 
  - Hebrews 12:28 (KJV)

Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved [*God's initial act of grace*], let us have grace ( $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ ), whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear [*the believer's grace reciprocating God's grace*]



These people have moved into our neighborhood. What differences in culture might hinder our efforts at evangelism and discipleship among them?



# Concluding thoughts



# 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

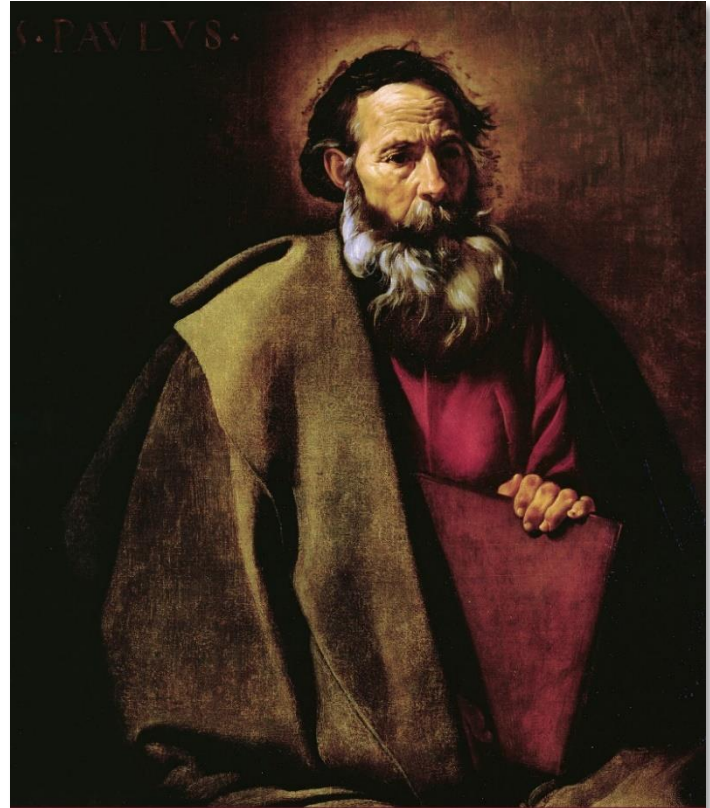
- Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel*
- Jayson Georges, *Ministering in Patronage Cultures*
- Jayson Georges & Mark Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures*

# HONOR, PATRONAGE, KINSHIP & PURITY

Unlocking  
New Testament  
Culture



DAVID A. deSILVA



Paul & the Gift

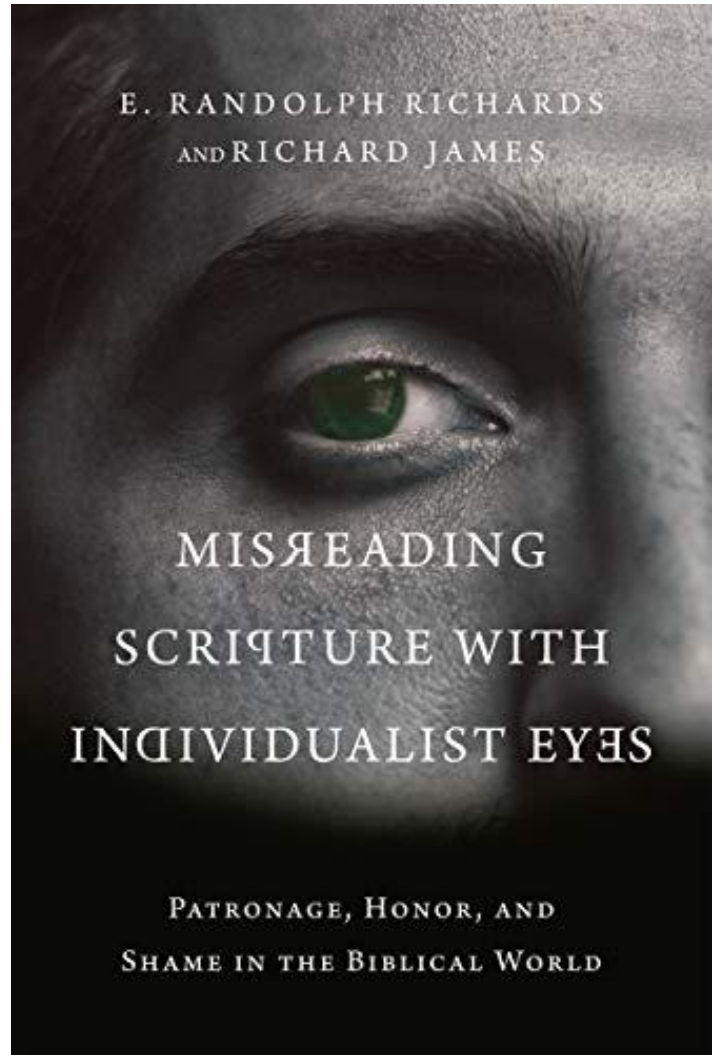
JOHN M. G. BARCLAY



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

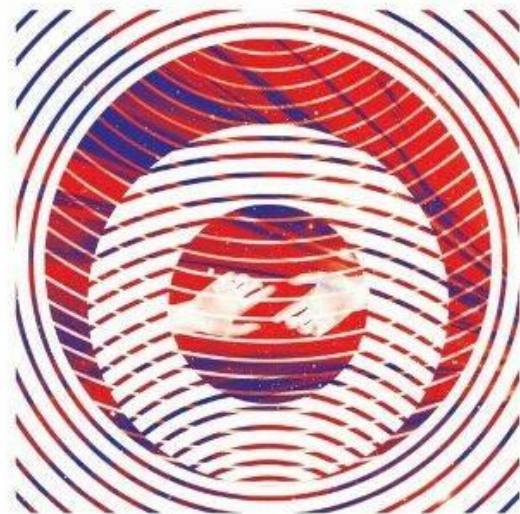


JAYSON GEORGES

*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*

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# 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

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# 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