

Book Review

Evertt W. Huffard, *The Honor of God: More about Character than Reputation or the Radiance of God*

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We sing, “To God be the Glory!” and easily say, “To the glory of God!” Do we mean God’s reputation or God’s visible presence? Or could it be we mean something deeper?

Themes of the Book

Glory: Extrinsic or Intrinsic?

Evertt Huffard’s book, *The Honor of God*, is about the glory and honor of God. Both English words have in fact become clichés and, as such, have lost much of their meaning and impact. Yet the word “glory” (*kabod* in Hebrew and *doxa* in Greek) is much used in Scripture. Both words are almost always translated in English as “glory” and only occasionally as “honor.”

The Hebrew meaning of *kabod* is “weight, to be heavy,” and when the term refers to God it is normally understood to speak of God’s awesome (heavy) and radiant presence. The Septuagint uses the Greek word *doxa* for this Hebrew word.

Huffard argues that both biblical terms, *kabod* and *doxa*, speak as much of the intrinsic nature of God, his goodness and his character, as they do of God’s extrinsic, radiant presence, his greatness. Huffard concludes that in many cases these two terms should be translated as the “honor” of God in English.

The author briefly describes “honor,” not as receiving praise and esteem, but as the nature or character of a person. And in relation to God, honor means God is true to his own nature and character (7-8).

The Moses Story (Ex. 33-34)

Huffard grounds his overall argument on the Moses story, where Moses requests to see God’s *kabod* (Ex 33:18). Instead of revealing his radiant splendor, Yahweh proclaims to Moses his name which consists of distinct characteristics of Yahweh (Ex 34:6-7), that his goodness and intrinsic nature. As Richard Baukham writes, “The story seems to suggest that God’s glory is the radiance of his character, of his goodness, of who he truly is” (2015, p. 77; cf. Knowles, 2012, pp. 36-38). (In fact, the Hebrew uses the phrase “all my goodness” [Exod. 33:19] as equivalent to “my glory.”) And God will be true to his nature. True honor!

This proclamation of God’s name and attributes becomes Huffard’s lens through which he interprets *kabod* and *doxa* in Scripture.

Moses wanted to *see* God's radiance. God wanted Moses to *hear* who he is. The author makes much about *hearing* God rather than *seeing* God (26-27). When God proclaims his name, "God actually describes Himself" (27).

Texts with Kabod as Honor

There must be textual evidence for how *kabod* and *doxa* speak of God's character as much as God's radiant presence. This need becomes the core of Huffard's book as he seeks to show how God's name and character are reflected throughout Scripture, most specifically in Ex 34:6-7. Huffard lists *kabod*–*doxa* texts that he argues refer to God's character (112-114 and the appendix, 275-294), many of which he discusses in his book. He concludes that the word "honor" better reflects the meaning of each of these texts.

The Psalms are a veritable library of texts where *kabod* could be understood as honor (God's intrinsic nature). David ascribes "glory" due Yahweh's name who is splendid in His *holiness* (Ps. 29:1-2) and sings, "... to your name be the glory (*kabod*), because of your *love* and *faithfulness* (Ps 115:1-2). *Kabod* could speak of God's character in these texts. Note Isaiah's proclamation, "the *kabod* of the Lord will be revealed" (40:5), and the missional vision that God's *kabod* will be proclaimed among the nations (66:18)—likely as much a message of God's nature and presence to be revealed. In this light, many of the *kabod* / *doxa* texts speak both of God's glory (greatness) and His honor (goodness).

Jesus: We Saw His Glory

In the New Testament, John 1:14 is key to understanding *doxa*. John says, that "We saw His *doxa*, the *doxa* of the one and Only Son, who came from the Father."

Huffard shows how Jesus displayed the features of Ex 34:6-7 in his life (150-151). Jesus revealed the goodness of God rather than the radiance of God—except possibly at the Mount of Transfiguration and the resurrection. Jesus brought grace and truth, which Huffard says summarizes Ex. 34:6-7 (153).

Israel rejected Jesus because he did not come with power and splendor, as they expected of the Messiah. They wanted the greatness of God but missed God's goodness and grace.

When Jesus walks to the cross, he fully expresses Yahweh's faithfulness and compassionate love. The cross becomes the ultimate interpretation of Ex 34:6-7. Here is God's *doxa* in self-sacrificing love, as Richard Baukham explains: "The cross as the supreme enactment of God's love is also the supreme revelation of his glory—of who he is (2015, p. 109).

The Epistles: Doxa-dense Texts

In the *doxa*-dense text of 2 Corinthians 3 and 4, Paul speaks of the lesser *doxa* of the Old Covenant that required Moses to cover his face because it was so radiant—yet it left the people unchanged. However, the *doxa* of the New Covenant revealed through the face of Christ, who is the image of God, is life-changing as believers gaze on this image (220).

In another *doxa*-dense text, God blesses his people with salvation in Christ, so that they would praise his *doxa* (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). Are God's people to reflect his greatness (glory) or his goodness (honor)? And when a person experiences the goodness of God's *doxa*, their inner life will be transformed (228).

In the benediction “To Him be *doxa* in the church and in Christ” (3:21), Paul envisions a church honoring God by reflecting the honor of God through worthy (honorable) lives (Eph 4 and 5).

Concerns

Honor Everywhere

Based on Yahweh’s proclamation of his name in Ex 34:6-7, Huffard sees echoes of *kabod* and *doxa* throughout Scripture, even where these words are not used. He devotes two chapters to show how the features of Ex 34:6-7 are displayed in the Gospels and Epistles. For example, “Throughout this letter (Ephesians), Paul refers to most of the features of the honor of God revealed at Sinai” (227). My sense is that seeing the “honor of God” everywhere can flatten the meaning and depth of the book’s thesis.

Western or Collectivist Cultures

Throughout the book, Huffard critiques Western theology for not appreciating the honor–shame worldview of Scripture and, for this reason, Western theology has paid less attention to “the honor of God,” especially in translation.

My concerns are several: Honor-shame cultures focus on the outward and visible, which relate to one’s worth and public name (reputation), without necessarily being honorable. Therefore, honor-shame cultures can also veil the intrinsic, character dimension of honor.

Second, while I affirm that humanity longs for and needs honor and that the gospel gives honor (267-268), communal, honor-shame cultures would not naturally describe honor as being true to one’s intrinsic character. Honor is what the honor-group deems worthy and valuable, and so to gain and maintain honor in one’s community, a person must keep the communal honor. Hence, there can be a tendency to resort to dishonorable ways to gain honor (Loewen, 2020).

Huffard critiques English translations which have rendered *kabod* and *doxa* as “glory” and not “honor,” irrespective of the context. He argues that Western, individualist orientation has influenced this word selection. Interestingly, collectivist (non-Western languages) such as Persian, Arabic, and Urdu also use a radiance word (*jalal*) for *kabod* and *doxa*. Some of my colleagues would say, “Honor-terms seem unworthy of God.”

Takeaways

Honor as Transformational

Huffard contends that a deeper understanding of the honor of God, theologically and in Christian life, becomes transformational.

God brings us into *doxa* (Heb. 2:10). Huffard tentatively suggests that we become like God in his character rather than entering God’s radiant splendor. (Huffard frequently remains tentative in his argument and uses such phrases as, “could be appreciated as,” “it is possible” (216), “could it be” (219), and “could refer to” (224).) Note the next verse speaks of God’s people being “made holy” (2:11; see 204).

“Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27). Is this an eschatological hope that believers will experience the presence of God in the future? Or is it an ethical vision that believers have hope for transformation, to become like God in his character? (135). If *kabod* refers to God’s character in

certain contexts, the people of God will seek to live for God's honor, to live up to his name—or as Thomas Aquinas reportedly said, “Glory is God's goodness on display—which leads to a missional vision.

Honor as Missional

The *kabod-doxa* terms are inherently missional, as Habakkuk envisions: “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the *kabod* of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Hab 2:14; see also Ps. 72:19). The call to declare God's *kabod* and his marvelous deeds among the nations (1 Chron. 16:24; Ps. 96:3) is deeply missional.

When Simon sees Jesus, he envisions this child as the *doxa* of God bringing salvation to the nations (Lk 2:29-32).

This vision of God's *kabod-doxa* covering the world must become multi-dimensional, a triad glory: showing God's beauty, enhancing God's reputation, and reflecting God's image. What can be more inspiring than this vision!

Conclusion: A Triad of Glory

Recently at our church's Sunday morning “worship” service we were singing, “Is He Worthy?” I sensed a new vision of God's glory: honor. God intends to dwell with us (visible presence); he is the Lion of Judah who conquered the grave (reputation). Obviously influenced by Huffard's thesis, I wanted another verse to speak of transformation from darkness to truth and goodness. A few weeks later we sang, “Let us experience the glory of your goodness!” (from the song: “Holy Spirit you are welcome here.”) What a vision to remind ourselves of: the glory of the Lord's goodness coming into our midst.

References

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- Loewen, A. (2020). *Towards true honor*. Kabul, Afghanistan. (Presently, this book is only available in Afghanistan and as isolated scattered copies in the West.)