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Wisdom Theology and the Centre of Old Testament Theology

by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.

Dr. Kaiser is a newcomer to the ranks of our contributors, but he is well known to many of us, if not personally then as Professor of Semitics and Old Testament in Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, as author of The Old Testament in Contemporary Preaching, editor of Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation and contributor to a variety of symposia and periodicals. His present article adds weight to the happily growing acknowledgment that the wisdom literature of the Old Testament does not belong to its theological periphery.

AT last, wisdom literature has begun to receive some of the much deserved attention it has needed. From such slow beginnings as Walther Zimmerli's article in 1933¹ and J. Coert Rylaarsdam's 1946 monograph,² the area suddenly sprang to life with such recent monographs as those of Gerhard von Rad,³ Patrick Skehan,⁴ R.B.Y. Scott,⁵ and William McKane's extensive introduction on "International Wisdom," in his Old Testament Library Commentary on *Proverbs*.⁶ Special mention should also be made of Hartmut Gese's 1958 Tübingen thesis, *Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weisheit*, and Martin Noth and D. Winton Thomas's editorial work in 1955 on that important assemblage of essays entitled *Wisdom in Israel and the Ancient Near East*.⁷

Now the literature has leaped out of all proportions as articles and monographs pour forth in such rapid succession that one can

¹ Walther Zimmerli, "Zur Struktur der alttestamentlichen Weisheit," *ZAW* 51(1933), pp. 177-204. In this article he stressed the fact that wisdom was advice (*'esah*) and not authoritative commands.

² J. Coert Rylaarsdam, *Revelation in Jewish Wisdom Literature* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1946). He attempted to discover how empirical and rational wisdom became associated with a religious character and developed such close correspondence with the teachings of the prophets and Deuteronomy.

³ Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972). Note already his *Old Testament Theology*, I (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), pp. 370-459.

⁴ Patrick W. Skehan, *Studies in Israelite Poetry and Wisdom* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1971).

⁵ R. B. Y. Scott, *The Way of Wisdom in the O.T.* (N.Y.: Macmillan Co., 1971).

⁶ William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 51-208. See his pp. xi-xxii for an excellent bibliography as it affects Proverbs.

⁷ *Vetus Testamentum Supplement*, III (Leiden: Brill, 1955).

hardly keep pace with them. However, one aspect of the subject still remains safely out of bounds for most writers. This aspect remains the Achilles' heel to most recent O.T. theologies: the successful integration of Wisdom Theology with the rest of the O.T. The reason for this state of affairs varies from scholar to scholar, but it always leads to the same result: there is no unifying theology to be found between wisdom literature and Pentateuchal or prophetic literature. More disheartening still are those results which conclude there is no unifying theology to be found even within the wisdom literature itself. This essay deliberately explores the challenge of these denials.

I. THE WISDOM LITERATURE

Usually Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs are classified as wisdom books. While Catholic scholarship adds the extra-canonical books of Ecclesiasticus (= Ben Sirach) and the Wisdom of Solomon,⁸ Jewish and Protestant scholars have traditionally restricted their investigations to the former. To these four books can be added a number of Psalms. The criteria for distinguishing wisdom Psalms falls into two categories: formal (literary style) and thematic (content).⁹ Some of the distinctive literary styles are (1) alphabetic structure (e.g., acrostic Psalms), (2) numerical sayings ("3 yea 4," etc.), (3) "blessed" sayings (*'ašrê*), (4) "better" sayings, (5) comparisons and admonitions, (6) the address of father to son, (7) the use of wisdom vocabulary and turns of phrases¹⁰ and (8) the employment of forms such as proverbs, similes, rhetorical questions and words like "listen to me." Examples of notable wisdom themes are: (1) the problem of retribution, (2) the sharp division between the righteous and the wicked, (3) exhortations to trust personally in the Lord, (4) the fear of the Lord and (5) the study of written Torah as a source of delight and meditation.

Using these criteria, Psalms 1, 37, 49, and 112 are easily classified as Wisdom Psalms. To these may be added Psalms 32, 34, 111, 127, 128 and 133. When meditation on the Torah is used as a category, then Psalms 119, 19:7-14 may also be included. Perhaps Psalm 78 with its invitation to "Give ear, my people, to my teaching" along with its proverbial (*māšāl*) and riddle (*hīdôt*) form qualifies it to also

⁸ Roland E. Murphy, *Seven Books of Wisdom* (Milwaukee, 1960); *Introduction to the Wisdom Books of the O.T.* (Collegiateville, 1965); "Introduction to Wisdom Literature," in the *Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 487-94.

⁹ These lists were compiled from Roland E. Murphy, "Psalms" in *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 574; "The Classification of 'Wisdom Psalms'", *Vetus Testamentum Suppl.* IX (1963), pp. 156-67; cf. S. Mowinckel, "Psalms and Wisdom," *Vetus Testamentum Suppl.* III (1955), pp. 205-24; and R. B. Y. Scott, *The Way of Wisdom*, pp. 193-210. ...

¹⁰ For a good list of such terms, see R. B. Y. Scott, *ibid.*, pp. 121-22.

be designated as wisdom. Thus we conclude that Psalms 1, 19B, 32, 34, 37, 49, 78, 111, 112, 119, 127, 128 and 133 should be included in the wisdom category.

II. THE QUEST FOR A UNIFYING THEME

The sentiment expressed by F. C. Prussner is almost universal: "The question of identifying the theological unity of the Old Testament remains one of the most controversial issues in biblical interpretation today."¹¹ However, this writer believes that such a centre can be identified, notwithstanding the difficulties involved. In an article in *Themelios*,¹² this centre was identified with the promise theme which commences in Genesis 3: 15; 12: 1-3 and continues through the Sinaitic, Davidic and New Covenants!

Among the first to trace the possibilities of the promise as an integrating theme was Willis J. Beecher's Stone lectures at Princeton entitled *The Prophets and the Promise*.¹³ Mention should also be made of Paul and Elizabeth Achtemeier's semi-popular treatment in *The Old Testament Roots of Our Faith* (N.Y.: Abingdon Press, 1962). In yet another work, Walther Zimmerli espouses large aspects of the promise theme, even though he is committed to a promise/fulfillment type of hermeneutic and theology.¹⁴ The most recent addition is Foster R. McCurley, Jr., *Proclaiming the Promise* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974).¹⁵

Caution must be exercised, however, to distinguish the use of the promise theme from any key-word approach, topical study, or promise/fulfillment hermeneutic. By "promise," we mean the seminal salvific idea announced by God to Eve which continues to build by accumulated details and specifications. Promise theology

- 11 F. C. Prussner, "The Covenant of David and the Problem of Unity in O.T. Theology," in *Transitions in Biblical Scholarship*, ed. by J. C. Rylaarsdam (1968), p. 29. See also R. C. Dentan, *Preface to O.T. Theology*, 2nd. ed. (N.Y.: Seabury Press, 1963), p. 117: "No question is more vexing to writers of O.T. theology than the practical one of arranging its materials." Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Problem of the Center in the O.T. Theology Debate," *ZAW* 86 (1974), p. 65; "One of the most vexing questions in the current debate on O.T. Theology . . . is the one that concerns the center and unity of the O.T." See also Hasel's *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 49-63.
- 12 Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. "The Centre of Old Testament Theology: The Promise," *Themelios* 10 (1974), pp. 1-10.
- 13 Willis J. Beecher. *The Prophets and the Promise* (New York: Thomas F. Crowell, 1905, repr. by Baker Book House, 1963 and 1975).
- 14 Walther Zimmerli, "Promise and Fulfillment," in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. by Claus Westermann (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1971), pp. 89-122.
- 15 Also see Foster R. McCurley, Jr., "The Christian and the O.T. Promise", *Lutheran Quarterly* 22 (1970), 401-10; F. C. Fensham, "Covenant, Promise and Expectation in the Bible," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 23 (1967), 305-22.

is at once and always a disclosure of the person, work and plan of God. It prefers to emphasize the *contents* of the covenants rather than their forms. In our judgment, the latter emphasis only leads to a stress on discontinuity, since there are many variegated covenants—witness the discussion over a conditional Sinaitic versus an unconditional Abrahamic-Davidic covenant. It selects the word promise¹⁶ not just because the N.T. has done so in some forty different references to the content of the O.T. material (though this is impressive to say the least), but rather because the place occupied by the announced divine word of hope and judgment is exceedingly large in the O.T. It is just such a word of promise which connects the revelation of the divine person and the revelation of the subsequent divine works. The significance, meaning, value, and worth of each of these two revelations collapses apart from the interpreting presence of these words of promise.

Finally, these words of promise cannot be understood as scattered disconnected comments on unrelated events, persons and places; rather, they form a detailed, unified and fixed divine plan which encompasses all men and all of history in one of the world's greatest *summus* ever written.¹⁷ True, it has its focal point: Israel. Indeed, it also has real ties with historical events and people.

But was such a promise doctrine in the minds and purposes of each of the O.T. writers? And can such a centre of O.T. theology embrace the entirety of O.T. revelation without artificially overloading this focal point or arbitrarily deleting large blocks of important, but nevertheless intractable material from the standpoint of the promise?

The first question we have attempted to answer elsewhere.¹⁸ If it cannot be shown that the authors of Scripture had such a concerted

16 See our discussion on conditional and unconditional aspects in the Davidic Covenant, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Blessing of David; The Charter for Humanity," in *The Law and The Prophets: O.T. Essays Prepared in Honor of Oswald T. Allis*, ed. by John H. Skilton (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1974), especially pp. 305-308.

17 The chapter entitled "The Divine Plan in History," in Bertil Albrektson, *History and the Gods* (Lund, Sweden: Berlingska Boktryckeriet, 1967), pp. 68-97, is very stimulating in this regard. He is more skeptical about the results of his study than we are, but the difference comes, as even he recognizes, in the evaluation of the force of the *Niphal* in Gen. 12: 3. He should have read O.T. Allis, "The Blessing of Abraham," *Princeton Theological Review* 25 (1927), 263-98.

18 Cf. footnote 12; also see the following articles by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.: "The Eschatological Hermeneutics of 'Evangicalism': Promise Theology," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 13 (1970), 91-99; "The Promise Theme and The Theology of Rest," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130 (1973), 135-50; "The Old Promise and the New Covenant," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 15 (1972), 11-23.

organization in mind as a result of divine revelation, this suggestion and all others which likewise fail must be abandoned. The second can be demonstrated only in a complete O.T. Biblical Theology; however, since space forbids such a venture here (not to mention the ominous mystic which surrounds so ponderous an undertaking that the majority of those who have undertaken the task have had to settle for publishing their works posthumously), one can demonstrate its adequacy by selecting one of the two most difficult areas for any O.T. theology to prove itself: the Sinaitic covenant or wisdom literature. Since we have already tackled the former problem elsewhere,¹⁹ we turn to the wisdom literature here.

III. LAW AND WISDOM IN RELATION TO PROMISE

Unlike the apocryphal wisdom books such as Ben Sirach, where "to fear the Lord" meant "to keep the Law" (Sirach 2: 16; 19: 20; 23: 27; 24: 23) canonical wisdom literature did not totally equate *hokmāh*, "wisdom" with *tôrāh*, "law."²⁰ However, the *tôrāh* of Moses did play an important part in *hokmāh*. This law of God was the delight of the wise man's attention (Ps. 1, 19, 119), especially since it gave him a standard by which to judge all his conduct. Accordingly, he could be taught and instructed in the "way" or "path" that he should go.

This "way" (*derek*) was also a "nuclear symbol" in Prov. 1-9, according to Norman Habel.²¹ It is called "the way of Wisdom" in Prov. 4: 11. The "way of wisdom" continued the older Patriarchal and Pre-monarchical phrase, "way of Yahweh" (Gen. 18: 19; Judg. 2: 22), not to mention the frequent reference in Deuteronomy to the way commanded by Yahweh.

But the special term that brought law and wisdom together was "the fear of God the Lord." Likewise, the same phrase linked both law and wisdom to the promise made to the patriarchs.

Hans Walter Wolff argued the same point when he asserted:

God's normative word from Mount Sinai to all Israel is directed towards the same goal that he had set for the patriarchs: fear of God, which produced obedience through trust in God's promise . . .²²

¹⁹ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Lev. 18: 5 and Paul: 'Do This and You Shall Live' (Eternally?)" *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 14 (1971), 19-27; and "The Weightier and Lighter Matters of the Law: Moses, Jesus and Paul," in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation: Studies in Honor of Merrill C. Tenney*, ed. by Gerald F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 176-192.

²⁰ J. C. Rylaarsdam, "The Nationalization of Wisdom," *Revelation in Jewish Wisdom Literature* (Chicago: University Press, 1946), 18-46.

²¹ Norman Habel, "The Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9," *Interpretation* 26 (1972), 131-57.

²² Hans W. Wolff, "The Elohist Fragments in the Pentateuch," *Interpretation* 26 (1972), 167.

The fear of God, which became more intimately the fear of the Lord, more than any other phrase linked the Patriarchal promise with law and wisdom. But what was this "fear"?

IV. THE FEAR OF THE LORD

During the Patriarchal era, this response of worship, knowledge, and obedience could be seen in Abraham's test of faith (Gen. 22: 12), in one of Isaac's names for God ("The Fear [*pahad*] of Isaac," Gen. 31: 42, 53), in Joseph's believing response (Gen. 42: 18) and in Job [if he is correctly located in the Patriarchal era] (Job 1: 1, 8, 9; 2: 3). Rather than suggesting some emotional or psychical form of experience, the fear of God in these contexts is more akin to our concept of "commitment to" or "trust in" God.²³

The expression continued to appear in Exodus (1: 17, 21; 14: 31; 20: 20) and Leviticus (19: 14, 32; 25: 17), but in Deuteronomy it became a focal point of interest (Deut. 4: 10; 5: 29; 6: 2, 13, 24; 8: 6; 10: 12, 20; 13: 4; 14: 23; 17: 19; 31: 12, 13, etc.). Herein the fear of the Lord was both command and taught. It had as its object the voice, word and commandments of the Lord. It involved service, love, obedience, worship, and total surrender to the living Lord. Whybray correctly summarizes the phrase:

The concept of 'fearing Yahweh' thus included every aspect of Israel's relationship to him: obedience, loyalty, worship, sacrifice and love . . . It is in this sense that Obadiah used it when he said to Elijah, "I, thy servant, fear Yahweh from my youth" (I Kgs. 18: 12).²⁴

But it was the wisdom books and wisdom psalms that made this fear the essence of knowledge and wisdom of God. Altogether, apart from such suffixial forms as "thy fear," the phrase, "the fear of the Lord," occurs only eighteen times;²⁵ however, its locations are all strategic and often supply the purpose for writing the whole book.

In Proverbs 1: 7 it served as the motto for the whole book, while it functioned as the conclusion towards which the whole argument of the book of Ecclesiastes built (Eccles. 12: 13-14). Likewise, Job 28: 28 dramatically climaxed the wisdom poem in that strategically placed chapter by saying "The fear of the Lord,²⁶ that is wisdom; and

²³ See Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 66.

²⁴ R. N. Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs* (London: S. C. M., 1965), pp. 96-97.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 96, n. 1.

²⁶ 100 MSS read YHWH, 4 read 'adōnāy YHWH and 2 omit it altogether. Most interpreters suspect the YHWH reading since YHWH is found elsewhere only once in the poetic parts of Job: Job 12: 9. However, one must not discount the introduction to the Yahweh speeches and the prose sections for no reason exists for doing so. The A-B-A (i.e. prose, poetry, prose) form belongs very much to authentic Near Eastern format, e.g. Hammurapi's law code. For references to YHWH see: Job 1: 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 21; 2: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6; 38: 1; 40: 1, 3, 6; 42: 1, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12.

turning away from evil is understanding." Rather than classifying this poem as a mere interlude or interruption in the debate between Job and his friends, it must be seen as the writer's attempt to give to the reader a revelatory perspective in the midst of so much talk which is devoid of divine wisdom. This wisdom cannot be unearthed like other rare metals or jewels. Neither can it be purchased since it is as invisible as the wind (25a), as immeasurable as the seas (25b), as unfixable as the weather forecast (26a) and as unsearchable as the traces of the lightning bolts (26b).²⁷ Only God can supply this rare commodity to the man who fears him. "He saw it" (27a), "he enumerated it" (27b), "he established it" (27c) and "searched it out too" (27d)!

In addition to its appearance as the motto for the book, "The fear of the Lord" appeared 13 more times in Proverbs (1: 7, 29; 2: 5; 8: 13; 9: 10; 10: 27; 14: 26, 27; 15: 16, 33; 16: 6; 19: 23; 22: 4; 23: 17; in addition to verbal forms like 3: 7; 14: 2; 24: 21; 31: 30). Its purpose statement in 1: 7 and its distribution throughout the book supports the contention that this teaching epitomizes and places in capsule form the main truth taught by the writer.

Indeed, the writer called this "fear" the "beginning" (*rešit*) in Prov. 1: 7 (but *tehillat* in 9: 10) of "knowledge" (1: 7) and "wisdom" (9: 10). It suggested that this attitude of total commitment to the Lord was the starting point, the inception of any and all real knowledge. It was thereby the essence and heart of any claims to wisdom. Consequently, "the roots of [knowledge] and wisdom have their source and nourishment in the fear of God."²⁸

Several of the wisdom Psalms made the same point: "the fear of the Lord is the beginning (*rešit*) of wisdom, a good understanding have all they that do his commandments" (Ps. 111: 10). Ps. 34: 11 [Heb. 12] promises to "teach the fear of the Lord," which "fear" Ps. 19: 9 describes as "clean and enduring forever" (cf. also Ps. 119: 38).

It may therefore be said with confidence that the fear of the Lord was the key theme of wisdom literature. But this raised the question of its relationship to all other things including the theology of the O.T. Some of these relationships may now be investigated under the rubrics of "life," "knowledge" and "wisdom."

V. THE FEAR OF THE LORD AND THE PROMISE OF LIFE

The connection between this fear of the Lord and life is explicitly affirmed in the text. Consider the following texts from Proverbs:

²⁷ P. A. H. DeBoer, "The Counsellor," *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, ed. by M. North & D. W. Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 1955), p. 68.

²⁸ See the unpublished M.A. thesis in O.T. at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School done under my direction by Martin R. Johnson, "An Investigation of the Fear of God as a Central Concept in the Theology of the Wisdom Literature" (June, 1974), p. 67.

The fear of the Lord prolongs life,
 but the years of the wicked will be short (10: 27).
 The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life.
 that one may avoid the snares of death (14: 27).
 The fear of the Lord leads to life;
 and he who has it rests satisfied;
 he will not be visited by harm (19: 23).
 The reward for humility and fear of the Lord
 is riches and honor and life (24: 4).

Just as Lev. 18: 5 had counselled all whose God was the Lord, "Do these things and you shall live," so the wisdom books continued the theme by pointing out that: (1) obedience is the "path [or way] to life" (Prov. 2: 19; 5: 6; 10: 17; 15: 24), (2) the teaching of the wise and the fear of the Lord is a "fountain of life" (Prov. 13: 14; 14: 27), and (3) wisdom, righteousness, and a gentle tongue are each a "tree of life" (Prov. 3: 18; 11: 30; 13: 12; 15: 4).

That was the message of the law of Moses also. Since Israel had received God's grace and redemption, they were urged to "observe" and "do" all of their new Lord's commands "so that [they] might live" (Deut. 8: 1). Such *life* was not just a materialistic thing, but it had spiritual roots and goals. Men could not *live* by bread alone, but by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God (Deut. 8: 3). Thus Israel had set in front of them life and death: they were urged to choose life (Deut. 30: 15, 19). This they could do by loving the Lord their God, obeying his voice, and "cleav[ing] to him, for he [was their] life" (Deut. 30: 20).

To solve the problem of Sinai's relationship to promise is to solve wisdom's relationship to promise.²⁹ As Roland E. Murphy observed, these wisdom themes of "the fear of the Lord," "justice," "understanding," and "honesty" would have been identified by the Jews of that era "with the moral ideals expressed in the Law."³⁰ Thus, for the man or woman who had put his personal trust in the promised one who was to come (as Abraham did in Gen. 15), he was said to be one who "feared the Lord." Included within this initial decision to commit oneself to the God who promised an heir (the "Seed"), an inheritance (the "land"), and a heritage ("in your seed all the nations

²⁹ See provisionally Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Law of the Lord: Teaching the Paths of Life," in *The O.T. in Contemporary Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), pp. 49-69, 118ff. Coert Rylaarsdam, *op. cit.*, p. 23, also pointed to the parent's instruction fastened around the neck (Prov. 6: 20-22; 7: 3) as being similar to the function of the law as a guide in Deut. 6: 4-9. Also "the upright" will possess the land as an inheritance (Prov. 2: 21; 10: 30; cf. Deut. 4: 21, 38; 15: 4; 19: 10; 21: 23; 24: 4; 25: 19; 26: 1). Alfred von Rohr Sauer argued that wisdom and law were joined together in Ezra; "Wisdom and Law in O.T. Wisdom Literature," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 42 (1972), p. 607.

³⁰ Roland E. Murphy, "The Kerygma of the Book of Proverbs," *Interpretation* 20 (1966), p. 12; also Martin Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-73.

of the earth shall be blessed") was the subsequent life-style of obedience to the word and commands of God. The result or fruit of this trust and obedience could be summed up in one word: "life". By definition, then, to fear God was to turn away from evil and to choose the way of life. All pride, arrogance, perverted speech and devious behaviour were to be dropped from the life of the man who feared the Lord (Prov. 3: 7; 8: 13; 14: 2; 16: 6; 23: 17).

VI. THE FEAR OF GOD AND THE UNITY OF KNOWLEDGE

The greatest case ever made for the unity of all truth, secular and sacred, is to be found in the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon's whole point is positive, not negative or a mere naturalistic point of view. Three times the theme of the fear of God appears (3: 14; 5: 7; 8: 12) before the grand conclusion to his whole argument appears in 12: 13: "Let us hear the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the wholeness of man (*kol hā'ādām*)."

No one has given a more illuminating essay on this book than J. Stafford Wright.³¹ Canon Wright pointed to Ecclesiastes 3: 11 which affirms:

God has made everything beautiful in its time: also he has set eternity [*hā'olām*] in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God does from the beginning to the end.

Accordingly, man in and of himself is unable to put the pieces of the puzzle of life together—secular or sacred. Yet he hungers to know how to make it all fit because he has a vacuum as large as eternity craving satisfaction in his being which has been made in the image of God. The "vanity of vanities," then, is not that life is a bore, filled with futility, emptiness with the frustrating conclusion that nothing is worth living for; instead "vanity" [*hebel*]³² is simply that life *in and of itself* cannot supply the key to the meaning of life, to a truly liberated self. No part of God's good universe or otherwise can provide any all-embracing solution that will integrate truth, learning and living.

Only when one comes to fear God, does he begin to perceive the unification of truth, learning and living (cf. Eccles. 7: 14 and

³¹ J. Stafford Wright, "The Interpretation of Ecclesiastes," originally published in THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY (1946) and now through his kind permission it is reproduced in an anthology which the writer of this paper compiled and is now conveniently available in *Classical Evangelical Essays in O.T. Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), pp. 133-50.

³² Theophile J. Meek contends that "in this short book, *hebel* would seem to be used in at least five different senses: 'futile' (most frequent; e.g., 1: 2), 'empty' (e.g., 6: 12), 'sorry' (e.g., 6: 4), 'senseless' (e.g., 8: 14), and 'transient' (e.g., 11: 10)." See his article, "Translating the Hebrew Bible," *JBL* 79 (1960), p. 331.

8: 14 as well). Life is deliberately sketched in such stark contrasts as life and death, joy and pain, poverty and wealth so that every man might realize that apart from a relationship of a total commitment ("fearing") to such a Lord, nothing will ever make sense—nor could it ever!

The charges of Epicureanism, atheism and hedonism are met head on by Otto Zöckler.

... in a time inclined to the abandonment of faith in God's holy and just government of the world, he [the writer of Ecclesiastes] clings to such a faith with a touching constancy, and defends the fact of the wise rule of the Eternal and Omnipotent God against all the frivolous scoffs of fools (ii. 26; iii. 20sq; v. 1; v. 17-19; viii. 14; ix. 1-3; compare ii. 13; iv. 5; x. 2sq; x. 13, 14) . . . He is never weary of pointing out the righteous retributions of the future as a motive to the fear of God, the chief and all-comprehending virtue of the wise (iii. 14-17; v. 6; vi. 6, 10; viii. 12sq; x. 9; xiii. 13, 14) and of commending unwavering constancy in individual callings as the best prudence . . . (compare ii. 10; iii. 22; v. 17, 18; viii. 15, etc.)³³

Once again the connection with the law is obvious: fearing God and keeping his commandments are closely linked together. The counsel given in this book is applied to the more practical situations of life, but its aim is to commend the same standard of righteousness commanded in the Law of Moses. Its own contribution to the unfolding expansion of that same core of truth is that the fear of the Lord is both the inception and essence of a truly integrated life. There is no hard divorce between the secular and sacred, faith and knowledge, learning and believing, faith and culture.

Gerhard von Rad also rightly chastizes those like William McKane who would apply an evolutionary pattern to wisdom by suggesting that earlier wisdom was at first fundamentally secular and then it was "baptized" and theologized into the Yahwistic religion. Said von Rad, with reference to a passage like Prov. 16: 7-12 where "experiences of the world" alternate with "experiences of Yahweh": "It would be madness to presuppose some kind of separation, as if in one case the man of objective perception were speaking and in the other the believer in Yahweh."³⁴ Von Rad had yielded somewhat, however; for while noticing the call of wisdom was always a divine call even though it was uttered in a secular world and apart from the sacred, he stressed that this divine call did "not legitimate itself from the saving history, but from creation."³⁵ Thus he concludes that the wisdom teachers were not at all interested in

³³ Otto Zöckler, *Proverbs of Solomon* in Lange's *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Co., 1870), p. 17.

³⁴ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, I (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), p. 440.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 452.

... searching for a world order. . . One can in no sense speak of a world order as really existing between God and man. . . The teachers move in a dialectic which is fundamentally incapable of resolution, speaking on the one hand of valid rules and, on the other, of *ad hoc* divine actions.³⁶

But this disclaimer rips wisdom away from the rest of the Old Testament and from its own stated objectives, for while it may be conceded that creation plays a greater role than previously in theology,³⁷ one must acknowledge the Biblical writer's interest in integrating all of this.

To introduce the topic of the integration of truth, fact and understanding is to appeal to the unity of truth made possible by the one God who created a UNI-verse. Thus the doctrinal base for any norms of truth and character is grounded ultimately in a doctrine of creation and the person of the Creator. It must also respectfully be pointed out that wisdom has as much a place in history between God and Israel as does Mount Sinai and the Mosaic Covenant. To have seen the place for one is to have found the function of the other. Israel, like all creatures here below, was to fear the one true God, Yahweh. The universal standards were to be those norms prescribed in the law of God (Ps. 19b; 119; Eccles. 12: 13): those Proverbs on "life," "knowlege," "understanding" and the "fear of God." Consequently, a comprehensive world view and a full enjoyment of life was impossible apart from a recognition of the Creator, the same God who had spoken his commandments. In fact, this same priority of "fearing Yahweh" is again found in Deuteronomy; only there it is a prerequisite to keeping the law and authentic living. Wisdom and law again reflect the proper responses of the authentic believer in the promise.

VII. THE FEAR OF THE LORD AND WISDOM

Wisdom cannot exist apart from the source of Wisdom; accordingly it cannot be known or applied apart from "the fear of the Lord."

Wisdom is to be found with God, and nowhere else, and unless the quest for wisdom brings a man to his knees in awe and reverence, knowing his own helplessness to make himself wise, wisdom remains for him a closed book.³⁸

At least five passages in Proverbs associate wisdom with the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1: 7, 29; 2: 5; 8: 13; 15: 33). The fear of the Lord makes a man delight in wisdom and instruction (1: 7), receive

³⁶ Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, p. 107.

³⁷ See Walther Zimmerli, "The Place and Limit of Wisdom in the Framework of the O.T. Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 17 (1964), pp. 146-58. "Wisdom thinks resolutely within the framework of a theology of creation" (p. 148).

³⁸ Lawrence E. Toombs, "O.T. Theology and the Wisdom Literature," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 23 (1952), p. 195.

counsel and reproof (1: 29-30), and listen to wisdom, understanding and the knowledge of God (2: 1-6).

Undoubtedly, the key teaching passage on wisdom is Proverbs 8. This chapter may be outlined as follows:

- A. Wisdom's Excellence 8: 1-21
 - Introduction 1-3
 - 1. In Her Truth 4-12
 - 2. In Her Loves and Hatreds 13-16
 - 3. In Her Gifts 17-21
- B. Wisdom's Origins 8: 22-31
 - 1. Her Antemundane Existence 22-26
 - 2. Her Active Participation in Creation 27-31
- C. Wisdom's Blessings 8: 32-36
 - 1. Concluding Admonition 32-33
 - 2. Promised Blessing 34-36

Centrally located in this discussion is verse 13 with its assertion that "the fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride and arrogance, and an evil way and a deceitful mouth, do I hate." But McKane cannot accept vs. 13a as it stands. He repeats in his commentary on Proverbs³⁹ the argument he developed in his *Prophets and Wise Men*,⁴⁰ viz., that "the fear of Yahweh is not an original ingredient of old wisdom . . .," but rather it is a "prophetic reinterpretation of wisdom" and "imposed" on the ancient sage to give it more of a Yahwistic flavor!⁴¹ In support of this attempt to reinterpret the Proverbs passage, it is asserted that Proverbs 8: 12-14 is dependant on Isaiah 11: 1f. which speaks of a spirit (*rûah*) of wisdom (*hokmāh*) and understanding (*bînāh*), a *rûah* of counsel (*'ēṣāh*) and power (*gebûrāh*).

³⁹ William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), p. 348. He argues that vs. 13a "interrupts the smooth transition from v. 12 to v. 14".

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.*, pp. 48f.

⁴¹ Norman Habel, *op. cit.*, pp. 144, n. 24, 143-149 incorrectly argues for a similar but internal, division between "old [empirical] wisdom materials" and "Yahwistic reinterpretations" as illustrated in Prov. 2: 1-19 where vs. 9-11, 12-15 illustrate the former and vs. 5-8, 16-19 the reinterpretive process. But the scheme appears to be thinly supported by exegesis and the pattern imposed and intruded over the text and text sequence without any evidence. It would appear that whereas Biblical scholars have argued for decades that the historical position of wisdom literature had to follow the assumed literary development of all other nations—poem, narrative, and wisdom (coming after the prophetic literature, but more precisely after Ezekiel because of the predominant factor of elements like personal recompense)—now since 1924, with the discovery and publication of the ancient Egyptian wisdom texts, they have disseminated that view, and scholars are now retreating to a new line of defense which allows for ancient "empirical wisdom sayings" but restricts theological wisdom sayings to much later prophetic-like reinterpretations. The obvious desperation tactics should be obvious to all who control and work with the Ancient Near Eastern data and the wisdom literature of the Bible.

But if Proverbs is demonstrated to be Solomonic⁴² and all evolutionary claims prove to be as unfounded as we have argued above, then the wisdom made available to mankind and kings in Proverbs is the same wisdom with accompanying qualities which is to be found in prophetic description of the Messianic king who is to come.

According to verse 12, wisdom is at home with prudence and easily rules it. Her intellectual power includes all carefully thought out plans. She offers counsel, understanding and the energy to carry out the duties conferred on kings, nobles, princes and rulers of the earth.

Her temporal priority is stressed by the use of these ten words: *rē'sīt* (vs. 22), *qedem* . . . *mē'āz* (vs. 22), *mē'ôlām* (vs. 23), *mērô's* (vs. 23), *miqqadmē* (vs. 23), *be'ên* (vs. 24), *be'erem* (vs. 25), *lipenē* (vs. 25), *'ad-lô'* (vs. 26). Three more verbs describe the way she came into existence: the Lord "created me" (*qānāni*, vs. 22); "I was born" (*nissakti*, vs. 23 or if from *nāsik*, "prince"; "I was appointed") and "I was brought forth" (*hōlalti*, vs. 24).

Since Prov. 8: 22-31 is an expansion of Prov. 3: 19 which states that "Yahweh founded the earth by wisdom; by understanding he established the heavens," the discussion on the term *'āmōn* in vs. 30 need not be so difficult. Without revocalizing the text to *'āmūn*, (Qal passive Ptcp. of *'āman*, "to nurse," hence "nursling, child") we may translate it "I was beside him, the *Master Craftsman*."⁴³ Wisdom then claims to have been present at creation; indeed, she claims to have functioned as one of the means by which Yahweh created the world. The noun *'āmōn*, then, stands in apposition to the pronoun representing Yahweh and wisdom appears as one of the key character traits manifested in that creation.

All of this suggests not a hypostatization⁴⁴ or a mythological⁴⁵ origin for wisdom, but as Whybray concludes:

The terms used to describe wisdom's origin are metaphorical not mythological, and the single word which can be interpreted as speaking of her activity [*'amon*] at the creation does not essentially go beyond the statement of 3: 19. Everything which is her said about her can be naturally interpreted

⁴² See internal claims and such discussions as R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the O.T.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), pp. 1010-21; Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of O.T. Introduction*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), pp. 465-74.

⁴³ So argues Mitchell Dahood, "Proverbs 8: 22-31: Translation and Commentary," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30 (1968), pp. 518-19.

⁴⁴ Helmer Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom: Studies in the Hypostatization of Divine Qualities and Functions in the Ancient Near East* (Lund: Hakan Ohlssons Boktryckeri, 1947).

⁴⁵ So Mitchell Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 521; W. F. Albright, "Some Canaanite—Phoenician Sources of Hebrew Wisdom," *Wisdom in Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1955), pp. 1-15.

as belonging properly to the poetical personification of an attribute of Yahweh . . ."⁴⁶

Thus the connection or association [not the full equivalence] of "the fear of the Lord" with wisdom denotes the intrinsically religious nature of any and all wisdom. Once again we see that arrogant man in and of himself can and never will understand or receive prudent counsel. This must begin with a personal relationship to the Lord, the essence of which continues to "inform" all of that man's thinking, living, and acting. Hence just as the attribute of God's holiness supplies the yardstick or norm for Mosaic theology, so God's attribute of wisdom provides the norm for all who will relate to it in "the fear of Yahweh."

VIII. CONCLUSION

Old Testament theology does have an overall unity that embraces the distinctive emphasis of each succeeding historical epoch. The alternation of three disasters (Fall, Flood, Tower) and three resulting promises (Edenic, Noachic, Abrahamic) during the pre-Patriarchal times builds up to the enlarged concept of the Patriarchal promises and continues to receive the further elucidations in the gift of: the Law (Mosaic), God's Rest (Conquest era), the Davidic Dynasty (Monarchical era), Wisdom (Solomonic Monarchy), the Day of the Lord (Earliest Writing Prophets), the Servant of the Lord (Isaianic Era of Prophets), the New Covenant (Jeremian Era of Prophets), the Kingdom of God (Exilic Prophets) and the triumph of God's Promise (Post-Exilic Prophets).

Without any doubt, the most difficult to relate to this unfolding theme is the concept of wisdom. Nevertheless, as the *kerygma* of Paul needs to be worked out in the *didache* of James, so the great Abrahamic-Davidic Promise of God must find a practical expression in the marketplace of life. As Derek Kidner so aptly stated the case:

The relation of Proverbs to the Decalogue and Deuteronomy is similarly straightforward by Scripture's own account of itself; for it is seen as the relation between the commending and the commanding of truth—a relation already established by Deuteronomy itself, with its preaching of the law. . . The harmony between these two parts of Scripture is expressed in the saying of Deuteronomy 6: 24: 'The Lord commanded us to do all these statutes . . . for our good always, that he might preserve us alive.' Here is the union of right and good, of obligation and satisfaction. Centered upon God's will, Wisdom unites with Law . . .⁴⁷

Wisdom theology is the commendation of the will of God as it relates to the entirety of life for all who are willing to start by

⁴⁶ Whybray, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁴⁷ Derek Kidner, "Wisdom Literature of the O.T.," in *New Perspectives on the O.T.* (J. Barton Payne, ed.) Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1970, p. 118.

“fearing the Lord.” To these men and women, the development of the promise may now be referred to as “life,” and “wisdom”; the plan of God in history may now be called the “way,” a veritable integration of creation theology with redemptive history and human life. These are they who have found the unifying principle to truth and meaning, life and death. They have met the wise Creator and Lawgiver.

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