Title: Honor and shame: an exegetical-thematic analysis of the narrative of Hagar and Sarai in Genesis 16

Author: Douglas O. Ochanda

Date completed: November 2015

Granting Institution: Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIIAS)

Description: Unpublished Thesis (MA Religion): 101 pages

Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the identity of honor and shame values in Gen 16. The narrative presents nuances of honor and shame particularly in verse 4 and clause in verse 13b. Most scholarly discussions on the narrative have construed the narrative as (a) ethnographic, (b) theological, (c) personal event, and (d) birth narrative. The preliminary analysis of the Pentateuch shows that in ANE, the identity of honor and shame formed a key component of social values.

The semantic field of the term קָלָל within the Pentateuch also impinge on the understanding of the characteristics of honor and shame. The lexical analysis within various context in the Pentateuch indicates possible connotations of the values of honor and shame in Gen 16. Lexical definitions offer a wide range of overlapping meanings for honor and shame in the narrative.

The exegetical-thematic analysis of Gen 16 expresses a larger network that includes propositions linked to honor and shame. The prominence of familial, childbearing and appointment values accrue ascribed shame to the characters in the first section of the narrative. The second section honor comes to Hagar after her encounter with God.
The term "קְלֵל" (Gen 16:4), "lower esteem," in the sense of Hagar (slave-wife) lowering Sarai’s (mistress) status, and the contentious phrase "רֹאִי אַחֲרֵי רָאִיתִי הֲ" (Gen 16:13b) translated as a rhetorical question: “Have I also here seen Him who sees me?” (Gen 16:13b) provide an orientation close to the OT grammar without need of textual emendations.

Contempt and ridicule all describe shame, all loss of honor. Hagar’s encounter with God in the theophany reverses the ascribed shame to honor. Furthermore, Hagar, the maidservant (Egyptian) bearing of a child to Abram, a man called from Ur, provide an appropriate framework of how God’s presence converges societal marker of honor and shame. Thus, this study shows that the narrative is strongly ethnological, theological, and missiological in the context of honor and shame. It is an esteem of the downtrodden and God’s honor to people.