

THE WISDOM MOVEMENT AND ISRAEL'S  
COVENANT FAITH

*By* D. A. HUBBARD

Among the great gains in biblical scholarship in recent years has been the rediscovery of the importance of holy history. We have become increasingly aware that God's revelation centres in the record of His redemptive acts and in the inspired interpretation of them by prophets and apostles. Other approaches, like the study of Israel's faith as an expression of man's search for ethical order or as a chapter in the history of world religions, have given way to an emphasis on the uniqueness of Israel's role among the ancient peoples. Her election and the covenant which God made with her, her attitude towards her calling, her preoccupation with history more than nature, her non-mythological faith, her cultus whose moral demands took priority to ritual—these and many similar ideas have captured the attention of European and American scholars in the past three decades.

Redemptive history has rightly become the mainline of Old Testament interpretation. Recent approaches to hermeneutics concentrate on the historical connection between the Testaments, rather than on the similarities in ethical instruction or spiritual values. Typology, the study of the orderly patterns which God has followed in steering the course of holy history, has become a dominant theme. Time and again we meet the phrase 'promise and fulfilment' in biblical studies.<sup>1</sup> The Exodus and its preparation in the patriarchal period, the Monarchy and its previews in the days of the Judges, the Exile and return

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1. See for instance, Claus Westermann, ed., *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, John Knox Press, Richmond (1963).

with their intimations of judgment and grace—these have been the focal points of Old Testament investigations.

An unhappy by-product of this concentration on covenant, kingship, and cult has been a neglect of other aspects of Old Testament thought, notably the wisdom literature. Of the Old Testament theologies with which our generation has been so abundantly blessed, only von Rad's has sought to do any thing like justice to the wisdom movement, which is responsible for the presence of three or four books in the Canon (depending on the classification of the Song of Songs) and has bequeathed a rich legacy of literary form and language to the psalmists and prophets.<sup>2</sup> The two great works on the culture of Israel—Pedersen's and de Vaux's—stress the royal, priestly, and prophetic offices and give only fleeting attention to the role of the wise men in Old Testament times.

Not that the wisdom literature *per se* has been neglected. During the past forty years a great deal of attention has been given to the interpretation of the individual books, and we are well equipped with commentaries and topical studies, especially on Job and Proverbs. A spate of articles and monographs has appeared on the relationship between Israel's wisdom and that of her Egyptian and Mesopotamian neighbours. But with all of this, there has been insufficient wrestling with the precise connections between wisdom and prophecy, between wisdom and the cult, between wisdom and the covenantal aspects of Israel's faith.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, many scholars have pointed out the fact that biblical wisdom literature was stamped by Israel's peculiar, religious convictions. Eichrodt, for instance, observes that the sapiential writings are brought under the shadow of the covenant as their 'cosmopolitan and religiously neutral worldly

2. H. Wheeler Robinson's *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament*, Clarendon Press, Oxford (1946), also contains a substantial section on wisdom literature.
3. W. Zimmerli's article, 'Oft und Grenze der Weisheit im Rahmen der alttestamentlichen Theologie', *Gottes Offenbarung*, Chr. Kaiser Verlag, München (1963), English translation in *SJT* 17 (1964) 146-158, is one of the welcome exceptions to this statement. See also L. E. Toombs, 'Old Testament Theology and the Wisdom Literature', *Journal of Bible and Religion* 23 (1955) 193-196.

wisdom . . . changes into a means of obedience to the unquestionable divine command, teaching that true wisdom lies in the fear of God'.<sup>4</sup> H. Wheeler Robinson goes so far as to define the wisdom movement as '*the discipline whereby was taught the application of prophetic truth to the individual life in the light of experience*'.<sup>5</sup> From these statements and Robinson's general treatment of wisdom we can see illustrations of the traditional approaches to wisdom which view it as originally a secular movement within Israel which gradually came under the influence of the prophets and attained its present form with its strong religious orientation fairly late—perhaps in post-exilic times.

In the light of the current tendencies to view the religious insights of the sages as legacies from the prophets and to slight wisdom's contribution to the revelation, we shall pursue three main purposes in this paper. First, we shall try to point out some of the possible links between the wisdom movement and Israel's covenant faith. Second, we shall attempt to show that these links need not be as late as is frequently suggested nor need they be the product of a purely evolutionary development within the circles of the sages. Finally, we shall underscore some of the implications that flow from an enhanced understanding of the contributions that wisdom literature makes to our understanding of the Scriptures and the faith of the church.

#### I SOME SIGNIFICANT LINKS BETWEEN THE WISDOM MOVEMENT AND ISRAEL'S COVENANT FAITH

It may be that one of the reasons for the uncertainty as to the place of wisdom in the Old Testament is the difficulty of definition. What is wisdom literature? Do we define it in terms of its literary techniques—riddles, parables, proverbs, analogies from nature, numerical patterns, acrostics, *etc.*—or in terms of its content—practical advice expressed in brief maxims or short exhortations? Or is it a combination of both? If we define it in terms of content, what is the relationship between the opti-

4. *Man in the Old Testament*, SCM, London (1951) 23.

5. *Op. cit.* 241.

mistic, straightforward, simple observations about the nature of sin and righteousness with their rewards, and the speculations, questioning, sometimes doubting, of Job and Ecclesiastes? Proverbs seems to say, 'Here are the rules for life; try them and find that they will work.' Job and Ecclesiastes say, 'We did, and they don't.'

Furthermore, the problem is compounded by a lack of information about the part played by wise men in Israel's culture and the changing nature of their role throughout Israel's history. We find traces of their work in the riddles, fables, and proverbs which antedate Solomon. Then with the opening of the channels of political, social, and commercial intercourse between Israel and, her neighbours, particularly Egypt, some sages at least seem to have come under court patronage as the wise king sought to compose, collect, and edit the prudential sayings which were one source of his fame (1 Ki. 4:29-34). The precise relationships between sage and prophet or sage and priest in the Monarchy and Exile can only be guessed at. The tit-bits of information are so tantalizing and yet so meagre that they tend to whet our appetites and not to sate them.

In *The New Bible Dictionary* I have tried to describe the style and contents of wisdom, which I take to be a combination of the literary techniques mentioned above and the age-honoured themes of the wise men—maxims of blessing and success and deliberations on the knotty questions of human existence. The Song of Solomon should probably be included in the wisdom corpus, because of its literary style, especially its metaphors drawn from nature, and because the Israelites lumped proverbs and songs together as kindred literary types (1 Ki. 4:32).<sup>6</sup>

The links between wisdom literature and Israel's covenant faith are many and varied. Because there are so many unknown or uncertain factors in a study like this, a good bit of the argument must rest on circumstantial evidence. But perhaps

6. Recent discussions of the nature and scope of wisdom literature: R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes* 'Anchor Bible', 18, Doubleday, New York (1965) xv—liii; R. E. Murphy, 'The Concept of Wisdom Literature', *The Bible in Current Catholic Thought*, ed. J. L. McKenzie, Herder & Herder, New York (1962) 46-54.

as the various arguments are weighed together they will have a certain corroborative affect, as they suggest how the way of the sages and the ways of the priests and prophets have paralleled and criss-crossed each other.

The first link is to be found in *the relationship between the establishing of the monarchy and the rise of a wisdom movement in Israel*.

Wisdom had been present in the folk-life of Israel from the beginning. Jotham's fable (Jdg. 9:7-15), Samson's riddle (Jdg. 14:14), the popular proverb about Saul (1 Sa. 19:24), and David's wise woman from Tekoa (2 Sa. 14:2ff.) are all so well known as to make comment superfluous. But at the time of David, who leaned heavily on the counsel of Ahithophel (2 Sa. 16:23), and especially at the time of Solomon, wisdom began to fulfil an official function in the life of Israel. From this time, through the period of Hezekiah and Jeremiah (Je. 18:18), the wise men played a key role and did so under royal patronage.

We have ample evidence that Israel's covenant faith put its unique stamp on the monarchy from the beginning, since it was Samuel who first laid down the rules for kingship (1 Sa. 10:25). The Israelite ideal of kingship, though superficially resembling the royal ideologies of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Canaan, stands in all crucial respects in marked contrast to them. Nathan's encounter with David and David's complete capitulation to the authority of the covenant as spelled out by the prophet are reminders that early in the history of the kingdom all of life—including the life of the king—was subject to the demands of the covenant faith.<sup>7</sup>

There is no hint in the Old Testament that the monarchy began as a secular institution and was gradually shaped to conform with the covenant tradition. The close association of Samuel and Saul, as well as Nathan and David, suggests that from the start the kingship was informed by the covenant traditions. Israel's king was the complete leader—military

7. The royal psalms (*e.g.* 2, 18, 20, 45, 72, 89, 110, 132) when studied together give an excellent portrait of the ideal king—a servant of God, obedient to the covenant while enforcing its demands among the people.

hero, civil judge, defender of the faith. He was the pivot on which the common life of the people in all its phases turned, the glue that gave coherence to the social, political, military and religious components of the nation. And he was patron of their wisdom—the personal embodiment of its highest ideals. It is not likely that wisdom would have been left outside the canopy of the covenant, when the king, who was its sponsor, had brought all of life under its shelter.

The second link between wisdom literature and Israel's covenant faith is to be seen in the fact that *the prophets and wise men seem to have had considerable influence on each other*. Nathan used a parable, not an oracle, to catch the conscience of his king. The pages of Amos are flecked with literary patterns, images, and concepts from the wisdom movement. The three-four numerical pattern (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13, etc.), the cause-and-effect sequence carefully designed to capture his hearers' consent to his argument for the non-voluntary nature of his prophetic ministry (3:3-8),<sup>8</sup> the rhetorical questions based on observations from nature (6:12), the stylized questions and answers with which two of the visions are introduced (7:7-8; 8:1-2) and which serve to create a feeling of suspense as the answer is delayed,<sup>9</sup> and the 'woe' oracles (5:18, 6:1, 6:4),<sup>10</sup> are among the rhetorical weapons borrowed from the arsenal of the sages.

H. W. Wolff has argued forcefully that the earliest of the writing prophets, Amos, drew far more heavily on Israel's popular or clan wisdom (*Sippenweisheit*) than he did on the cultus. In addition to the literary devices mentioned above he calls attention to such characteristic themes of Amos as the

8. These and other examples are discussed by Samuel Terrien in his essay on the contributions of wisdom literature to Amos in the Muilenberg *Festschrift, Israel's Prophetic Heritage*, ed. by B. Anderson and W. Harrelson, Harper, New York, SCM, London (1962).
9. J. Lindblom, 'Wisdom in the Old Testament Prophets', *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, ed. M. Noth and D. Winton Thomas, E. J. Brill, Leiden (1955) 202.
10. E. Gerstenberger, 'The Woe-Oracles of the Prophets', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962) 249-263, considers the woe-oracle to be the negative literary counterpart to the '*ashrey* (blessed/happy) formula which is used so frequently in Psalms and wisdom writings.

relationship of Israel to the nations, the use of words like right (נכחה), justice (משפט), and righteousness (צדקה), the use of antithetical pairs of words, a concern for the poor and lowly, and a contempt for profligate living. It is worth noting that Wolff's index of passages contains at least three times as many references to Proverbs as to any other Old Testament book.<sup>11</sup>

Isaiah strikingly combines the use of wisdom techniques (e.g. the allegory of the vine in ch. 5 and the parable of the farmer in 28:23-29) with a scathing attack on the empty wisdom of Israel's political pundits (e.g. 29:14). Though we may not go along with Fichtner's interpretation of this evidence as indicating that Isaiah had originally been a wise man, we can readily admit his indebtedness to the wisdom movement.<sup>12</sup>

Jeremiah, too, shows his acquaintance with the tools and techniques of wisdom. Lindblom calls attention to his frequent use of לָקַח מוֹסֵר (to take correction: 2:30, 5:3, 7:28, 17:23, 32:33, 35:13), an idiom which occurs several times in Proverbs, where the noun מוֹסֵר is found some thirty times. It occurs about fifteen times in the rest of the Old Testament. Though Lindblom attributes the passage in Jeremiah 17:5-11 to redactors of a wisdom school, he goes on to say that 'the fact that reminiscences of wisdom are spread over the whole book suggests that Jeremiah himself as well as his disciples had special connections with the wisdom school'.<sup>13</sup>

Of the many themes which the wise men and prophets share, only one will be mentioned here—an emphasis on rewards or punishments granted or meted by God to individuals.<sup>14</sup> Although Jeremiah and Ezekiel are the first prophets to bring the doctrine of individual retribution into bold relief (Je. 31:29-30; Ezk. 18:1ff.), the idea was present in the religious

11. H. W. Wolff, *Amos' geistige Heimat*, Neukirchener Verlag (1964).

12. J. Fichtner, 'Jesaja unter den Weisen', *Th. L.* 74 (1949) cols 75ff.

One could argue on similar grounds that Isaiah had been a priest, because of his keen interest in and criticism of the cultus.

13. J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, Blackwell, Oxford (1962) 238.

14. For themes which both Prophets and wise men deal with, see H. Ranston, *The Old Testament Wisdom Books*, Epworth Press, London (1930) 18ff.

life of Israel from the beginning.<sup>15</sup> The stories of Cain and Abel and the patriarchal wanderings turn on it, especially the Joseph story. [This is considered by von Rad and others as a wisdom story. In it von Rad finds the distilled essence of wisdom teaching, both in the devout and wise conduct of Joseph and especially in the implicit affirmation that all of life is under the sovereign sway of God.<sup>16</sup>]

When we see the doctrine of individual retribution present in the early stories, we are not surprised, to find it in the wisdom literature. It is not peculiar to wisdom, though it bulks large in the thinking of the sages. This retribution is not the result of an impersonal mechanistic fate but that of a personal God, a judge of all the earth who does right. A characteristic of certain of the proverbs, as von Rad reminds us, is that they 'speak very directly of the displeasure (or pleasure) which God has in certain practices or ways of human behaviour'.<sup>17</sup> There is a conflict of opinion as to whether the idea of retribution was present in wisdom literature from the beginning or was added later. Rankin holds that '... from the very outset in Israel's wisdom-writings the religious sanction of right conduct, the motive supplied by the idea of God's blessing and curse, was present',<sup>18</sup> while von Rad attributes the idea originally to secular teaching about orders and natural laws.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps it is safe to say that wherever a specific agent of judgment is mentioned it is not fate or natural law but Yahweh who passes sentence (*e.g.* Pr. 16:5). We should pause to observe that the frequent use of the divine name Yahweh in Proverbs, especially in what seem to be the oldest strata, cannot be overlooked in a study of the contribution that wisdom and the covenant faith have made to each other. Though in Proverbs the name may not always ring with its redemptive significance, it is surely going

15. O. S. Rankin, *Israel's Wisdom Literature*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh (1936) 69.

16. G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, E. Tr. Harper, New York (1962) I, 440.

17. *Op. cit.* 437. He cites as examples 11:1, 20; 15:8, 9, 26; 16:5, 7, 17:15; 20:10, 23; 21:3; 22:11.

18. *Loc. cit.*

19. *Op. cit.* 436.

too far to say, as Rylaarsdam does, that for the sages 'it simply means "deity" in a general sense'.<sup>20</sup>

When the great eighth-century prophets began to sound their indictments against the injustices of their day and when Jeremiah and Ezekiel made it clear that individuals were to be punished personally for their disloyalty to the covenant terms, they were not heralding new standards but calling the people back to old ones.<sup>21</sup> In other words, they were drawing on one of the rich traditions of Israel's faith—a tradition present in wisdom literature but not exclusively so. Gerstenberger's summation is noteworthy: 'The (prophets') process of taking over the old ethical rule and applying them to the new situation—in the name of Yahweh!—proves that the prophets believed that this very order of society, of which the wise men were the guardians, was he order sanctioned by Yahweh which had to be maintained.'<sup>22</sup>

We should not overlook *the similarities between Proverbs*, especially chapters 1-9, *and Deuteronomy* when we discuss possible links between wisdom literature and the covenant faith of Israel. Rylaarsdam cites the admonitions of Proverbs that parental instruction should be fastened to the neck or fingers (Pr. 6:21-22; 7:3; *cf.* Dt. 6:4-9), and the promise that

20. J. Rylaarsdam, *Revelation in Jewish Wisdom Literature*, University of Chicago. Press (1957) 21, following Fichtner. It seems rather inconsistent to say, as Rylaarsdam does, that the writers of the early sections of Proverbs used 'Yahweh' without intending its particularistic sense, while maintaining (as Rylaarsdam does) that the sage who gave us Job shied away from using 'Yahweh' because it was 'still too strongly coloured by tribal and national hues to permit its safe use in discussions which had a universal interest' (*op. cit.* 22).
21. The 'wild grapes' proverb like all proverbs, must be considered an overstatement of the corporate nature of Israel's life. It does not rule out an equally important, equally ancient emphasis on individualism.
22. Gerstenberger, *op. cit.* 62. He goes on to make the point that both the descriptions of the social situation in the eighth century and the prophetic denunciation of them may not have been historically unique but may have been based on pre-formed patterns or standardized reproaches of social wrongs. His conclusion is pertinent to our discussion of the possible interrelationship between sage and prophet: 'The myth that it was the prophets who invented the ethical maxims behind their charges must be discarded in the light of the evidence' (263).

the upright will inherit the land, as Deuteronomic touches (Pr. 2:21; 10:30; cf. Dt. 4:21; 15:4; 19:10; *etc.*).<sup>23</sup> Quite recently Jean Malfroy has pointed out some marked similarities in vocabulary, style, and content between Deuteronomy and wisdom literature and has tried to show the impact of sapiential techniques and motifs on the presentation of the law.<sup>24</sup>

M. Weinfeld rejects the oft-repeated theory that Deuteronomy was strongly influenced by the prophetic movement. He goes so far as to say that 'Deuteronomy represents the fusion of law and wisdom rather than of law and prophecy'.<sup>25</sup> This statement is based on several lines of evidence: the general didactic and hortatory tone, the humanistic concern which embraces the poor and underprivileged, the lack of eschatology, and the legalistic formulation of the moral principles. The precise implications of these comparisons between Deuteronomy and Proverbs will depend on the date assigned to Deuteronomy, but it is safe to say that too careful a distinction between wisdom writings and the covenant literature of Israel breaks down in the light of the clear signs of interdependency.

At this point we may do well to look briefly at the recent studies published by Erhard Gerstenberger. He has reviewed the work of Alt and his successors on the Hebrew law and suggested that *apodictic law* is closely related to aphoristic literature. Both instruct forcefully and directly without regard to contingencies or exigencies. Whereas Alt had found the origin of the apodictic pattern in the cultus, Gerstenberger finds it in the *Sippenethos*—part of which is the *Sippenweisheit*—the rules for right conduct transmitted within the clan. In his most recent article (*JBL* 84 (1965) 38-51) he has related his theories to D. McCarthy's pivotal research on *Treaty and Covenant*. McCarthy has seriously questioned Mendenhall's conclusions which treated the commandments at Sinai as counterparts to the stipulations of Hittite sovereignty treaties.

Gerstenberger suggests the commandments resemble in both

23. *Op. cit.* 23.

24. 'Sagesse et Loi dans le Deuteronomie', *VT* 15 (1965) 49-65.

25. 'The Origin of the Humanism in Deuteronomy', *JBL* 80 (1961) 245.

form and content certain sayings found in Proverbs; *e.g.* 3:27ff.:

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.

Do not say to your neighbour 'Go and come again, Tomorrow I will give it' when you have it with you.

Do not plan evil against your neighbour who dwells trustingly beside you.

Gerstenberger attributes the transmission of rules like these which are designed for the welfare of society to fathers, tribal heads and wise men, rather than to prophets or priests. In a secondary way court officials may, have taken them up and given them fixed literary form.

Though we may not agree wholeheartedly with Gerstenberger's analysis of the origins of the law, we can appreciate his reminder of the close connections between commandment and proverb, and his insistence that official wisdom and prophecy both have deep roots in the common life of Israel.

A similar situation may be said to prevail as we turn to another possible link between wisdom and the covenant traditions: *the occurrence of wisdom motifs in the Psalter*. There is little need to point out the intimate relationship between the Psalter and the cultus (though we may not give full support to the extreme views of Gunkel and Mowinckel), nor is there need to rehearse the evidence for the close connection between the cult and the redemptive history of Israel which was the great theme of the feasts and solemn assemblies. It is quite clear that the Psalter is the hymnal and prayer-book of Israel's covenant faith. Yet present within it in no discernible pattern or order are psalms which are distinctively sapiential (*e.g.* 1, 34, 37, 49, 73, 111, 112, 127, 133).<sup>26</sup>

Their precise link with the cult, their *Sitz im Leben*, is not easy to discover. To brand them as basically non-cultic as

26. For a discussion of some of the characteristics of wisdom psalms see R. E. Murphy, 'A Consideration of the Classification "Wisdom Psalms"', *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. 9, E. J. Brill, Leiden (1963) 156-167.

Mowinckel has done is probably an overstatement.<sup>27</sup> The ties between wisdom and cult seem substantial. Many of the thanksgiving psalms and laments have didactic sections which instruct the community by witnessing to the saving acts of God. (e.g. Ps. 31:23-24; 32:8-9). Psalm 73 is hard to classify because of its subtle combination of thanksgiving and instructive testimony to the congregation. Psalm 78 uses an introduction typical of wisdom literature—‘I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old’—to launch a lengthy and detailed summary of holy history.

If the wisdom psalms were readily identifiable and always distinguishable from other types, Mowinckel's theory that the learned psalmography was late and only attached itself to the cultic materials during the final stages of the collection might be acceptable.<sup>28</sup> However, the inter-relationship between wisdom elements like moral instruction or formulas of blessing (אשרי) and cultic materials is too complex to justify a simple explanation. It is, of course, possible that Psalm 1, a wisdom psalm, was added to the Psalter at one of the final stages of the collection to serve as introduction. Mowinckel seems nearer the mark when he calls attention to the fact that wisdom psalms are actually third-person prayers, addressed to God as well as men, and when he points out the affinities between the wisdom psalms and the didactic elements in the earlier psalms.<sup>29</sup> It should come as no surprise that there would be close connections between wisdom and cult when one bears in mind that the king was patron and sponsor of both.

Another possible link between the tradition of the sages and the covenant faith of Israel is found in *the stories of Joseph* (Gn. 37-50). It is made quite clear in the narrative that Joseph had many of the attributes of wisdom (Gn. 41:33): ability to interpret dreams, administrative skills, personal virtue in the teeth of great temptation, craftiness in manoeuvring his brothers into a place where he had the upper hand, yet willingness to

27. 'Psalms and Wisdom', *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, 205-224. Cf. *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, Abingdon Press, New York (1962) II, 104-125.

28. *Op. cit.* 213-217.

29. *Op. cit.* 209, 213.

forgive upon evidence of their contrition. Woven through the narratives and binding them together is the firm thread of providence. Joseph's wisdom derives from God, as do his success in politics and vindication before his brothers.<sup>30</sup> But quite obviously something more is involved than a blend of narrative wisdom and personal piety. Its didactic lessons of trust and obedience are only part of its purpose: though a wisdom narrative, it also serves to set the stage for the Exodus and the framing of the covenant.<sup>31</sup>

From a survey of some of the possible links between the wisdom literature and the covenant traditions of Israel we may make some observation which pertain to the structure and message of the Old Testament.

First *we must not set up rigid categories when we consider the offices of Israel—prophet, priest, and wise man*. Jeremiah makes clear that these offices were recognized in his day (Je. 18:18), but the overlapping of themes and literary techniques suggests also an overlapping of ministry.<sup>32</sup> An interesting illustration of the overlapping of subject matter from various areas of Israel's life is seen in the deliberations upon the problem of the justice of God's ways in Job, Habakkuk, and Psalm 73. The sage, the prophet, and the psalmist tackle essentially the same problem and utilize forms and themes from the various areas of Israel's life as they do so. Job and Habakkuk both use a dialogue pattern akin to the questions and answers of teacher

30 I see no justification for W. McKane's contention that in this story, and particularly in Gn. 41:33ff., the vocabulary of old wisdom has been reinterpreted and accommodated to Israelite piety. *Prophets and Wise Men*, SCM, London (1965) 50.

31. The story of Daniel is kind of later parallel to the Joseph narratives. Wisdom, sterling character, administrative skills and a sense of providence are blended. The religious tones are more dominant, however, and the covenantal aspects more explicit. The covenant community has become the 'wise' (Dn. 12:3). S. Talmon, "'Wisdom" in the Book of Esther', *VT* 13 (1963) 419-455, classifies Esther as a 'historicized wisdom-tale', dependent on the Joseph story and on a literary tradition common to both. Brevard Childs has reached similar conclusions in regard to the 'The Birth of Moses', *JBL* 84 (1965) 109-122.

32. Cf. S. Mowinckel, *op. cit.* 206. G. von Rad, *op. cit.* 430, notes that Israelite wisdom was not tied nearly so tightly to a class or a corps of officials as Egyptian wisdom.

and master. Psalm 73 discusses a wisdom theme within the literary framework of a psalm of thanksgiving. Habakkuk finds the way to answer his query in a poem which resembles the psalmists' summaries of holy history, which were used to rehearse the acts of God at Israel's great feasts like Passover and Tabernacles. And he, a prophet, concludes his book with an expression of confidence similar to those used in psalms of lament or thanksgiving. Illustrations of the interdependence of the various offices in Israel could be multiplied. Lamentations, for instance, combines the artistic interests of wisdom, especially in its use of acrostics, the laments used in the cultus, and the theology of doom and hope characteristic of the prophets. The functions of the leaders were not absolute, if only because, in a sense, they were all extensions of the ministry of the king, who as God's adopted son and anointed servant carried the weight of the covenant upon him and had ultimate responsibility for its enforcement in the common life of his people.

Second, *there is a sense in which all biblical literature is covenant literature*, because it is the literature of the covenant people. It was shaped by them and for them and bears a definite relationship to their faith, whether that relationship is apparent or not. There can be no real argument as to whether wisdom literature is religious or not. If it was in Egypt, it certainly was in Israel. The difference lies not in the religious nature of the one against the other but in the nature of the religion.

The sources of this literature are many and varied: patriarchal narratives, royal chronicles, folk sayings, cultic hymns, prophetic oracles, summaries of redemptive history, *etc.* There seems to have been a common chest of materials from which writers of the various schools drew. Prophets, sages, psalmists, court historians—all had access to the same resources in the history, worship, and folk ethos of the people. They differed in emphasis but not in basic orientation. They all saw their God, Yahweh, as Lord of nature, history, and personal experience; but they chose different ways of making this lordship known.<sup>33</sup>

33. These elements are all present in the Song of Deborah which by

If the king and the wise men of his court made a significant contribution to the collecting and preserving of Israel's wisdom, the wise among the common people also made theirs. Sheldon Blank distinguishes the 'officially wise', the royal counsellors and scribes, from the 'simply wise', the elders, parents, teachers, judges, and other men of ready wit and ample wisdom.<sup>34</sup> I take this group of simply wise—guardians of what Wolff calls 'clan wisdom'—to be the real well-spring of Israel's wisdom movement. It is they who began the grappling with the meaning of life in the light of personal experience. They did so without concern for an official ministry of teaching or counselling.

Official wise men drank from their cup, although they also had access to other streams from Egypt, Edom, and Mesopotamia. So did the prophets and psalmists. As the king in his position as father of the people and head of the nation was a unifying force among the various offices, so were the people, many of whom must have enjoyed a time-honoured spiritual, ethical, and social understanding of the covenant. The 7,000 who stiffened their knees against Baal worship in Elijah's day may be considered typical of the stalwart souls throughout Israel's history who understood and transmitted the old ideas of devotion to God and concern for man. From them came Hannah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, and a nameless host of men and women who were Israelites indeed. They helped to bring unity to the various aspects of Israel because they made no iron-clad distinctions between the several offices or the varying methodologies. Their personal piety and their covenant faith touched and transformed all areas of life.

Third, *we should fight shy of any theory of simple, straightline evolutionary development in Israel's wisdom movement*. Wisdom has been one of the last bastions of evolutionary thought in Old Testament studies. Solomon's enterprising ways spurred

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common consensus dates from the period of the Judges. Cf. von Rad's comment (*op. cit.* 428) 'Wisdom had to do with the whole of life, and had to be occupied with all of its departments. It was most unfortunate that in the past the Old Testament wisdom was thought of more or less as the product of an exclusive theological school'.

34. 'Wisdom', *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* IV 856.

on a movement which had existed in the popular life of Israel from her earliest days and which had taken on semi-official status under David. This means that the literature of the sages and that of the priests developed simultaneously, and, to some extent, interdependently. As with the Psalms, so with the Proverbs, we must not confuse the date of the composition of the various components with the collection of the whole. All evidence points to a substantial oral and written tradition behind both. Is there any literature more susceptible to prolonged oral transmission without alteration than gnomic sayings?

In the case of Proverbs, the earliest section, Proverb 10-22:16, contains a religious element which 'does not appear to have been woven in or tacked on later, as an afterthought.'<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the introductory chapters (1-9) usually considered to be the latest have been shown by W. F. Albright to contain stylistic parallels to Canaanite, especially Phoenician literature which stem from the early monarchy.<sup>36</sup> It has been commonly held that the two-line aphorisms of 10:1 ff. are earlier than the extended periods of chapter 1-9. Though this may be generally true, Gemser's warning is salutary: 'The lesson learnt . . . by the discovery of the Instructions of 'Onchsheshonqy has its significance also for the dating and the reconstruction of the history of Biblical proverb books and collections. Here too more developed forms of thought are not necessarily younger and later than the more simple ones.'<sup>37</sup>

All of this leads us to question McKane's seemingly arbitrary distinction between older and later wisdom.<sup>38</sup> In contrast to von Rad, McKane views old wisdom as 'primarily a disciplined empiricism engaged with the problems of government and administration'.<sup>39</sup> The overlapping of literary themes and

35. O. Rankin, *op. cit.* 69.

36. 'Some Canaanite-Phoenician sources of Hebrew Wisdom', *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* 1-15.

37. B. Gemser, 'The Instructions of 'Onchsheshonqy and Biblical Wisdom Literature', *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 7, E. J. Brill, Leiden (1960) 128.

38. William McKane, *Prophets and Wise Men*, SCM, London (1965) 61.

39. *Op. cit.* 53.

forms and the implicitly religious tone of the earliest proverbs suggest that there should, be no arbitrary division between older and later wisdom. It seems to me that the question is not so much that of older and later but secularized and God-fearing.<sup>40</sup> What the prophets oppose, especially Isaiah, is a wisdom from which the fear of God has been drained, a paganized kind of political understanding that distorts the true ideal of wisdom. Analogies from the other offices are telling here. Priests who missed the meaning of the cult, let it turn mechanical, and fused Israelite and Canaanite practices are not called older priests but false, disobedient priests. Prophets who prophesy for gain and cry peace when there is none are not called older prophets but false prophets. Kings who fleece the people instead of leading and feeding them are not called older kings but unworthy kings.

The point is that true and false practitioners existed simultaneously in the various offices. The fact that the distinctively Israelite aspects of wisdom literature are not so readily discernible at an early date as they are later does not mean that every instance of secular wisdom is early and that every instance of religious wisdom is late. Simple evolutionary approaches ought to be as *passé* in studies of wisdom as they are in those of prophecy or cultus.

Fourth, if there is anything like the kind of interrelationship among the various offices that has been suggested above, *we may do well to question the tendency of most scholars to attribute wisdom sections in the prophets to later redactors influenced by the wisdom movement.* Passages like Jeremiah 17:5-11 or Hosea 14:9 may better be understood as evidences of the prophets' acquaintance

40 A. Drubbel, 'Le conflit entre la Sagesse religieuse et la Sagesse profane', *Biblica* 17 (1936) 45-70, 407-428, shows how the sacred wisdom and secular wisdom have warred against each other throughout the biblical narrative. The one roots in the fear and obedience of God; the other in pride and haughty self-confidence. He suggests that the early stories of obedience and dependence upon God or disobedience and arrogant independence are part of the preparation for the later wisdom literature. Undoubtedly he goes too far in making the wisdom writings 'porteurs des pensées des prophètes' (67-70). He does not give due recognition to the interdependence of sage and prophet.

with wisdom motifs and techniques than as sapiential glosses.

In short, what I am suggesting thus far is this: there were two great factors in Israel's life and culture which from a human standpoint gave shape and tone to her Scriptures — the *clan ethos* with its social standards, its covenant faith, and its personal piety; and the *monarchy* which ideally, at least, gave official support and sanction to these ancient ideals.

Prophet, priest, and wise man alike are indebted to the common souls of Israel. Alike they are sons of the covenant. While less obviously so than the writings of priest and prophet, wisdom literature is covenant literature not only because it bears the stamp of Israel's distinctive faith but because those wise and good people from whom it stemmed helped to shape the form and the expression of that faith.

## 2 SOME IMPLICATIONS OF WISDOM LITERATURE FOR CHRISTIAN FAITH AND PRACTICE

First, *without an adequate emphasis on wisdom literature our understanding of the revelation of God will be fiat-sided*. No-one can doubt that redemptive history is the skeleton, the framework, of revelation. The first two verses of Hebrews make this crystal clear as they carve their cameo of the message of both Testaments. But the skeleton needs to be fleshed out, the relief needs to be rounded by other elements in revelation, particularly the emphasis on the piety and integrity of the individual found in the teachings of the wise men.<sup>41</sup>

Israel's covenant faith needed checks and balances to keep it from toppling into a narrow, bigoted nationalism. Amos, who saw clearly the glory and uniqueness of the covenant (Am. 3:2), saw too that the chosen people had to be reminded that God had other sheep who were not of their fold and that He had a keen interest in the affairs and destinies of other nations

41. For a warning against an overstress on redemptive history to the neglect of other aspects of revelation, see James Barr, 'Revelation through History in the Old Testament and in Modern Theology', *Interpretation* 17 (1963) 193-205.

Am. 9:7).<sup>42</sup> Ruth and Jonah make the same point. And so in its own way does wisdom literature. Take, for instance, the non-Israelite setting given to the story of Job or the contributions to Proverbs made by Agur son of Jakeh and King Lemuel's mother, both of whom seem to be gentiles (Pr. 30:1 ff.; 31:1 ff.). Not only are specific references to Israel's unique calling as God's elect avoided but the authors and editors seem to go out of their way to suggest that outside the bounds of Israel there may be found a wisdom worthy of inclusion among the writings so holy that they defile the hands.

Israel's covenant faith, with its emphasis on community and with its roots deeply sunk in the soil of a culture marked by a view of corporate personality, was ever in danger of minimizing the role of the individual. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel issue solemn warnings against the tendency of their countrymen to shirk personal responsibility and to hide behind the communal pattern of Israel's faith and life. Whether they knew it or not they had stout allies in the sages who compiled the proverbs. For here more than anywhere else in the Old Testament, the implications of the law and the covenant are applied to specific situations and problems in the lives of individuals.

Wisdom literature makes yet another contribution to the roundness and wholeness of the biblical revelation by helping to bring a balance between the elements of transcendence and immanence which are part of the uniqueness of the Old Testament portrait of God. Too much stress on the mighty acts of God in history would lead, as it did in the intertestamental Period, to an apocalyptic attitude which despaired over the present and comforted itself with the hope that, though God had withdrawn from His people temporarily, He would one day break into history again to bring redemption.<sup>43</sup> Con-

42. The oracles against Israel's neighbours (Am. 1:3-2:3) have as one of their purposes this anti-nationalistic thrust. *Cf.* also the indictment of an exclusive interpretation of the day of the Lord, as though Israel could escape judgment while God vented His wrath upon her enemies (Am. 5:18-20).

43. G. E. Ladd, 'The Kingdom of God—Reign or Realm?' *JBL* 81 (1962) 238: . . . apocalyptic thought was pessimistic with regard to this age. God had become the remote God who was no longer active in

versely, too much stress on the activity of God in nature played right into the hands of the pagan, nature-centred religion which surrounded Israel and were a constant threat to engulf her from the time of the Judges until after the Exile. Just a the cult, when it was rightly practised, provided a kind of mediation for the tension between God's transcendence and His immanence by calling attention to the high deeds of God in history and yet to His personal presence among His people, so the wisdom teachings linked together the two great spheres of God's activity—creation and redemption, nature and grace.

The wise ways of God may be observed in and illustrated by the habits of animals and the processes of nature (although the sages did not and could not use the word), yet man ultimately is accountable to the transcendent judge who is Lord of all creation (Jb. 28:38-42). To the true Israelite both the still, small voice and the outstretched arm, both the cleaving of the Jordan and the budding of the lily, were testimonies to the glory of God. He was not a God of the gap, rushed in to account for the inexplicable or to achieve the impossible. He was responsible for all of reality. Not as an impersonal Ground of all being, but as both the dynamic God who comes and the consistent God who has been there all the time.

Theologically, wisdom has as one of its functions an explication of Genesis 1-2. It is part of the outworking of the God-given commands to subdue the earth and name the animals. Understanding the creation is not merely a means of success for man, it is a divinely designed way of blessing. By acquiring and applying wisdom man fulfils one of the purposes for which he was created.<sup>44</sup>

We see then the role of wisdom literature in rounding out the revelation and in helping to preserve the delicate balance between Israel's covenant calling and her universal missionary outreach, between the communal and individual aspects of her faith, and between her understanding of the transcendence

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history . . . God's deliverance could be expected only in the day of the eschatological visitation'.

44. See W. Zimmerli, essay in *Les Sagesses du Proche-Orient Ancien*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris (1963) 121-137.

and immanence of God. If the sages, in their zeal for their point of view, sometimes overstated, this too must be viewed as providential. Only God knows fully what we suspect of each other if not of ourselves: how hard it is for anyone to see all sides of an issue at once.<sup>45</sup>

The role of wisdom literature in contributing to the wholeness of revealed truth is underscored in the New Testament where the grand announcement of the good news is accompanied by a detailed explanation of its significance in ethical and moral instruction. The *kerygma* is complemented by the *didache*. The Epistle of James is a New Testament compendium of wisdom. The similarities between it and the Sermon on the Mount show how deeply its approach is grounded in the teachings of Jesus. The absence of the great redemptive themes coupled with the stress on personal righteousness made it a fit target for Luther's volatile attacks. But neither he nor we could get along without it.

Like Job it shows us that suffering may work for purposes higher than we know. Job's friends said, in effect: 'When you meet with various trials, repent.' James says, 'When you meet with various trials, rejoice.' What made the difference? James knew both the meaning of Job's experience and of Christ's. Like Ecclesiastes, James puzzles over the question of purpose in life in the midst of a society at best heedless and at worst hostile to his faith, and finds his answer in the command to love—and especially to love the unfortunate and underprivileged. He had a sharp advantage over the Preacher because he had known the One in whom all life finds its ultimate meaning and had seen that One's love in action. Like the wise men of Proverbs and their royal leader, he taught that true religion must grasp the whole person, body, heart, mind, and tongue. But he did so, not so much in terms of earthly

45. R. B. Y. Scott, 'Priesthood, Prophecy, Wisdom, and the Knowledge of God', *JBL* 80 (1961) 1-15, shows how each group of religious leaders—priests, prophets, sages—'contributes something indispensable to the Bible as the Book of the Knowledge of God'. The chief contribution of wisdom according to Scott is 'a clearer knowledge of truth and of God through the self-discipline of learning and through dedication to its most worthy goals' (15).

advantage as in the light of the final judgment. He had known the One to whom all judgment is entrusted by the Father and could feel both the hope and the fear of it.

James centres true wisdom in Christ as clearly as the Gospel find in Him the culmination of redemptive history. In each case a familiar theme is played in clearer, stronger tones James represents a higher wisdom, wisdom from above, but wisdom none the less. Neither testament could have been considered complete without it.<sup>46</sup>

A second implication is that *a correct understanding of the nature and role of wisdom literature will help to make clear the differences between the canonical and the apocryphal wisdom writings*. In the intertestamental period and the first Christian century the sages skilfully and deliberately adapted their writings to the nationalistic ideals of Israel.<sup>47</sup>

This nationalization shows itself in two ways. First, wisdom is equated with the Torah, the law given to Moses. This change begins in the *Wisdom of Sirach* (early second century BC when the pressures of life in the Diaspora threatened the survival of the faith of the Jewish people. To counter this threat, which may have been particularly dangerous to the Jewish sages who moved in cultured and enlightened circles, Ben Sirach gave anchor and stability to the wisdom movement by tethering it to the Jewish Law (*Sirach* 24:23). 'To fear the Lord' means for him 'to keep the Law' (*Sirach* 2:16; 23:27).

In the *Wisdom of Solomon* (early first century BC) wisdom is equated with all law whether the universal moral law in men's hearts, or the Law of Moses (e.g. *Wis. of Sol.* 6:1-4). *The Book of Baruch* (first century BC) clearly identifies wisdom with the Law of Moses. By forsaking wisdom Israel lost her way and was scattered in exile (3:8-13); yet Israel can find her way again by obeying the book of the commandments of God (4:1).

This narrow definition of wisdom tends to make wisdom

46. L. E. Toombs *op. cit.* 195-196, stresses the differing contexts of wisdom and covenant but suggests that they have both been brought into these contexts in the same way: 'as a mighty act of God in response to human need and human insufficiency'.

47. J. C. Rylaarsdam, 'The Nationalization of Wisdom', *Revelation in Jewish Wisdom Literature*, University of Chicago Press (1946) 18-46.

literature subservient to the purposes of the legal writings of the Old Testament and restricts its contribution markedly. Furthermore, the role of canonical wisdom literature as a check against an over-zealous nationalism or an over-pessimistic view of transcendence, which made God's wisdom available only as a gift through the Law, was compromised.

The nationalization of wisdom which took place between the Testaments shows itself in another way. Wisdom becomes the dynamic force which shaped not only the creation but the great episodes in Israel's history. In other words, redemptive history is rewritten with wisdom rather than the mighty hand of God as the moving power which made it possible. Chapter 10 of *Wisdom of Solomon* is the *locus classicus* of this reinterpretation.

This stellar role in history is only possible because of another modification in post-canonical wisdom: the hypostasis of wisdom. While wisdom is personified in Proverbs (1:20-33; 3:15-18; 4:7-9; and especially 8:1ff.) the personification does not really move much beyond a dramatic poetic device, a battery of metaphors to spot-light the glory and splendour of wisdom.<sup>48</sup> But later writings carry the personification further. In *Sirach* the figure of Wisdom oscillates between the metaphor

48. The same may be said of the description of wisdom in Jb 28:20-28. It should be noted that the degree of personification varies. It is least obvious in Jb. 28 and most obvious in Pr. 8. The role of wisdom in the latter passage is variously interpreted. I would agree with those who view it as poetic personification, e.g. R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs Ecclesiastes*, Anchor Bible, Doubleday, New York (1965) 71, and Roland E. Murphy, *Seven Books of Wisdom*, Bruce Publishing Co., Milwaukee (1960) 13. H. Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom*, Haken Ohlsson's Boktryckerei, Lund (1947) 104, says flatly that wisdom in Pr. 8 is a hypostasis. But he defines hypostasis as a quasi-personification, 'occupying an intermediate position between personalities and abstract beings' (*op. cit.* 8, where he cites this definition from W. O. E. Oesterley and G. H. Box, *Religion and Worship of the Synagogue*, Pitman, London, 169). Perhaps we should use a term like 'extension of personality', following A. R. Johnson's lead (*The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God*, University of Wales, Cardiff (2nd ed., 1961) 16), although Johnson does not discuss the personification of wisdom. At any rate we should reject any idea that wisdom in Proverbs is hypostasized so as to become co-divine or otherwise independent of God. The theology of Proverbs is too unrelentingly monotheistic to allow this.

and the hypostasis.<sup>49</sup> In *Wisdom of Solomon*, however, the personal character of Wisdom dominates. She is loved by God (8:3) and sits beside Him on the throne (9:4). She is virtually His consort.<sup>50</sup>

The elevation of wisdom not only raises it above the level of a divine attribute but gives a mediatorial role in creation and history which tends to detract from the divine glory and majesty which the God of the Old Testament guards so jealously. Furthermore, it is hard not to detect in the mediatorial work of wisdom not only an undue elevation of wisdom but an implicit pessimism about nature and history. God has become so transcendent, so remote from the processes of life that He must use wisdom as an agent to keep in touch with them.

Is it possible that God's withdrawal and His use of a mediary, wisdom, anticipate the demiurges of later Gnosticism which perform God's tasks and keep Him free from contact with the foul stuff of matter? We do know that by the time of the *Book of Enoch* wisdom is described as setting out from heaven to dwell among men and having to return and dwell with the angels because she found no suitable abode on earth (Enoch 42:1-2). Here the pessimism is complete. Not even the go-between can risk involvement in human circumstances. How different this great divorce of heaven and earth from the spirit of the Old Testament passages which sees God vitally and vibrantly involved in the processes of nature and the movements of history. The complete absence of God was a horror that not even Koheleth in his darkest hour could contemplate.

A third implication is that *wisdom literature is part of the preparation* for the New Covenant. We must not let the absence of the promise-fulfilment motif or the lack of Messianic prophecies mislead us into thinking that the sages were not among the voices in the wilderness preparing the way of the Lord.

Most discussions of the offices of Christ overlook one of His

49. Cf. H. Ringgren's analysis of Sirach's treatment of wisdom in *Word and Wisdom*, 106-113. The key passages in *Sirach* are 1:1-10; 14:20-15:8; 24:4-11.

50. Ringgren, *op. cit.* 117-119.

important claims: '... and behold, something greater than Solomon is here' (Mt. 12:42).<sup>51</sup> The context clearly indicates that it is Solomon's wisdom, so impressive to the Queen of Sheba, which is the point of comparison, not Solomon's political power or royal splendour.

There is a close tie between Christ's claim to be the greater sage and His kingly role as Messiah. Kings were in special need of wisdom in Israel since the welfare of the people hinged on their counsel.<sup>52</sup> The wise woman of Tekoa paid a supreme tribute to David 'My Lord has wisdom like the wisdom of the angel of God to know all things that are on earth' (2 Sa. 14:20). Solomon's wisdom is proverbial, and Hezekiah apparently had hand in editing collections of proverbs (Pr. 25:1).<sup>53</sup>

It is against this background that Isaiah predicts the coming of a king who will be a Wonder of a Counsellor (9:6), *i.e.* One whose plans will never miscarry, whose advice never mislead.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, when the Spirit of the Lord comes to rest upon the shoot from Jesse's stump, it is described as 'the spirit of *wisdom* and understanding, the spirit of *counsel* and right, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord' (Is. 11:2). This kind of equipment was indispensable to the Messiah who was both king and sage.<sup>55</sup> Isaiah clearly intends to contrast this spiritual wisdom stemming from the fear of the

51. E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Harper, New York (1958) 251-253, is a welcome exception. He discusses four Old Testament offices.

52. N. W. Porteous, 'Royal Wisdom', *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* 247-261.

53. Apparently one of the hallmarks of a leader was his ability to dispense wisdom in proverbial form or to outwit a foe by the use of clever sayings. Examples of this royal one-up-manship are well-known: 'Let not him that girds on his armour boast himself as he that puts it off' (1 Ki. 20:11), 'A thistle on Lebanon sent to a cedar on Lebanon, saying, "Give your daughter to my son for a wife"; and a wild beast of Lebanon passed by and trampled down the thistle' (2 Ki. 14:9).

54. P. A. H. de Boer, 'The Counsellor' *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* 57ff., suggests that the title Everlasting Father in the same passage really means counsellor of the future. He mentions as analogies of this meaning for אב, Joseph's claim that he was the father to Pharaoh (Gn. 45:8) and Deborah's title Mother in Israel (Jdg. 5:7).

55. Cf. Je. 23:5: 'he shall reign as king and deal wisely . . . ?'.

Lord with the paganized secular wisdom which in his day has substituted shrewd political suggestion for sound spiritual counsel (Is. 5:21; 29:14).<sup>56</sup>

As the master-sage Jesus made full use of the literary tools of the wise men: parables, whose purpose was sometimes to teach and sometimes to trap the hearers, as Nathan's parable with David and Isaiah's song of the vineyard with Israel (Is. 5);<sup>57</sup> proverbs, especially those which are antithetic in their form and which underscore the teaching of the two ways so familiar to us from Proverbs and Psalm 1;<sup>58</sup> beatitudes, which are based on the אֲשֶׁר־י patterns, familiar to us from Psalms 1, 2, 32 etc.;<sup>59</sup> puzzling questions, some of which he posed and others of which he answered and so doing proved his capabilities as a sage, just as Solomon had done before him when the Queen of Sheba plied him with riddles (1 Ki. 10:1).<sup>60</sup>

Christ was not only master of the wise man's techniques; He was steeped in the wise man's message. He not only personifies wisdom, after the manner of Proverbs 8, but He virtually identifies Himself with it. Surely it is His wisdom

56. Cf. C. R. Martin-Achard, 'Sagesse de Dieu et Sagesse humaine chez Esaïe' *Maqqel Shaqedh: Hommage à Wilhelm Vischer*, Causse, Graille, Castelman, Montpellier (1960) 137-144.

57. T. Y. Mullins, 'Jewish Wisdom Literature in the NT', *JBL* 68 (1949) 335-339, distinguishes between prophetic parables and wisdom parables (which number about 16). He goes too far, of course, when he suggests that Christ was a sage who had 'Messianic claims thrust upon him' (337).

58. E.g. 'Every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit' (Mt. 7:17).

59. Approximately 75 per cent of the occurrences of XXXXX are in the Psalms and wisdom literature. R. E. Murphy, 'A Consideration of the Classification, "Wisdom and Psalms"', *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 9, E. J. Brill, Leiden (1963) 165-167, lists the 'ashrey formula as one of the formal marks of a wisdom psalm. Cf. C. Keller, 'Les "Béatitudes" de l'ancien Testament', *Maqqel Shaqedh, Hommage à Wilhelm Vischer* 88-100.

60. Although the prophets sometimes pose rhetorical questions, there is almost no prophetic parallel to this dialogical method of instruction. Questions posed by the prophets are not usually designed to put the answerer on his mettle but to get his attention. The closest counterpart to the pressing questions which punctuate the conflict between Jesus and his detractors is the round of conversations (or debates) in Job.

that will be justified by her deeds (Mt. 11:19).<sup>61</sup> The spiritual and intimate quality of His wisdom is expounded in Matthew 11:25ff., where the Son is said to have a depth of understanding of the will and ways of the Father unique to him and to those to whom he reveals it. N. W. Porteous has called attention to the similarities between Jesus' claim and wisdom's in Proverbs 8.<sup>62</sup> We should note that this wisdom is not floated on a cloud of theory but is firmly moored to the practical needs of men. It issues in a call for the heavy-laden to share their burdens with Him and the weary to find their rest in Him.<sup>63</sup>

If Christ implies that He is the Wisdom of God, the apostle Paul teaches this explicitly in 1 Corinthians 1:24, 30 and Colossians 2:2-3. In both of the passages the divine wisdom in Christ is pitted against the false wisdom of the Greeks, whether the sophisticated speculations of the Corinthians or the esoteric doctrine of an incipient Gnosticism in Colosse. Paul's emphasis is on God's plan and work, not on human reasonings. Wisdom here, as in the Old Testament, is word of action, 'God's supreme action in Christ on the Cross'.<sup>64</sup> The meaning of this becomes most clear in 1 Corinthians 1:30: Christ the wisdom of God from all eternity became our wisdom, when he provided through the cross righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.<sup>65</sup> No hollow advice or vapid theory this, but a concrete solution to man's basic problems.

61. *Cf.* also the parallel sayings in Lk. 11:49 and Mt. 23:34. What is attributed to the 'Wisdom of God' in the former (see Arndt, *in loc.*, for suggested interpretations) is credited directly to Jesus in the latter passage.

62. *Op. cit.* 261.

63. It is possible that the words of Christ in Mt. 11:28-30 are a reflection of *Wis. of Sir.* 51:23ff. where the wise man issues a similar gracious invitation to find rest and instruction in wisdom.

64. N. W. Porteous, *op. cit.* 258.

65. W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, SPCK, London (1948) 147-176, argues cogently that Paul's wisdom christology grew out of his conviction that Christ was the New Torah, the totality of God's revelation of Himself and His will for His people. Because Paul was already familiar with the Jewish equation of wisdom with Torah, the equation of Christ (the New Torah) with wisdom was readily made. In stressing this source of Paul's wisdom teaching, Davies, to my mind, understates the part that Christ's own claims played in this development.

The *Logos* teaching of John's gospel bears the marks of wisdom literature. Of course the creative word of Genesis and Psalm 33 together with the prophetic word provided the main reservoir from which John drew. But an auxiliary channel flowing into the main stream is the personification of wisdom in Proverbs 8: wisdom was in the beginning with God (Pr. 8:22; Jn. 1:1), was active in creation (Pr. 8:30; Jn. 1:3) and is a source of life (Pr. 8:35; Jn. 1:4).<sup>66</sup>

Christ is the greater wise man and the greater wisdom. In both roles He mediates the tension between nature and grace between God's transcendence and His immanence. As the sage who teaches in parables He sees a continuity between what God does in creation and what He does in redemption. The similarity between the growth of a grain of mustard and the increase of God's kingdom is not just coincidental. The one true God is operative in both. John 1 and Colossians 1 both dependent in part on Proverbs 8, teach that the Creator is the Redeemer. Transcendence and immanence are bound together without compromising the integrity of either. This is done not by driving God out of the world and using wisdom as a mediator, nor by rewriting redemptive history in the interests of exalting wisdom, but by the mystery of the incarnation. The Word, who is also the Wisdom of God, became flesh. Wisdom in the Book of Enoch roamed the earth and returned unable to find lodging in the sorry circumstances of sinful existence. Wisdom in the person of Jesus Christ dwelt with us, rolled up the sleeves and did something about those circumstances.

A fourth implication is that *wisdom literature may become one of the bridges between our Hebrew-Christian faith and non-Christian religions*, especially those that have no sense of history. Communicating the Christian message in a non-western society presents peculiar problems. The biblical story centres in God's redemptive acts in history. The good news is based on the fact that God chose one people through whose experience in

66. Cf. C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge University Press (1955) 275. See also Davies, *op. cit.*, for the relationship between Pr. 8 and the great christological passage in Col. 1:15ff.

history He could reveal Himself not only to them but to all men. The story has a beginning at creation, crisis events like the call of Abraham, the Exodus, the founding of the hart monarchy, the exile; it comes to a climax in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and moves towards its completion at the second coming.

It is difficult to tell this story (and have it understood) to a people whose view of history is static or cyclical, where events happen in endless repetition or are the result of a relentless fate rather than a sovereign purpose. It may be that wisdom literature can help us gain a beach-head. The gnomic quality of much of Proverbs or the Sermon on the Mount may capture the attention of some, while the grappling with the meaning of suffering in Job may catch others. Many a man whose attention has been arrested by the fascinating stories, poetic beauty, or practical insight of the Scriptures has lingered long enough and ranged within its pages broadly enough to allow the Spirit to do His work. As the church struggles to gain a hearing on a shrinking globe still divided by 3,000 languages and scores of culture patterns, the diversity of types of biblical literature, among which is wisdom, may well be an assets.<sup>67</sup>

What is true abroad may also hold at home. The final implication is that *wisdom literature has telling comments to make on some of the most pressing contemporary questions.*

In the midst of the current moral crisis, Proverbs and the Sermon on the Mount remind us that biblical morality is a morality of *content* as well as *context*. These writings give us specific directions in a non-directive age. They do not claim to exhaust the ways in which love is to be applied, but they give enough illustrations of its application to guard us from our own selfish tendencies. The sages were realistic. If they oversimplified, it was as an antidote against man's common temptation to rationalize and justify his own self-centred ways.

The Song of Solomon placards the beauty of marital love. As Karl Barth has shown, it is an extended commentary on Genesis 2:24-25. Through the centuries the human family has sought to cope with the awful power of sexual attraction by

67. Cf. James Barr, *op. cit.* 204-205.

denouncing it through asceticism or exploiting it in licence. The Song suggests the better way: the ardent, loyal love of husband and wife, the free expression of affection within the confines of the marriage covenant. Here can be found what all men seek and in seeking so often drive from them—a love which water cannot quench nor floods drown; a love freely offered yet beyond price (*Ct.* 8:7).

By emphasizing the fear of the Lord and the faithful discharge of one's duty (which even Koheleth does in his own way), wisdom literature points the way by which a world bogged down in meaninglessness can find some firm ground of purpose. In its frenzied search for meaning our contemporary generation would do well to recall the Preacher's pilgrimage and to learn his clearest lesson: the frailty of false goals.

Both Job and Ecclesiastes give guide-lines for trust in the midst of anxiety and suffering: the latter by rejecting cynicism and scepticism as options, and encouraging his disciples to do the best they can under unrewarding circumstances; the former, by stubbornly refusing not to trust God when it seemed on the surface that God had forfeited His right to be trusted.

In our confused world some have given up God and others take Him for granted. To the first group the Proverbs announce that wisdom can be found, life can make sense, God can be known—through trust and obedience. To the second group Job testifies that God is not at man's disposal; the situation is the other way round. Proverbs reminds us of the dependability of God; Job, of His freedom. Both sides are necessary, if the coin is to be complete.<sup>68</sup>

The first word heard from wisdom was in heaven at the beginning of creation. The last word is there, too, at the end

68. W. Zimmerli, *op. cit.*, holds that a danger of proverbs which command rather than advise (*e.g.* Pr. 1-9) is that they may lead to attempts at controlling God. By promising life and security they lend themselves to a mechanical application which stifles God's freedom. Job, Ecclesiastes, Habakkuk, Psalm 73, *etc.*, serve as excellent correctives by heralding the freedom of God. Zimmerli goes so far as to say that it is in this noble dedication to divine independence that wisdom and holy history meet.

of the ages. This wisdom is ascribed not to a sage or sovereign but to a Lamb. Here the merger of covenant faith and wisdom literature is complete. The differing strands of the revelation which began separately and were braided together in various patterns through the centuries, each lending its strength and colour to the other, for ever have become one in Christ. No wonder innumerable angels joined with all creation in grand doxology. No wonder the four living creatures said 'Amen' and the elders fell down and worshipped (Rev. 5:12-14).