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The Shady Side of Wisdom:

The Date and Purpose of Genesis 3

Wisdom, it would seem, is as inevitable to human civilization as death and taxes. Yet what it was in ancient cultures that was termed "wisdom" has been grossly obscured by modern scholarly concerns with literary "forms," on the one hand, and by romantic confusion of highly specialized social functions with the rich legacy of quaint folk proverbs in which every simple culture abounds.[1] Paul Volz pointed out decades ago that there is a world of difference between the lowly folk proverb and the highly sophisticated literary productions that we call "wisdom literature,"[2] but the difference in social milieu and social function seems largely to have escaped modern scholarship. The unhistorical or even antihistorical bias of biblical and theological disciplines has resulted in an increasingly sterile mass of irrelevant verbiage about "form criticism" but little insight into the meaning and substance of biblical narratives and literature. The constant concern for the "exegesis" of biblical texts for modern homiletical or theological purposes has resulted in a systematic process of taking texts out of their *own* historical and cultural context—and therefore to a large extent a systematic misrepresentation of the Bible that has come home to roost in the contemporary rejection of it by all sorts of movements, from Women's Lib to radical theologians, and its reduction to mere political propaganda by various secular political ambitions.

Perhaps there is no more dramatic example of the millennia-long distortion and exploitation of biblical narrative than the brief and simple narrative of Genesis 3. It has reemerged into prominence in the news media as a favorite target of Women's Lib and other such movements. One article on the subject quotes a poem of Archibald MacLeish:

The Fall! she said—
From earth to God![3]

The narrative has quite a different thrust when it is seen within the perspective of the cultural and intellectual history out of which it emerged. The problem of recovering that cultural and intellectual history is not an easy one by any means, and it cannot be done at all by treating merely one passage or literary unit of the Bible in isolation. The present treatment of Genesis 3 is, then, merely one episode of a much broader and long-continued concern for the whole problem of ancient Israelite faith, its origins and its history, in the context of the history of ancient civilization in general. At the same time, Genesis 3 is an important element in that intellectual history of biblical times, and to argue, as do some theologians, that such a treatment of biblical texts "loses them in ancient cultural history"[4] is quite the opposite to the truth. It is only by such means that the Bible becomes anything more than merely a mirror or a ground of authority for the arbitrary power or prestige structures of contemporary man, who is and was absolutely irrelevant to the ancient writer or writers. To deal with the Bible as though the real world in which its writers lived was completely irrelevant is just as absurd as the position that the real world of the present is completely irrelevant to the Christian faith. Actually, the ancient and the modern problem are much the same—just what is the connection between faith in God and the course of human experience? On this, Genesis 3 had much to say, until the substance was lost in the forest of theological battles over issues that were originally entirely alien to the author's intention.

The thesis to be presented here is nearly as simple as the story itself— namely, that the apparently naïve and childlike story is actually a work of utmost artistry and sophistication that stems from the "wisdom" tradition of ancient Israel. It is a *mashal*: an "analogy" or, better yet, a "parable" that was told to convey a point, one that could hardly be communicated in any other way with such pathos and sympathy. It is a sad comment on modern civilization that it has become merely a favorite subject for cartoonists, Women's Libbers, and Sunday school lessons for very young children. The narrative does not belong to the J document to which it is universally assigned by the literary critics (except Winnett [*JBL*, 1965, pp. 1–19], who has also seen that the story cannot be tenth-ninth century), but is a part of that enormous ferment of thought and creativity that followed the destruction of the Temple and State in 587 B.C. Like the book of Job, which it closely resembles in ways to be pointed out below, it stems from a wisdom tradition that had been chastened by calamity and that was forced to the conclusion that the old religious tradition was, after all, in the right.

It represents an astoundingly creative transformation of what probably were very old traditions, and therefore offers an engaging illustration of the fact that tradition need not be merely the rust on the bolt of civilization or religion that makes it impossible to remove the nuts. On the contrary, it may well be a source of understanding and inspiration that is otherwise unrepresented in any contemporary society and culture.

The problem of interpreting the original intention of the narrative falls thus into three distinct categories plus a final one of attempting to restate in modern thought patterns what the original author intended to say. It has been a rather curious experience to find that an attempt to understand what the narrator intended to communicate turned out to be inseparable from an understanding of the course of late pre-exilic cultural history, and both, in turn, led to a new concept of narrative forms.[5]

The problems to be dealt with are: 1) the social function of the wisdom tradition, and its connection with Genesis 3; 2) the *mashal* as a thought pattern of antiquity into which category our narrative falls; 3) evidence for the late date of the narrative—over against the general consensus that it is a J document of the tenth century B.C.; 4) the correlation of the narrative with what we know to be true of the enormous changes that took place in biblical thought between Josiah and Deutero-Isaiah—this is, in turn, inseparable from the main purpose, which is to understand what the ancient writer was saying to his contemporaries.

THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF "WISDOM"

As any *philosophiae doctor* is painfully aware, "wisdom," whether it be called *sophia* or *ḥokma* or *ḥikma*, is the presumed product of a long process of training in a specialized field of skills or knowledge. If the major contrast between a primitive culture and civilization is the latter's wealth in specialized occupations, as the anthropologists maintain, then it follows that such specialized training is the only foundation for civilization, and any society without it is necessarily "primitive." It is therefore no accident that our earliest sources indicate a very close relationship between what we blithely label "wisdom literature" and the very ancient pagan educational system by which the children of the elite class of society were trained in the necessary skills that enabled them to compete in the ancient pecking order determined by the ancient states and empires. Those skills were, first of all, literacy itself and, in pre-biblical times, administration. Though it is clear that the various terms translated as "wisdom" included far more than a specialization in scribal arts, nevertheless such works as the Egyptian "Satire on the Trades"[6] certainly places the scribe at the apex of the social scene. Further,

the wisdom literature almost certainly functioned as textbooks in the schools for scribes.

As Eissfeldt long ago pointed out,[7] a scribe was far from a mechanical copyist but, rather, was a highly cultured wise man, and often held positions of considerable authority and power. The wise men of antiquity were thus the educated elite upon whom rested the whole structure and function of the political state. Thus the wise man as a political functionary of the late pre-exilic monarchy is also well attested, particularly in Jeremiah. The bitter condemnation of the wise man together with other functionaries such as priests and (false) prophets is a recurrent theme in the prophetic books, building up to a climax just before the destruction. Is it merely a curious coincidence that only a century later Socrates was bitterly excoriating the "Sophists" of his day? Or is it, rather another indication that educated elitism is an international phenomenon, and has similar effects in radically different societies?

As a partial explanation of the problem concerning the crisis of wisdom, I would propose the "law of elaboration." It is an observation that in any society where there is a specialized group with time and resources enough, they will produce an enormously complex body of tradition concerning their own social role, whether it be religious ritual (Leviticus), building of tombs and ideologies to justify them (pyramids to Petra), architecture, theology, or form criticism. The elaboration is then inaccessible to the untrained, whether by virtue of its incomprehensibility to those without technical education or because of a jealous exclusion of those beyond the closed corporation of the elite. As the technical elaboration continues to accumulate, the range of experience, knowledge, and concern of the specialist group becomes more and more restricted, and, in the course of time, the specialist group comes more and more to resemble a primitive tribe whose concern is first to maintain the internal unity, the rigid and secure boundary line against outsiders, and the maintenance of its own power and prestige.

The closed social system becomes increasingly impervious to input from beyond the self-imposed boundary, and the dynamics of the group is characterized by a complex system of feedback. And thus we have the "Grammarian's Funeral"—settling *hoti*'s business—and the "teachers of Israel who do not know these things" (Jn 3: 10). Above all, the closed corporation is most impervious to suggestions from upstart prophets. In time, the specialized elite claim a direct pipeline to heaven, where an important god —Nabu, Thoth, Athena—becomes their divine patron and source.

A well-attested further characteristic of such elite groups is compulsive competitiveness, illustrated, for example, by King Solomon's wisdom that excelled all that of the *bᵉne qedem*—usually translated as "sons of the East," but which almost certainly should be translated as "sons of aforetime," for which compare *malᵉkē qedem* of Is 19: 11. After all, ancient man, during the brief periods of affluence and power, believed in his enormous superiority over the benighted unfortunates who were doomed to live in the pre-modern age too. The competitiveness of the wisdom tradition is also illustrated in the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, who was so overcome that the result was the foundation of the Ethiopian dynasty, according to a tradition that owes more to prestige concerns than to historical fact. However, the tradition does reflect fairly well-established habits of emotional response on the part of women.

For it is true that the products of technical specialization are intended to impress: to neutralize or overcome any possible exercise of critical faculties on the part of those who are not part of the specialized group. It is not surprising, therefore, that the king is *par excellence* the repository of all wisdom, and his regime is that alone which combines the total resources of technology with the monopoly of political and military power. This is the foundation of ancient pagan religion that was confronted with the prophetic spokesmen throughout the period of the Divided Monarchy of biblical history. (In passing, it might be advisable to point out that any similarity between the description of the ancient closed corporation of wise men and a modern university department lies in the eyes of the beholder. What I was thinking of are theological disciplines in which someone is always "going beyond" Bultmann, Barth, or whatever other king figure happens to be the apex of the heap.)

It must be admitted that the combination of the technological and the power factors in the political state is virtually a constant in human civilization. But it is one which has also periodically wrought its own destruction —and out of such a destruction at the end of the Late Bronze age, there emerged suddenly a realization that there is in addition a "transcendent factor" of human history and experience against which both military and technological power are eventually impotent.

To turn to specific biblical passages for illustration of the theoretical structure outlined above, we observe, first, that the oldest narratives of the Bible already illustrate the fact that wisdom has to do with a function in society rather than a mere category of literary form. Note, for example the wise woman of Abel, whose role it was to persuade both Joab and the elders of Abel to accept a course of action that avoided possible destruction of the town and a consequent political albatross on the neck of the king (2 Sam 20: 14–22). But wisdom is also a more than questionable charisma of Amnon's friend, who enables him to find a way to rape his half sister (2 Sam 13). (Luther was only half right; "reason" alias "wisdom" is not

only a whore but also a pimp.) English translations often disguise this wisdom by translating with a different word, such as "crafty."

The traditions about King Solomon in regard to wisdom are most eloquent in showing the contrast between the authentic Yahwistic traditions and the neo-paganism of the united monarchy. Wisdom is far from being a divine charisma in the pre-monarchical period. In Deut 32: 29, it is merely a normal human talent that is lacking—an utter inability to see the inevitable consequences of stupidity. In the two cases cited above, wisdom is also an ability to persuade others to courses of action that result in the realization of goals. But what wisdom has never or rarely been able to achieve is a critical evaluation of those goals.

With Solomon's charisma of wisdom, received at the old Gibeonite high place, almost certainly in connection with a pagan incubation ritual, the old pagan tradition of some god as the source of royal or other wisdom was reintroduced into Palestinian politics. And this had nothing to do with the Yahwistic tradition, while the gods as the donors of technical wisdom go back at least to old Sumerian myth. For political reasons, Solomon's gift of wisdom at Gibeon from the pagan Hivvite deity was followed immediately by sacrifices at the ark of the covenant in Jerusalem (1 Kings 3: 15). While his father, King David, was the Constantine of the OT, Solomon was the Kausitoros (the "bull-burner"—an appellative of Julian the Apostate), for which compare 1 Kings 8: 5, 63.

With wisdom thus firmly established as a royal gift derived from the divine world, and therefore immune to critical evaluation from merely historical sources, Solomon proceeds to act as the Supreme Court to solve the legal battle of two prostitutes. In earlier Yahwistic practice, the problem would have been brought "before Yahweh"—either by an oath, by which a perjuror would have placed herself in jeopardy, or by the casting of lots. The case is an excellent example of the mere acceptance of a verdict of power as divinely inspired. One could just as easily argue the opposite— that the true mother would rather see her child killed than give him up to an unscrupulous bitch.

The description of Solomon's wisdom that has recently been questioned by R. B. Y. Scott[8] need not be so facilely dismissed. The organization of wisdom into *mashal*, music, trees and shrubs, beasts, birds, reptiles, and fish[9] corresponds very closely to the Egyptian wisdom tradition of the New Empire, and in some ways is far more sophisticated than the Greek disciple of Aristotle, Theophrastus, several centuries later. Curiously, astronomy, which plays an important part in Egyptian wisdom, is lacking in Solomon's curriculum. It is extremely probable that it was censored by the later tradition—and the rather curious position of the heavenly bodies in the Creation story of Genesis 1, together with references in Job and Ezekiel, strongly suggests that astrology and its related ideologies were bitterly combated in exilic and post-exilic times. It is perhaps more germane to our present purposes, however, to emphasize the fact that the tradition credited a pagan divine charisma for the accomplishments of Solomon in technical knowledge. When this is compared with the surviving materials, all scholars have admitted that nothing that has survived can be credited to Solomon. There is absolutely no reason to be surprised about this seeming paradox. Solomon's function in the tradition had nothing to do with *content*, but with the social *authority* of the guild of wise men. As in so many other cases, the eminence of his wisdom, whatever it may have been, was much more a product of his social and political power at the time than of any lasting, intrinsic value. Furthermore, all wise men subsequent to his reign would be obligated by the social system to "update" his archaic observations. Whatever conclusions may eventually be agreed upon by biblical scholars, it is at present virtually impossible to conceive of a grandiose power structure of the time of Solomon that did not produce and support a gamut of technical specialists. It is equally impossible to imagine that the king would not have been *ex officio* the "king of the mountain."

The arrogant stupidity of power reinforced by access to, and control of, a wide range of technical wisdom had its logical culmination in the policies of Rehoboam, which resulted not only in the complete disintegration of the empire but also in schism of the homeland itself. Not long afterward, the invasion of Shishak brought destruction to the land, which no doubt indicates that foreign policy was no more tolerable than the domestic policy had been. Such a power structure—that recognized no binding obligation other than its own ambitions and desires—rapidly became intolerable. As in the case of the sorcerer's apprentice, the result was two such structures that limped along on two lame legs for a couple of centuries. After the final destruction, predicted by virtually all the pre-exilic prophets, some anonymous and chastened "wise man" saw the course of history in a new light and used old traditions to construct a new parable of the human plight.

The *Mashal* as a Means of Communication

Though no particular effort has been made to investigate the origin and history of the *mashal*, it can hardly be doubted that such a technique derives from very remote antiquity. It is psychologically—and perennially—much easier to tell a story, completely irrelevant to any existing contemporary vested interests, that brings to bear a principle supposedly shared by the speaker and his hearers than it is to apply the same principle directly to

a case at issue. To simplify the historical problem, we may cite only early biblical examples. First is the parable of Jotham in Judg 9 that transfers a real issue to the realm of the trees, that makes ridiculous the prestige and power ambitions of Abimelech.

Another such *mashal* is the case of the woman of Tekoa who thus appealed for the king's amnesty for his exiled son Absalom—with dire results (2 Sam 14: 1–24). Very similar is the *mashal* that Nathan uses to condemn the king himself (2 Sam 12: 1–15). In both the latter cases, a simple example arising out of everyday life, at least in verisimilitude, is used to induce the power-holder to act in accordance with his own decision. It is perhaps not entirely gratuitous to point out that the entire structure of legal thought is based upon such *mashals*: the binding nature of precedent decisions, which applies a legal principle used to decide a case to subsequent cases that are at least conceived to be analogous. One of the best historically attested examples is the trial of Jeremiah, in which he was acquitted on the ground of precedent deriving from the similar case of Micah a century before (Jer 26). Unfortunately, the text indicates very strongly that it was not concern for legal principle but political influence that saved Jeremiah from death.

There can hardly be any question about the importance of the *mashal* as a constant device of ancient thought that is just as alive today in different ways. In addition to the cases cited above, the book of Jonah is a similar type of *mashal*, and there can be no doubt that Hosea's marriage served as a vehicle for a similar thought pattern, regardless of whatever literary or historical purposes it is made to serve. It is not at all surprising that the *mashal* is most unpopular among elite circles and, at the same time, a favorite device of minority movements such as the prophets. The old cliché "comparisons are odious" would no doubt have been just as acceptable in the elite circles of the biblical monarchy as it is today with its parallelophobia. Yet the very title of the book that derives from the ancient elite is *mišlē šᵉlomo* Proverbs (of Solomon). The paradox is easily resolved. Similarities or classifications pointed out and taught by the elite have social status, and it is an affront to respectable society to point out analogies that are in conflict with the accepted social system. It is only when a social system is destroyed that a new value system can make its claim to validity, and this is the historical context of Genesis 3.

It is very tempting to see this form of argument in many other patently unhistorical narratives of the Hebrew Bible, such as many of the stories of the "common ancestors." Since the *mashal* is a form of thought that primarily classifies, such classification can be used for a number of purposes other than upbraiding or persuading, even though this is the clearest usage of the form. A *mashal* may serve as a ground, precedent, or justification of existing reality—similar to the category of myth in ancient pagan cultures. Historical persons and events become *mashal* also, as for example in Deut 28: 37. I would argue, however, that the most elaborate *mashal* in the Bible is the book of Job.

EVIDENCE FOR THE LATE DATE OF GENESIS 3

In view of the virtual unanimity among literary critics since the nineteenth century that the narrative belongs to the J document (now dated to the tenth century), it must seem presumptuous and temerarious to suggest that it actually stems from the sixth century. As a matter of fact, the old literary criticism was carried out upon the foundation of such grossly inadequate historical and linguistic presuppositions that it is a wonder that it could even approximate the truth.

Instead of dating or classifying passages by the presence of particular clichés, any sound linguistic method must deal with the entire language of the passage in question. It is true that purely formal elements of language, such as changes in orthography and grammatical elements, have become largely inaccessible because of the long-continued process of editing and standardization to which the text was subjected over a period of many centuries. However, no language stands still for long. Words become archaic and drop entirely out of use, while new words are introduced into the language either by neologism or by borrowing. As passages of the Hebrew Bible are successfully dated with some degree of confidence, those passages, in turn, furnish knowledge of the linguistic inventory of that particular time and increase the total base for reconstructing the history of the language. There is now fairly firm evidence for a systematic archaizing tendency in the exilic period, during which period (as well as perhaps a generation or two earlier) there was a reuse of archaic words and forms that are not attested over a period of perhaps four centuries. The distinction between the archaic language of the tenth century and the preceding period of the Judges and the late imitation of the old language was one which the old literary criticism simply could not cope with. The contention here is that Gen 3 is a parade example of Exilic imitation of archaic language, entirely in harmony with its setting and purpose. The language is no more tenth century than is the prose of the prologue to the book of Job.

Though it is not possible or appropriate here to present what is a very complex and sophisticated technique that perhaps can best be done by computer programming (in which work is being done), a very cursory overview of the distribution of words (*with* their meanings—since the rate of change semantically is much more rapid than morphological change) yields

information that should leave no doubt as to the linguistic and historical milieu from which Genesis 3 sprang. That milieu is the pre-exilic wisdom literature—the language of the technically trained specialists of the last generations of the kingdom of Judah. It is incredible that scholars could ever have conceived of the passage as tenth-century prose. Following is a list of linguistic indicators that supports if not proves the present thesis:

ʿarūm: Occurs elsewhere only in Proverbs, always in contrast to *ʾewīl*, "fool," thus a label for a personality trait that is highly admired as the goal of the wise[10]; and twice in Job, where it is definitely pejorative, as here. The feminine abstract form already occurs in the old Covenant Code, Ex 21: 14, where it is equivalent to the legal concept of "malice aforethought." The root shows evolution from "malice" to "cunning" to "sophisticated" to "crafty." Our passage belongs toward the end of the semantic evolution, and illustrates the change of attitude that followed the destruction of Jerusalem caused by the insane political policies of the "wise" condemned by Jeremiah. The word applied to the serpent certainly reflects the common usage of the wisdom literature.

taʾawah: Again a favorite word in Proverbs and Psalms that does not occur in the early sources. Gen 49: 26 is obscure, and probably not this word. The place name *qibrot hat-taʾawah* certainly is a popular etymology. The passage Prov 13: 12 is actually the starting point of our narrative: *ʿēṣ ḥayyīm taʾawah bāʾāh*, "a tree of life is an object of desire realized."

neḥmād: The *nifʿal* form occurs elsewhere only in Prov 21: 20 and Ps 19: 11 outside this narrative (including Gen 2: 9, which is of course closely related).

haśkīl: Infinitive, with meaning "to make wise" occurs only in Ps 32: 8, Prov 16: 23; 21: 11, Nehemiah, 1 Chronicles, Daniel. Pre-exilic uses have quite another meaning—for example, Deut 32: 29.

ʿērummīm: This word occurs elsewhere only in Ezekiel and Deut 28: 48, over against the usual older form *ʿārōm*. There is certainly a play on words intended, referring to the *ʿarūm* that characterizes the serpent.

yitperū: The word is otherwise exclusively exilic and post-exilic: Ezekiel, Job, Ecclesiastes.

ḥagōrōt: The only word in the chapter that occurs in early sources, 2 Sam 18: 11, 1 Kings 2: 5, 2 Kings 3: 21, Is 3: 24, and then becomes obsolete; outside our passage, it never recurs in exilic and post-exilic literature. The author deliberately chose an archaic or obsolete word to designate the garment of the remote past.

hiśśīʾani: Not attested with this meaning before 2 Kings 18: 29 (time of Hezekiah). A favorite word in Jeremiah and Is 36 and 37.

To avoid unnecessary elaboration, further description of the distribution of words may be dispensed with. I had expected that the poetic curses would be older, but the pattern is much the same. In view of the fact that many have expressed skepticism or even hostility to the idea that passages in biblical Hebrew can be dated by such a method as that exhibited above, several observations are in order. First, if an authentic tenth-century passage is dealt with in the same manner, the distribution proves radically different. In other words, if words with particular meanings that have a limited distribution in biblical Hebrew are carefully examined, it seems beyond doubt true that the living, working vocabulary of the time from Jeremiah to Deutero-Isaiah shows a considerable contrast to that of the tenth century. This is precisely what one would expect once the hoary old myth of the "unchanging Orient" is seen to be the nonsense it is. Furthermore, the accepted dating or assignment of passages to the various documents is based merely upon a very amateurish and historically ungrounded similar sort of method but using merely certain key words or phrases. To be sure, the exilic period undeniably did see the reintroduction of archaic linguistic features, but it is usually not difficult to recognize such archaic revivals, for the meaning in context could not be so easily revived—the words are simply used in different ways and sometimes even with different grammatical constructions.

The conclusion from this and further study is that Gen 3 is a work stemming from the period of exile, when there was a great ferment of agonizing and recrimination concerning the question: "What happened—and why?" My impression is that the unknown author was really not much concerned with trying to imitate the old classical prose: his concerns were not linguistic or literary virtuosity but telling his simple and perennial story.

THE CONTEXT OF DESTRUCTION AND EXILE

Pelikan's assessment of the predicament of Protestantism is in part correct when he complains that the Bible is absolutized "as somehow suspended from the historical process,"[11] but when he thinks it is lost "in the cultural-religious history of the Near East," one wonders what is left. His recommendation is the problem, not the answer—namely, the location of the "authority of the Bible in the context of the teaching and praying church..." The statement is historically and theologically nonsense: for the church is the product, not the cause, of the proper proclamation of the Gospel. The church is where two or three are gathered who have heard, understood, and responded to that "good news." The reduction of the Bible to a mere authority symbol of ecclesiastical or political power is the basis of the

predicament of the church, not its solution. It is precisely the taking of the Bible *out* of its context in the "cultural-religious history of the Near East" that has resulted in the foisting upon it of all sorts of man-made traditions that are increasingly seen to be both absurd and dysfunctional. The obsession with corporate self-preservation is no adequate substitute for faith, particularly when there is no very evident concern for understanding what that faith stands for and how it should be operative in our own historical context. Perhaps the Bible, like any Christian, must lose its life (in that ancient history) in order to find it.

The parable of Gen 3 conveys an insight into the process of history resulting in the destruction of the community and of virtually all its institutions. It is, first of all, to be observed that the scene is placed at the beginning of the history of man—it is not culturally bound, and the unity of all mankind as participating in the same process was correctly seen by Saint Paul. We have an historical phenomenon similar to that of the book of Job, where the event and subsequent dialogue are so successfully removed from the particularistic traditions of ancient Judah that Pfeiffer was led to conclude for a non-Israelite origin.

The breakdown of political parochialisms actually made possible a most highly creative ferment of religious thought, culminating in Job and Deutero-Isaiah. The process is difficult to trace in detail; but, in the first place, the destruction discredited with finality the old political nationalism that the prophets since Amos had protested in vain as no substitute for obedience to Yahweh. The immediate past was painful—and largely irrelevant in exile. The destroyed community had to transcend its own immediate—and grossly inadequate—past if it were to have any continuity at all.

The opposition between the prophets and the wise men, that climaxed in the time of Jeremiah when he narrowly escaped death, is the immediate context for Gen 3. In Jer 9: 22–23, we have a vain plea for the valuation of something other than the big three of the wisdom tradition: power, wealth, and wisdom itself. The message of the prophets from Amos on was that the course bent upon with fanatic determination could lead, lemming-like, only to destruction. In the time of Zephaniah and Jeremiah, the warnings were effectively neutralized: "Yahweh does not do good, nor does he do evil" (Zeph 1: 12). This attitude, illustrated also in the Psalms, underlies the words of the serpent to Eve: "You will not surely die. . ." The wise man is one "who is in control of his environment," who has both knowledge of "the way things are" and the power to carry out his desires, and thus there is an effective negation of the idea that there is a transcendent factor in history—in the process of cause and effect—that must be taken into consideration. Therefore the land is full of "those who fill their master's

house with violence and fraud" (Zeph 1: 9)—that is, wealth obtained by such procedures.

Next, we have the description of Eve's desire that is also inseparable from wisdom which itself is able to "discriminate between good and evil." This is a very subtle jibe—a comment upon King Solomon's wisdom that also effectively neutralized the old Israelite covenant theology and ethic in favor of becoming "modern." The result: schism, and destruction at the hands of Shishak. For wisdom as a means of achieving goals has rarely been able to evaluate the goal itself. With no control other than the limitations of technology and power, the possible almost automatically becomes the imperative. If some lasting fears or superstitions are left, they can also be well neutralized by proper ritual—though of this I find no hint in our narrative, and the prophets constantly protested this facile evasion of responsibility. Even the prologue to Job has a mildly ironic reference to the futility of ritual as a means of avoiding calamity (Job 1: 5).

The violation of transcendent obligation—the command of Yahweh—in favor of achieving an immediate and illegitimate goal had consequences that are described again with delightful irony. Adam and Eve became able to distinguish between good and evil, the immediate effect of which new talent was the recognition of their own nakedness. All that the much-desired "likeness to God" had done for them was to add evil to their stock of knowledge and experience. Shame for their own nakedness was soon joined by terror—of God—and the vain attempt to hide. The attempt to read into the narrative a fall "upward," on the one hand, or the discovery of sex, on the other, is a simple illustration of the misuse of biblical narrative.

The old wisdom had proclaimed: "An expectation deferred is a sickness of heart; but a 'tree of life' is an object of desire realized." One is immediately reminded of the case of poor Amnon, wasting away in his incestuous desire for his half sister, until his "wise" ways and means committee found a way for realization—which also turned out to be a "tree of life" for no one (2 Sam 13). The expulsion from Paradise made the "tree of life" inaccessible, and the divine curses constantly reminded Adam's children that the experience of evil is not necessarily being "like God, knowing good and evil."

Though it is not possible to go into all the various ramifications of narrative detail—and no parable can be expected to walk on all fours—the history of the period prior to exile furnishes some very suggestive answers to the question, "Why Eve?" The misuse of the story by contemporary power movements, who seemingly want also to throw out all weightier considerations of love and loyalty in favor of "justice" and of becoming "like men," demands at least some comment on the fact that the narrative represents

Eve as the one who succumbed to the serpent's false promises. One can only point out the unquestionable fact that since Jezebel, most Old Testament prophecy also leveled most serious charges against the upper-class aristocratic females of the time. Rather than indicating a depressed status of women, such charges (e.g., Is 3), as well as Gen 3, indicate rather an utterly unscrupulous competitiveness and unbridled ambition that could not have been without effect upon their equally unscrupulous husbands. And even after the destruction, the final confrontation with Jeremiah (Ch. 44) involves the women's self-willed and compulsive determination to continue the cult of the Queen of Heaven—and their husbands defend it. Our author gently points out that men suffer just as much as do women from the female cult of their own desires— and he cannot place the blame upon the woman.

Possibly some light may be shed upon the matter by observing that women have very often been in the peculiarly dangerous situation of being in a position to exercise enormous influence with virtually no *public* responsibility. This contrast between the public and the private sectors of human life is one of which we seem hardly to be aware, but which seems of crucial importance in understanding the polarization between the sexes that seems to be increasingly exploited for the seizure of power, prestige, and wealth— and therefore the sin of Eve all over again. The lunatic fringe of the feminist movement has at least a potential redeeming social value of reducing the birth rate, but any movement that denigrates and has nothing but contempt for the private sector of life, which must be of primary importance to the young, and probably to the vast majority of the human race, can only be deplored. The concept that the value of any person is merely a function of his income and social role is simply vicious, for it must reduce to nothing not only the vast majority of the human race who are by this definition "nobodies," but, worse, it glorifies precisely those goals and desires that are probably in the long run incompatible with any peaceful society. Over against the Roman empire, where the only respectable occupation for a "gentleman" was politics, the early biblical tradition a thousand years earlier had given the appropriate answer: that it is only the intrinsically unproductive and worthless element of society that *wants* to be in power (parable of Jotham, Judg 9).

There is an intriguing contemporaneity in Is 3: 12, where juveniles and women either are or are to be the dominant powers in society. There is no indication that this is (or was) likely an improvement. It is rather a punishment. The issue is not the age or sex of those in control—but their desires, principles, and value system. To judge from several recent theological references that indicate a bitter hostility if not contempt for "values," since it is not an item in traditional theological vocabulary (and misunderstood

by some social scientists as well), an explanation is in order. First, *Random House Dictionary*, under "values" no. 16: "to consider with respect to worth . . ." is of course when made a noun, "worth-ship" = "worship." Second, no. 10: "*Sociol.* the ideals, customs, institutions, etc., of a society toward which the people of the group have an affective [i.e., emotional] regard." These two meanings probably account for the theologians' and perhaps the social scientists' hostility to the term—but for opposite reasons; the first because the complex of such social phenomena (i.e., no. 10) is considered with enormous "respect to worth," and the latter because (unless it is exotic) it seems devoid of worth. But according to no. 16—the verbal usage—valuation is an individual and highly important *act* that has relatively little to do with what the church as an institution calls "wor[th-]ship". A "value" for a person is that which determines his choices when faced with an alternative—and it is his *choice* that exhibits what he "worships" to public view: "By their fruits you shall know them." The "worship" of the church may well be classified as the "ritual labors" of the anthropologist, which have no further significance (as Luther once pointed out) than the fact of going through the ritual—and helping keep the ritual community together, since they often have little else in common as the basis for a real *community*. All the talk about "experimental worship techniques" going around church circles today is prima facie evidence that theological (or at least biblical) illiteracy is present, just as it is when church administrators talk about the "jurisdictional units" of the church.

Both have reduced God to a mere cultural authority symbol, and both are reducing man to a mere "used-people lot." The battle between public-relations techniques and administrative-judicial technology has nothing to do with the Christian (or, originally, the Jewish) faith, but I would suggest they are both very good contemporary illustrations of the perennial validity of Gen 3. Perhaps the cartoonists are right: the idea that there could be something else is merely humorous, but somehow I doubt that the future historians will see much humor in what ensues from the present struggle for publicity and power; Eve and her colleagues are looking for technologies by which they can become gods, while many are looking for a community that will support and encourage them in the belief that honesty, integrity, and refusal to engage in gimmicks for personal ends have at least some chance for survival. The Christian community, if it exists, ought to offer something other than crucifixion. This would really be "good news."

As an epilogue to the history of the wisdom tradition, it may be observed that with its chastening in exile, the reformulation of the tradition, its expurgation, and thorough reorientation resulted in placing at the beginning: "The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom." Many centuries

later, Jesus of Nazareth again broke the identification of the fear and faith
in God with the mere teaching of religious traditions when he said, "Call no
man father . . . ." Knowledge and love of God cannot be thus absolutely
identified with a parochial, technical wisdom or politico-religious tradi-
tion—and He lost his life as a consequence.

NOTES

[1] E. Gerstenberger, "Covenant and Commandment," *JBL* 84 (1965), 38–51, esp. p. 51.
The late proverbs he cites derive *from* the covenant form: the prohibitions are followed
by the curse.

[2] *Hiob und Weisheit, Die Schriften des AT*² (Göttingen, 1921) p. 98 f.

[3] Catherine Drinker Bowen, "For American women, again it is the time to move
mountains," *Smithsonian* July, 1970, 25.

[4] J. Pelikan, "Luther Comes to America," *BLTSG* 52, Feb., 1972, 10.

[5] In a recent discussion with a zoological taxonomist, it turned out that we had reached
identical conclusions in radically different fields—namely, that classification of phe-
nomena must be based on observations as to how similarities came to be, not merely on
formal similarities as such.

[6] *ANET*, pp. 432–34.

[7] *Sanchunjaton*, p. 51.

[8] "Solomon and the Beginnings of Wisdom," in *Wisdom in Israel and the Ancient
Near East*; cf the much more defensible position he takes in *Proverbs*, AB, p. 12 f.

[9] 1 Kings 4: 32 f. This tradition is utilized in Gen 1 also.

[10] Prov 12: 16, 23; 13: 16; 14: 8, 15, 16; 22: 3; 27: 12.

[11] Cf n. 4.