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About This Journal: What Is a Kabod?

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About This Journal: What Is a *Kabod*?

If the very word invokes images of meat and other delicious food sizzling on a skewer, it is because you are thinking of a kebab and probably happy to do so. You are not too far from the truth. A *kabod* does have something to do with eating, but it invites a different kind of feasting; it suggests a spiritual consumption of “solid food” described in Hebrews 5, appropriate and necessary for mature Christians (14),¹ and especially for all individuals in academe who enjoy a regular regimen of expanding their hearts, minds, and souls in their love of God and His knowledge.²

Liberty University’s Honors Program has adopted the name of *The Kabod* for its interdisciplinary journal, taking it from Proverbs 25.2: “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter” (*King James Bible*). Both “glory” and “honour” are translated from *kâbôd*. Dr. Don Fowler, who has generously chaired over a hundred Honors theses and who is an excellent Bible scholar, assured us that we could use the word with a grammatical article and without the diacritical marks. He said that “non-Hebraists” will recognize the word without the circumflexes because it is found in the personal name Ichabod.³ Of course, since Dr. Nutter and I⁴ are literature professors, we jumped for joy as we thought about Ichabod Crane from Washington Irving’s famous story, but Brother Don brought us back to the Bible and reminded us of Ichabod in 1 Samuel 4.⁵ Eli was the High Priest of Shiloh. He was the one who saw Hannah praying silently and thought that she was drunk. She was promising God that if He gave her a son, she would dedicate him to full service to Yahweh. Once Eli realized that she was more sober than sober, and learned of her request, he prophesied that indeed she would have a son. That son would be Samuel, and Hannah would give him to Eli to train him to be a Nazirite. Eli had two sons of his own, Hophni and Phinehas, whose sinful

behavior provoked Yahweh to curse Eli's male descendants forever. When Samuel became an adult, the Philistines attacked the Israelites, killed Eli's sons, and stole the Ark of the Covenant. When Eli heard the news, he fell out of his chair and died from a broken neck. Phinehas's wife went into labor and delivered a boy she called Ichabod, meaning "The Glory has departed from Israel."

Right. We knew that. What we also knew was that Ichabod was the equivocal school teacher in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" which was first published in his *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* in 1820. Although those of you who love literary research no doubt have your own personal interpretation of what the Connecticut Yankee represented in his being a foil to the New York Dutch, I have been unable to find any article written about the parallels between the biblical and the Irving Ichabods. Nevertheless, the parallels do exist, and they were probably obvious to nineteenth-century readers who were Bible literate.

Significantly, the schoolmaster is "without a doubt the most celebrated Covenanter in all literature."⁶ The Covenanters were members of a Scottish Presbyterian movement that began in 1557. They formed covenants with each other, binding themselves to maintain Presbyterian doctrine. The first Covenanter who migrated to North America arrived in 1717. Washington Irving was a Scottish Covenanter, even as the Israelites were the beneficiaries of a covenant that God had made with Abraham (Gen. 17.7). As for Ichabod, he certainly adhered to the letter of Calvinistic doctrine regarding total depravity and original sin as he made ready use of a "formidable birch tree" in the way of switches (359).⁷ Yet, even though he was "exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves" (358), he apparently was not so diligent about avoiding his own sins, like gluttony, for one, "for he was a huge feeder, and though lank, had the dilating powers of an anaconda" (360). He was

more than fond of the ladies, but his priority was to marry money, and his chief delight was to tell stories of the occult (362). In these ways he was no different from the state of the Israelites as they were legalistic and yet hypocritically sinful and apt to worship false idols. Just as Eli fell from his chair, so Ichabod fell from his horse when he was hit on the head by another head that had been thrown at him by the headless horseman (385). “The old country wives . . . maintain to this day that Ichabod was spirited away by supernatural means” (388), but an old farmer reported that Crane had survived, relocated, studied law, and became a politician and a judge (387). Therefore the ending is somewhat different from 1 Samuel 4. Regardless, both Ichabods were parties to a covenant that was honored by God but was broken by the covenanters, which caused “*kâdôs* to depart” (1 Sam. 4.22).

The passion for literature often does hijack us and takes us on unplanned journeys. Dr. Fowler, however, always standing firmly on the Bible with more use for Hebrew than English, explained that “*kabod* is a highly nuanced word.” He checked his TANAKH⁸ translation and offered the following explanation of Proverbs 25.2: It employs

“glory” in both lines (as did NASB) so it may be best to understand the Proverb as saying that God’s Kabod is that He has the power to conceal Wisdom from humans, but earthly kings (Solomon is the prime example) have the kabod to be “able” to successfully search out a meaning. It is relatively unusual for a verse in Proverbs to have a context but vss. 2-7 are devoted to the unique status and practices of kingship. In other words, the ability to successfully extract “wisdom” is surprisingly the provenance of Kings—God knows the meaning but Kings (who have the Spirit) can find it out. The “Spirit” concept (which isn’t mentioned in

the Proverb) is an important aspect of OT kingship (note that both Saul in 1 Sam. 10 and David later) have special Spirit moments.

Last, both “glory” and “honor” are inherent in the meaning of the word here.
(email of 8/6/14)

So what does *kabod* have to do with Honors students? Here is the syllogism:

Christians believe that Jesus is King of Kings (1 Tim. 6.15)

⇓

Those who believe that Jesus is the Christ becomes a child of God (1John 5.1)

⇓

Christians are children of the King of Kings and therefore are kings themselves.

But wait; there’s more:

All truth and wisdom come from God (John 16.13)

⇓

But the “depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God” are “unfathomable” (Rom. 11.33)

⇓

But it is God’s will to reveal Himself to us (1 John 1-3)

Here is the logic of God’s Word. Most of God’s truth is concealed from us, mainly because of this truth: “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55.9). Even so, God promises to “bring to light what is hidden in darkness” (1 Cor. 4.5). He does not want us to be ignorant about His will for us (Rom. 11.25). This is His pledge to us: “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him”

(Isa. 64.4 and 1 Cor. 2.9). He wants to reveal these things “through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God” (1 Cor. 2.10).

Much of God’s wisdom is hidden to those who do not fear Him (Ps. 111.10). Moreover, He “has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong ... so no man may boast before God” (1 Cor. 1.27-29). But to those who share in Christ’s glory (Rom. 8.17), God encourages to pursue knowledge, as He describes it in Isaiah 45.3: “I will give you hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who summons you by name.” He desires to give us “all wisdom and prudence” and reveal to us “the mystery of His will” (Eph. 1.8-9).

Whether a student is pursuing knowledge in the sciences, arts, social sciences, history, languages, religion, or any hijacking passion that has put him or her on a journey of discovery, God has imbued that journey with “hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places.” This is God’s *kabod*, and it is for *kabod* that Honors students make their search, and for the same that *The Kabod* publishes it.

Notes

1. The biblical references in this article are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise designated.

2. When asked to identify the greatest commandment, Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Matt. 22.37, Mark 12.30, and Luke 10.27).

3. Don Fowler, Message to the author, 5 Aug. 2014, E-mail.

4. Dr. Jim Nutter is the Director of the Honors Program, and I am one of two assistant directors, with Dr. Marilyn Gadomski being the second. Dr. Gadomski is a professor of psychology.

5. Don Fowler, Message to the author, 6 Aug. 2014, E-mail.

6. Caleb Stegall, “Ghostly Echoes: A Eulogy,” *Semper Reformanda* 17.1 (Summer 2008), rpt. *Front Porch Republic: Place, Limits, Liberty*, Oct. 2, 2009, Web, 6 Aug. 2014.

7. All references are from Washington Irving, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” *Washington Irving’s Sketch Book* (1820; New York: Longmans, Green, 1905) 355-390, Web, *Google Books*, 6 Aug. 2014.

8. TANAKH is an acronym of the first Hebrew letter of the three major subdivisions of the twenty-four books of the Hebrew canon: *Torah* (means “teaching” and refers to the Pentateuch or the first five books of the Bible written by Moses), *Nevi'im* (“Prophets”) and *Ketuvim* (“Writings”).