Introduction

> Sin is respectable and highly poetical, shame is not.
>
> (Ellmann 1987: 54)

> Shame itself is an entrance to the self. It is the affect of indignity, of defeat, or transgression, of inferiority, and of alienation. No other affect is closer to the experienced self. None is more central to the sense of identity. Shame is felt as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul. It is the most poignant experience of the self by the self, whether felt in the humiliation of cowardice, or in the sense of failure to cope successfully with a challenge. Shame is a wound felt from the inside, dividing us both from ourselves and from one another.
>
> (Kaufman 1985: ix–x)

Writing at the end of the 1960s, the psychoanalyst Charles Rycroft asserted that shame was 'the Cinderella of the unpleasant emotions, having received much less attention than anxiety, guilt, and depression' (Rycroft 1972: 152). If this claim was justified at the time, it has been eroded over the last thirty years. A plethora of books with a huge variety of perspectives in disciplines ranging from literature, sociology and philosophy to various kinds of psychology has emerged on the topic of shame in recent times, especially in the USA. This particular Cinderella is now one of the main objects of attention at academic, cultural and clinical balls that consider the negative or shadow side of existence. Shame is recognised as a major phenomenon of the times, a basic and prevalent condition of individual and social life in late capitalist society (Lasch 1991; Giddens 1991). Contemporary theologian James Fowler writes, 'Now that I have eyes for it [shame], I see it everywhere' (Fowler 1996: 91). He is not alone in acquiring the gift of sight.

Shame is not only an entrance to the self, as Kaufman (1985) has it. It provides an *entrée* to many other important features of individual and social life, as well as being a nexus of attention for many intellectual and clinical disciplines.

There are any number of good academic reasons that might justify examining shame as a phenomenon. However, my own reason for undertaking this study was personal. At the outset, I simply wanted to understand the phenomenon of shame in my own life.

Beyond seeking to understand my own experience, this book has three main aims. The first is to provide an overview, and to try to make sense, of the very different understandings, languages and experiences that surround the phenomenon loosely labelled as shame today. Is there a set of core understandings or experiences that unites all phenomena that are characterised as shame? Or is there a variety of different, incommensurable uses and phenomena that are confused by what is basically a coincidence of terminology? There is considerable doubt and debate about how shame should be conceived and responded to.

The second aim is to attempt to understand what might be called chronic or dysfunctional shame. While shame is an integral, and often very important, positive element in all social relationships, it seems that some people get caught in an enduring experience of shame that blights their lives and limits their potential. It will be important to analyse why this happens and to survey some of the ways in which individuals and groups might be helped from such a situation by therapy and other means.

The third aim, which is both distinct and over-riding, is to consider the relationship between the ideology and practice associated with Christianity and human experiences of shame. Shame provides a rich seam of exploration and discovery from which the interaction between the Christian religious tradition and human well-being can be scrutinised anew. It acts as a kind of 'hub' from which many theological and practical issues can be explored (de Sousa 1990: 1). The dialogue of religious belief and practice with shame is situated within the discipline of practical theology which also provides the structure for this book.

I shall say more below about practical theology. However, it is not necessary to be interested in theology or religion of any kind to make use of this book as an interdisciplinary source and survey of approaches to, and insights about, shame.

I envisage at least two main different and possibly overlapping audiences for this work. One readership consists of therapists, counsellors and academics who are interested in shame alone, especially chronic shame, and who wish to gain a broad overview of perspectives, findings and techniques relating to this phenomenon. They will find in the first two Parts of the book much straight discussion of shame that has

nothing specifically to do with religion. The second main readership is likely to consist of theologians, pastors and others who are concerned with religious thought and practice. For them, there is much material about the ways in which shame and Christian thinking may interact, particularly in the third part of the book.

To facilitate usage by these two groups with different needs and interests, I will outline the structure of the book at this point. I will then turn specifically to some background introductory material, some of which is concerned with setting the book in a theological context.

The content of this book

This volume is divided into three main Parts. Many readers, particularly those of a practical bent, may wish to omit, or to return later to, the first Part, 'Approaching shame'. It provides preliminary theoretical orientation to the phenomenon of shame and considers methodological and epistemological issues that are relevant to understanding the approaches and discourses surrounding shame.

Shame in the modern world is often understood fundamentally as an emotional state. There is much debate, however, about the nature of emotions. The first chapter provides an overview of perspectives that will challenge any assumption that emotions can easily be defined.

The kaleidoscopic vertigo that may be induced by the consideration of emotions in general is intensified in chapter 2. Here it will become apparent that shame, too, is variously understood in different academic and clinical discourses. A family resemblance theory of shame is advanced whereby it can be maintained that different uses of the concept 'shame' in various discourses may have overlapping meanings, but that shame cannot be narrowed down to any one set of agreed meanings or phenomena. Shame remains a family of meanings and phenomena, not a single experience or definition.

Part II, 'Encountering shame', is more practical and immediately accessible than its predecessor. It is to this Part that practitioners of various kinds might like initially to turn. I first consider the experience of shame and make some fundamental distinctions about different kinds of shame as they appear in contemporary discourses. Having situated shame into various broad ecological contexts, at the end of chapter 3, I move towards discussing the kind of shame that is to be the focus of this volume, chronic or dysfunctional shame. The focus of chapter 4 is upon the diverse causal factors that may be implicated in producing

and maintaining chronic psychological shame from early infancy to adulthood. Chapter 5 goes on to look at the effects that reactions to chronic or character shame may have on behaviour, attitudes and pathology. It also discusses the ethical and moral effects of shame, advancing the argument that shame prevents people from taking responsibility in community. In this way, shame has a pernicious effect upon morality. This can be signalled by suggesting that more guilt and less shame is needed in individual and social life.

Chapter 6 attempts to broaden the understanding of chronic, dysfunctional shame away from seeing it simply as an individual phenomenon. Some socio-historical aspects of the generation and use of shame are considered and the place of shame as a tool of social control and disapprobation is discussed. Shame is a powerful force for social conformity. However, the stain of shame is difficult to control, limit and direct. Having considered both individual and social aspects of the causes and effects of alienating shame, chapter 7 suggests ways in which both individuals and groups may be integrated within themselves and within society. Integration dissipates the defilement, alienation and dishonour implied in the toxic unwantedness that characterises chronic shame. Various therapeutic and other responses to shame are surveyed. Unfortunately, there appear to be few, if any, effective solutions or cures to this condition. This somewhat pessimistic conclusion ends the Parts of the book that are devoted to trying to understand shame in terms of psychological and other non-religious discourses.

Part III critically examines the relationship between contemporary Christian thought and practice and shamed groups and individuals. Chapter 8 surveys modern Christian theological responses to shame and finds them to be generally rather limited. They are mostly oblivious to the insights provided by 'secular' academic and clinical disciplines. This makes them inadequate. The next chapter considers ways in which Christian ideas and practices might generate or nurture dysfunctional shame and alienation rather than alleviating it. Finally, chapter 10 tentatively outlines some ways whereby Christianity might begin to change itself so that its capacity to integrate would be enhanced and its use and exploitation of shame might be diminished. Christianity, I maintain, is ambivalent in its effects, having the power to heal and to harm. If it is to maximise integration and minimise alienation, it may have to change its theories about itself and its practices. This kind of conversion or repentance is, perhaps, justified and informed by the symbolically inclusive ministry of Jesus who came to seek and save the lost.

In the remainder of this Introduction, I shall discuss the use of my personal experience in this volume. Thereafter, I will consider the nature of practical theology, which provides the field and structure for the book.

The use of personal experience

The starting point for this study was my own experience of shame. I have used this experience to guide, and sometimes to illustrate, all the material that follows, even when this is not directly acknowledged or apparent. A main reason for doing this is to challenge the assumption that shame is a distant phenomenon that only occurs in other people and not amongst academics or theologians. This colludes with the obscuring and objectification of shame and shamed people (S. Pattison 1998). In a work of scholarship, however, what might appear to be self-indulgent solipsism requires some further justification. It will also be useful directly to outline some of my experience and motivation here to ground the examples that occasionally occur in the main body of this text.

Rendering visible the authorial self

Paradoxically, even in an age of individualism and obsession with the self (Lukes 1973; Taylor 1991), it is still frowned upon for authors of academic books to address readers directly and to talk about themselves. This may reflect a desire to maintain an illusion of impersonal objectivity, a concern that writers should not descend into boring solipsism, or even a certain embarrassment about discussing the self in public, based perhaps on reverence or revulsion for what that self might be. It remains difficult for an academic author to step out from behind the words of a text directly to discuss his or her own experience.

The etiquette that requires authorial invisibility is slowly changing. Some postmodern and feminist authors have questioned the illusion of objectivity that is sustained by third person formulations and observations (Karp 1996). There are new demands for honesty and personal authenticity as people learn to, and assert the right to, speak for themselves (Read and Reynolds 1996). Narrative, especially personal narrative, has become an important field for serious academic enquiry (Frank 1995; Freeman 1993; Karp 1996). It has been noted that creating personally meaningful and socially credible stories or narratives is essential to understanding and coping with the world (MacIntyre 1981). Further, it has been suggested that the process of individuals manufacturing their own narratives out of the socially available materials that are

extant may be helpful and liberating for themselves and for others: 'When any person recovers his voice, many people begin to speak through that story' (Frank 1995: xiii; cf. Bolton 1999). It has become apparent, too, that both persons, and the accounts that they give of themselves, are socially funded and constructed (Scheff 1997; G. Pattison 1998). Thus, a personal account is also in many ways a social account of existence. Individuals participating in the world of language and concepts are not self-constructed atoms; the accounts they give of themselves are not relevant to themselves alone. Finally, all enquiry, however 'academic' it may appear, is fuelled by emotional energy or passion that ultimately finds its locus within individual interests and needs (Game and Metcalfe 1996).

Within this broad framework that gives some credence to the importance of persons, narratives and passions within academic discourse I adopt a loosely 'autoethnographic' approach here. This approach is described by sociologist David Karp: 'Instead of viewing the self as a contaminant, it is more reasonable and honest to recognize that "whenever we discuss others, we are always talking about ourselves"' (Karp 1996: 203–4). While this book is not a work of sociology, 'you will find that I am very present in this text. Every analysis offered in the book . . . is initially guided by personal introspection' (Karp 1996: 204). My text is heavily 'contaminated' (an interesting concept to use in the context of discussing shame and selves) with my interests and experience.

In offering some aspects of my own experience of shame here there are a number of limitations. I do not offer all my experience. The experience that is described is selective and the narratives are shaped by my own interests and needs. This means that, although I attempt to be honest by my own lights, readers must be aware that they are in receipt of an edited account of what I interpret as my experience. Perhaps accounts of my 'experience' in this connection are better seen as truthful fiction than any kind of straightforward fact as I narrate and rewrite my self in public (Freeman 1993; McLeod 1997; Pattison et al. 1999).

My experience of shame

It may help readers to understand the nature and significance of what follows in this book if I say some more about the background to my own experience of shame and the ways in which I have sought to understand and come to terms with it.

I am sure that there are many people in the world whose experience of the kind of profound or chronic shame to be considered later in this book

is limited, fleeting or non-existent. For such people this work might seem incomprehensible. They may be like William James' 'once born' psychological types with a 'consciousness, developing straight and natural with no element of morbid compunction or crisis' (James 1960: 96).

However, it is likely that most people have some direct experience of shame in their lives, for it seems to be a fairly universal phenomenon. And for some individuals and groups, shame plays a persistent and dominant role whose effects are baleful and destructive. If shame becomes a constant experience, a perennial attitude to the self, a dominant mood or character trait, its effects can be very negative. The habitually deeply shamed or shame-bound person is trapped, self-rejecting, paralysed, passive, and often depressed.

I believe myself to have been a shame-bound person for most of my life, regarding myself as unworthy, valueless and defiled, with a deep desire to hide myself away from the 'legitimate' negative judgment of others (cf. Tantam 1998). It has taken me a long time to realise this, not least because of my involvement with Christianity. At a very early age I developed a strong Christian faith. I believed that the good, powerful Christian God would look after me and allow me to experience joy and salvation if I served him faithfully and obeyed his laws. The fact that I continued to feel bad about myself, even after confirmation and ordination in the Church of England, I attributed to the fact that I did not try hard enough to trust God and do his will. Of course I felt bad – I was a sinner, guilty of many continuing offences against the deity who graciously loved me and just wanted me to trust more and try harder!

My sense of ontological guilt, fundamentally defiled identity and basic badness was first problematised when, in 1977, I had to write an essay on the theory and therapy of guilt. I was intrigued by this topic. However, I came away from it puzzled; the category 'guilt' and the methods used to deal with it did not seem to address my own condition. The literature on the theory and therapy of guilt suggested that this emotion comes into play when a real or fantasised discrete offence has been committed against another person or a moral rule (Stein 1969). Therapy or forgiveness lies in recognising and acknowledging the offence and making realistic reparation in an appropriate way where that is possible. At this point, the guilty feeling should depart. My problem was that I felt non-specifically bad most of the time, whether or not I had committed any offences against God or other people. Sacramental confession sometimes provided temporary relief (though that was a shaming experience in itself to a scrupulous soul), but I still

felt that basically I was no good. I realised this was not real guilt, but did not have a vocabulary to describe my condition.

It was some years later that I came across a short account of Helen Merrell Lynd's book, *On Shame and the Search for Identity* (Capps 1983). Here I found a name for my condition, which was that of shame. Better still, when I read Lynd's original work – one of the very few books about shame in existence at the time – I found a full description of the phenomenology of personal shame which corresponded almost exactly with my own experience (Lynd 1958).

I resolved that I would explore the relations between shame and Christian theology and practice further. The nature of my explorations has been twofold. In the first place, I engaged in personal psychotherapy for fifteen years. Secondly, I researched the different kinds of literature within which shame seemed to figure, overtly or covertly. This ranged from fiction to philosophical treatments of shame and more clinically related material about narcissism, victimisation in various contexts, and child abuse.

At the end of this process, I think I have gained some understanding of why, for many years, I experienced a sense of chronic shame. Broadly, I now believe the roots of my own shame to lie in a certain amount of abuse and neglect in my childhood which was amplified by social institutions like church and school. I have written about this at length elsewhere (Pattison 1998). However, this is just one narrative about shame that makes sense to me personally. Like many shame-bound people, I cannot actually remember my infancy. What I have gained is a story that helps me to understand and make sense of the present and integrates my experience to some extent, as well as relating it to the experience of others in society (McLeod 1997).

I should acknowledge at this point that neither scholarship, nor therapy, nor religion have freed me from a sense of fundamental personal shame. However, there is some freedom in understanding and accepting a shamed identity (cf. Karp 1996). To a much greater extent than when I set out on this personal and academic venture, I now feel I have a sense of shame and defilement rather than it having me. For that I am grateful.

Although this book starts with my experience and is guided by it, it is not limited to it. So, for example, I try to consider a wide variety of views about shame, and I also try to locate it socially and politically as well as personally. Experience is used as an entry point for thinking about shame

as a general phenomenon and to illuminate aspects of it, not as an end-point of closure.

The practical theological dimension

This book is basically a study in practical theology. I have used a particular practical theological model, that of critical conversation, to structure it. It is necessary to say something about this kind of theology in general and the model in particular. I will conclude with some questions for practical theology that have emerged from this study.

The nature of practical theology

The term, practical theology, has been variously understood (Pattison and Woodward 2000). Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), the German Protestant 'father' of the discipline, thought practical theology was the 'crown' or result of the more academic theological enterprise whereby theoretical theological conclusions would be implemented and applied to ministerial activity (Schleiermacher 1988). On a less exalted level, it has been thought of as simply teaching clergy the practical skills needed for ministry. More recently, practical theologians have become aware of the need to make this a more dialectical activity which explores contemporary human experience and practice, both inside and outside the faith community, and critically relates this to theological insights and traditions (Browning 1983, 1991; Hiltner 1958; Tillich 1978).

In an ill-defined area, Whyte defines practical theology as 'the theology of practice'. He suggests that

> pastoral theology is triadic, concerned with the interrelationships of faith, practice and social reality, and is aware that the lines of force flow in both directions. (Whyte 1987)

Practical theology can thus be seen as a tripartite interaction between faith (including doctrines and historical traditions), practice (including experiences and phenomena that may lie inside or outside the Christian community), and social reality (including personal reality and insights about that reality derived from the human sciences).

This interaction can be translated into the more concrete model of critical conversation (Pattison with Woodward 1994). Practical theology can then be thought of as a critical conversation between aspects and interpretations of (a) one's own ideas, beliefs, experiences, feelings, perceptions and assumptions; (b) the beliefs, perceptions and assumptions

arising from the Christian community and tradition; (c) the contemporary situation, practice or event which is under consideration; and (d) relevant insights, methods and findings that emerge from non-theological disciplines.

The model of conversation has several positive aspects. Conversation often lies at the centre of human encounters, including pastoral encounters. Conversations can be short or long, deep or superficial. They can involve two or more parties. They do not necessarily proceed in a straightforward direction or at the same level. Used in practical theology, a conversational model does not presuppose a lot of previous knowledge about theology or a particular issue, but it does presuppose a willingness to attend, to listen and to learn. The skills and conventions of conversation can be learned. They benefit from practice with other people. Good, creative conversations transform people and their views of themselves and the world. If words are regarded as deeds, as they are in the Bible, they shape events, actions and persons (cf. Cupitt 1990; Schüssler Fiorenza, 1995: 25ff.).

Practical theological process can be seen as an illuminating, often demanding, critical conversation which draws participants onwards and outwards without prescribing exactly where they should go or what they should do (Pattison with Woodward 1994). The richness of practical theological activity is increased by a variety of different perspectives and participants (Ballard 1986). However, practical theology is not just talk for talk's sake. Nor is it an abstract, disconnected intellectual quest. Liberation theologies of various kinds suggest that theological activity must spring from, and feed into, practice in a concrete way. It must resist rather than colluding with oppression in the interests of promoting human flourishing (Pattison 1997a; cf. Jantzen 1998). Practical theology must, therefore, be a transformational activity in the arena of practice as well as in that of theory and understanding.

Practical theology is not just the province of clergy or religious people. Nor need it be confined to the overtly religious sphere. Any inhabitants of an action-influencing world view such as management or the market are likely to find that their activity is undergirded by fundamental faith assumptions about the nature of reality (Pattison 1997b). Many 'secular' practitioners and theorists would, therefore, perhaps benefit from becoming much more self-consciously critical practical theologians, insofar as their own faith assumptions remain implicit and so uncritical (Pattison 1995b).