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NARRY F. SANTOS

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**Turning our Shame into Honor**

*Transformation of the Filipino Hiya in the light of Mark's Gospel*

Published by LifeChange Publishing, Inc.

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Narry F. Santos, Ph D

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To my wife,  
Hazel,  
whose love and selflessness  
are beyond compare



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# FOREWORD



When the publisher asked me to write a foreword to this book, I felt it is *nakakahiya* or politically incorrect to say no, since I have much *utang na loob* to the author, Dr. Narry Santos, for his roles as a senior partner in the ministry of Greenhills Christian Fellowship. Having then considered the incumbent functional realities and some applicable dynamics of Philippine culture, it is indeed an honor for me to oblige. Admittedly, I am making light of the intended sense of the title *Turning our Shame into Honor*.

Truly Dr. Santos' thesis represents a seminal effort in contextualizing Christianity. It calls on Filipino Christians "to take a fresh look at the dynamics of *hiya* with one eye on our cultural context and with the other eye on the biblical content. As a catalyst, this work challenges and stretches the canons of biblical theology and hermeneutics and lays some foundations for similar studies that must be pursued in the years ahead. "If we Filipino Christians are to make an impact...on our beloved country," says the author, "we need to address the relevant cultural issues of our day and have the Bible interact with them in culture-sensitive and life-changing ways." Having particularized his audience and using a profusion of the vernacular in the text may limit its appeal and readership. But non-Filipino theologians and exegetes will surely benefit from it given their effort to comprehend and their endorsement of this inevitable approach to hermeneutics.

Using the Gospel of Mark as his main biblical model, my colleague skillfully showed how eternal values dramatically redefine and reverse man's value systems denoting honor and shame. In the light of the gospel, what Mark's readers consider shameful must now be valued honorable and what is deemed honorable then reverses into what must be dishonorable.

There is a measure of universality to this radical notion. In other words, while Mark addresses a culture-specific audience and Dr. Santos applies Mark's values reorientation model to the Filipino *hiya* and *dangal* system, the challenge is arguably universal. If God's thoughts differ from man's

thoughts and God's ways differ from man's ways, then the reader could see how values reversal is endemic to the power of gospel truth. What is "foolishness to the Greeks" i.e., of no honorable value to them, and "a stumbling block to the Jews" i.e., a veritable source of shame, is actually God's only method of saving sinners. The most honorable persona and mission of Jesus Christ, the "crucified Messiah", was accorded with worthless and shameful evaluation then.

As it was then, so it is down to the present. Apart from the regeneration of man's heart and mind by the Holy Spirit, such estimate of Christ will be the dominant universal value. "Saving one's life" as a value held in human terms results in "losing one's life" in eternal terms. What is generally understood as leadership and "greatness" by man's ranking as "first" is transformed into eternal honor terms as that of being "servant of all." From the Filipino perspective of personal and corporate Christianity, such Markan paradoxes constitute in part what Dr. Narry Santos proposes as *Turning Our Shame Into Honor*.

By this pacesetting work, this prophet named Narry Santos is not without honor even among his kin, his peers and his own countrymen.

**Dr. Luis L. Pantoja Jr.**  
Office of the Senior Pastor  
Greenhills Christian Fellowship

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



I write this book out of a conviction that if we, Filipino Christians, are to make an impact in contemporary Christianity and in our beloved country, we need to address the relevant cultural issues of our day and have the Bible interact with them in cultural-sensitive and life-changing ways. This book is a small step in moving toward this significant direction.

God has providentially made us both Filipinos and Christians for a purpose. I believe that we can discover his purpose in making us Filipinos by blood and Christians by the blood of Jesus, when we encourage one another to engage in our culture through meaningful interactions with biblical Christianity. God's purpose for us is found when we build bridges between the world of our culture and the world of the Bible.

Just as God has spoken in the Bible, he seeks to speak in our culture. But how can we listen to God's voice when we are not strategically placed between these two worlds? How can we discover God's purpose for us when we are not extending our hands to help the first-century world of Jesus and our twenty-first-century world meet?

M. Maggay gives us an incisive indictment of Christianity's minimized impact in our country, "[Christianity] has hardly made a dent in the indigenous religious consciousness. . ." <sup>1</sup> To make a dent, we are called to listen to the voice of our culture and to the voice of the Scriptures. When we do, we can hear the voice of God. When we do, we can discover his purpose in making us Christians who are Filipinos.

By the nature of this book, I naturally address Filipino Christians, using a number of Filipino terms that capture the essence of our cultural concepts. If you're not Filipino yet wish to read this book, you are welcome. I've enclosed rough English translations for the Filipino words so that you can follow along with us. Whatever religious group or denomination you may belong to, you are also welcome. You will find that the wisdom and

<sup>1</sup> M. P. Maggay, *Filipino Religious Consciousness: Some Implications to Missions* (Quezon City: Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture, 1999), p. 38.

truths of the Bible are beneficial to anyone who seeks to understand life as it relates to those whom we know, love, and serve.

I thank God for giving me the chance to write this book during a six-month sabbatical leave. God indeed graciously strengthened and nurtured me. My thanks goes to the Greenhills Christian Fellowship (GCF), its leadership, and Dr. Luis Pantoja, Jr., my senior pastor, for allowing me to take this leave after eight years of ministry. I am also grateful to Mr. Mike Trinidad (our satellite board chairman) and the Governing Board of the GCF-South Metro (where I serve as resident pastor), along with the whole satellite family, for generously supporting and praying for my writing project, and for taking care of my family while I was gone. I also appreciate the GCF Christian Education Ministry staff for faithfully holding the fort in my absence.

With my whole heart, I thank the Langham Writers Program (LWP) of the John Stott Ministries for giving me a grant to be able to research and write in the United Kingdom (UK). I am blessed by the care and encouragement of Canon Paul Berg, the LWP director for UK. I appreciate the support and kindness of Mr. Brad Palmer, the LWP Director for the USA. I also wish to thank Mr. Pieter Kwant for sharing his publishing expertise with me. My thanks extends to the staff of the Tyndale House in Cambridge, England for letting me use their rich biblical and theological library resources. I also appreciate Dr. Bruce Winter, Warden of Tyndale House, for his valuable suggestions in the actual writing of the book.

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I benefited a lot from the reflective and insightful comments of Mr. Anwar Tjen, an Indonesian brother in the Lord, doing his PhD at the University of Cambridge. His friendship and cooking ministered a lot to me. In addition, I appreciate the help of friends who diligently located a lot of Filipino cultural resources for me: Miss Carol Felipe; Miss Gabeeh Almendral; and Mr. JC Morales. Moreover, I value the inputs on *dangal* and *hiya* shared to me by Mr. Dan Andrew Cura, Mr. Freddie Motos, Mr. Rommel Leuterio, and Pastor Johnny Dalisay.

My heart is also full of gratitude to Mr. Mark Sosmeña, the publisher of LifeChange Publishing, Inc. As a friend and co-laborer in God's kingdom, he has shown full support for me and has gone the extra mile to make this project a reality for God's glory.

I am also very thankful to my mother, Mrs. Atesina Santos, for her love, loyalty, and service to my brother and me. Her committed and faithful way of raising us up (since my father died when I was six years old) is a rich legacy that I will never forget.

Finally, the three people who sacrificed a lot so that I can fulfill my dream of writing this book are Hazel (wife), Eirene, and Kaira (my two daughters). I am utterly grateful for their gracious love and understanding. I realize that our being together for three weeks during my sabbatical can never compensate for my being away for the rest of the other long months. To them I give my heartfelt thanks and love.

## INTRODUCTION

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# NEW PAIR OF LENSES TO LOOK AT *HIYA*



When we think about our Filipino concept of *hiya*, what comes to our mind? Does the word “shame” or “shyness” or “propriety” rush into our thoughts? When are the times, where are the places, what are the occasions that we feel *hiya*? Who are with us when we experience it? Why do we usually respond this way? Are we to view our *hiya* as positive or negative or both? Should we keep it, change it, or just throw it away?

I realize it's not natural for us to ask these questions, nor is it common to think about these issues. I understand how *hiya* has been embedded and nurtured in us throughout our lives. *Hiya* is as natural as raising both our eyebrows to greet others without audibly saying “hello.” It's as common as making the sound *psst* to call or get the attention of others. In other words, *hiya* forms part of our culture. It describes the way we are.

### *Common Yet Contrasting Concepts of “Hiya”*

When we're pressed to answer the questions above, we would probably come up with a list of different and even opposite answers. Similarly, Filipino and foreign psychologists and social anthropologists vary in their own answers to these questions. Some identify *hiya* closest to the word “shame,” while others relate it to “shyness,” “embarrassment,” “bashfulness,” and “feeling inferior.”<sup>1</sup> Some even link *hiya* to the feeling of shame that follows failure or wrongdoing in front of authority figures. On the other hand, some say *hiya* must be viewed and translated as “propriety.”<sup>2</sup>

Using the language of psychology, Bulatao gives us a typical definition of *hiya*. He defines it as “a painful emotion arising from a relationship with an authority figure or with society, inhibiting self-assertion in a situation which is perceived as dangerous to one's ego.”<sup>3</sup> For him, *hiya* occurs in face-to-face encounters, especially in the presence of authority figures whose opinions are important to us.

Let's note that. *Hiya* operates when we conform to what our group or community expects, due to the presence of influential people in authority. *Hiya* can make us feel the silent public pressure to conform. It can push us to defer to the people whom we give the right to approve or disapprove what we do or don't do. So in this sense, *hiya* functions as social control for our conduct. It works as a norm to make us live up to the standards of society. If we don't live up to these norms, we would be labeled as *walang hiya* ("shameless") or *walang utang-na-loob* ("no debt of gratitude").

*Hiya*, then, has been seen as both "shame" and "shyness." Yet we must note that *hiya* has also been viewed neither as "shame" nor "shyness," but as "propriety." Moreover, it has been considered as not simply showing social sanction but also moral dimension, with inner strength and circumspection.<sup>4</sup> Through affixation,<sup>5</sup> it has also been viewed as a concept with external and internal dimensions that bring out the social, emotional, and value-based aspects of *hiya*.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, *hiya* has been understood positively and negatively. Positively, it brings a sense of social propriety, which regulates the give and take of reciprocal relations.<sup>7</sup> It prevents us from violating or hurting the feelings of others. As a Filipino trait, *hiya* can be aligned with the other positive virtues of hospitality, modesty, politeness, courtesy, devotion to family ties, patience, ability to bear pain, perseverance, high sense of dignity, and love for Christian virtues.<sup>8</sup>

Negatively, *hiya* has been taken as an expression of inferiority complex. This view reveals a low assessment of Filipino self-concept, independence, and personal worth. Along with a string of other traits, it is perceived as contributory to the ills of our present society. The list of cited negative traits include *bahala na* (fatalism), *mañana* habit (procrastination), Filipino time, *ningas-kugon* (initial fervor that is later lost, completing little in the end), excessive *amor propio* (oversensitive self-love), and so forth.<sup>9</sup>

The common (yet contrasting) view that *hiya* is both positive and negative typifies our alleged Filipino identity or value crisis. Lapuz has observed some apparent contrasts in our values and actual behavior. These conflicts involve the following: (1) a stress on smooth interpersonal relations versus high levels of hostility; (2) *hiya* versus the desire for status and toward extravagance; (3) strong wish for dependency versus an attraction for power; (4) *bahala na* attitude versus a longing for economic security; (5) a focus on self versus an eye for others' interests; (6) in women, *hiya* and modesty versus strong needs to achieve and use aggression; (7) in men, a bent to dominate versus an inclination to be humble; and (8) a tendency to see people as superior or inferior versus social-control mechanisms that seek to equalize status in a group.<sup>10</sup>

Why is there such a scenario of perceived identity crisis or contrast in values and behavior? Some account for it as a result of our cultural diversity. This diversity can come from the external and cultural influences of China, India, Spain, America, and Japan, along with our Malay roots.<sup>11</sup> Some bring up the reality of our ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences within the Philippines itself.<sup>12</sup> Some even raise the issue of modernism in contrast to traditionalism. Thus, this opposite set of settings can exist: modern, educated, technologically advanced urban Filipinos co-exist, within short distances, with more traditional and rural Filipinos who subsist by hunting-and-gathering or agriculture in the mountains or lowlands.<sup>13</sup>

Along with fast-paced changes in society, external and internal influences may be used to explain our cultural diversity. Yet despite these influences, some people don't see a Filipino value crisis. They observe that these influences have been integrated within our own context.<sup>14</sup> Others note that we already had positive value systems before Spain came to our shores.<sup>15</sup> Still others see in us a "split-level" personality as a product of less integrated relations between Western influences and our indigenous culture.<sup>16</sup>

### *Call for a Filipino Christian Response*

With these current cultural contrasts of understanding ourselves, we wonder, "Which view is right? Whose voice are we to listen and heed?" Regarding *hiya*, we're back to square one. How are we to view it? What are we to do with it? These questions deserve our attention, especially as we relate it to our Christian values and biblical convictions. As Christians, we can't simply dismiss *hiya* because of its confusing and complex nature. If we say that we have placed our faith in Christ and have submitted to God's authority in the Scriptures, and if we claim that we want to be more effective in our witness as Christ's followers in the Philippines, we need to connect our Christianity to our culture, the Bible to our values. We need to remember that one of our basic responsibilities to our Filipino people is to respond biblically to relevant issues of our contemporary culture.

In fact, we need to ask more questions on *hiya* from a different plane. As Filipino Christians, what do we do with *hiya*? Is it compatible or incompatible to the truths of Scriptures? How do we know if *hiya* is biblical or not? As an example, let's assume that we invited a brother or sister in Christ, who belongs to our same church or fellowship, to attend an important church event. Let's assume further that this person declines our invitation and says, "*Nahihiya ako*" ("I'm shy"). How must we respond to this person? Is it justified for us to say, "*Nakakahiya ka*" ("You're a shame") or "*Mahiya ka naman*" ("Be ashamed")? Does the Bible bear any comment on *hiya*?

### *Overview of the Book*

This book is an effort to interact with these questions. Through this effort to dialogue between biblical Christianity and Filipino culture, the book hopes to give some biblical perspectives and Christian principles regarding *hiya*. It aims to call Filipino Christians in the Philippines and abroad to take a fresh look at the dynamics of *hiya* with one eye on our cultural context and with the other eye on the biblical content. Looking at both culture and Christianity in perspective will not only help us see the honor in *hiya*, but will also transform our walk with God and work for him, in the same way that Jesus turned his shameful death into something honorable.

I believe that we first need to understand our cultural setting and its related concepts. *Hiya* must not be taken as a concept in isolation. Along with its other related cultural concepts, *hiya* needs to be studied together with *dangal*. I realize that it's not natural for us to put *dangal* and *hiya* together, nor do we hear many people call on us to wed the two cultural concepts. Yet, we must be quick to think not only of what's *nakakahiya* but also of what's *marangal*.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, our cultural investigations of *dangal* and *hiya* form Part I of the book. In Part I ("Valuing our Filipino Concepts of Honor and Shame"), we basically answer the question, "What does our Filipino culture teach us about *dangal* and *hiya* and their related cultural concepts?"

From a firm grasp of our *hiya*, we need to get a grip of how the first-century world of Jesus viewed honor and shame. If we are to understand what Jesus says about these values, we must first check out the culture of his time. So we need to wrestle with the question, "What does the cultural value system in Jesus' day tell us about honor and shame?" We will then relate these first-century honor-shame concepts to how Jesus addresses them in the Gospel of Mark (a gospel brimming with honor-shame contents, concepts, and contexts). We will also observe how the Gospel transforms first-century honor and shame to reveal God's perspective about them. Thus, our discussion of the first-century cultural and Gospel interaction covers the book's Part II ("Viewing Honor and Shame in Jesus' Day").

In Part II, I will propose that Mark seeks to reverse the content of the honor-shame value system of his audience through the Gospel. This reversal is not the elimination of honor and shame, but a radical redefinition of the content of the value system. The dramatic redefinition basically turns the system upside-down. I see Mark seeking to persuade his readers to reverse their value system: what they consider as shameful must now be valued as honorable, and what they view as honorable must now be seen as dishonorable. We will also see how Mark transforms some key cultural concepts of his day in the Gospel.

Part III (“Transforming Honor and Shame in Mark’s Gospel”) will do the actual investigation of the Gospel of Mark and the honor-shame social values. The investigation will surface the honor-shame lessons through the stories about Jesus, the disciples, the religious leaders, and some minor characters. It will also look at the radical redefinitions of honor and shame in the three sermons of Jesus (Mark 8:34-9:1; 9:35-50; 10:42-45). Thus, Part III will answer the question, “What does the Gospel of Mark teach us about honor and shame?”

Finally, Part IV (“Applying our Own Honor-Shame Transformation”) will discuss how we, as Filipino Christians, can take some initial steps to help transform our *dangal* and *hiya*. It will answer the question, “How can we improve our lives and service for God with a transformed understanding of *dangal* and *hiya*?” I will argue that just as Mark used his first-century cultural context in order to present the Christian content of honor and shame, we are also called to use our 21<sup>st</sup>-century Filipino cultural context of *dangal* and *hiya*, to help understand, appreciate, and transform our culture.<sup>18</sup>

However, I’d like to share that I write not to arrive at the definitive way to understand and transform our culture. I do write with an awareness of my own limits in comprehending both the text (i.e., the Bible) and our context (i.e., the Filipino culture). Yet despite this limitation, I seek to “engage” the text and context. I also invite you to do so with me. We can do it together with the assurance that God, who has spoken in the Bible, continues to reveal himself to us in the context of our culture. As we seek to see the relationship and relevance of the text to our context, we hope to be transformed together by the biblical content of honor and shame, just as the audience of Mark was changed by Jesus’ transforming work.

For any kind of transformation to happen, we need new lenses with which to see our Filipino *hiya* better. These lenses can help us view *hiya* and our culture with more appreciation and less deprecation, with more sympathy and less apathy, with more positivism and less negativism. With these new lenses, we hope to gain fresh insights from our culture. With new lenses, we wish to see how the Bible can inform us to engage our culture for life-change, for growth in our service for God, and for some improvement in our society’s ways of valuing our *kapwa-tao*.

<sup>1</sup> For a helpful survey of the various views on *hiya* for 25-30 years until 1986, see A. T. Church, *Filipino Personality: A Review of Research and Writings* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1986), pp. 49-52. For an updated review of research, see A. T. Church and M. S. Katigbak, *Filipino Personality: Indigenous and Cross-Cultural Studies* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 2000), pp. 1-39.

<sup>2</sup> V. G. Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology: The Philippine Experience* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1994), p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> J. C. Bulatao, "Hiya," *Philippine Studies* 12 (1964), pp. 424-38 (428).

<sup>4</sup> R. H. Mataragnon, "Pakikiramdam in Filipino Social Interaction," *Foundations of Behavioral Sciences: A Book of Readings* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1987); Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>5</sup> For details on affixation, see Armando Bonifacio, "Hinggil Sa Kaisipang Pilipino" ["On Filipino Thought"], in L. F. Antonio, R. E. Pe, and N. R. Almonte "Eds.", *Ulat Ng Ubuang Pambansang Kasiperensya sa Sikolohiyang Pilipino* [Proceedings of the first National Conference on Filipino Psychology] "Quezon City: Pambansang Samahang sa Sikolohiyang Pilipino, 1976," 24-48.

<sup>6</sup> Zeus A. Salazar, "Wika at Diwa: Isang Pangsikolinggwistikang Analisis sa Halimbawa ng Konsepto ng 'Hiya' ["Language and Consciousness: An Illustrative Psycholinguistic Analysis of the Concept of 'Hiya'"], in Susan Cipres-Ortega "Ed.", *Ulat ng Kalabindalawang Seminar sa Sikolohiya ng Wika* [Proceedings on the twelfth Seminar on the Psychology of Language] Quezon City: 1981.

<sup>7</sup> M. R. Hollnsteiner, "Reciprocity as a Filipino Value," in M. R. Hollnsteiner (ed.), *Society, Culture and the Filipino* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979), pp. 38-43 (42).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. D. F. Batacan, *Looking at Ourselves: Our Study of Our Peculiar Traits as a People* (Manila: Philaw Publishing, 1956).

<sup>9</sup> Church, *Filipino Personality*, pp. 10-12; cf. J. Estrada, "Inferiority Complex – a Filipino Trait?" *Unitas* 38 (1965), pp. 517-23.

<sup>10</sup> Church summarizes Lapuz's view in *Filipino Personality*, p. 87.

<sup>11</sup> T. D. Andres, *Understanding Filipino Values: A Management Approach* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1981), pp. 2-9; cf. V. Rosales, "The Influence of Spanish Culture on the Psychology of the Filipino," *Unitas* 38 (1965), pp. 498-504.

<sup>12</sup> V. G. Enriquez, "Filipino Psychology in the Third World," *Philippine Journal of Psychology* 10 (1977), pp. 3-18; Samson, "Is There a Filipino Psychology?" *Unitas* 38 (1965), pp. 477-87.

<sup>13</sup> J. C. Bulatao and G. M. Guthrie, "Psychology in the Philippines," *Psychologia* 11 (1968), pp. 201-06.

<sup>14</sup> R. Lawless, "The Foundations for Culture-and-Personality Research in the Philippines," *Asian Studies* 5 (1967), pp. 168-72.

<sup>15</sup> R. J. Morais, "Some Notes on the Historical Roots of Contemporary Interpersonal Relationships in the Christian Philippines," *Philippine Journal of Psychology* 12 (1979), pp. 45-49.

<sup>16</sup> J. C. Bulatao, "Westernization and the Split-Level Personality of the Filipino," Paper presented at the Conference on Mental Health in Asia and the Pacific, East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1966.

<sup>17</sup> Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology*, p. 48. Enriquez puts the two concepts together, claiming that *karangalan* needs to be seen beyond the superficiality of *hiya* (which he would rather translate as "propriety" than "shame"). In the glossary portion of his book, he even defines it as "dignity," and takes *karangalan* as its synonym (*From Colonial to Liberation Psychology*, p. 165).

<sup>18</sup> For helpful insights on how Christianity can transform culture, see J. R. Stott and R. Coote (eds.), *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980); C. H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: Orbis Books, 1979); H. Yung, "Towards an Evangelical Approach to Religions and Cultures," *Transformation* 17 (2000), pp. 86-91.