



BOOK NOTE REVIEW

Aidoo, Mark S. *Shame in the Individual Lament Psalms and African Spirituality*. African Theological Studies / Études Théologiques Africaines 12. New York: Peter Lang, 2017. Pp. 261. US\$ 80.15 (hardcover), US\$ 75.85 (ebook).

Christopher L. FLANDERS

ORCID: 0000-0002-5860-5972

Abilene Christian University, Abilene, Texas, USA

chris.flanders@acu.edu

Mark S. Aidoo's *Shame in the Individual Lament Psalms and African Spirituality* offers a substantial exploration of the Hebrew concept of *bôš* (בוש, 'shame') within twelve Individual Lament Psalms (ILPs) and places these exegetical findings into dialogue with African Christian spirituality. This work, a revision of Aidoo's doctoral dissertation, demonstrates how rhetorical analysis can illuminate the theological and spiritual functions of shame, revealing both its destructive and constructive potential. Although published in 2017 — ordinarily outside the customary range for book reviews — the book's uniqueness and enduring value make it especially worthy of review.

The study begins with a survey of *shame* in the Hebrew Bible, anthropology, and psychology. Aidoo resists the overly simplistic "shame versus guilt" binary that has long dominated anthropological discourse, arguing instead that shame in the Hebrew Bible, and particularly the Book of Psalms, is multifaceted and contextually deployed. Drawing from various scholarly studies, Aidoo distinguishes *positive shame* (discretion, repentance, transformation, self-knowledge) from *negative shame* (despair, worthlessness, destruction). Such categories provide the interpretive scaffolding for his close readings of the psalms.

The heart of the book lies in a detailed rhetorical analysis of twelve ILPs. It is a fact that in the Hebrew Bible, shame vocabulary is most prevalent in the book of Psalms. Aidoo examines these twelve ILPs, which use shame terminology: Psalms 6, 22, 25, 31, 35, 40, 53, 69, 70, 71, 86, and 109. Aidoo carefully engages these ILPs, their literary structures, situations, and strategies, showing how petitions for enemies to be "put to shame" function rhetorically as positive appeals — intended to evoke remorse and eventual transformation — while pleas for the righteous to be spared shame reflect a longing for wholeness and a restored relationship with YHWH.

**BOOK REVIEW: *Shame in the Individual Lament Psalms and African Spirituality*,
by Mark S. Aidoo**

Aidoo's theological claims extend beyond exegesis. He contends that shame in the Psalms operates within a spirituality of relatedness, deeply resonant with African spirituality. African worldviews emphasize interconnect-edness, reciprocity, and communal wholeness; thus, the psalmist's petitions against shame can be read not merely as self-defense but as appeals for restored balance in the community and renewed fidelity before God. This contextual bridge is one of the book's strongest contributions, demonstrating how Old Testament spirituality and African Christian experience mutually illumine each other. He reminds readers that in the Hebrew Bible, guilt, though perhaps important for Western readers and in Western theology, is not a materially important part of the emotional matrix for the human person like that of shame.

Methodologically, the work is noteworthy for its interdisciplinary reach. Aidoo employs rhetorical criticism as his primary tool but supplements it with insights from anthropology, psychology, and theology. His analysis of shame alongside "Disappointment Theory" is particularly fresh, showing how unmet expectations in the psalms function rhetorically to reassert trust in God. Specifically, when enemies are "put to shame," they are not merely dishonored but forced into an experience of disappointment — their plots against the psalmist fail, their expectations collapse, and their humiliation exposes them before YHWH.

Theologically, the book underscores the necessity of addressing shame in contemporary Christian formation, pastoral care, and liturgy. Yet, as Aidoo argues, this is particularly true in the African ecclesial contexts, where the vocabulary for articulating shame before God is often underdeveloped. Since this is so, contemporary leaders and those who use the Bible would do well to pay heed to Aidoo's claims that the shame experience is central to spirituality in the ILPs and that these ILPs urge the church to "reexamine its liturgies to meet those who suffer negative emotional shame" (12). Importantly, Aidoo challenges the African church to cultivate a biblical spirituality more attuned to shame, addressing phenomena such as curses, communal rejection, and restoration, while also cautioning against "undisciplined prescriptions of shame" (220). He argues that churches in Africa must work toward developing a "hermeneutic of shame" to connect deeply with the linguistic and cultural realities of various contexts.

Some limitations are apparent. The sheer breadth of secondary literature occasionally makes the argument dense, and the rhetorical and exegetical detail may at times overwhelm readers less versed in Hebrew poetry. The book would also benefit from a more sustained engagement with recent honor-shame scholarship in biblical studies and missiology. Additionally, there is no index of authors and terms, which would have been helpful. Still, these are minor quibbles in an otherwise impressive and rigorous study.

Christopher L. Flanders

**BOOK REVIEW: *Shame in the Individual Lament Psalms and African Spirituality*,
by Mark S. Aidoo**

In sum, Aidoo has produced a pioneering contribution to both Psalm studies and African theology. His work enriches literature on biblical spirituality by demonstrating that shame, far from being merely negative, can serve as a transformative resource for renewal, repentance, and relatedness. For missiologists, the volume underscores the importance of addressing shame in global Christian witness and pastoral praxis. For African leaders, this book can serve as a valuable resource for working toward a more authentic African Christian spirituality. This reviewer hopes that excellent works like Aidoo's will spur on a new generation of African biblical and theological engagement with the critical issues of *shame*, *honor*, and *face*.