

The Ancient Mediterranean Values of “Honour and Shame” as a Hermeneutical Lens of Reading the Book of Job

ANDREW M. MBUVI (SHAW UNIVERSITY, USA)

ABSTRACT

The book of Job is here read through the ancient Near Eastern values of honour and shame and also in relationship to its placing within Wisdom literature. This article points out the fact that the book of Job goes beyond focus of wisdom whose primary concern is navigating life successfully. For Job, it is the concern of what Gustavo Gutiérrez calls disinterested faith that puts God’s honour at the centre of his struggles.

A INTRODUCTION

In a paper presented more than four decades ago at the Oxford Society of Historical Theology, David Daube noted that there was considerably more shame-oriented material in Deuteronomy than there was in the other books of the Pentateuch, for example, an army spot outside the camp for relieving oneself (23:12), public degradation by a dead brother’s wife for breaking faith (Deut 25:8-10), etcetera. This factor he accounted for by claiming Deuteronomy’s affiliation to wisdom “whose ideal reaching outward, is to find favour and avoid disgrace.”¹

This article considers Daube’s two claims concerning the influence of wisdom in the light of the elements of “honour” and “shame” in the book of Job. I am aware of the difficulty of placing Job within wisdom.² Even though the characteristics of wisdom are present in this book, it is really a narrative set in poetic form, encapsulated in a prose prologue and epilogue. My contention is that while the book of Job does deal with finding favour and avoiding disgrace, its primary focus is not in that dimension. For, the book of Job seeks to challenge this very perspective. It is not merely the question of finding favour before humans and God, but also a question of how faith relates to material benefits and, even more importantly, on the relationship of these “favours” to one’s faith and the role of God in the absence of these favours, especially in suffering. Therefore, a look at the story of Job through the hermeneutical perspective of “honour and shame” would hopefully illumine some of these concerns.

¹ David Daube, “Law and Wisdom in the Bible,” *Orita* 3 (1969): 27-40.

² David J. A. Clines, “Why Is There a Book of Job, and What Does It Do to You If You Read It?” in *The Book of Job* (ed. Wim A. M. Beuken; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 1-20.

The struggle to understand the role of what Gustavo Gutiérrez calls disinterested faith/religion is an important facet of the story of Job.³ Can one's faith in God truly be disinterested and without expectation, or is all religion only interested in the benefit we get from the deity? Does this then not become just like primal religions where God (or the gods) is manipulated for the benefit of human kind? This idea is challenged by Job's life which exemplifies the life of a person who feared God and was blameless but who goes through a most trying time and much suffering despite his claim to innocence. The theory of retribution, which his friends expound, is shown to be inadequate to explain Job's situation and to bring meaning to what is happening to him. Instead it brings more pain.

A search for specific vocabulary of honour and shame might not yield much and might even prove to be a disappointment with the few references we find. But widening the semantic field opens a whole new world. This article will strive to show that the whole scenario of the story is laid out in an honour and shame perspective that keeps the narrative moving. This is also a projection of the author's⁴ cultural background into the narrative, so that what can be extracted from the story actually provides some information about the cultural setting of the author albeit in very general Mediterranean terms. However, this may not be of any use, for example, to determine the exact location of the author or the origin of the book.

B HONOUR AND SHAME IN GENERAL

Scholars of Mediterranean culture(s) have recognised that elements of "honour" and "shame" form a category that defines central cultural values that have been identified with the cultures of the Bible.⁵ They form the underlying unarticulated framework within which the biblical authors and characters, including Jesus, operated. By isolating these categories as a method through which we could view the events of the Scripture has illumined some aspects of the Scriptures that have otherwise been understood or overlooked.

In biblical studies, some of the most significant contributions to the role of social science methods in biblical interpretation have focused on the New Testament.⁶ These studies discuss in great detail different models from the social

³ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), 5.

⁴ The entire work could be the product of more than one hand, with a final redactor compiling what we have today as a complete unit. And therefore it could reflect more than one cultural background within the text.

⁵ David D. Gilmore, ed., *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (American Anthropological Association special publication, No.22; Washington: American Anthropological Association, 1987).

⁶ See, Jerome H. Neyrey, and Bruce J. Malina, eds., *The Social World of Luke-Acts*.

sciences which are then applied to the biblical world, including models of “honour and shame.” I shall follow the basic framework of social scientific descriptions in this section, with interjections from other sources where there is a difference of opinion or certain discrepancies. In general, “honour-shame” cultures are characterised by the following:

Firstly, “honour” and “shame” are largely group values where different individuals that make up the group share the same values of honour and shame. The result is a strong bond of kinship ties with the common honourable ancestor as the binding factor.⁷ For example, while the phrase attributed to God “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” gives continuity to the one and the same God of Israel, it also reflects on the prominence of common ancestry. This is also the reason for the elaborate genealogies in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, who had to map Jesus according to the Davidic royal lineage and therefore be able to identify him with the promised messiah of Israel.

Honour is also replicated in “blood,” therefore the “good name of a family signifies that honour.”⁸ To know the family name is to know the honour rating of that family for example, “Simon bar Jonah.” A good name then becomes a central concern in that society, marking it one of the most valuable assets. The constant concern for a good name leads to rivalry and attempts are made to damage the reputations of others. Name and reputation then become the most guarded and vulnerable assets for a person.⁹

Secondly, placed on a behavioural continuum that ranges from individualism to “dyadism,”¹⁰ individuals in an honour-shame culture are “dyadic” per-

Models for Interpretation (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991); Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: John Knox, 1993; Rev. and Exp ed., Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Elijah Mahlangu, “The Ancient Mediterranean Values of Honour and Shame as a Hermeneutical Procedure. A Social-Scientific Criticism in an African Perspective,” *VE* 22/1 (2001): 85-101; John J. Pilch, *Introducing the Cultural Context of the New Testament* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2007). See also, Daniel J. Harrington, “Second Testament Exegesis and the Social Sciences: a Bibliography,” *BTB* 18/2 (1988), 77-85. Only more recently have social sciences OT studies begun to emerge, e.g., John J. Pilch, *Introducing the Cultural Context of the Old Testament* (Eugene, Ore: Wipf and Stock, 2007).

⁷ Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Handbook of Biblical Social Values* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 96.

⁸ Malina and Pilch, *Handbook*, 33.

⁹ Jesus asks his disciples who the people say he is and subsequently what his disciples think he is (Matt 16:13-16). It is hard to imagine Jesus as a *dyadic* personality, but it seems to be partly of what is happening in this passage, even though he is definitely not dependent on Simon *bar* Jonah to know that he is “the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁰ *Dyadism* is from the Greek word meaning “pair.”

sonalities. A “dyadic” personality is what Malina describes as “a personality which always needs others to learn and to continue to know who he or she is.”¹¹ That being the case, the dyadic personality assesses itself in the realm of honour and shame as opposed to guilt.¹² The dyadic personality finds personal value only in relationship to others in the community and not in any internal and personal egocentric element. But the individual is also representative of the group so that he or she is the symptomatic element of the group. Therefore moral responsibility and deviance are not just the responsibility of the individual but also of the group, for example, John 1:46.¹³ Thus the members of the group “owe loyalty, respect, and obedience of a kind that commits their individual honour without limit and without compromise.”¹⁴

Thirdly, honour is a scarce commodity and thus has to be obtained at a cost which would normally result in envy between friends and, even more so, among equals. This honour is achieved in the public arena via challenge-riposte, by means of showing off strength and courage, by giving alms and displaying wisdom. Therefore weakness is derided and shunned, and results in shame for a man. Honour can be ascribed, for example by possessing wealth, power, belonging to a particular social position, etcetera, or honour can be achieved, for example, through fits of strength, display of wisdom, etcetera. Preference is given to ascribed honour which has its privileges. Honour is also received by acquiring and disposing wealth, wisdom, etcetera, from those who honourably possess them. Therefore, money, goods, and wealth could become a means to an honourable name for example, (Job 1 and 42).¹⁵

Fourthly, the value of honour is embodied in the male adult, while positive shame is embodied in the female adult.¹⁶ Unlike honour, shame is “neither won (n)or claimed” rather “it is presupposed and then maintained” through the veil of privacy, and personal and sexual integrity.¹⁷ So unlike honour which is associated with strength or wisdom, shame is associated with “privacy and purity.” Thus, while for the male losing honour means to be shamed, for the female, losing purity, or being publicly unreserved, is to be without positive shame, and therefore, dishonourable.¹⁸ The distinction continues with the separation of the public space or arena which is associated with the contest for honour and is the male domain,

¹¹ Bruce Malina, “The Individual and the Community. Personality in the Social World of Early Christianity,” *BTB* 9 (1979), 126-38.

¹² Malina, “The Individual and the Community,” 128.

¹³ Malina, “The Individual and the Community,” 130.

¹⁴ Neyrey and Malina, *Luke-Acts*, 39.

¹⁵ Neyrey and Malina, *Luke-Acts*, 34.

¹⁶ Neyrey and Malina, *Luke-Acts*, 34.

¹⁷ Pilch and Malina, *Handbook*, 96.

¹⁸ See the ideal wife qualities in Prov 31:10-31.

from the domestic centre which is associated with the female and signifies the privacy and inward focus of shame. And since the male embodies the corporate honour of the family, clan or village he must therefore defend it by avoiding negative shame for himself and by protecting the positive shame (sexual purity and privacy) of the females (wife, daughters, sisters, mother, etc) but not necessarily of himself.¹⁹ Nudity or exposure becomes a most shameful experience, not just for the women who are the embodiment of privacy, but also for the men.

Thus a shameless person, whether male or female, is one who does not pay attention to or respect the rules of human interaction or social boundaries. And honour as a common value to both sexes can be the result of inherent goodness or that of social precedence or power.²⁰ Thus a ruler who is wicked gets honour from power or precedence, while a poor person would have honour from her ethical values.

Fifthly, an “honour-shame” culture is characterised by a constant and ongoing “challenge-riposte,” enacted in the public arena and which can be subdivided into four stages as outlined by Neyrey and Malina:²¹

- a) *claim* - introduced through words or actions by the challenger
- b) *challenge* - by both the challenged and the public at large
- c) *response* - by the challenged
- d) *public verdict*

The critical qualification of this challenge-riposte tug of war is that it can only be engaged in by equals or peers. Therefore, an inferior on the “ladder of social standing, power, and sexual status does not have enough honour to resent the affront of a superior.”²² This aspect of challenge-riposte is perpetuated by the fact that honour is deemed to be a limited commodity which can neither be increased nor destroyed. Therefore the little that is available has to get around at a cost.

Sixthly, there are also important roles that are played by what are called the “significant others” for example, an elder, a chief, a king, God, in the honour and shame culture. The “significant other,” by association, can elevate the honour or remove the shame of an individual for example, a poor person by marrying or getting married into a rich family removes the shame of poverty and by his/her

¹⁹ Neyrey and Malina, *Luke-Acts*, 44.

²⁰ Neyrey and Malina, *Luke-Acts*, 46.

²¹ Neyrey and Malina, *Luke-Acts*, 30.

²² Neyrey and Malina, *Luke-Acts*, 5.

association with the rich family, honour is attributed. Loyalty to this “significant other” can be so intense that it surpasses the shame that may result in seeking his (or her) favour. The significance of this is vital in understanding the role of honour and shame in the Scriptures as we shall see later.

C HONOUR AND SHAME IN JOB

Wisdom concerns itself primarily with the question of how to succeed here on earth and seems to have little concern on divine matters. However, one cannot be too rigid about such a dichotomy for as Proverbs 3:4 states, the benefits of wisdom are “to win favour and a good name in the sight of God and man” with the rest of the chapter showing that the real concern is with God rather than humans. So with the classification of Job under wisdom the attention is drawn to the human relationship with YHWH and how this relationship affects one’s life here on earth. The earthly and the heavenly are interestingly juxtaposed with some intriguing results, and the perennial human problem of human suffering is cast in a very complex situation which becomes the centre of attention in the story of Job. At stake are the questions of YHWH’s justice and sovereignty, and the law of cause and effect – retribution theology. But, probably even more seriously, YHWH’s honour is questioned, which in turn is dependant upon Job’s honour, as we shall see.

The story of Job presents the struggle of innocent suffering on one side, and a gracious and good God on the other. The beginning scene in heaven is presented in terms that are primarily those of an “honour-shame” culture. In such a society life is perceived as being a continuous cycle of challenge-riposte for the limited commodity, namely honour. As noted earlier, the four categories that characterise this interaction are claim to honour, challenge- riposte and public verdict. When this model is applied to the heavenly court scene²³ we see that YHWH is the one who makes the claim concerning Job “that there is no one on earth like him; he is blameless²⁴ and upright,²⁵ a man who fears YHWH and shuns evil” (1:8).²⁶ The

²³ This model makes better sense of the scene in heaven than the “wager” concept that has been propounded by others (See Gutiérrez, *On Job*, 1, who adopts it for his study of Job). A wager seems to imply some element of gambling but in the challenge-riposte model it is an ongoing cultural aspect of relating that is postulated by the author onto the heavenly scene.

²⁴ G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., “*מָן*,” *TDOT*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975, 4: 306-307. The word used in this instance is the same one used in 8:20; 9:20-22 with the meaning of pious. But the Hebrew word *מָן* has a range of meanings from blameless, innocent, sincere, quiet, peaceful, pious, pure and healthy. Nonetheless, the essence of the meaning is “wholeness” or “completeness,” and attributes that reflect genuineness and reliability. And thus “the word *מָן* designates (esp. in Wisdom literature) a discernable group of people to whom adherence to the ethos and social values that clearly distinguish the God-fearing from the wicked (*מַרְעָה*) is of prime importance.”

intention of the author is to leave no doubt in the mind of the reader concerning Job's integrity, spirituality, and social responsibility. Job is the ideal person that exemplifies the best of a person from a social and religious standpoint.²⁷ Of course, *צדק* does not carry the notion that Job is sinless, but rather in terms of the observance of the covenant requirements, Job cannot be faulted.

YHWH infringes into the social domain of the Satan who has just returned from "roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it" (1:7), since Job is to be found on the same earth. The implication is that having found no grounds on which to accuse Job, the Satan has no complete control on what happens on the earth. But since YHWH claims to know all about the domain that belongs to the Satan, he is implying a foothold in that domain. The Satan retorts with a challenge and asks if it is for no reason that Job fears YHWH and proceeds to spell out the reasons why Job fears and honours YHWH (1:9-10), basically claiming that Job's faith is not disinterested (to use Gutiérrez's term). The Satan in turn issues his own challenge and asks that Job's wealth and property (the hedge that YHWH has build around him) be removed and that Job would dishonour and shame YHWH by cursing him to his face and proving his claim to be false (1:11).

The refusal by the Satan to accept the assessment of YHWH concerning Job as correct, presumes knowledge equal to YHWH's, and thereby claims equality of power and honour. Consequently, the Satan looks at the potential of dishonouring YHWH by proving his claims as unfounded and winning the challenge. For in this challenge-riposte situation the winner takes all (could this be the reason we do not see the Satan in the epilogue?) Then YHWH makes the riposte which is judged by the audience. In the case of the narrative, the audience is the *בני הראלהם* - "sons of God" (1:6), who together with the Satan appeared before YHWH, but it also includes the reader who, unlike Job, has been given the window into the heavenly court scene.

This is an important characteristic of the story of Job by drawing the reader quickly into the whole struggle and forcing him/her to deal with the issues that the book is raising. Failure to respond would lead to a loss of reputation in the eyes of the public (the heavenly court and the reader). But YHWH responds and grants the Satan authority to remove "the hedge" and see what happens. Complicating the matters, is the fact that Job, who is the centre of attention, even though he is totally

(Botterweck and Ringgren, *TDOT*, "תָּם" 4:306-307).

²⁵ *יָשָׁר*, also found in 2:3, means "upright, straight, level, just, right," and it is a word that does not occur in the prophetic literature or even as an attribute of God. (Botterweck and Ringgren, "יָשָׁר," *TDOT*, 2: 1050).

²⁶ Gutiérrez, *On Job*, 4, Job's fear of God is a sign of his vertical relationship with God and his shunning of evil shows his relationship to the rest of humanity.

²⁷ This is also depicted in his family and property. The seven sons and three daughters total ten - the number of wholeness, completeness.

unaware of the heavenly court scene, he is nevertheless the person who determines how the challenge is resolved. The author then brilliantly weaves the two scenes in order to include Job in an otherwise simple situation of challenge-riposte and introduces a third party who, though unaware of the heavenly set up, becomes the determinant of the resolution to the situation.

Of interest, is the fact that the challenger and the challenged do not exactly have control of the outcome (even though one can postulate that YHWH knows everything including the outcome). However, on the narrative level it creates suspense that would otherwise not be present if Job was not involved. This is the thickening of the plot which leaves the audience in suspense as to what would happen, say, should Job indeed curse YHWH. YHWH cannot prove his challenge without Job and neither can the Satan maintain his riposte without Job. The focus then turns on Job.

Job's plight makes absolutely no sense to him or to those around him. He loses all his children, property and wealth within a fraction of minutes with the reporting servants whose repeating a formulaic expression simply heightens the pain: "Only I have escaped to tell you" (1:13-19). Job's reaction is critical as it is the determinant of the challenge-riposte in the heavenly court. Given the utter catastrophe that befalls Job his reaction is the one that the audience hoped for, but is also an unexpected reaction from a human level. It combines the strain of human desire to cry foul, versus the ideal expectation (Job's) of looking at it as the will to please YHWH. The audience wants Job to do the right thing, but it does not lessen the shock that Job's reaction elicits in the light of the catastrophe that befalls him, despite the fact that the author already pre-empted such a reaction given YHWH's confidence concerning Job. It would have been unimaginable that Job would have reacted otherwise, for YHWH would have lost the challenge which is inconceivable. The Satan's claim that Job's faith is not disinterested would have held, resulting in the unthinkable - the shaming of YHWH, who is the source of all honour. YHWH would cease to be God. And the Satan would succeed in usurping the honour and power of YHWH and this His sovereignty.

The reaction of Job to the calamities that befall him is also described in strong "shame-culture" language. He rises up, rends his garments in utter dependence, and shaves his head as signs of mourning. This is deliberate debasing in response to bad news and a sign of humility realising one's weakness in the matter and one's inability to do anything about it. This public debasing also solicits sympathy from others. But Job's word only gives glory to YHWH, and proves that he fears YHWH not only for the things he gets from him. Job's confession is that humans had had no claim concerning their coming to the world and they will have no control of their going out of it, and all that is between these two points is simply YHWH's gift. Coming into the world as naked is a sign of shame and should remind humans that it is in the same state of shame they shall leave the world.

In and of himself, man has no claim to honour. It has to be given from outside. And so he can have hardly any claims of what befalls him between life and death. Man cannot have claim to anything in this world and this should keep him in a perpetual state of humility and dependence on YHWH. YHWH is the sovereign ruler of the world and the least that a man can do, in whatever circumstances he finds himself, is to worship YHWH for who he is. Thus Job is able to say: "May the name of YHWH be praised." This praise in the midst of suffering and worship, in the midst of sorrow, is something of an anomaly in humanity that is prone to claim rights that Job seems to suggest that we do not have. The expected human reaction would be a wagging finger at God and a terrible complaint that would culminate in the Satan's expectation of cursing YHWH to his face. But the author reports: "In all this Job did not sin by charging YHWH with wrongdoing" (1:22). YHWH was right.

But the Satan does not give up so easily. He still has not conceded defeat and thus maintains the challenge to YHWH's claims. Once again YHWH maintains that Job is "blameless and upright, a man who fears YHWH and shuns evil." The next sentence has been cited by interpreters as being difficult to reconcile with the fact that it is YHWH who actually incites the Satan to consider Job, but now wants to pass the blame onto the Satan. Yet looked at from the honour and shame perspective, the actual challenger is the Satan, who challenges the claim of YHWH concerning Job. And as we said earlier, YHWH who is sovereign and omnipotent knows his claim to be true, but the Satan, in a bid to usurp the authority of YHWH claims to have equal – albeit contrary - knowledge, concerning Job. Therefore, YHWH is bound by the challenge-riposte interaction to respond to the challenge which means allowing for Job's "hedge" to be removed. For, if YHWH had declined, it would have meant conceding to the challenge. Thus, YHWH had no reason to prove anything about Job, but because the gauntlet had been cast he had to honour the challenge. So indeed the Satan has incited YHWH against Job "without any reason" (2:3c). The Satan's motive was to discredit YHWH by destroying Job.

Before YHWH could declare himself the victor in the challenge, the Satan interjects with a significant saying: "Skin for skin," he says, and claims that while a person can give up what he has, once his own flesh and bone are touched, he would curse God to his face. Once again it is a refusal of the Satan to accept defeat and validate his claim to know more than YHWH. YHWH is obliged to accept the challenge as the only way of proving the Satan wrong. Even though he was wrong in the first instance he still thinks he stands a chance in the second one. The truth is, the Satan has no other option. The only other thing to do would be to kill Job. This would prove nothing, since he would not have the chance to either curse YHWH or not. Therefore, this second move is a desperate one of the Satan to

eradicate the evidence by destroying Job. This expectation is depicted in YHWH's stern warning to the Satan not to touch Job's life (2:6): "You must spare his life."

We return to the scene back on earth. Job is hanging on to dear life and struck by sores that remove him from simply the realm of the poor to which he had fallen, to the realm of the unclean, condemning him to the ash heap outside the city, the abode of the outcasts (2:8). From the pinnacle of honour, Job has been reduced to the picture of utter shame. No greater fall can a man have in this culture. He who stood among the ruling honourable men of the society in the east gate of the city now sits outside, an unclean outcast not allowed in his own city, his own home (whatever of it is left). Job, the embodiment of the society's honour, is now reduced to the embodiment of the society's shame. Previously consulted for his wisdom and influence, he is now rendered a laughing stock, repugnant to the noses of the people and even his wife (19:17, 19).

The good name of Job has been lost and now his name is cursed. Death would be a welcome relief for Job - an opinion shared by his wife who questioned Job's clinging to his honour and suggested that he rather curse YHWH and die.²⁸ With her family destroyed and her husband's honourable life destroyed, she had no man to protect her positive shame. Job was as good as dead and would do well to simply curse God and die. Then she would be released to find another man who would protect her positive shame.²⁹ Her statement is born from fear and concern (perhaps some selfishness), rather than a deliberate evil plan to tempt Job, (parallel to Eve in the garden, as some have suggested.)³⁰ This is reflected in Job's answer to her when he says: "You speak like a foolish woman," - which, by implication, she is not.

Of course, Job's wife is not aware of the heavenly court scene. Therefore she does not realise that Job's death would mean no resolution of YHWH's claim. Essentially, this would stand against YHWH's instructions concerning Job's life and his confidence in Job. After all, earlier Job had attested to her: "Shall we accept good from YHWH and not evil?" (2:10).³¹ Once again the Satan's challenge has

²⁸ The meaning of the verb בָּרַךְ, translated as "curse" in this sentence, is literally "bless." The negative connotation is derived from the expected end result of the sentence "bless God *and die*." But also given that here it is in reference to God, it is used instead of the actual word for curse in reverence to God, much in the same way as the unpronounced Tetragrammaton.

²⁹ Neyrey and Malina, *Luke-Acts*, 42. It is the responsibility of the male to protect the female purity and positive shame. But with her sons dead and her husband incapacitated, Job's wife is extremely vulnerable.

³⁰ Sam Meier, "Job I-II. A Reflection of Genesis I-III," *VT* 39/2 (1989): 189-91.

³¹ The NIV seems intent on toning down the impact of בְּטָרָע by translating it as "trouble." But Job is here comparing goodness and evil as they relate to the two sides of man's relationship to the deity. Therefore, the more accurate representation of Job's words

been proved wrong. Job does not curse YHWH: he “did not sin in what he said” (2:10b). As one person has put it, “What is most admirable about Job is not that he refused to curse God, but the fact that he never lost his dignity as a human being.”³²

So, as we suggested earlier, the heavenly court judgment seems more suggestive of the cultural setting of the author than perhaps has been realised. The layout of the scene captures the socio-cultural reality and dimensions of a challenge-riposte model that is integrally characteristic of the “honour-shame” culture. The story is carried along by the increased build-up of tension and the suspense of the resolution that is entirely based on a third party that is not directly involved in the challenge-riposte in heavenly court.

The heavenly scene is brilliantly juxtaposed with the earthly situation of Job. This also embodies a story of an honourable God-fearing individual of repute in a society who is reduced to a shameful state of social mockery and disdain before the eyes of the people. He sunk even lower than the poor whom he used to help. Although they were poor, they were socially and religiously clean enough to come into the city (29:11-12; 30:25). But at this stage, he cannot come into the city since he is religiously unclean (Lev 13:18) and now the same poor can afford to mock him. His state seemingly cannot get any worse. But as we will see in the cycle of speeches in the poetic section, it does. The psychological, emotional, and social torture he undergoes, bring out of Job a bitter complaint, all the while maintaining his innocence, his only source of honour left.

The story of Job is not simply a story about innocent human suffering; it is also about human relationships in the light of suffering. This is captured in both the heavenly scene and the earthly life of Job and the debate cycles with his friends. These speeches of Job heighten this perspective. His complaint is not simply about suffering he also questions his relationship with YHWH: why is YHWH seemingly uninterested to vindicate Job? Job’s pain is greatly pronounced from the perspective of a “dyadic personality.” In a culture where the opinions of others - family, kin and friends - significantly determine one’s honour, Job’s loneliness and sense of rejection by both humans and YHWH simply wreck havoc on his personality. There is no lower level to which he could descend than the picture we have of him sitting in the ash dump ‘rejected’ by humans and YHWH. In this society, “[l]iterally, public praise can give life and public ridicule can kill.”³³ Existence ceases to have meaning and the only untold misery is Job’s lot.

would translate עָוֶן as “evil.”

³² Elsa Tamez, “Job. ‘Even When I Cry ‘Violence’ I Am Not Answered,’” in *The Return of the Plague* (eds. Jose O. Beozzo and Virgil Elizondo. London: SCM Press, 1997), 59.

³³ Neyrey and Malina, *Luke-Acts*, 36.

D CYCLES OF SPEECHES (JOB 3-31, 32-34, 38:1-42:6)

There are three cycles of speeches in which Job converses with his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. Each cycle becomes shorter and shorter and at the last one Zophar says nothing. And just like the heavenly scene, these speeches are laid out in a challenge-riposte interaction. Job's first statement in the poetic section contrasts radically with his last statement in the prose section. Whereas he ended the prose section with a positive and calm reaction to his misery, he begins the poetic section by cursing the day he was born and damning the hour of his birth (3:3-10). Suddenly, and unlike his reproving words to his wife, he now apparently agrees with her and death becomes desirable (3:11-19). This is the closest that Job comes to cursing YHWH, and only indirectly, for YHWH is the one who created the day Job was born.

Perhaps the best thing the friends of Job did was to remain with him for seven days, mourning and speechless. The moment they opened their mouths to speak, they ceased to be of comfort. Driven by the theological premise of retribution, they insisted on the fact that Job must have sinned for him to be going through what he was going through. And governed by the level of calamity, it must have been a grave and serious sin which Job ought to confess and repent in order for YHWH to restore him.

The speeches are couched in honour-shame language reflected in certain aspects of expressions that the three (four, if you include Elihu) friends employ. Job's continuous claims to his innocence incensed his friends, who perceived him as trying to dishonour YHWH, because these claims would imply that YHWH is wrongfully making Job suffer. This is because such claims, given the circumstances of Job, cannot fit into the retribution scheme since there would be no cause (sin) for the effect (suffering).

The opening words of Eliphaz are meant to shame Job when he ridicules him saying, "Your words have supported those who stumbled, you have strengthened faltering knees – But now trouble comes to you and you are discouraged; It strikes, you are dismayed" (4:4-5). The intention is to get Job to confess his hidden sin (4:7) by asking the question, "Who being innocent has ever perished?" Clearly this is indicative of the belief on the part of Eliphaz. At stake is YHWH's honour; therefore, Job cannot be right and YHWH also righteous, according to Eliphaz: "Can a mortal be more righteous than God?" (4:17). YHWH ascribes honour to humans ("the lowly he sets on high" - 5:11), and shames the crafty or wicked by thwarting their plans "so that their hands achieve no success" (5:12; cf. also 4:13-16; Prov. 10:3). In so doing YHWH gives hope to the hopeless and those without honour (4:16). Therefore, if Job only ponders for a moment, he would realise that the suffering he is experiencing has been sanctioned by YHWH to chastise him and to correct him (4:17).

But even though Job desires death (7:7-10), he knows that if he dies his claim to innocence dies with him, and that he would find no vindication (7:11-19). He goes on to make an explicit claim to his innocence and addresses YHWH directly, crying out, "If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of humans?" (7:20). God's ever watchfulness of humans brings torment to Job, rather than comfort: "Why have I become your target?" he asks YHWH (7:20).

Bildad's response is to slum Job in the face by accusing him of questioning YHWH's justice (8:3) and attributing the death of Job's children to their own sin (8:4). Struggling with Job's claims to innocence and his own theology of retribution, Bildad exclaims, "Surely God does not reject a blameless man or strengthen the hands of evil doers" (8:20). And once again, like Eliphaz, he urges Job to acknowledge his sin and confess it to YHWH to find restoration. Furthermore, instead of Job being clothed in shame the tables would be turned on his enemies. (8:22). Bildad's postulation is that there would be a trading of places according to the "rule" of retribution, with the shaming of Job's enemies for disdaining him while Job would be restored after he had confessed his own sin.

Job's response is that he sees no difference in the way YHWH treats both the blameless and the wicked, for he destroys them both (9:22). At this point in his life it does not matter that he is blameless because he is being treated as though he was not. The question Job raises here is, "Why strive to be blameless if there is not going to be a difference in the eyes of YHWH between the wicked and the blameless?" Overwhelmed by his suffering and seeking to know who is responsible for it, and since he is certain of his innocence, Job asks, "If it is not [God], then who is it?" (9:24). Job's attempt to directly address YHWH instead (ch. 10) draws the wrath of Zophar who defends the right of YHWH to do as he pleases (11:7-11).

Like his two counterparts before him, Zophar equates Job's situation to sin (11:14). He promises Job that his restoration would include removal of the shame that has befallen him as an integral part of his suffering (11:15), so that he would be able to lift up his face without shame.³⁴ Zophar is here answering the sentiments that Job expressed earlier, namely that even if he were innocent he could not lift up his head for he was full of shame (10:15).³⁵ Zophar totally misunderstands Job's sentiments by assuming it is simply the suffering that causes shame. Job's concern is more than just suffering. It is the concern of being unable to face up to YHWH since as humans we have no premise on which we can do that. That is probably why Job later on calls for an arbitrator.

³⁴ מֵאֵוֶם – "blemish."

³⁵ "To lift one's face" is a metaphor of one's ability to move honorably in public.

It is clear in this context that the concept of shame is the embodiment of poverty and deprivation which is opposed to prosperity, health and wealth – as Deuteronomic theology rightly spelled out. Obedience is rewarded while sin is punished. But for Job, this perspective has ceased to hold any more as he envisions no correlation between his blamelessness and his current suffering. This is Job's paramount struggle with YHWH. His struggle with humans is reflected in his complaints about the poor he helped, but who now turn around, mock and disgrace him (29:12-17, 30:1). For, like his friends, they also hold on to the same theology of retribution. They thus see Job as a sinner now being judged for his sins. Yet Job is convinced that his friends speak wickedly on YHWH's behalf in this regard (13:7).

These words of the friends continue to torment Job to the point that he unleashes a bitter tirade about the shameless manner in which they have wrongfully accused him (19:3).³⁶ Job holds to his integrity and complains that YHWH has stripped him of his honour (כבוד) and has removed the sign of honour, the crown, from Job's head (19:9). But his friends accuse him of stripping the people of their clothing and leaving them naked (22:6), using his power to torment rather than to build up the poor.³⁷ Of course, there are no grounds for the specific sins mentioned since the friends did not actually witness them. These are conjectures of their imagination following their inability to dislodge the arguments of Job. And Job raises the issue of the prosperity of the wicked and their peaceful and prosperous lives and deaths contra the "law" of retribution (ch. 21). Job calls judgement on himself in his imprecatory speeches listing the sins he could have committed, but which he claims he had not done (Chr. 31).

These words of his friends are in direct contrast with the words of the author, YHWH, Job himself and by implication the Satan, namely that Job was indeed a blameless person. As an upright man (ישר – 1:1; 1:8; 2:3), Job exercised justice and social responsibility, looking out for the poor and the needy in society and indeed is represented as a classic example of a just man on social level (29:12; 30:25). It is no wonder that indeed the friends do not speak for YHWH for they accused Job wrongly and presumed to have knowledge of things beyond their scope. Job's words to his friends seem to directly equate shame with sin and honour with righteousness, when he says to them, "Far from admitting you to be in the right, I shall maintain my integrity (NIV- "righteousness") to my dying day. I take my stand on my uprightness, I shall not stir: in my heart I need no be ashamed of my days" (27:5-6).³⁸

³⁶ לֹא תִבְשׂוּ – "without shame."

³⁷ John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 327. Cf. Job 10:15 when Job could not "lift his face" because of shame.

³⁸ Translation quoted by Gutiérrez, *On Job*, 114.

Elihu's interlocution is something of an oddity, with his long and winding speeches that tend to say nothing more than the three friends said, except for his insistence on the sovereignty of YHWH, and the fact that suffering can be used by God to purify. But probably above all Elihu draws attention to the fact that ultimate honour comes from YHWH. Therefore, no matter what social position one holds, YHWH shows no partiality in judgement and is just (34:16-20), that suffering can be used by YHWH to teach (36:22-26), and that contrary to Job's complaints of YHWH's silence, he is not silent and has been speaking to Job through the suffering (36:15).

One role of YHWH's speech is to shame Job by showing him his ignorance and by answering his call for YHWH to speak to him (31:35). Yet indeed YHWH does honour Job by simply answering his call and giving Job audience. When YHWH speaks to Job out of the storm, it is not to scare him but to show his control over nature. The storm is the primordial sign of chaos and from within the midst of chaos YHWH speaks to Job. This is not unlike Job's situation in which he experiences chaos as he suffers without reason; in the midst of this chaos that is his life, YHWH speaks to him. Unlike the storm that destroyed Job's property and family (ch.1), this storm bellows only with the voice of YHWH. Just as the domain of the primordial chaos is not out of reach of YHWH's control, neither is the chaos that is Job's life. The rhetorical questions with which YHWH proceeds to pummel Job would only elicit a response of self-proclaimed ignorance on the part of Job (42:6).³⁹

Given that true honour is ascribed by YHWH, the statement YHWH makes to Job in 40:10 is clearly one that Job cannot fulfil. Job is being challenged to take the appearance of a deity if he can (cf. Ps 104:1).⁴⁰ Job cannot adorn himself with dignity (גאון) and splendour (גבה) or clothe himself in honour (הוד) and majesty (הדר). Only YHWH can do this, not on the basis of any criterion of a person's works, for a human's right hand cannot save him or her (10:9-14). Only YHWH can save humankind.

E CONCLUSION

There is no denying that the book of Job is replete with concepts, motifs and vocabulary significant of honour and shame. While, this in itself does may not say much given the fact that, as it has been argued by the scholars of the Medi-

³⁹ Daniel Timmer, "God's Speeches, Job's Responses, and the Problem of Coherence in the Book of Job. Sapiential Pedagogy Revisited," *CBQ* 71/2 (2009): 289, puts it this way: "Having acquired wisdom through Yhwh's speeches, Job distinguishes between what he knows now and what he knew prior to the theophany." Cf. also Carol A. Newsom, "Reconsidering Job," *Currents in Biblical Research* 5/2 (2007): 155-182.

⁴⁰ Kenneth Barker, ed., *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1985), 778, note on Job 40:10.

terranean cultures, these values exist in the cultures of the whole Mediterranean region, it opens up ways of reading Job that put the whole book into categories that make both logical and cultural sense. Furthermore, even though the book of Job has traditionally been assigned as wisdom literature, it goes beyond the traditional pursuit of wisdom, namely, how to live a successful life here on earth, and more crucial questions of how to continue living in faith, even when all odds seem against it.

The author does an excellent job of juxtaposing the honour of YHWH with human suffering which in turn, after it has taken its full course, also brings honour to the human who remains faithful throughout the suffering. On the other hand, it also brings shame to the Satan and those who see more than there actually is in the suffering (Job's friends), and as a result misunderstand and misrepresent YHWH. In the case of the Satan the shame is not simply a bad feeling of humiliation, but a more powerful public defamation that eliminates any challenge that he might have harboured on YHWH. It is defaming and defacing that leaves no room for reprieve, and in this case, the winner, YHWH, takes all. At stake is not successful human living before YHWH and humanity, but rather perseverance and faithful human living in relationship with YHWH, in spite of suffering - a "disinterested" faith.⁴¹

As for the sufferer, Job, his personal encounter with YHWH brings untold shame. Not because of sin, but because of his inadequacy before YHWH. Realising that he could not fault YHWH even when he, Job, was convinced that he was an innocent sufferer, he confesses ignorance and states, "Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (42:6). In this respect then, the book of Job is questioning the very essence of wisdom whose focus is on earthly success. The question is whether success is really a measure of godliness or YHWH's blessing, and also, whether all suffering is only a result of sin and therefore a punishment from YHWH. The book of Job seems to answer this question in the negative but does not seem to give an answer as to why suffering does happen to "innocent" people.

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⁴¹ Rather than the traditional understanding of Job as "patient," clearly the complaints of Job speak more of "perseverance," even with impatience, as chs. 9-10 indicate (Cf. also the Epistle of James 5:11).

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- Andrew M. Mbuvi, Ph.D. Assoc. Prof., Biblical Studies and Hermeneutics, Shaw University Divinity School (High Point Campus), 1301 Lincoln Drive High Point, NC 27260, (0)336-886-4974 (Ext. 6603). *E-mail*: ambuvi@shawu.edu.