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ADAM LANGUAGE IN GENESIS AND EARLY JUDAISM: A SURVEY

Bernardita Dianzon, F.S.P.

This paper examines the use of the Adam language in the Old Testament, for the purpose of determining how Paul's corporate reference to Adam is influenced by and rooted in Old Testament ideas and manner of articulation. It also includes a brief survey of the various speculations on Adam in the deuterocanonical (apocryphal) and pseudepigraphal literature—the body of writings which could give us a glimpse into the relevant background-ideas to Paul's Adam Christology, and could provide us with clues to the latter's connection with the "Son of Man."

Adam Language in the Old Testament

The term אָדָם occurs 562 times in the Old Testament.[1] It has both an individual and a collective aspect. The individual usage is quite infrequent, whereas the collective meaning is much more common.

[1]Fritz Maass, s. v. "אָדָם", in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* Vol. 1, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 75–87.

Practically, it is only in the Genesis accounts of creation and the fall that the word אָדָם is used to indicate an individual. Outside this section, the other texts where אָדָם refers to an individual are: Gen 4:1 "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, 'I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord'"; Gen 5:4 "The days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years; and he had other sons and daughters"; Sir 49:16 "Shem and Seth were honored among men, and Adam above every living being in the creation"; Tob 8:6 "You made Adam and gave him Eve his wife as a helper and support. From them the race of mankind has sprung. You said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; let us make a helper for him like himself'."[2]

Over and beyond these texts, the term אָדָם or הָאָדָם bears a distinctly corporate meaning: "humanity," "the human race," "all human beings," "everybody," or "some men." The concept "humankind" (אָדָם) of Gen 1:26 is undoubtedly treated as a collective subject, since its verb is plural ("let *them* have dominion"). The same is true with Gen 1:27 (הָאָדָם), where the author has in mind not only a single pair but the entire human race. The collective sense of אָדָם in Gen 6:7 is evident from its contrast with the collective בְּהֵמָה, "beasts." In regretting the creation of "man," God had in mind the entire human race as it existed at the time of the great flood. While employing the singular "man," the statement, "the inclination of *man's* heart is evil," points obviously to human beings in general. The same nuance is found in a number of other texts[3]:

1. Mic 6:8 "He has showed you, O *man*, what is good."
2. Job 14:1, 10 "*Man* that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble …. But *man* dies, and is laid low; *man* breathes his last, and where is he?"

[2]Jean de Fraine, *Adam and the Family of Man*, trans. Daniel Raible (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1965), 134–35.

[3]De Fraine, *Adam*, 135–36.

3. Job 28:28 "And he said to *man*, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding'."
4. Job 33:17 "that he may turn *man* aside from his deed, and cut off pride from *man*"
5. Job 34:15 "All flesh would perish together, and *man* would return to dust."
6. Prov 20:24 "A *man's* steps are ordered by the Lord; how then can *man* understand his way?"
7. Jer 10:23 "I know, O Lord, that the way of *man* is not in himself, that it is not in *man* who walks to direct his steps."
8. Isa 6:12 "… and the Lord removes *men* far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land."
9. Zeph 1:3 "'I will sweep away *man* and beast; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. I will overthrow the wicked; I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth,' says the Lord."
10. Sir 15:17 "Before *man* are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given to him."

When negated (no human being), the term assumes an even more inclusive meaning, as borne out by the following examples:[4]

1. All human beings are sinners: 1Kgs 8:46 "… there is *no man* who does not sin …."; Eccl 7:20 "Surely there is *not* a righteous *man* on earth who does good and never sins."
2. No human being has full control of one's destiny: Eccl 8:8 "*No man* has power to retain the spirit, or authority over the day of death."

אָדָם or הָאָדָם can function adjectivally, i.e., "human." To express this sense, the Hebrews often had recourse to the phrase "of a human being." The corporate character of the words אָדָם or הָאָדָם is clearly borne out by the adjectival expression. Thus they speak of "the custom

[4]De Fraine, *Adam*, 138.

of human beings" (1 Sam 7:19 and Neh 9:29); "human bone" (Num 19:16; Ezek 39:15; 1Kgs 13:2; 23:14, 20); "human cords" (Hos 11:4); and "thoughts of human beings" (Ps 94:11).[5]

The term אָדָם may mean not only mankind in general but also each individual member of that general class, in an indefinite sense. This can be expressed by such phrases as "someone," "any man" or "any man whatsoever." Sometimes the expression is a bit more explicit as in Eccl 7:28, "one man" (אָדָם אֶחָד). The indefinite use is more common in cases of legal prescriptions where אָדָם evidently means "anyone." The following texts illustrate this:[6]

1. Lev 1:2 "When *any man* of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of cattle from the herd or from the flock."
2. Num 19:13 "Whoever touches a dead person, the body of *any man* who has died, and does not cleanse himself, defiles the tabernacle of the Lord."
3. Judg 16:7 "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings which have not been dried, then I shall become weak, and be like *any* other *man*."

Sometimes אָדָם means "some men," "a certain number of men" or "a group of men," as in this example from Isa 2:11—"The haughty looks of *some men* shall be brought low, and the pride of *some men* shall be humbled."[7]

The Meaning of "בֶּן־אָדָם"

The term "בֶּן־אָדָם" can mean many things, but in most cases it conveys a collective sense. "אָדָם" generically and quantitatively means all humanity or part of that whole (someone, some). Thus בֶּן־אָדָם bears

[5]De Fraine, *Adam*, 138.

[6]De Fraine, *Adam*, 139.

[7]De Fraine, *Adam*, 139.

the meaning of "a member of the human collectivity." It is never used to refer to a descendant of Adam as an individual.

The expression is encountered both in the singular and the plural. The singular (בֶּן־אָדָם) is attributively used, as in the following:

1. Num 23:19 "God is not man, that he should lie, or a *son of man* (i.e., human being), that he should repent."
2. Ps 146:3 "Put not your trust in princes, in a *son of man* (i.e., human being) in whom there is no help."

The plural (בְּנֵי אָדָם) has the same collective force, referring simply to all those who make up the human race or partake of the same human situation. For example, divine wisdom is said to find delight "in the sons of men" (Prov 8:31). The collective sense is often highlighted through the addition of the qualifier "all": "for thou, thou only, knowest the hearts of *all the children of men*" (1 Kgs 8:39).

Now and then, בְּנֵי אָדָם, whether singular or plural, is paralleled with "man," indicating that its meaning is synonymous to "man":[8]

1. Job 25:6 "How much less man, who is but a maggot, the *son of man*, who is only a worm."
2. Ps 8:5 "What is man that you should be mindful of him, or the *son of man* that you should care for him?"
3. Prov 8:4 "To you, O men, I call; my appeal is to the *sons of men*."
4. Mic 5:6 "… like raindrops on the grass, which wait for no man, nor tarry for the *sons of men*."

It is clear from the above examples that בְּנֵי אָדָם is never intended to be translated as "sons of Adam," for it does not refer to the descendants of Adam as such, but to humankind and to the human condition as a whole.[9]

[8]De Fraine, *Adam*, 141.

[9]De Fraine, *Adam*, 142.

Adam in the Genesis Narratives

Genesis 2:4b–4:1

A number of scholars, among whom are R. Scroggs,[10] P. Humbert,[11] and H. Gressmann,[12] support the view that the Adamic narrative in Gen 2:4b–4:1 is redacted from two different myths, one about creation, and the other about paradise. Although the problem of Pentateuchal sources is the center of current scholarly debates, this view should suffice for the simple purpose of this section. The creation story gives an account of human origin and pictures the first human being's exalted stature and positive relationship with God. This strand could be found in 2:4b–7, 9a, 15, 18–24; 3:20–21, 23; and 4:1. The paradise story, on the other hand, narrates the primeval act that brought about humanity's present state of predicament. This strand is contained in 2:8, 9b, 16f., 25; 3:1–19, 22, 24.

Von Rad suggests that the creation myth is used "to push the beginning of *Heilsgeschichte* back to creation and this can only mean that creation is itself an act of salvation."[13] Here, Yahweh's intention and the result of his acts harmonize. The myth concludes with the human beings fulfilling the ends God has set for them in creation—the man obediently working on the soil, and the woman joyfully bringing forth a son and praising God for the gift of new life. The form and function of the human being are revealed in the following characteristics:[14]

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[10]Robin Scroggs, *The Last Adam* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1966), 1–14.

[11]Paul Humbert, *Études sur le récit du paradis et de la chute dans la Genèse* (Neuchatel: Secrétariat de l'Université, 1940), 48–81.

[12]H. Gressmann, "Die Paradiessage," in *Festgabe A. von Harnack* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1921), 24–42.

[13]Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* I (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 138–39.

[14]Scroggs, *Last Adam*, 45.

1. Nature—only the human being, as distinguished from animals, receives the נְשָׁמָה, the breath of Yahweh, at its creation. This renders the human being unique and open to an intimate relationship with the Creator.
2. Wisdom—this important human trait is implied in the man's naming of the animals and of woman. The act indicates wisdom great enough to perceive the essence of things, since ancient thought equates name with essence.
3. Work—Gen 2:5 implies that man is destined to be a tiller of the soil. This destiny is apparently fulfilled naturally and without question in Gen 2:15 and 3:23.
4. Sexual awareness—sex and procreation appear to be central in the creation myth. The creation of the animals is explained by the necessity of finding a helper for man, and the narrative insinuates that the function of the helper is that of a sexual partner. Gen 2:23–24 presents the etiology of sex; 3:20 explains the woman's name in terms of her function of begetting; 4:1 describes the first birth cycle and illustrates that one of man's fundamental functions is to father the human race. In the narrative, sex is accepted and delighted in as one of the created goods of life.
5. Mortality—the creation myth does not show a preoccupation with immortality, as does the paradise myth. It simply describes the origin of the present order without implying a dichotomy between previous and present conditions. In all probability, the myth conceives of the first human being as subject to death.

The human being in the creation myth is distinct from the human being of the paradise myth. Unlike the former, who is presented as wise, the latter is without knowledge. Yet for all his ignorance, the human being of the paradise myth is not innocent of selfish or personal motivation. Rather, he shows no acceptance of Yahweh's good intentions, but regards divine authority as a yoke. When the opportunity to be free from the yoke presents itself, he grabs it, eager to create his own destiny. The only change experienced by the person as a consequence of this act of rebellion was the acquisition of new knowledge. The rest of

the changes occur in the environment. Death becomes the inevitable future of human beings; hard labor on cursed soil becomes the only chance of survival; the pangs of childbirth turn out to be the necessary outcome of the awareness and desire of sex.

Combining the two myths which are so contradictory in nature results, according to Humbert,[15] in the predominance of the theology of the paradise myth. While it brings about the union of two complementary theories of the divine, it also causes the juxtaposition of two contradictory theories of the human. Several characteristics of the human being have been changed or obscured by the fusion of the stories:[16]

1. In essence, man's original destiny is no longer procreating with woman, nor producing crops from the soil, for these have been turned into punishments instead, with the negative painful side of them being given the emphasis.
2. The intuitive acceptance of sex is obscured by the paradise myth. By collocating the naming of "Eve" (חַוָּה) and the narration of the first procreation to a time after the sin, explicit mention of the use of sex happens only after knowledge has been acquired through the fruit of the forbidden tree.
3. Since the two myths vary in their presentation of human character and disposition, their fusion has the effect of creating a "before" and an "after" in the human beings' attitude towards God and the world. The paradise myth, by itself, shows no indication of a positive and faithful human attitude towards God. It portrays how the initial provocation immediately results in the first disobedience. Instead, the creation myth shows a positively disposed man

[15]Humbert, *Récit du paradis*, 48–81.

[16]Scroggs, *Last Adam*, 9–10.

who responds warmly to God's acts of creation and finds joy in the company of the woman.

4. What is most ambiguous is the degree of human knowledge before sin. The creation myth shows man in possession of such wisdom as to enable him to name the animals and woman. This prevails over the paradise myth's portrayal of man as ignorant and naive. Thus, wisdom is seen more as a created good than an evil acquired through the eating from the tree of knowledge. The combined myths tend to emphasize more the act of disobedience and Yahweh's punishment as the main result of sin.

To summarize, the function and type of the man in the composite myth remains essentially that of the paradise story. He mediates not blessings and life, but hardship, suffering, death, and alienation from God. He is now a man created for dignity and glory, but who chooses instead autonomy from the Creator, causing an irreparable break in the relationship and ushering in the evils in human existence. It is to be noted that notwithstanding the gravity of the sin, no concept of "original sin" is to be found. The man introduces sin and brings about death, but there is complete silence about an alteration of man's nature, a degeneration, as it were, from a superior level to an inferior one, much less any mention of passing on this altered nature to his progeny.[17]

Genesis 1:26–30; 5:1–5

The traditions found in Gen 1:26–30; 5:1–5 are important both for Old Testament thought and as a source of later Jewish theology of the original man. Genesis 5 appears to be older than Genesis 1. אָדָם is apparently used as a proper name in Gen 5:1a. Gen 5:1b describes the creation of אָדָם, and of other human beings "in the likeness of God."

[17]Scroggs, *Last Adam*, 9–10.

Thus the model of man is אֱלֹהִים.[18] Gen 5:15 just proves that tradition accepts the myth of the first man, אָדָם, or better yet, of a first couple. In this tradition, the human being is exalted and honored. No trace can be seen of the first couple's deviating from the path God sets for them. They are blessed by the creator and live a lengthy, dignified life. Clearly the function of the human being is to rule over the created order, the animals and the earth. This task of ruling is assigned by God to the first couple because they represent humankind, and specifically, Israel. Just as the image of אֱלֹהִים is passed on through human procreation (Gen 5:3), so the human being's function as ruler is perpetuated throughout the generations. The anthropology here is described as "kingship of all humanity." This tradition is distinguished from Genesis 2–4 in that there is no mention here of Adam's sin.[19]

Speculations About Adam in Early Judaism

Other than the Genesis narratives, the number of Old Testament passages that deal with or even mention the myth of the original man are notably scarce. It can even be surmised that the myths did not elicit sufficient interest to trigger reflection among the writers of the Old Testament. It was up to later Jewish and Christian theologians to carry on the speculation about Adam and to raise the figure in importance, even if not always in a positive light. It is in this broad stream of Jewish writings, not in gnosticism, as has been suggested by some scholars,[20] that the relevant background literature to Paul's exegesis

[18]Usually translated in the Bible as singular when referring to the God of Israel, but also as plural when referring to the heavenly beings that make up the council of Yahweh.

[19]Scroggs, *Last Adam*, 10–14.

[20]N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 19; William David Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980), 45; L. J. Kreitzer, "Adam," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald Hawthorne, et al. (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 10; A. J. M. Wedderburn, "Adam and Christ: An Investigation into the

in Romans and 1 Corinthians is to be found. Adam-christology is a Jewish phenomenon, unrelated to Gnostic *Urmensch* speculations about a glorious first creature. Through Adam language Paul describes the reality and assurance of the restoration of the human being's humanity. However, as N. T. Wright notes,

> … the use of "Adam" themes in the Jewish literature which may without controversy be considered as part of the background of the New Testament—i.e., the Old Testament, the Scrolls, and the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha—consistently makes one large and important point: God's purposes for the human race in general have devolved on to, and will be fulfilled in Israel, in particular. Israel is, or will become, God's true humanity. What God intended for Adam will be given to the seed of Abraham. They will inherit the second Eden, the restored primeval glory. If there is a "last Adam" in the relevant Jewish literature, he is not an individual, whether messianic or otherwise. He is the whole eschatological people of God.[21]

Adam theology, found in the Old Testament and intertestamental writings, fulfills the basic purpose of advancing a claim about Israel's place in God's purposes. As subsequent traditions affirm, Abraham will be God's means of undoing the sin of Adam.

Abraham and his family, as it were, inherit the role of Adam and Eve. Israel is God's true humanity. Thus *Jubilees* and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* align Israel with Adam, and the Gentiles with the beasts over whom Adam rules. *I Enoch* regards Israel as Adam's true heir. The *Wisdom of Solomon* avers that the righteous will be restored to God's intended place for them as lords of creation. *IV Ezra* and *Baruch* likewise claim that Israel will be conferred with the rights of Adam's true heir. In *BenSira* 49:16, Adam's preeminence parallels that of the great kings David, Hezekiah and Josiah earlier in the chapter. In the literature of Qumran, the references to Adam serves as one of the

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Background of 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5:12–21," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Cambridge, 1970).

[21]Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 20–21.

varied ways by which the sect appropriates to itself the status of being God's true Israel, the ones who constitute God's true humanity.

This is the overall context from which the Adam language sprang and developed. To ignore this context is to open oneself to the risk of distorted interpretation. To understand how Paul uses Adam language to convey his thought, this context must be seriously taken into account. This shall be the concern of the next subsections.

Main Lines of the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal Teachings[22]

The writings included in this survey, with the exception of the *Apocalypse of Moses* and the *Life of Adam and Eve*, are only those that represent Early Judaism, ca. 200 BCE–135 CE, prior to the proliferation of rabbinic, Gnostic and second century Christian literature. Exception has been made for the two works cited above because of their utmost importance for the study of Adam. Other writings that give relatively few references and allusions to Adam have not been included in this survey.

Wisdom Tradition: Sirach[23]

The following triple interpretation drawn from Genesis 13 can be found in the Book of Sirach:

1. Adam is Israel's glorious ancestor: "Shem and Seth were honored, and Adam above every living being in the creation" (Sir 49:16).
2. The first man lacked wisdom: "Just as the first man did not know her [Wisdom] perfectly, the last one has not fathomed her …" (Sir 24:28).
3. Genesis 1–3 portrays universal aspects of human life.

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[22]James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* I and II (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), *passim.*

[23]John Levison, *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1988), 33–48.

The glorification of Adam in Sir 49:16 is a function of Ben Sira's desire to glorify Israel. In an attempt to create an impressive list of Israelites to illustrate the glory of Israel's past, it was but logical to present Adam, the first human and first Israelite as possessing a glory which excelled all. This Adamic splendor, however, does not go back to the Adam tradition.

Sir 24:28 instead presents the first human as lacking in wisdom. This is in contrast to Job's assertion that the first human possessed wisdom beyond all other people, an interpretation which, as we have seen, harmonizes with the creation myth's presentation of the first human. But again, Ben Sira's statement about Adam here is primarily intended for another purpose, that is, to emphasize the unsearchable quality of wisdom, rather than to make an assertion about the first human.

Ben Sira's most extensive use of Genesis 1–3 is for the purpose of defending the sovereignty of God over a world where evil and good contend. In portraying humanity, Ben Sira ignores the original context of Genesis 1–3 and simply extracts from it elements which he, however, transforms by eliminating their pejorative connotations. Thus **יצר** is portrayed as a neutral impulse; the tree of knowledge is presented as merely the capacity to distinguish between good and evil; death is regarded as part of God's original plan for the cosmos. Even mortality, as drawn from Gen 2:7[24] and 3:19,[25] becomes the basis for God's compassion. There is complete silence about sin, temptation, and expulsion from paradise. By such maneuvers, Ben Sira attempts to undergird his arguments concerning the sovereignty of God and the impertinence of challenging him.

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[24]"Then the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."

[25]"In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust and to dust you shall return."

Wisdom Tradition: Wisdom of Solomon[26]

Just like Ben Sira, the author of the Book of Wisdom makes adaptations of the Genesis story in accord with his own purpose and tendency. In 2:23 and 15:8–11, he alludes to Gen 1:26–27 and 2:7, respectively, in order to anchor the Sage's appeal to wisdom:

Wis 2:23	Gen 1:26–27
… for God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity …	Then God said: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness …. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him …
Wis 15:8–11	Gen 2:7
… His heart is ashes, his hope is cheaper than dirt … because he failed to know the one who formed him and inspired him with an active soul and breathed into him a living spirit.	Then the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

He demonstrates that people are limited by mortality (7:1),[27] and for this reason they must pursue wisdom. In the same way, he describes human dominion only for the sake of showing that people need wisdom to govern the world properly (9:1–3).[28] He introduces the first man as the first of the Israelite heroes whom wisdom preserved and upon whom, as an archetype, wisdom bestowed dominion and the capacity to

[26]Levison, *Portraits of Adam*, 49–62.

[27]"I also am mortal, like all men, a descendant of the first-formed child of earth; and in the womb of a mother I was molded into flesh."

[28]"O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy, who hast made all things by thy word, and by thy wisdom hast formed man, to have dominion over the creatures thou hast made, and rule the world in holiness and righteousness, and pronounce judgment in uprightness of soul …."

rule. Since Adam is a type of the just person, the blame for the entrance into the world of death (2:24)[29] and the flood (10:3–4)[30] are imputed to the devil and Cain, respectively. Like Ben Sira, the Sage interprets Genesis 1–3 both of Adam and of human beings in general.

Philo Judaeus[31]

Philo espouses a predominantly Hellenistic view of the dichotomy between body and soul, and he employs Genesis 1–3 as a vehicle for articulating that view. He consistently presents the human race and the first man as borderline, composite creatures, who are mortal with respect to the body and immortal with respect to the mind. In *De Opificio Mundi* 64–88, he demonstrates that the human race is superior to all other races by virtue of the possession of reason. Philo's description of the first man also reflects the deep influence of Hellenistic philosophy. The first man's ability to rule over the mortal world and to commune with the heavenly world is depicted by Philo according to the lineaments of the Stoic sage. The harmony with nature provides the rationale for the biblical portrait of Adam's rulership, for such harmony is depicted as "virtue." When the human race begins to live again according to reason, as Adam and the other great figures of the biblical tradition have done, they too can assume rulership.

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[29]"But through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it."

[30]"But when an unrighteous man departed from her [wisdom] in his anger, he perished because in rage he slew his brother. When the earth was flooded because of him, wisdom again saved it, by steering the righteous man by a paltry piece of wood."

[31]D. Tobin, *The Creation of Man: Philo and the History of Interpretation*, CBQ Monograph Series 14 (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1983), *passim*; A. J. M. Wedderburn, "Philo's Heavenly Man," *Novum Testamentum* 15 (1973): 301–26; D. Jobling, "'And Have Dominion …' The Interpretation of Genesis 1:28 in Philo Judaeus," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 8 (1977): 50–82; Levison, *Portraits of Adam*, 63–88.

Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesin contains Philo's interpretation of the "two men," in which he combines Platonic cosmology, Hellenistic anthropology and his own ethical theory. He distinguishes the molded "man" of Gen 2:7 from the "man" of Gen 1:27. The molded man was created on the seventh day, consists of soul and body, and is in need of teaching and instruction. The incorporeal man, who was created on the sixth day in God's image, is a self-hearing and self-taught being. From the Platonic point of view, the two men represent the ideal intelligible human being and its sensible copy. From the anthropological point of view, they represent the immortal mind, which is independent of the body, and the mortal soul, which is connected with the body. From the ethical point of view, they represent those who live virtuously according to the rational mind, and those dominated by the flesh, which is intertwined with the inferior, sensible world.

Philo allegorizes Genesis 2–3 by interpreting Adam as the rational mind, and Eve as sense perception. This allegory presupposes Hellenistic anthropology which distinguishes the rational mind from the body. Philo interprets the entire story as an account of how the rational mind is ensnared by pleasure through sense perception. When he demonstrates that virtue and not birth determines nobility, Philo readily lays the blame on the first man for succumbing to his bodily desires rather than his mind, and when he interprets the creation of woman, he faults her for the conception of pleasure which issues in unhappiness and mortality:

> Pleasure does not venture to bring its wiles and deceptions to bear on the man, but on the woman, and by her means on him … for in us the mind corresponds to man, the senses to woman; the pleasure encounters and holds parley with the senses first, and through them cheats with her quackeries the sovereign mind itself …. Reason is forthwith ensnared and becomes a subject instead of a ruler … and a mortal instead of an immortal. (*De Opificio Mundi* 165–66)

Philo shows a consistent preference for Greek conceptions when interpreting the other details of the story. The gender differentiation into male and female is interpreted as the division into genus and species. The divine inbreathing is understood as the impartation of a soul. The human race's kinship with the first man is traced to human

beings' possession of a rational mind. However, the faintness with which the first man's glory is reflected by the human race is blamed on the result of successive degeneration.

Parenetic History:[32] *Book of Jubilees*[33]

Since the Book of Jubilees is an exhortation to obey the Law and to shun gentile practices during the Maccabean period, it portrays Adam as the first of the virtuous patriarchs of Israel. To commend the Jewish heritage of the Law, the author exonerates Adam from guilt. The couple's eating from the forbidden tree is not said to have led to universal sin, but only to the loss of speech of the animals:

> On that day [when Adam went out from the garden of Eden] the mouth of all the beasts and cattle and birds and whatever walked or moved was stopped from speaking because all of them used to speak with one another with one speech and one language. (3:28)

Adam, like the other Patriarchs after him, is presented as a priestly figure: "And on that day when Adam went out from the garden of Eden, he offered a sweet-smelling sacrifice—frankincense, galbanum, stacte and spices—in the morning with the rising of the sun from the day he covered his shame" (3:27). This becomes the historical basis for laws of purification. Adam is even portrayed as offering incense at the holy of holies. This portrait of Adam has the sole purpose of providing a narrative basis for calling his contemporaries back to the Jewish heritage and to compliance with God's will expressed in the Law.

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[32]Robert Henry Charles classifies *Jubilees* as "primitive history rewritten from the standpoint of law." Its concern is to review the critical events of the past in order to expose their significance for understanding the author's contemporary political, social, or cultural situation. Cf. *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English* II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), v.

[33]O. S. Wintermute, "Jubilees," in James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* II (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), 35–142; Levison, *Portraits of Adam*, 89–97.

Rhetorical History: Flavius Josephus[34]

Since it is Josephus' intention to convince his Roman audience that Jewish history merits attention, he employs techniques of Greco-Roman historiography. The use of main characters as *exempla* to teach contemporary lessons is a fundamental feature of Greco-Roman histories. Thus Josephus portrays the figure of Adam in order to inculcate the lesson that God rewards the obedient and punishes the disobedient. To do this, Josephus carefully reorganizes, condenses, supplements, and omits portions of Genesis. Adam and Eve are made to represent those who forfeit a life of bliss (not immortality) and fall into catastrophe because of disobedience to God. By means of techniques of rhetorical historiography, Josephus transforms the Genesis account of Adam and Eve. One technique is to explore the psychological motivations of actions. The serpent is presented as deceiving Eve due to envy. Adam's hiding from God after eating from the forbidden tree is attributed to guilt of conscience. A second technique consists of inserting a lengthy speech which repeats Josephus' moralistic retributive theme in an attempt to commend the Jewish heritage to his Roman audience. Roman notions abound in Josephus' portrait of Adam. For example, Gen 2:7b is interpreted as God's implanting a spirit and soul into Adam's body. The description of bliss which Adam and Eve should have continued to enjoy calls to mind Hesiod's depiction of primeval ease. Adam is also portrayed as predicting a destruction by flood and fire, a notion affirmed by Greco-Roman tradition. By thus writing in a manner in which his audience can relate to his characters, Josephus raised Adam to a figure of universal importance.[35]

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[34]T. W. Franxman, "*Genesis and the 'Jewish Antiquities' of Flavius Josephus*," *Biblica et Orientalia* 35 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1979), *passim*; Henry St. John Thackeray, *Josephus: The Man and the Historian* (New York, NY: Ktav, 1967), *passim*; Levison, *Portraits of Adam*, 99–111.

[35]Levison, *Portraits of Adam*, 99–111.

Apocalypses:[36] *IV Ezra*[37]

The entire book consists of a dialogue in seven episodes between Ezra, the questioner, and Uriel, the divine respondent. The first three episodes are pervaded with pessimism and present Adam, the first man of the present age, as an entirely negative figure. The positive elements in the Genesis story, such as the existence in paradise, are intentionally suppressed. Human dominion of creation is regarded as a disadvantage because the mind, which enables the human race to rule, also permits people to anticipate their own condemnation. The author depicts creation in positive terms only to evoke God's mercy toward sinful and hopeless humanity.

Since the author expresses his insights through both Ezra and Uriel, his negative view of Adam could not be regarded as monolithic. Uriel unequivocally affirms individual responsibility and attributes to Adam solely the physical difficulties of the present age. He regards these difficulties as a test and a contest by means of which human beings can act responsibly in obedience and receive the reward of eternal life. Even if Uriel views Adam as the first person to succumb to the evil seed, he never considers the sin of Adam as the factor that determines the sinfulness of the entire human race.

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[36]"Apocalypticism" is a modern designation widely used to refer to a worldview which characterized segments of early Judaism from ca. 200 BCE to 200 CE, and which centered on the expectation of God's imminent intervention into human history in a decisive manner to save his people, punish their adversaries, destroy the existing fallen cosmic order and bring it back to its original pristine perfection. Writings of this period which espouse such a worldview are classified as apocalypses. Cf. D. E. Aune, "Apocalypticism," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald Hawthorne, et al. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 25–35.

[37]B. M. Metzger, "Fourth Book of Ezra," in James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* I (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), 517–59; Levison, *Portraits of Adam*, 113–27.

On the other hand, Ezra views Israel's present predicament and eschatological destiny in a wholly negative way. His pessimistic attitude ranges from simply regarding Adam as the first sinner, to indicting him for bringing inevitable sinfulness and eschatological ruin upon his progeny. There is no clarity as to whether he believes in hereditary sinfulness or individual responsibility. His categories become rather confused when he interprets the decree of death. On the one hand, he asserts that when Adam transgressed, God decreed death for him and his progeny. On the other hand, he equally avers that the flood is a punishment for the sin committed by that generation. Bent as he is on exonerating Israel from guilt by imputing sin to Adam's transgression and evil heart, he fails to convincingly blame physical death, sin, and eschatological damnation on Adam. In the end, he attributes sin to the evil heart, without clearly elaborating how Adam passed it on to his progeny.

Other views that are peculiar to IV Ezra are:

1. Adam is not an Israelite; Israel's election is explained not by means of Genesis 1, but by means of Isa 40:15–17. The author of IV Ezra writes thus:

> As for the other nations which have descended from Adam, you have said that they are nothing, and that they are like spittle, and you have compared their abundance to a drop from a bucket. And now, O Lord, behold these nations, which are reputed as nothing, domineer over us and devour us. But we your people, whom you have called your first-born, only begotten, zealous for you and most dear, have been given into your hands. If the world has indeed been created for us, why do we not possess the world as an inheritance? How long will this be so? (6:55–59)[38]

2. Adam will have no role in the *eschaton*;[39] any primeval splendor that persists belongs to the righteous, among whom Adam may not even be counted.

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[38]Metzger, "Fourth Book of Ezra," 536.

[39]Scroggs, *Last Adam*, 30; Levison, *Portraits of Adam*, 127.

3. The author applies the language of Genesis 1–2 consistently to the human race and does not distinguish Adam of Genesis 2 as an individual.[40]

Apocalypse: II Baruch[41]

Both IV Ezra and II Baruch hold an apocalyptic view of history in which Adam is regarded as the transgressor whose sin brought about the present evil age. But unlike IV Ezra, II Baruch gives a clearer view of the result of Adam's transgression: (1) the loss of paradise and the celestial city; (2) physical death and Sheol; (3) eleven evils that characterize human existence, which are as follows:

1. "Untimely death" resulting from violence
2. "Mourning" as a ritual act concomitant with violent death
3. "Affliction" as a general anguish that characterizes the present evil age
4. "Illness" which subsumes the grief and pain associated with childbirth
5. "Labor" which has also to do with child bearing
6. "Pride" of the enemy upon the conquest of Israel
7. The realm of "death's request for blood," which most likely entails the inevitability of a violent death: "Sheol demands blood."
8. "Death of children" conveyed by the idea of the "snatching away" of the innocent
9. "Passion of the parents," which refers to the sexual urge that results in the conception of children

[40]Cf. "IV Ezra 6:45–59," in James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* I (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), 536.

[41]A. F. J. Klijn, "II Baruch," in James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* I (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), 615–52; Levison, *Portraits of Adam*, 129–44.

10. "The loftiness of men was humiliated," which implicitly harks back to Adam's physical splendor prior to his transgression
11. "Goodness" refers either to divine goodness, which vanished, or to human goodness which ceased to exist

This list represents II Baruch's view of the present age rather than early Jewish speculation about Adam's transgression.

At the theological level of interpretation, the author portrays Adam as the spiritual father of the wicked. But rather than imply that Adam's sin produced disobedience among his descendants, he avers that it is by reason of people's own failure to submit to the Creator that they become Adam's descendant. They choose to follow Adam's sinful way and to draw from his darkness rather than from the light of the Law. By this fact, they are those "born from him" who transgressed first. While IV Ezra and II Baruch agree that Adam is the ancestor of sinners, the latter employs this interpretation to argue for free will, whereas the former poses the possibility that Adam's sin affected all people morally. The question of hereditary sinfulness cannot be found in II Baruch. Individual responsibility determines the author's view of the effects of Adam's sin. But he goes even beyond this and presents Adam as the paradigm of free choice and individual responsibility. Herein lies the uniqueness of his interpretation. He takes a figure who was regarded as the possible source of moral depravity and transforms him into a paradigm of free choice. By such an argument, he silences IV Ezra's speculation on hereditary sinfulness. For him, when Adam transgressed, he merely brought physical effects to the present age; each person now chooses to inherit the age to come through his/her own obedience: "Adam is, therefore, not the cause, except only for himself, but each of us has become his own Adam" (54:19).[42]

The glory of the age to come is depicted as resulting from both the reversal of the curses of Gen 3:16–19 and the elimination of the afflictions that hold sway in the present evil age due to Adam's

[42]Klijn, "II Baruch," 640.

transgression. Paradise will be restored, evil body parts will be transformed and receive immortality rather than death, joy rather than affliction. The physical effects of Adam's sin will be reversed in the age to come for those who do not follow Adam's choice but choose freely to submit themselves to the Creator.

Vita Adae et Evae

Among the themes presented in the work *Vita Adae et Evae*,[43] the principal ones are: (1) God's mercy which is bestowed upon proper penitence; (2) Satan's enmity that continues to be directed against the *imago dei*; (3) The view that Adam is righteous and Eve guilty of bringing about the present predicament.

Adam, both during his life and after death, is the recipient of God's mercy. At every instance that mercy is obtained, the author makes it a point to give elaborate instructions on the proper observance of penitence.

Satan is portrayed as twice interrupting the human quest for God's mercy. In the first episode, he again deceives Eve, thereby causing her to pause from her act of penitence. In their conversation, Satan reveals that his enmity with human beings began when he refused to worship Adam as *imago dei*, and as a consequence, he and his angels were cast out by God and divested of glory. Thereafter, he incessantly pursues Adam with malice and treachery. In the second episode, Satan, in the form of a serpent, also attacks Seth. In this account, the serpent's use of the plural pronoun, *vos*, indicates that Seth and Eve, like Adam, possess the *imago dei*. The reader could infer from the episode that the author regards all people as *imagines dei*, and, therefore, as targets of Satan's enmity.

There is an unconcealed misogynistic element in the work. Adam is openly exonerated from guilt, his only fault being his passive submission to Eve, who is regarded as the real perpetrator of the

[43]M. D. Johnson, "Life of Adam and Eve," in James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* II (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), 249–95; Levison, *Portraits of Adam*, 174–84.

culpable act. Through contrastive dialogue and actions, the author presents Adam in a positive light, but always at the expense of Eve. Adam is presented as sensible and pious, while Eve is made to appear foolish. Eve is presented as admitting full responsibility for the sin that brought about the fall. God refuses Eve mercy and only later concedes it to her, on account of Adam.

It would be a misconception to think of the primeval glory of Adam in terms of *imago dei*. For the author of *Vita*, this attribute of Adam remains even after the loss of paradise. In fact, it becomes one of the bases for God's mercy toward Adam.

Apocalypse of Moses[44]

The author's predominant purpose is to exhort the readers to guard themselves from sin in this present life, to revive their hope in God's mercy, and to assure them that God will grant resurrection and dominion to those who shun evil. All throughout the presentation, the author invokes the figure of Adam as the archetype of the sinner who obtains God's mercy at his death. Adam is thrice presented at his deathbed:

1. When he was in agony due to relentless pain, Eve and Seth are prompted to go forth in quest of the oil from paradise to alleviate his pain;
2. After the unsuccessful quest for oil, Eve returns and explains to Adam that his pains are due to the fact that he was one of the three who had passively fallen prey to the devil's deception.
3. Adam, at the point of death, feels confident that God will take care of his body. However, his fear persists that his spirit will continue to experience God's eschatological wrath. The angels intercede for him because he is God's image and the work of God's hands. On this account Adam receives God's pardon and the promise of resurrection.

[44]The title given to the Greek text of *Vita Adae et Evae*. Cf. Johnson, "Life of Adam and Eve," 249–95; Levison, *Portraits of Adam*, 164–74.

This portrayal of Adam as a forgiven sinner is a source of hope for the readers who experience pain, grief, and enmity in the present age, which is under the devil's rule and death's dominion. The author gives the assurance that the day is coming when God will overturn the devil, restore human dominion and raise all righteous people in the resurrection.

Topical Summary of Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal Speculations on Adam

Two distinct uses of the protoanthropos myth were handed down by Old Testament writers to their successors: first, for the purpose of explaining the reality of sin and the world's present state of misery; second, for describing the human being's created state as willed by the Creator. These uses were further elucidated in the post-Old Testament period. The anthropological role of the myths was further developed, while new roles emerged as Adam motifs began to be used in eschatological writings. The description of Adam as originally intended by the Creator has become the description of humanity's final eschatological existence. *Urzeit* has become equated with *Endzeit*.

Death

The most obvious effect of Adam's transgression is death. Ben Sira sees it as consequent upon the warning in Gen 2:17: "You must surely die." Although Sir 17:1[45] alludes to death as a natural phenomenon, 25:24[46] definitely points to it as God's punishment, not a natural state of human beings. It is not, however, the man who gets the blame but the woman: "From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her

[45]"The Lord created man out of earth, and turned him back to it again."

[46]"From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die."

we all die." IV Ezra and II Baruch work on the same motif but offer different insights on human responsibility for sin.[47]

Degeneration of the Human Condition in the World

Another upshot of Adam's transgression is the corruption of the perfect world intended by God. In Genesis, there follows from human sin a cycle of violence starting with Cain's fratricide. Ben Sira also speaks of the mental and spiritual anxiety which now lies as a "heavy yoke … upon the sons of Adam" (40:111). All physical ills are imputed on the first sin. II Baruch augments the list by including erotic passion, murder, and moral depravity.[48]

Sin

A further result of Adam's (or Eve's) misdeed is the prodigious spread of sin which has taken a foothold on humanity. By the time of IV Ezra and II Baruch, this belief, which has been held even by the earliest inter-testamental writer, is proclaimed with such vigor and intensity unheard of before. The fundamental premise propounded by most authors is that sin is a universal phenomenon and every human being is thereby a sinner. But while these authors may feel the necessity to single out the event by which sin entered into human history, they may not feel equally compelled to demonstrate the exact relationship between cause and effect. Thus, while Ben Sira affirms Adam and Eve to be the first sinners, he equally pushes for individual responsibility. The Wisdom of Solomon alludes to the story of Adam but does not lay on it nor on any other event the blame for sin and death. Rather, each person is believed to bring death upon himself or herself. A similar interpretation is presented in no uncertain terms by the author of II

[47]Scroggs, *Last Adam*, 18.

[48]Scroggs, *Last Adam*, 18–19.

Baruch, who asserts both the significance of Adam in the history of sin and the individual's full responsibility.

> For though Adam sinned first and brought untimely death upon all, yet of those who were born from him, each one of them has prepared for his own soul torment to come, and again each one of them has chosen for himself glories to come …. Adam is therefore not the cause, save only of his own soul, but each of us has been the Adam of his own soul. (54:15, 19)

The author of IV Ezra holds an entirely different and pessimistic view of responsibility for sin. He presents a tightly knit causal relationship between Adam's sin and that of his offspring, which is sometimes called a "doctrine of original sin." Here we find the most intense statement about Adam's being the protosinner: "Thou didst lay upon him [Adam] one commandment of thine; but he transgressed it, and immediately thou didst appoint death for him and for his descendants" (3:7a, b). This is a recurring theme that reaches its climax in the anguished exclamation: "O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants" (7:48). The author believes that among the effects of Adam's transgression is a change in his inner nature, which is transmitted by generation to his offspring.[49]

Exaltation of Adam

With just a few exceptions, the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal literature hold Adam in high esteem and assign to him roles that have nothing to do with being the bearer of sin and death. He is portrayed as the image of humankind as originally willed by God at creation, the humankind that will be reconstituted at the new creation. He is extolled as the protopatriarch. This glorification of Adam has the effect of toning down his role as the one who ushered death into humankind, so that even the guilt for transgressing God's commandment is imputed

[49]Scroggs, *Last Adam*, 19–20.

to another. Eve becomes an easy candidate for this notorious role. Satan, too, gets to play this role in second place. The story about the angels having relations with the daughters of human beings (Gen 6:13) is just as often cited as the Adam story, to account for the origin of sin. *Jubilees* is an example of this shift in emphasis and the attribution of the beginning of human corruption to the desire of the angels.[50]

First father of Israel

In describing Israel's history, Ben Sira glorifies Adam above all human beings:

> No one like Enoch has been created on earth,
> for he was taken up from the earth.
> And no man like Joseph has been born,
> and his bones cared for.
> Shem and Seth were honored among men,
> and Adam above every living being in creation
> [καὶ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ζῷον ἐν τῇ κτίσει Ἀδάμ]. (Sir 49:14–16)

Why is Adam held in such high esteem? The heading of the quoted section in the book of Ben Sirach indicates that these lines constitute a praise of "Our Fathers." In v. 16, Adam is linked to Shem and Seth, through whom the pure lineage of Israel was transmitted to Abraham. This context suggests that Adam is being regarded as the first patriarch, the head of Israel's race, and it is for this reason that he is held in high esteem.[51]

Image and Promise for Eschatological Humanity

The second reason for exalting Adam lies beyond his being acclaimed as the first patriarch of Israel. For some writers, Adam's nature also becomes the description of God's intent for humanity. Such intention is thought to have been realized with Adam at the time

[50]Scroggs, *Last Adam*, 21–22.

[51]Scroggs, *Last Adam*, 22–23.

of creation, and will find its ultimate fulfillment for all believers in the coming age. The exaggerated descriptions of Adam are tentative efforts at illustrating the inevitable uncertainty about what his state of perfection could have been like. Human beings who experience the precariousness of their present condition could only speculate at what God could have originally created. Yet far more than the speculation about the past is the fascination with the future and what God holds in store for the righteous. The existence in the age to come is portrayed by Jewish theologians along the lines of the original existence at creation. The glorification of Adam is not an idea alien to the Old Testament. The Genesis narratives already present us with some notion about God's intent for humanity. But post-biblical writers painted an embellished picture of Adam that turned him into a superhuman. The ensuing difference between biblical and post-biblical portrayals of Adam can be traced to the interrelation of Adamic motifs with descriptions of human beings' eschatological nature. Post-biblical speculations about the world to come went beyond the realm of the merely human, messianic rule in the old historical order. New ideas about eschatological anthropology emerged as a result. But if this anthropology is to be equated with the original divine intent for humanity, then Adam's existence could not have been any different from the future existence to be expected by the blessed in the age to come. *Urzeit* equals *Endzeit*, and the latter is viewed through the lenses of the former. Jewish writers hopeful about the future, imbued eschatological nature with characteristics, which eventually came to be applied to Adam, and thus Adam came to be exalted.[52]

One way by which Adam is exalted is by referring to him frequently as king. An interesting thing is to be noted here: the shift from "Adam" as proper noun to "adam" as common noun, from a particular individual to the generic classification, i.e., "human beings." It will be noticed that Ben Sira who, in 49:16,[53] is probably thinking

[52]Scroggs, *Last Adam*, 23–25.

[53]"Shem and Seth were honored among men, and Adam above every living being in the creation."

of Adam's kingship, transfers this function to humankind in 17:114.[54] In the same way, Wis 9:13[55] shows how easily the kingship of Adam is convertible to that of human beings. Here the author speaks of human beings' rulership in greater detail than he does about Adam's rulership in 10:1–2.[56] In these writings Adam, as king, embodies God's intent for humanity and points to the centrality of the human being in the created order.[57]

Another way by which Adam is exalted is by speaking of him as possessor of glory (כָּבוֹד). A slight problem arises with the use of the phrase כֹּל כָּבוֹד אָדָם "all the glory of אָדָם," as in several of the Qumran materials connected with eschatological glory. In these references, it is not certain whether אָדָם refers to humankind or to the first human

[54]"The Lord created man out of earth, and turned him back to it again.[2] He gave to men few days, a limited time, but granted them authority over the things upon the earth.[3] He endowed them with strength like his own, and made them in his own image.[4] He placed the fear of them in all living beings, and granted them dominion over beasts and birds.[5–6] He made for them tongue and eyes; he gave them ears and a mind for thinking.[7] He filled them with knowledge and understanding, and showed them good and evil.[8] He set his eye upon their hearts to show them the majesty of his works.[9–10] And they will praise his holy name, to proclaim the grandeur of his works.[11] He bestowed knowledge upon them, and allotted to them the law of life.[12] He established with them an eternal covenant, and showed them his judgments.[13] Their eyes saw his glorious majesty, and their ears heard the glory of his voice.[14] And he said to them, "Beware of all unrighteousness." And he gave commandment to each of them concerning his neighbor."

[55]"O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy, who hast made all things by thy word,[2] and by thy wisdom hast formed man, to have dominion over the creatures thou hast made,[3] and rule the world in holiness and righteousness, and pronounce judgment in uprightness of soul …"

[56]"Wisdom protected the first-formed father of the world, when he alone had been created; she delivered him from his transgression, and gave him strength to rule all things."

[57]Scroggs, *Last Adam*, 23–25.

being in Genesis. Neither syntax nor context gives away the right interpretation. But the absence of other allusions to the Adamic myth in the Qumran materials makes the generic interpretation of אָדָם the weightier option. But whether or not אָדָם is specific or general, the glory that awaits the righteous in the age to come is identical with the glory of Adam before the fall. Similar affirmations are also scattered all over the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal literature. II Baruch unreservedly speaks of the remarkable glory to be inherited by the righteous at the eschatological age. In IV Ezra 8:51, Ezra, as the prototype of the righteous man of the future, is hereby exhorted to inquire about the glory of those who, like himself, are righteous.[58]

Two ideas are correlated in this interpretation: first, that Adam, before his fall, possessed a nature of glory; and second, that the righteous will possess glory as an eschatological gift. The answer to the question of which is prior to the other is important for delineating the function of Adam's glory. Scroggs believes that the concept of eschatological glory is prior to the concept of Adam's glorious nature before the fall. The concern of the Jewish theologians was not to perpetuate or expand upon the traditional Adamic myth, but to portray Jewish anthropology and Israel's eschatological future. The mythical figure Adam is invested with all the glorious characteristics believed to be proper for the righteous in the age to come, because the new human being cannot be but the recreation of what once truly existed in the *Urzeit*. The mythical Adam becomes the symbol of true humanity who, at the same time, embodies Israel's hope for the future.[59]

Adam and the Eschaton

It is usually believed that Adam would have a personal role in the eschatological events. But Scroggs has convincingly shown that the true subject of the Adamic motifs in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

[58]Scroggs, *Last Adam*, 26–27.

[59]Scroggs, *Last Adam*, 29.

is not Adam as an individual, but human beings in general. The individual Adam is almost never mentioned in the description of the eschatological happenings. Three tendencies emerge: (1) the tendency to associate Adam with sin and death, and thus to portray the world to come as the reversal of Adam's work. It is the contrast between the present and future worlds that they throw into relief; (2) the tendency to use Adam as an illustration of the divine intent for humanity, and thus to highlight the parallelism rather than the contrast between the creation and the *eschaton*. But even in these works, the figure of Adam rarely comes out nor is he made to play an independent role in the eschatological events; (3) the tendency to correlate creation and salvation, and thus use the Adamic myth to insure the anthropological link between the two *kairoi*. For these works, the anthropology of creation equals the anthropology of salvation.

Only in two instances is Adam given a personal role in the *eschaton*:

1. The promises made to Adam hold the key to the meaning of the *Apocalyse of Moses*. When Seth and Eve beseech God to grant the ailing Adam some oil from the tree of life for his healing, Michael responds to Seth:

> Seth, man of God, do not weary yourself with prayers and entreaties concerning the tree which flowers with oil to anoint your father Adam. For it shall not be yours now, but in the end of times. Then shall all flesh be raised up from Adam till that great day—all that shall be of the holy people. Then shall the delights of paradise be given to them and God shall be in their midst. (13:24)

2. The second instance is found in Eve's description of the happenings that brought about the expulsion from paradise (28:3–4). We encounter here two references to an explicit promise to Adam, the first being given on condition that he avoid sin; the second reference is given without conditions.

Paul and Early Judaism's Speculations about Adam

Most of the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal materials are known to have been contemporary with or later than Paul. Their usefulness for our purpose does not lie so much in the possibility that Paul may

have read any of these materials available to him in the first century, but rather, in the fact that they help us today to recover the rich religious culture and communal environment whose main concerns and ways of thinking Paul would undoubtedly have known and shared. This approach is particularly possible for the Jewish community whose oral tradition was both persistent and well diffused throughout the centuries before and after Paul. Only by identifying the prominent lines of Jewish thought, especially those that are consistent throughout the period, can we single out the teachings that the community regarded as central enough to retain in its memory during the course of the centuries. These teachings, in turn, can provide us with some clues for deciphering Paul's Adam language. Consideration of this body of Jewish writings also puts us in touch with those ideas which Paul may have found objectionable and thus countered or ignored, and these can further our insight into his use of Adam language.

The following considerations drawn from Early Judaism's speculations about Adam will help us grapple with Paul's use of Adam language in 1 Corinthians, Romans and Philippians:

1. The human being, not Adam, is the true subject of the Adamic motifs in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.
2. The Jewish theologians are not concerned seriously about Adam as a mythic personality but rather about the eschatological glory.
3. The mythical figure of Adam rarely appears and plays no independent role in the end-time events.
4. If the mythical Adam ever does play a role in the *eschaton*, it is as the symbol of true humanity.

It must be recognized, however, that Paul is a creative author whose writings exhibit a discernible tendency. His understanding of Adam is an independent contribution to biblical interpretation, which can be compared fruitfully with other individual authors who employ the figure of Adam to express their tendencies.[60]

[60]Levison, *Portraits of Adam*, 161.

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HUSBANDS, WIVES, AND OTHER STRANGERS:
Another Look at the Hosean Broken Marriage Metaphor

Mary Alexis Montelibano-Salinas

The Hosean marriage metaphor captures the religious imagination not simply because it images God as a faithful Husband. It also depicts the YHWH-Israel covenant as a *broken marriage*.[1] In Hosea chapter 1, God is a Husband wedded to a promiscuous Wife. In chapter 2, his unfaithful Wife unrepentant, his marriage over, God struggles with wrath, but moves from misery to awaken new life. In chapter 3, while there is no happy ending, hope glows in the promise of a new beginning.

As an image of a broken marriage, the Hosean metaphor portrays the crisis from the viewpoint of the Husband/God. Taking chapters 1 to 3 as a literary unit in its canonical form, this article shall explore nuances of its symbolic language that may provide openings for a deeper insight into the covenant of God with Israel.

Part I presents the paper's assumptions. The story of Husband God/Hosea is viewed against the backcloth of marriage relations and the YHWH-Israel covenant. Using a reader-response critical method,

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[1]Bernard Oestrich, *Metaphors and Similes for Yahweh in Hosea 14:2–9 (1–8): A Study of Hoseanic Pictorial Language* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1998), 96.

Part II proposes re-reading Hosea chapters 2 and 3 as a drama of the inner tensions in a faithful Husband. Ultimately, the paper aims to show how the broken marriage metaphor invites the believer to enter into the mystery of being Elect, loved by a God who yearns passionately to be known as "Beloved Spouse."

The Broken Marriage Metaphor: Framework of Assumptions

> On that day, says the LORD, you will call me "My husband," and no longer will you call me "My Baal." Hos 2:16[2]

These words of God as Troubled Husband in Hosea chapter 2 verse 16 offer a significant insight into the YHWH-Israel covenant, and a possible key to the drama.

The significance lies in the word *ba'al*—which, the NRSV footnote says, means "master"—and the use of the term *ba'al* in the marriage relationship. In ancient Israel, the husband through marriage becomes the master, lord and owner—in Hebrew, *ba'al*—of his wife.[3] The wife addresses her husband as "master," just as the slave does his owner, or the subject, his king.[4]

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[2]All Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Catholic Edition. The numbering of the Hosean texts follows this NRSV edition.

[3]J. C. de Moor, "*Ba'al*," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* II, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Hemler Ringgren (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1975), 181–2.

[4]Karl Hermann Schelkle, *The Spirit and the Bride: Woman in the Bible*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1979), 25. For John Otwell, in a culture such as ancient Israel's where corporate identity takes precedence over the individual identity, the term *ba'al* for husband and lord may simply be to identify this individual authority figure as a personification of the group. See John H. Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed: The Status of Women in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 82–3.

That marriage puts the wife under the authority of the husband does not mean tyranny of the husband. A. Shalvi points out that the marriage contract *(ketubah)* gives the woman security, her husband being obligated to honor, support, and maintain her in proper style.[5]

The term *ba'al* also has another connotation. That Israel shall no longer call God "my Baal" may also be seen as an allusion to the polemic against the cults of the Baals with which Israel's whoredom is associated in chapter 2, e.g., "I will punish her for the festival days of the Baals when she offered incense to them" (Hos 2:13a). The line following Hos 2:16 does refer directly to the cult-polemic: "For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth" (Hos 2:17).

However, H. W. Wolff points out that the text of Hos 2:16 is simply a *word-play* on the *ba'al* cult motif: if the cult-polemic was being directly referred to, the text should have said, "You will call me 'Yahweh' or 'my God' and no longer will you call me 'my Baal'." But what is primarily being referred to in Hos 2:16 is the marriage relationship.[6] In this verse, the Hebrew term used for "husband" is *'iš,* or "man"; thus, "my husband" is translated literally as "my man."[7] In Hos 2:16, God thus seems to be saying to Israel: "You will call me 'my man', 'my husband', no longer will you call me 'my lord and master'."

Wolff explains the significance of Hos 2:16 thus:

> "My husband" is apparently an endearing expression; it addresses the husband as one who belongs to, and even enjoys, a personal relationship with, the wife. On the other hand, the address "my lord," "my Baal," emphasizes the legal position of the husband as lord and owner of the

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[5]Alice Shalvi, "Agunah the Abandoned," http://www.bet-debora.de/2001/jewish-family/shalvi.htm. Accessed April 14, 2005.

[6]Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*, trans. Gary Stansell (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 49–50.

[7]Panagiotis Bratsiotis, "'ish, 'ishsha," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* I, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), 230–2; J. A. Emerton, "Names of God in the Hebrew Bible," http: www.crain.english.mwsc. edu/jonah /name_of_god.htm. Accessed April 2005.

> wife. There is not necessarily a correspondingly genuine and personal devotion to her as his wife. Hence this saying announces that Israel will not just respect Yahweh somewhat reluctantly since he is its legal lord, but it knows itself to be placed in a completely new, loving relationship with him.[8]

For H. D. Beeby, the change of appellation from *ba'al* to "my husband" also means more than merely removing the "names of the baals from her mouth," for the Hebrew *'iš* (husband) and its corresponding *'iššah* (wife) reflect an endearing mutuality, a truly personal relationship rather than the connection implied in the word *ba'al* with its suggestion of "boss."[9] According to P. David, that the YHWH-Israel relationship is one of Lover-Beloved forms the core of Hosea's radical covenant theology in chapters 1 to 3.[10]

The Covenant as Marriage

A major confession of faith underlying Israel's sacred writings is the covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel, his chosen people. The covenant is expressed in the formula "You shall be my people and I shall be your God" (Dt 26:17–18). This meant worshipping only YHWH: "The LORD is our God, the LORD alone" (Dt 6:4).

It is possible, as M. Friedman imagines, that the author of Hosea 1–3 saw the Exodus-Sinai tradition allegorically as the initial marriage proposal of God and Israel's consent. That the covenant is understood as mutually desired is expressed in Exodus:[11]

> [The LORD said] … "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now

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[8]Wolff, *Hosea*, 50.

[9]H. D. Beeby, *Grace Abounding: A Commentary on the Book of Hosea* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989), 29.

[10]Pablo S. David, "From Owner to Lover: Re-imaging God in Hosea 3:1–3," *Landas* 15:2 (2001), 94.

[11]Mordechai Friedman, "Israel's Response in Hosea 2:17b: 'You Are My Husband'," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99:2 (1980), 202.

> therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation." … The people all answered as one: "Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do." (Ex 19:4–6a, 8a)

Redeemed from slavery, Israel is God's *possession*. Israel's chosenness is an unmerited favour (Dt 7:6b) but it also carries accountability and choice:

> If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God … by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous and the LORD your God will bless you …. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish. (Dt 30: 16, 17–18a)

The Hosean imaging of the covenant as a marriage suggests that the marriage relationship had the power to stir up emotions and values of loyalty and commitment as much as, but different from, the model of the covenant as political treaty. P. David says that the political treaty model showed the wide gap between treaty parties—king and subjects, or overlord and vassal—which Hosea attempted to bridge with the relational model of marriage.[12] That Hosea however depicts the marriage bond as *broken* shows his alarm over the estrangement between Israel and YHWH. The broken marriage metaphor, says Oestrich, is a vehicle particularly for the religious motifs of *God's jealousy* and *the people's idolatry or worship of other idols as fornication*.[13]

The culpability of Israel, imaged in chapters 1 to 3 as a forsaking whoring wife, is undeniable. Writing on the marriage metaphor picked up by the prophet Jeremiah, A. C. Welch proposes a view on why it is likely that Israel forsakes her husband:

> Yahwism had this iron core in it. The iron core was that Israel could only have Yahweh on his terms …. Yahwism was no colorless faith

[12]David, "From Owner to Lover," 94.

[13]Oestrich, *Metaphors and Similes for Yahweh*, 123.

> which was simply the expression of the people's pride in itself and its destiny. It laid a curb on men, it had a yoke and bonds. The bonds were those of love, but love's bonds are the most enduring and the most exacting.[14]

That the covenant involves hard demands on God's people explains the harsh strident tone in Hosea. To be God's possession is to think and behave differently "from the nations," surely a difficult expectation to live up to. Given the disparity in the capacity of the covenant partners to be faithful, the broken marriage metaphor may be viewed as depicting God's dilemma regarding the agreement being chronically violated by elect Israel, for, as the following section shows, chapters 1 to 3 portray a Divine Husband who suffers the anguish of the broken marriage. More importantly, it is also he who labours to renew the broken relationship.[15]

YHWH as Faithful Husband: Overview

The Hosean metaphor is, essentially, that of a *broken but renewed marriage*—broken by the forsaking Wife but renewed unilaterally by the forsaken Husband.

Chapter 1 lays the basis for the marriage metaphor in God's first call to Hosea:

> When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea: "Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." (Hos 1:2)

Hosea's prophetic calling is to get married, have a whoring wife and children in order to be the public sign of God's marriage to the "whoring" land, i.e., the people Israel. Hosea obediently follows: "So

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[14]Adam C. Welch, *Jeremiah: His Time and Work* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1951 reprinted), 33. Quoted in Walter Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1–35* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988), 34–35.

[15]Oestrich, *Metaphors and Similes for Yahweh*, 120.

he went and took Gomer, daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son" (Hos 1:2).

The names of the three children whom Gomer births contain both positive and negative undertones, symbolizing the strained relations between God and his Wife. The first name "Jezreel" alludes to the Jezreel Valley where the Jehu dynasty had established power through much bloodshed (2 Kgs 9–10); the name symbolizes God's judgment against using violence for power: "for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel" (Hos 1:4b).

The second child's name "Lo-Ruhamah" or "Not Pitied" contains *ruhāmāh* meaning "mercy," with the negative form *lo'* meaning "not." *Lo-Ruhamah* symbolizes God's gradual turning away: "for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them. But I will have pity on the house of Judah" (Hos 1:6–7a).

The climax comes with the third child's name: "Lo-ammi, for you are not my people and I am not your God" (Hos 1:9). This alludes to the covenant formula. *'Ammî* means "my people," thus *"Lo-ammî"* means "not my people," symbolizing the Elect's wanton disobedience. The words "… and I am not your God" signify God's repudiation of the covenant. God declares that his marriage with Israel is over. As H. D. Beeby puts it, "God's rejection of Israel was … but a recognition and a confirmation of Israel's own choice. God's love, though endlessly patient, could not be coercive."[16]

Yet, hinting that repudiation is not the final word, chapter 1 in the NRSV ends on a note of hope: "Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea … and in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' it shall be said to them, 'Children of the living God'"(Hos 1:10b).[17] The children are also addressed in the

[16]Beeby, *Grace Abounding*, 18.

[17]A footnote in the NRSV says that the text above, Hos 1:10, is considered chapter 2 verse 1 of the Hebrew Bible. This numbering difference should be noted.

positive forms of their names in the opening verse of chapter 2: "Say to your brother Ammi and to your sister Ruhamah" (Hos 2:1).[18]

The rest of chapter 2 portrays the crisis, the divorce, triggered by the adultery of the Mother/Wife, assumed to refer to Israel/Gomer as Husband refers to YHWH/Hosea:

> Plead with your mother, plead—for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband—that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts or I will strip her naked and expose her as in the day she was born. (Hos 2:2–3a)

The words "she is not my wife and I am not her husband" reflect the *Husband's* divorce declaration. The language evokes a court, or legal, setting. But the initiative for divorce is not only by the Husband. As H. Wolff points out, the words "or I will strip her naked" are significant, because historically, it is in a divorce *initiated by the wife* where the husband indicates his freedom by "stripping her naked"; the same image used here leads Wolff to propose that it is the Wife who actively seeks the end of the marriage.[19] For Beeby, the wish for divorce appears to be mutual, although it originates with the Wife in her persistent faithlessness.[20] Y. Sherwood likewise proposes that the case seems to be one of both parties seeking separation: the Husband's dismissal of his Wife coincides with her initiative to leave, and prefigures the subsequent chapters where Israel's decision not to be a peculiar people coincides with YHWH's decision to send her back among the nations.[21]

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[18]This verse is considered chapter 2 verse 3 in the Hebrew Bible.

[19]Wolff, *Hosea*, 44.

[20]Beeby, *Grace Abounding*, 23.

[21]Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Hosea's Marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspective*, JSOT Supp. 212 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 315. Cf. Hos 8:1, 8:8, 9:17, 10:11–15.

A key assumption therefore regarding the broken marriage metaphor is that the marriage is *mutually ended:* the Husband has dismissed his Wife who, flaunting her adultery, "wants out." The crux, however, as commentaries agree—and hence a crucial premise of the metaphor—is that the Divine Husband still desires the marriage; it is he who is torn apart between destroying his Wife, letting her go, and wooing her back.

Chapter 2, the heart of the drama, is composed of two movements set mostly in poetic verse. The first movement, vv. 2–13, is vitriolic, depicting the forsaken Husband's wrath. The boundaries between Husband YHWH and Husband Hosea are often blurred, but the second movement, vv. 14–23, glowing with hope, seems to focus on YHWH.

Of particular interest are the charges and the triple use of the word "Therefore" which is usually associated with judgement and punishment. The first accusation charges the Wife with pursuing lovers: "For she said, I will go after my lovers / they give me my bread and my water" (Hos 2:5b). This is immediately followed by the first "Therefore" announcing isolation and seclusion:

> Therefore I will hedge her way with thorns;
> and I will build a wall against her,
> so that she cannot find her paths. (Hos 2:6)

The second accusation cites the Wife's lack of knowledge of him: "She did not know / that it was I who gave her / the grain, the wine, and the oil" (Hos 2:8a). This is followed by a second "Therefore" announcing deprivation and public shaming:

> Therefore I will take back my grain in its time,
> and my wine in its season;
> and I will take away my wool and my flax,
> which were to cover her nakedness.
> Now I will uncover her shame
> in the sight of her lovers. (Hos 2:9–10a)

The wrath of the Divine Husband rages on:

> I will punish her for the festival days of the Baals,
> when she offered incense to them
> and decked herself with her ring and jewellery,

> and went after her lovers,
> and forgot me, says the LORD. (Hos 2:13)

This punitive intent is immediately followed by a third "Therefore" which, *surprisingly however*, shifts to a tender conciliatory mode, and ushers in the second movement:

> Therefore I will now persuade her,
> and bring her into the wilderness,
> and speak tenderly to her. (Hos 2:14)

YHWH bares his longing for her reciprocal response:

> There she shall respond as in the days of her youth,
> as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. (Hos 2:15b)

As the language turns into prose form, there is also a turn-about. YHWH addresses his wife for the first time in the narrative, envisaging their new relationship:

> On that day, says the LORD, you will call me "My husband," and no longer will you call me "My Baal." (Hos 2:16)

Initiating a new covenant with creation (Hos 2:18), he will re-marry his Wife:

> And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD. (Hos 2:19–20)

Chapter 3 shows YHWH affirming his unconditional love for his unfaithful wife:

> The LORD said to me again, "Go love a woman who has a lover, and is an adulteress, just as the LORD loves the people of Israel who turn to other gods, and love raisin cakes." (Hos 3:1)

W. Brueggemann finds in Hosea chapter 2 a theme of *reversal*: The covenant was marked by a retribution theology, i.e., only by faithfulness can Israel receive blessings. But the discontinuity between Israel's infidelity and her reception of blessings suggests a different theological affirmation—blessings *do* come to the disobedient, because the

promises are grounded in YHWH's initiating action "which is grace."[22] Brueggemann continues:

> Gracious gifts derive not from what Israel does, but from who YHWH is. The grounding of promise in grace rather than in obedience is not a complete departure from the old covenant … but a new emphasis. Covenant obedience is not the basis of the relation, and failure to obey does not void the relation …. God of the Covenant transcends the necessities of covenant agreement for the sake of relation.[23]

For Brueggemann, the punishment of Israel is certain because she is guilty, but because YHWH is sovereign, punishment may be averted.[24] In the context of the covenant, punishment for disobedience is warranted. But in the context of the metaphor's premise that the marriage is mutually ended, punishment would seem vindictive. Hosea's insight that YHWH sees Israel calling him "my man" and no longer "my master" in a renewed marriage is crucial. It implies perhaps that the quality of their marriage has not been satisfactory even to YHWH; he thus seeks a change in their new relations. As P. David says, what God desires from Israel his wife is not fear nor subservience but her *love*.[25]

Marriage Relations

Hosea's model of the covenant as marital love and partnership, not subservience, is interesting. It reflects a notion of marriage as *a love relationship and partnership* evident in OT stories, such as Isaac-Rebekah (Gen 24:67), Jacob-Rachel (Gen 29:1–30), Elkanah-Hannah (1 Sam 1:8).[26]

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[22]Walter Brueggemann, *Tradition for Crisis: A Study in Hosea* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1968), 78–79.

[23]Brueggemann, *Tradition for Crisis*, 78–79.

[24]Brueggemann, *Tradition for Crisis*, 85.

[25]David, "From Owner to Lover," 92.

[26]Schelkle, *The Spirit and the Bride*, 30.

Alongside the notion of covenant as *marital love*, another aspect in the metaphor is the juridical legal aspect of marriage. Oestrich notes that the language of a divorce declaration and accusations conjures marriage as a relationship with mutual obligations and expectations: the husband's obligation is to provide food, clothing, and the wife's sustenance; the wife is expected to remain faithful.[27] In the law codes, the wife is mentioned as part of the patriarch's household, e.g., in the Exodus commandment:

> You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbour. (Ex 20:17)

That the wife is mentioned here in the category of a man's belongings suggests the notion of marriage as *legal possession,* i.e., the wife was regarded as property of her husband, the wife's status seems to be practically no higher than that of slave.[28] Interestingly, however, this commandment is formulated differently in Deuteronomy, suggesting a dynamic plurality in views regarding marital relations:

> Neither shall you covet your neighbour's wife. Neither shall you desire your neighbour's house, or field, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbour. (Dt 5:21)

That the wife is here named first and separately before the household suggests the wife's standing as an eminent part of the patriarch's household.[29]

The question of parity in the man-woman relationship in ancient codes on marriage is not easy to answer. The Law allowed the husband to divorce his wife, only with due cause, after writing a bill of divorce (Dt 24:1). But the Torah expressly prohibited a man from re-marrying the wife he had divorced, citing its dire consequence:

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[27]Oestrich, *Metaphors and Similes for Yahweh*, 97.

[28]David, "From Owner to Lover," 94.

[29]Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed*, 76.

> Her first husband who sent her away is not permitted to take her again to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that would be abhorrent to the LORD, and you shall not bring guilt on the land. (Dt 24:4)

The wife generally had no power to dissolve a marriage; but interpreters of the law did allow the woman to be released from her marriage, e.g., when degradation by the husband made cohabitation intolerable.[30]

A double-standard did exist regarding sexual behavior: a woman is culpable on the basis of *any* pre- or extra-marital sex, while a man commits adultery only with a married woman (Lev 20:10–21).[31] Adultery was a crime against *the husband* and was not subject to divorce but was punishable by death, with both guilty parties to be punished (Lev 20:10; Dt 22:22).

The broken marriage metaphor clearly grapples with these codes. Hosea's prophetic calling in chapter 1—to marry and live openly with a promiscuous wife and children—is a set-up for social derision, given the double-standard on sexual behavior.

In chapter 2, the adulterous Wife Gomer/Israel is *not* punished with *death,* although the threatened punishments sound like it. That YHWH sees Israel calling him "my husband," no longer "my master" (Hos 2:16), sees marriage as partnership and intimacy: according to Terrien, this suggests that Hosea is against the idea of marriage as a contract of ownership through which a wife is nothing more than the property of a man.[32]

The metaphor boldly defies religious convictions (Dt 24:4 above) when God, who has dismissed his unfaithful wife, decides to re-marry her and not ever dismiss her again: "And I will take you for my wife for

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[30]Schelkle, *The Spirit and the Bride*, 27.

[31]Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 272.

[32]Samuel L. Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings: A Biblical Theology of Manhood and Womanhood* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 54.

ever" (Hos 2:19a). Writing on the marriage metaphor picked up by the prophet Jeremiah, Brueggemann points out this stunning revelation of God: YHWH's capacity as first husband to take back his wife, who has been defiled by a second relationship, is clearly precluded by the Torah, and yet in spite of the Torah, he yearns for the return of his wife to the covenant:[33]

> This yearning on the part of Yahweh violates the torah, yet Yahweh's great love for Israel is sufficient to risk God's own violation of the torah. The yearning also violates common sense and pride. No husband, so it may be assumed from social convention as well as the torah teaching, would be so vulnerable as to take back such a fickle wife …. Against all expectations which should lead to final rejection, Yahweh, the God of Israel, will risk humiliation and defilement.[34]

That YHWH's covenant love is a paradigm also for the prophet-husband is suggested by the narrative language. Oestrich notes that in chapter 1, the wording of God's calling to Hosea "Go take a wife" conveys the *juridical* character of marriage, a legal contract with mutual obligations.[35] In chapter 2, God's re-marriage to Israel uses the same legal language: "I will take you as my wife," but the language also emphasizes "taking" in terms of "steadfast love, mercy, faithfulness." Thus, in chapter 3, the wording of God's new call to Hosea—"Go love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress"—conveys a command to love unconditionally, like God, without expecting *reciprocity*. This notion of marriage not simply as a legal relationship but a commitment of faithful love, perhaps even one-sided unrequited love beyond the law, is significantly addressed to the husband. YHWH seems to be saying: "To be a husband is to love your wife, even though your love is unrequited, to stay faithful even if your wife is unfaithful." For Hosea, such one-sided love, the way God loves, is also the calling to him as

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[33]Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down*, 40.

[34]Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down*, 40.

[35]Oestrich, *Metaphors and Similes for Yahweh*, 94.

husband. In a patriarchal society, even today, no message can get more radical than that. Such a revolution only comes from revelation.

Thorny Gender Biases

While the broken marriage metaphor powerfully dramatizes covenant love, it is ambiguous and tense about woman's sexuality. Considering that Israel's God was aniconic, the patriarchal imaging of God as a Husband is not surprising. But the "whoring wife" to symbolize the Elect sets up the woman figure in the metaphor in a "no-win" situation: as Y. Sherwood says, the woman must be *promiscuous* to bring home the theological point and then *punished for being what she must be*.[36]

The images of sexual violence in chapter 2 may be read as symbolizing the historical misfortunes, e.g., the fall of the kingdoms and the Exile, as consequences of Israel's infidelities: "I will strip her naked / and expose her as in the day she was born / and make her like a wilderness / and turn her into a parched land / and kill her with thirst" (Hos 2:3); "Now I will uncover her shame / in the sight of her lovers" (Hos 2:10). But the metaphorical language is cause for alarm because, as R. Weems points out, it seems to associate God with sexual abuse of a woman as justifiable punishment.[37]

It is indeed significant to point out here that Hosea's image of God's wrath as *Husband* towards Israel as *Wife* in chapter 2 is a marked contrast to his image of God as *Parent* towards Israel as *Son* in chapter 11: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt, I called my son" (Hos 11:1). What is notable is the depiction of God in an inner struggle with wrath against his Son**:**

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[36]Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 317.

[37]Renita Weems, "Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor?," *Semeia* 7 (1989), 100; see also Naomi Graetz, "God is to Israel as Husband is to Wife: The Metaphoric Battering of Hosea's Wife," in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 136–45.

> How can I give you up, O Ephraim?
> How can I hand you over, O Israel?
> How can I make you like Admah?
> How can I treat you like Zeboiim?
> My heart recoils within me,
> my compassion grows warm and tender.
> I will not execute my fierce anger;
> I will not again destroy Ephraim;
> for I am God and no mortal,
> the Holy One in your midst,
> and I will not come in wrath. (Hos 11: 8–9)

That God as Parent is gentle with a Son, but as Husband is harsh with his Wife, makes the thorny language of Hosea's marriage metaphor an obstacle for women to get into the broken Heart of God as Husband. A critical reading of the metaphorical language is important. In the Philippines' own culture where wives are generally expected to be faithful even when husbands are not, the infidelity of a wife triggers resounding social disapproval, and God's violent behavior in chapter 2, which usually mirrors that of human husbands, may be taken as justifiable behavior of betrayed husbands. God's violence out of passion for his Wife risks being put in the category of "crimes of passion," exonerated under Philippine laws such as Art. 12 of the Revised Penal Code, which lists "circumstances that render one exempt from criminal liability"; among these: "Any person who acts under the compulsion of irresistible force" (Art. 12, Sec. 5, Revised Penal Code). G. Yee notes that the strategies to punish the erring wife—enforced segregation, physical and psychological punishment—unfortunately reflect methods of controlling women's sexuality and the abuse of male power; also the change of the Husband's behavior from violence to tenderness unfortunately tends to mirror patterns of domestic violence: "while God's (mis)treatment of Israel eventually ceases, a human husband's abuse of his wife usually does not."[38]

[38]Gale Yee, "The Book of Hosea: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* VII, ed. Leander E. Keck, et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 225; see also Yvonne Sherwood, "Boxing Gomer: Controlling the Deviant Woman in Hosea 1–3," in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 101–25.

In the Philippine context, it seems ironic that the image of God as Faithful Husband, manifesting one-way love, mirrors the way generations of most *Filipino wives* have tended to respond to a husband's infidelity.[39] The Hosean depiction of the Elect as a Mother would not be strange to Filipinos, given the figure of *Inang Bayan* to symbolize land and nation. Because mothers are revered as self-sacrificing icons, to apply Hosea's metaphor of a "whoring mother" to *Inang Bayan* would be jarring. But that is precisely what the metaphor is supposed to do—to jolt the audience out of complacency.

Still, considering that Hosea's fiery language castigates Israelite *men* in chapters 4 to 14—namely, the priests, rulers, and whoring men—the choice to depict the Elect in chapters 1–3 as a whoring wife seems ironic. Whether and how men can identify with a transgressing Wife is difficult to imagine, the tendency of men being to identify more easily with the troubles of God as betrayed Husband. Hosea's inside view into the heart of God as forsaken Husband may have aimed to elicit horror, shame, and the repentance of Israelites from their apostasies. But is it possible that the Hosean metaphor is also luring its audience into God's heart to experience not only God's love but God's way of being *Faithful Husband*? Indeed, despite—or because of—its androcentrism, is it possible to read chapter 2 also as an *inner struggle of God* as Husband, like in chapter 11, to deal with a beloved but chronically unfaithful spouse? The premise—that the marriage is *mutually* ended—would nuance the interpretation of the meaning of the Divine violence.

Struggling with Wrath: Options

The approach to read chapter 2 as God's inner struggle is taken by David Clines. Clines considers the third "Therefore"—the climax of the divine speeches—to be out of character with the preceding judgment speeches:

[39]Mary Alexis M. Salinas, "The God-Image of the Faithful Spouse: A Reversal in the Filipino Context," *Landas* 15:2 (2001), 103–4.

> One may wonder whether the prophet (or redactor) saw these three decisions on the part of Yahweh as a sequence of actions God planned to take, so much as a set of options God opened himself up to. Could the mood of this poem then be one of divine indecision—which leads to an unexpected and unconditioned act of grace? One could hardly imagine were it not for the other glimpses Hosea gives us of God "struggling with himself." (Hos 6:14, 11:9)[40]

Clines proposes that Chapter 2 lends itself to a reading that can dispense with sequence on the historical plane, and presents the judgments of imprisonment and deprivation as a sequence of possibilities that Yahweh passes in review, only to decide against them, and for the third possibility: restoration.[41] Clines argues that the concept of *belonging* is central to the poem, and analyzes the plot as a dynamic with a *sequence of options* moving toward a resolution—*restoring Israel's relationship with YHWH.*[42] He explains why the first two "therefores"—imprisonment and deprivation—must be rejected by YHWH in favour of the third option—restoration:

> The first option blocks Israel's path to her lovers but does not restore her to Yahweh. The second option leads only to destruction and punishment and perhaps to the elimination of Israel herself; this option tends to the removal of the possibility of reconciliation. The third option, on the other hand, in restoring the relationship of Yahweh to Israel, does not issue in a *cul de sac* of a future, but opens up the way for a movement that will continue long after the poem is over.[43]

Clines' "options" approach assumes, rightly, that because the faithful Husband still desires the marriage, the struggle of the Husband is what

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[40]David Clines, "Hosea 2: Structure and Interpretation," *Studia Biblica* 1 (1978), 87.

[41]Clines, "Hosea 2," 87.

[42]Clines, "Hosea 2," 99.

[43]Clines, "Hosea 2," 99.

to do to restore the relationship. The focus of the narrative is on the options to woo back his estranged, unrepentant wife.

The Husband's wrath can be read as jealousy or pathos, i.e., "sadness of love."[44] At the same time, Oestrich notes that the ancient notion of wrath or jealousy in connection with marriage is related to the fact that the marriage was also a matter of possession, so the wrath is related more to the zeal of the husband to secure his rights, the wrath of the possessor whose rights have been violated.[45] Interestingly, the Troubled Husband in the story does not vent his wrath and rage at his wife's "lovers." This may seem surprising to a contemporary audience: gender differences in reacting to a spouse's infidelity indicate the tendency of betrayed husbands to direct their anger toward their *rivals*.[46] But in Hosea, the Wife's lovers who are implicated in the charges are invisible.[47] No threats of punishment are issued against the lovers; they are only a backdrop to the strife between Husband and Wife.

However, the real *power struggle* depicted in the poem is *within* the Husband as he wrestles with how to use his power to express his commitment and love for his wife. If YHWH destroys his wife, he executes justice as his Law demands. But how can he also destroy his beloved "treasured possession?"

Adopting Clines' notion of "belonging" as central to the marriage metaphor, the next section proposes exploring chapter 2 as the drama of a faithful Husband's *inner struggle to deal with a beloved unfaithful wife*.

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[44]Teresita Magno, "Understanding the Metaphor of Wrath in Hosea as the Sadness of Love: Pastoral Implications of a Ricoeurian Re-Interpretation." M.A. Thesis (Quezon City, Philippines: Loyola School of Theology, 1990), 91.

[45]Oestrich, *Metaphors and Similes for Yahweh*, 120.

[46]Rona Subotnik and Gloria Harris, *Surviving Infidelity: Making Decisions, Recovering from the Pain*, 2[d] ed. (Holbrook, Massachusetts: Adams Media Corporation, 1999), 98.

[47]Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 315.

The notion of "options" offers a way to interpret YHWH's passage as troubled husband from misery to new life.

Lovers and Other Strangers: Re-reading Chapters 2 and 3

Because the crisis is told from the Husband's viewpoint, it is only his voice we directly hear. But in the following reading, attention will be paid also to the instances when the Husband quotes words the Wife allegedly said. The presence of these words in the text indicates their significance to the Husband and his inner struggle. This reading will explore nuances in the wife's words as possible openings to insight into the marital relations from the wife's point of view. The reader-response approach here to interpretation is cued by the varying notions of marriage as a love relationship, as partnership, and as legal possession. Unless otherwise stated, "Husband" will refer to YHWH/Hosea and "Wife" to Israel/Gomer.

Options of the Husband as "Baal-Owner": 2:2–13

The Husband initially pleads for his Wife to renounce her adultery. That he does not speak directly to her but through the children suggests the total mutual estrangement:

> Plead with your mother, plead—
> for she is not my wife,
> and I am not her husband—
> that she put away her whoring from her face,
> and her adultery from between her breasts. (Hos 2:2)

If she does not change, the plea becomes a threat. Divorce will be disaster for her:

> or I will strip her naked
> and expose her as in the day she was born,
> and make her like a wilderness,
> and turn her into a parched land,
> and kill her with thirst. (Hos 2:3)

"To strip her naked" means he will no longer be her husband. Yet, coping with the end of their marriage, he reacts like a *ba'al*, asserting ownership over her. To "make her like a wilderness" and "kill her with thirst" may mean for YHWH to destroy the physical material land and thus execute the covenant agreement—that his people perish (Dt 30:18). For Hosea, this may mean simply no longer providing for her, letting her fend for herself.

The Husband also disowns her offspring:

> Upon her children also I will have no pity,
> because they are children of whoredom.
> For their mother has played the whore;
> she who conceived them has acted shamefully. (Hos 2:4–5a)

He now accuses her in her own alleged words:

> For she said, "I will go after my lovers;
> they give me my bread and my water,
> my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink." (Hos 2:5b)

The items bread, wool, flax etc. refer to basic needs of food and clothing which the Husband is expected by Law to provide. But here the Wife attributes to "lovers" her sustenance. What is also striking is the repetition of the possessive pronoun *my*: they give me *my* bread, *my* water, *my* wool, *my* flax, *my* oil, *my* drink. This repetition would not by itself be significant except that, as will be seen later, the Husband reacts to it. Y. Sherwood proposes that these words suggest the Wife's claim to equal ownership: in the socio-economic context, the items bread, wool, and flax are strongly associated with domestic activities of women; thus the Wife's words suggest that while she is being provided for, she is also a partner in providing for her sustenance.[48]

Restrict Her Movements

Reacting to her going after lovers, the Husband will set boundaries on her behavior and movements. His possessiveness, perhaps initially

[48]Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 315.

protectiveness, becomes an obsession to defend his exclusive claim on her:

> Therefore I will hedge her way with thorns;
> and I will build a wall against her,
> so that she cannot find her paths. (Hos 2:6)

For Hosea, this may mean locking her up, or imprisonment. In the case of YHWH, the protective wall may be the Torah setting Israel apart from the nations. Now, in the contest between *his way* and *her way*, his threat to "hedge her way with thorns" and "build a wall against her" might mean to use fear, guilt, terror to keep her from leaving the marriage.

He imagines that she shall find a way to leave, but she too will be *forsaken:*

> She shall pursue her lovers
> but not overtake them;
> and she shall seek them
> but shall not find them. (Hos 2: 7a)

Putting words into her mouth, he imagines her with no choice but to return to him:

> Then she shall say "I will go
> and return to my first husband,
> for it was better with me then than now." (Hos 2:7b)

Is returning to him for pragmatic reasons better than nothing?

From hereon, the voice that takes over is that of the Divine Husband. YHWH now gives a reason for Israel seeking lovers—her lack of knowledge of him:

> She did not know that it was I who gave her
> the grain, the wine, and the oil,
> and who lavished upon her silver
> and gold that they used for Baal. (Hos 2:8)

Does YHWH accuse, or lament? For H. D. Beeby, the fact that Israel does *not know* YHWH as the source of gifts of Nature suggests that YHWH is being marginalized by indigenous cults of fertility, the

Baals.[49] Perhaps cults are perceived as gracious and accessible compared to an aniconic God who is Spirit, whose Name one cannot even utter. Knowledge of YHWH as Redeemer can easily fade as people experience oppression. Perhaps YHWH is known, and feared, more as Law, a punitive Deity, with natural disasters perceived as his punishments.

Deprive and Destroy

Indeed, faced with his Wife's ignorance of him, or *ignoring* him, as Source of her sustenance, the Divine Husband considers withholding his provisions—a veritable natural disaster. He will punish by withdrawing. After all, he is no longer Husband with the duty to provide for her:

> Therefore I will take back my grain in its time,
> and my wine in its season;
> and I will take away my wool and my flax,
> which were to cover her nakedness. (Hos 2:9)

The repetition of the possessive pronoun *my* reacts directly to his Wife's earlier words: "they give me my bread, my wool, my flax." He repudiates her claim that her sustenance is hers or from her lovers. Rather, *he is the sole owner of everything she has*.

Outraged that she does not know him and his power, he will use his power to chastise and shame her:

> Now I will uncover her shame
> in the sight of her lovers,
> and no one shall rescue her out of my hand. (Hos 2:10)

The threat, however, sounds double-edged. With his Wife dispossessed, a spectacle for ridicule, the Husband becomes the "captor," ironically turning lovers into possible *rescuers*.[50]

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[49]Beeby, *Grace Abounding*, 32.

[50]Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 302.

He also threatens to destroy all her feasting, even those instituted by his Law:

> I will put an end to all her mirth,
> her festivals, her new moons, her sabbaths,
> and all her appointed festivals. (Hos 2:11)

His resistance to her claim of ownership is amplified in the second quote of the Wife:

> I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees,
> of which she said,
> 'These are my pay
> which my lovers have given me.'
> I will make them a forest,
> and the wild animals shall devour them. (Hos 2: 12)

To destroy "her vines and her fig trees" will assert his power over her and all creation. Sherwood interprets the Wife's reference to "my pay" from "my lovers" as possibly the Wife's claim to financial autonomy, e.g., she strikes her own bargain with society through "wages."[51] The words imply the Wife's claim to be not simply any man's property—whether her Husband's or her lovers'—but a partner, an owner in her own right.

Based on what *he said she said*, the Wife's pursuit of lovers who give her a sense of ownership suggests a defiant woman claiming to be capable of taking care of herself. This image of a feisty woman with a mind of her own is not a rarity in scriptures, e.g., Rebekah told Jacob to trick his father (Gen 27:6–17); Rachel stole her father's household gods (Gen 31:32–35). However, the Wife's insubordinate behavior, depicted as sexual and economic autonomy, threatens the honour of her Husband. He considers chastising her:

> I will punish her for the festival days of the Baals,
> when she offered incense to them
> and decked herself with her ring and jewellery,

[51]Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 317.

and went after her lovers,
and forgot me, says the LORD. (Hos 2:13)

The words "she forgot me, says the Lord" betray utter frustration, if not a tinge of self-pity. Will using his power stop her from forgetting him or make her love him voluntarily? Will destroying his Wife/Israel lead her back to him?

Options of the Husband as "Her Man/Lover": 2:14–23

A sudden shift of mood ushers in the second movement which suggests that while Wife Israel does not love him as he desires, YHWH truly loves her. In a seeming turn-about, YHWH now seeks to woo Israel back in ways that contrast his earlier options. What is striking is that he takes responsibility for making changes to awaken new life in their relationship.

Respect Her Self-Possession

The wilderness imagery, echoing the earlier image, suggests a "beginning again."

Therefore, I will now persuade her,
and bring her into the wilderness,
and speak tenderly to her. (Hos 2:14)

If she does not change her ways, instead of destroying her, he will woo her again, communicating from his heart. He will acknowledge her right to ownership, a contrast to his earlier mock of her claims:

From there I will give her her vineyards,
and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. (Hos 2:15a)

The "Valley of Achor" refers to Josh 7:22–26 with its punishment for disobedience. Turning it into a door of hope means consequences of her infidelities will not be cause for despair. YHWH envisages her reciprocating, not in fear, but in love, once again.

There she shall respond as in the days of her youth,
as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. (Hos 2:15b)

Partnership and Communion

Addressing his Wife for the first time, YHWH expresses his desire to belong to her, to be her possession:

> On that day, says the LORD, you will call me "My husband" and no longer will you call me "My Baal." (Hos 2:16)

To be "her man/husband" means that he does not dominate their relationship, imposing only his terms. Their relationship is one of partnership and mutual belongingness and vulnerability. Thinking now to himself, he envisions no more "masters"—whether husbands or idols. He himself will not bring up the past. This will enable his Wife to stop seeking, or speaking of, "her lovers."

> For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more. (Hos 2:17)

Speaking to her again, he vows to use his power for her well-being and security:

> I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. (Hos 2:18)

Defying conventions and his own law, he will re-marry her, in a unilateral vow of love:

> And I will take you for my wife for ever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD. (Hos 2:19–20)

YHWH's five-fold bride-price represents the core of the covenant. As H. D. Beeby says:

> "Righteousness" is that response to the covenant which preserves the covenant community, healthy and intact. "Justice" is righteousness in its legal aspect when the laws are God's laws and rightly administered. "Steadfast love" is love that one has promised to another …. It therefore contains the strength of duty and sensitivity of kindness. "Mercy" is

> the pity and piety that belong more to the mother than to the male ….
> And "faithfulness" is lived out truth, or "Amen" in action.[52]

In the context of the marriage metaphor, these gifts may suggest the Divine Husband's initiative to make the covenant possible for his Wife as she is, where she is. To turn to her and speak tenderly is his righteousness that renews the covenant. To give her her vineyards reflects his justice, recognizing her as partner in their marriage. His steadfast love will not allow him to turn his back on her needs. His mercy—*ru-hamah*—not only makes up for, but forgives, blots out, transcends, all her transgressions.[53] His faithfulness does not depend on hers.

These gifts of his devotion will lure her to cherish him. The goal and fruit of his unconditional love is "And you shall know the LORD" (Hos 2:20). This is what YHWH longs for: intimacy, into-me-you-see, knowledge of the Lord from his inside. In this communion, he will no longer be a stranger, she will know him as Her Man, Lover, Creator of Life—not a distant strange God but endearing, vulnerable, and accessible. His intimacy with her will generate new life, harmony and fruitfulness of all Creation:

> On that day I will answer, says the LORD,
> I will answer the heavens
> and they shall answer the earth;
> and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine and the oil,
> and they shall answer Jezreel;
> and I will sow him for myself in the land. (Hos 2:21–23a)

He will reconcile with her children, whom he had repudiated at the end of the covenant:

> And I will have pity on Lo-ruhamah
> and I will say to Lo-ammi "You are my people"

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[52]Beeby, *Grace Abounding*, 30.

[53]Victor Salanga, "The Loving Kindness of God," in "'The Song of Miriam and the Song at Sea' and Other Essays." M.A. Thesis (Quezon City, Philippines: Loyola School of Theology, 1975), 42.

> and he shall say "You are my God." (Hos 2:23b)

Lo-ammi's response symbolizes the renewal of the covenant, in response to God's love.

From Misery to Mercy and New Life

The first movement in chapter 2 shows Husband YHWH reacting in wrath, coping with his honor but leaving him alienated and estranged. The second movement shows his option to rise above his wrath, to respond in love, renouncing violence to create a new beginning. He considers using his power to create conditions no longer hostile but life-giving to his estranged Wife. YHWH bares his face and heart as Lover—powerful but vulnerable, passionate but also compassionate, assertive but now communicative of inner self.

Perhaps when his Wife gets to know him this way, she will love him and be faithful to him. He seeks to belong to his Wife as "her man," recognizing her vulnerability and autonomy, offering her devotion, mercy, and his own vulnerability. He does not expect her to change, nor does he need her repentance, before he loves her. He simply loves her. This baring of heart is disarming, revealing a Divine Husband whose authority lies in initiative and responsibility, whose control lies in compassion, whose lordship means unconditional love.

Love Means Giving Time and Space: 3:1–5

Chapter 3 shows that YHWH chooses to renew his marriage not because Israel returns, but regardless of whether she does. He does not own her, but neither does he disown her. He accepts their estrangement but does not force himself on her. This is dramatized in YHWH calling Hosea again to be a sign, this time of *unconditional love*:

> The Lord said to me again: "Go, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as the LORD loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes." (Hos 3:1)

Hosea is called to rise above his own humiliation and love "the adulteress," assumed here to be Gomer. The public sign of this is

taking on the husband's duty to redeem his wife who apparently has been reduced to becoming a slave:

> So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver, a barley of homer, and a measure of wine. (Hos 3:2)

For David, Hosea's redeeming his wife from slavery symbolizes the same act of love and mercy of YHWH toward Israel.[54] Having redeemed his wife, legal ownership of her now reverts back to Hosea, signifying their re-marriage. Speaking to his estranged wife for the first time in the narrative, Hosea claims her as his own and admonishes her:

> You must remain mine for many days; you must not play the whore, you shall not have intercourse with a man, nor I with you. (Hos 3:3)

It is striking that while the husband exercises authority, he does not exercise his conjugal rights; he respects her self-possession; because they are estranged, their abstention recognizes that conjugal intimacy requires mutual love. This symbolizes "the wilderness" (Hos 2:14), that space in their relationship for solitude and beginning again. Whether she goes with him, the story is open-ended.

Parallel to Hosea's abstaining from sexual intimacy until his wife is ready, God's way of loving his people is also to "give them space and time to be," to make their own choices, even mistakes, to know what they want and whom they want:

> For the Israelites shall remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterwards, the Israelites shall return and seek the LORD, their God and David their king, they shall come in awe to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days. (Hos 3:4–5)

The "wilderness" will be the consequence of their own decisions, the loss of their signs of security—the kingdom, priesthood and prophecy. After a time, they will return on their own. Their awe at his "goodness" will come from the new beginning that the Lord has already graciously initiated while he waits for them.

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[54]David, "From Owner to Lover," 93.

Summary and Conclusion

The YHWH-Israel covenant expected Israel to love only YHWH. The broken marriage metaphor depicts the covenant in crisis. While YHWH is Israel's "husband" and Israel is YHWH's "wife" by Law, they are virtual strangers to each other. Israel's infidelities are a "declaration of independence" from YHWH. Going after "lovers," Israel has forgotten YHWH. Their marriage—the covenant—is mutually over.

Hosea chapters 2 and 3 show YHWH as Husband in an inner struggle to deal with the end of the covenant. At the heart of the crisis is Israel's lack of knowledge of God as Lord and Creator, but more importantly as Lover-Beloved Husband. The faithful Divine Husband considers using control, deprivation, and shaming, executing punitive justice as the covenant demands. The second movement of the poem however bares his heart's core yearning—compassion, not damnation; communion, not domination; renewal, not revenge, and so YHWH decides to re-marry her, unilaterally, risking himself and his love to be taken for granted, to renew the covenant, baring the depth of his love, and endowing his beloved with a worthiness of love beyond law or reason.

Hosea's broken marriage metaphor takes us into the heart of God, Husband and Lover, broken yet beating with infinite love. A heart that suffers because of Love unrequited, yet relents from violence and renounces it. A heart that refuses to use power to lord it over his beloved, risking rejection instead. A heart that recognizes a woman's dignity and claim to be partner. A heart that surely breaks when a wife is shamed by her husband who is a stranger to his wife. A heart whose mercy leads to repentance, whose loyalty atones for—and heals all—disloyalty.

And what does this God expect from his Beloved and her children in faith? Simply, in the words of the hymn based on the book of Hosea:

> Come back to me with all your heart
> Don't let fear keep us apart
> … … … … … … … … … … … .

> Long have I waited for your coming home to me
> And living deeply our new life.[55]

This image of a powerful vulnerable God of Israel seems strange until one looks at Jesus of Nazareth. Then one can say, "Oh, that's what Hosea meant." The Israelite faith of Jesus "got" what Hosea meant. In the closing words of Hosea:

> Those who are wise understand these things;
> those who are discerning know them. (Hos 14:9a)

[55]Gregory Norbert, "Hosea," in *Rejoice and Sing* (Makati City: Religious of the Assumption Philippine-Thailand Province, 2000), 87.

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WHEN GOD LOVES A (WO)MAN:
Creation and Marriage in Genesis 2:4b–3:24

Mary Alexis Montelibano-Salinas

> A man shall leave his mother
> And a woman, leave her home
> They shall travel on to where the two shall be as one
> As it was in the beginning, is now, until the end
> Woman draws her life from man and gives it back again
> There is Love, there is Love.
>
> – Wedding Song (There is Love)[1]

These words from a modern wedding song capture what has become a paradigm of marriage: a man and a woman journeying through life together, growing in union "as one." This image and the notion that "woman draws her life from man" clearly bear imprints of the creation story in the Book of Genesis:

> The rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman for out of Man, this one was taken." Therefore a man leaves

[1]N. Stookey, "Wedding Song (There is Love)," in *A & M Gold Series: Captain and Tennille*, performed by Captain and Tennille (Public Domain Foundation Inc., Warner Bros. Music, Polygram International Music Philippines, 1991), cassette.

> his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Gen 2:22–24)[2]

God's creation of the man-woman in marriage in Genesis chapter 2 may well be the love story of the "first couple." But it only sets the stage for the drama in chapter 3 which has come down in Judeo-Christian tradition as the story of the "fall" of humankind represented by "Adam and Eve," whose disobedience of God brought sorrow, suffering, and death to human existence and exile from Eden. The story is usually read as the *genesis* of the *troubled* relationship between God and the human family, and between men and women.

This article hopes to show how the rich figurative language of the story renders it capable of yielding a less melancholic reading, a more nuanced notion of the "fall" and an uplifting yet down-to-earth view of marital relations. This article takes the Eden narrative in Genesis 2:4b–3:24 in its present canonical form as a *literary unity* related to, but distinct from, the creation story in Genesis 1:1–2:4a. Using a reader-response method but drawing as well from commentaries and exegetical studies, the article explores the Eden story as a drama on the Divine-human relationship and the man-woman relationship with their delights, demands and dilemmas. The article also explores the significance of the marital motif in this Divine-human drama. The notion of marriage as a union of man and woman in a tripartite partnership with God emerges so clearly that the drama may well be entitled "When God Loves A Man-Woman" or "When God Loves a Wo/Man." But the androcentric orientation is embedded as well, hence the title of this article "When God Loves a (Wo)Man."

The first part presents the article's assumptions. The second part does a close reading of the text. Hopefully this reading will deepen appreciation of this story and why it continues to strike resonant chords in the human heart.

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[2]All Scripture quotations in this article are from the Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Catholic Edition.

Entering the Narrative World of Eden: Assumptions and Parameters

This article approaches the Eden narrative primarily as *story*. Like all literary work, the story requires the reader to suspend disbelief and enter into its narrative world.

Truth in a World of Pure Imagination

Like all stories on primeval time, the Eden story represents the author's attempt to make sense of human existence and the troubled world, e.g., "Where did we come from? Why were we created? Why do we suffer? Why do we die?" Whether or not the story is "true," i.e., factual or historical, does not matter. As J. Rogerson and P. Davies point out:

> The stories of all the peoples of the ancient world that wrestled with the questions of life, death, and origins were true, for at least some of those who wrote and heard them. This was not so much an intellectual truth as a truth that enabled the world to be coped with and lived in …. In Gen 1–11, the truth of these stories is bound up with their effectiveness in explaining for the Old Testament writers the origin and destiny of the world and humanity in the light of their belief in God.[3]

A central question in the story is: What is the appropriate human relationship with God? While Israel's faith is monotheistic, the author plays around with a *popular motif* from pagan myths in the ancient Near East, i.e., that *knowledge and immortality are divine prerogatives jealously guarded by the gods*.[4] This motif, symbolized in the story by the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" and "the tree of life," is crafted into a fascinating drama on the boundaries between the Divine and human realms.

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[3]John Rogerson and Philip Davies, *The Old Testament World* (London and New York: T & T Clark International, 2005), 115.

[4]Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 78.

Like most stories in the Old Testament (OT), the Eden story is a folktale.[5] As narrative genre, the folktale aims to entertain listeners as well as to teach a moral lesson on human nature.[6] Thus, while the Eden story contains profound themes, it is also meant to be enjoyed as a *delightful didactic tale.*

In the OT, folktales also tend to be etiological, explaining how things came to be as they are.[7] Essential features of the folktale include fantasy and credulity, projecting a world of imagination where different rules apply, e.g., animals talk, magical events are normal.[8] Aside from talking animals, folktales often have a *trickster* character, a mix of good and evil who sometimes helps people, and other times is a mischief-maker.[9] The trickster also has a capacity to transform situations and overturn the status quo.[10] The Eden story, notably, has a talking serpent that the woman claims "tricked" her (Gen 3:14). Scholars say the serpent in the story is depicted more as a mischievous trickster creature, a trouble-maker, and not as a demon or agent of a rival deity or of *Satan,* in Hebrew, ***haśśāṭān***.[11] This article wishes to explore precisely this view of the serpent.

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[5]Susan Niditch, "Folklore and Biblical Narrative: A Study of Genesis 3," in *Folklore and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 33–47.

[6]"The Folktale," http://www.glencoe.com/sec/literature/course/course3/unit/folktale.shtml. Accessed Feb. 18, 2006.

[7]Rogerson and Davies, *Old Testament World*, 133.

[8]Rogerson and Davies, *Old Testament World*, 133.

[9]"Folktales," http://www.eve-tal.com/Folktales.html. Accessed Feb. 18, 2006.

[10]Susan Niditch, "Genesis," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, eds. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (London: SPCK, 1992), 14.

[11]Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary*, *Text*, *and Interpretation*, trans. David Green (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987), 22; Gerard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 87; Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 26; Vawter, *On Genesis*, 77; Niditch, "Genesis," 14. Note however that in the Book of Job

A Man's World

The word "man," in Hebrew *hāʾāḏām,* is repeated many times in the narrative. The term *ha-adam* is not the personal name of the male character who in some contexts has a generic collective inclusive sense, i.e., denoting *humankind.* Clearly, a main theme in the story is what it means to *be human* vis-à-vis God and the rest of creation.[12]

However, the story is also interested in depicting what it means to be *man vis-à-vis woman* or vice versa. For, as H. Bloom notes, the story's mode of creation of woman is the only one of its kind in the ancient Near East.[13] In this article, the *male* character will be referred to as "the man"; if both sexes are implied, the term will be "the wo/man."

Genesis chapter 2 is also unique, says C. Westermann, in its appreciation of human existence as a *partnership of man and woman*.[14] The depiction of *marriage* as *the foundational partnership* thus merits attention.

But, as D. Clines points out, the androcentric orientation is undeniable.[15] The first human character, *hāʾāḏām,* that God forms out of the earth in Gen 2:7 may be interpreted to be a *sexually undifferentiated* earth creature, as P. Trible proposes.[16] This article adopts the view

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chapters 1 and 2, Satan is depicted to be part of the heavenly court of God.

[12]Niditch, "Folklore and Biblical Narrative," 41.

[13]Harold Bloom, *The Book of J*, trans. David Rosenberg (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 9, 178. Bloom proposes that the author is probably a woman.

[14]Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scuchin (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974), 232.

[15]David J. A. Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament*, JSOT Supp. 94 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990, 1994), 40–41.

[16]Phyllis Trible, "A Love Story Gone Awry," in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 80. Rashi says that rabbinic midrash interpeted Gen 2:21 to mean that God first created *ha-adam* with two faces, i.e., as bisexual, and that God later divided him. See Rashi, *Pentateuch with Rashi's Commentary*,

however that the imaginative language—God forms a female figure from *hā'ādām*'s rib or side (Gen 2:21)—suggests that the first human character, even if inclusively generic denoting humankind, is male-sexed.[17] The narrative language and development, as will be seen, prioritizes the man's relationship with God. B. Stratton proposes, rightly, that in the narrative, God expects obedience *primarily* from the man.[18]

An androcentric story may be expected to cast the man-woman relationship into a patriarchal mold. But a question is: Is the narrative intrinsically sexist?[19] Is it derogatory towards women? An attentive ear to the nuances may yield unexpected surprises.

Imaging a God of Surprises

The imaging of God in the story is enigmatic. For example, E. H. Pagels notes: "Why does God prohibit the Tree of Knowledge? Was the Lord surprised or disappointed by his human creatures?

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trans. A. Silbermann (Jerusalem: Silbermann Family, 1929), 12. This view—that the original human was androgynous and God had to divide it into two gendered beings for procreation and human life to begin—is also held in feminist readings of biblical inclusive language. See Carol Meyers, "Eve," in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books and the New Testament*, ed. Carol Meyers, et al. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000), 80.

[17]Samuel Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings: A Biblical Theology of Manhood and Womanhood* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1985), 9; Patricia A. Williams, *Doing Without Adam and Eve: Sociobiology and Original Sin* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 89.

[18]Beverly Stratton, *Out of Eden: Reading, Rhetoric, and Ideology in Genesis 2–3*, JSOT Supp. 208 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 102.

[19]Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 63.

… Details that delight storytellers often trouble theologians."[20] K. Armstrong also notes that in the Hebrew Bible, when God becomes inextricably involved with men and women, he frequently appears to be as ambiguous, contradictory, and dubious as they themselves are.[21]

W. Brueggemann helpfully points out that *metaphor* was a central element in Israel's articulation of YHWH; Israel's theological rhetoric is *evocative,* not descriptive:

> Yahweh is presented as a key character in a story. This means that Yahweh is not subject to the norms of critical inquiry or classical theology in its commitment to essence …. Israel's dramatic rendering of Yahweh is characteristically intended to be playful, inviting, teasing, rarely hardened into claims that push outside the drama itself.[22]

The drama in Eden, some scholars say, evokes the dynamics of a parent-child relationship. For example, U. Cassuto sees God depicted like a wise generous father, rebuking but giving remedies.[23] H. Bloom on the other hand sees the man and woman as misbehaving little children, but God is like a cruel parent, imposing unjust punishments; it is a "children's story that ends unhappily."[24] A. Brenner sees God rendered as a benevolent, but also tyrannical, male parent; the maturation of children however requires their eventual separation from parents.[25]

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[20]Elaine H. Pagels, "On Adam, Eve and the Serpent," www.geo.tcu.edu/honors/_PAGELS.doc. Accessed February 18, 2006.

[21]Karen Armstrong, *In the Beginning: A New Interpretation of Genesis* (New York: Random House Publishing, 1996), 13.

[22]Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Advocacy, and Dispute* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 69–70.

[23]Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1978), 113, 135, 163.

[24]Bloom, *Book of J*, 184, 186.

[25]Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 125–27.

N. Rosenblatt and J. Horwitz think that the imaging of God as Parent offers a "helpful role model that strikes a balance between the extremes of child-rearing, between discipline and permissiveness, between asserting control and letting go, between unconditional love and clearly stated expectations."[26]

D. Gunn sees the story in continuity with Genesis 1, depicting the contradictory character of God who desires dominion but also values exploration, "God saw that it was good" (Gen 1:24).[27] R. Hanson reads the story allegorically as the "rise" of man, where discovering likeness to God requires leaving the "cradle."[28] R. Simkins sees the man and woman like children in a rite of passage, transformed into humans living in a real world.[29]

This article explores the story as a family drama-cum-love story: the Creator is depicted as a Parent, firm but caring; the man and woman are married to each other, but are still like little children. This mixes metaphors, but in fantasy, different rules apply.

Framework: Boundary vs. Union

It is commonly agreed that a major purpose of the story is to show the limits of human existence in relation to the Divine.[30] This

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[26]Naomi H. Rosenblatt and Joshua Horwitz, *Wrestling with Angels: What the First Family of Genesis Teaches Us About Our Spiritual Identity, Sexuality, and Personal Relationships* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1995), 31.

[27]David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: University Press, 1993), 201–3.

[28]Richard S. Hanson, *The Serpent Was Wiser: A New Look at Gen 1–11* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1973), 41, 49.

[29]Ronald A. Simkins, *Creator and Creation: Nature in the Worldview of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 185.

[30]Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary*, 17; von Rad, *Genesis*, 89; Donald E. Gowan, *From Eden to Babel: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 1–11* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Edinburgh: Eerdmans, 1988), 37.

article adopts this notion of *limits* and calls it "boundary." The notion of *boundary*—a *dividing* line indicating or fixing a limit or extent—is a familiar motif in Biblical stories, and also in contemporary paradigms on relationships.

The article proposes the *boundary motif* as the framework of the Eden drama. Unlike the preceding creation story where the boundaries set by God establish order out of chaos, the Eden story shows the divinely-set boundary as double-edged, protecting *order* as well as provoking *disorder*. This is because God does not program the Divine-human relationship. The drama shows what T. E. Fretheim calls a "relational model of creation":

> In the very act of creating, God gives to others a certain independence and freedom. God moves over, as it were, and makes room for others…. Creation involves … a degree of openness and unpredictability wherein God leaves room for genuine decisions on the part of human beings as they exercise their God-given power.[31]

Thus the storyline is: God sets a boundary, the couple trespass, God sets a new boundary.

But within the story, like a counterpoint, is the motif of *union* which connotes joining separate things into one. This is signified by the *marriage motif*:

> Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Gen 2:24)

This passage provides a key to the drama: the conflict between union and boundaries.

J. Walsh finds the story to be structured into seven scenes like a chiasm, with the disobedience of the couple as the climax (D) of the plot, as shown below:[32]

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[31]Terence E. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in 12 Volumes* I, ed. Leander E. Keck, et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 355–56.

[32]Jerome Walsh, *Style and Structure in the Hebrew Biblical Narrative* (Collegeville,

A The man is placed in the garden (2:4b–17)
B Character relationships are established in harmony (2:18–25)
C Snake makes statements to the woman (3:1–5)
D Woman and her husband eat of the tree (3:6–7)
C1 YHWH God asks questions of the man (3:8–13)
B1 Character relationships are re-established in disharmony (3:14–21)
A1 The man is driven from the garden (3:22–24).

This article adapts this seven-scene structure by proposing that the dramatic plot is an alternate movement between two motifs: (A) the Divine-Human Relationship marked by boundaries and (B) the Man-Woman Relationship marked by union, as shown below:

A God forms man, sets boundary: tree of knowledge is off limits (2:4b–7).
B God creates woman, and marital love and union (2:18–24).
A1 Boundary is questioned in the encounter with serpent (2:25–3:6).
B1 Marital union leads to trespassing boundary (3:6b–8).
A2 God calls man and woman to accountability on boundary (3:9–19).
B2 Man recognizes his wife as Mother; God clothes couple (3:20–21).
A3 God sets new boundary; tree of life is off limits (3:22–24).
B3 Epilogue: Man and woman conceive; Eve acknowledges help from God (4:1).

The drama is divided into two Acts. Act I (A, B) shows the beginning—the creation of marriage as a tripartite partnership. Act II (A1, B1, A2, B2, A3) shows the tension and testing of the partnership. The Epilogue (B3) shows the partnership outside Eden.

Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2001), 59, cited in David W. Cotter, *Genesis Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003), 28.

Boundaries of Love: Reading Gen 2:4b–3:24

Act I. Beginnings: Gen 2:4b–24

Scene 1. God "Births" Man and Sets Boundaries (2:4b–17)

The drama opens, showing why the man was created—to till the bare earth:

> In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground. (Gen 2:4b–6)

The Creator is closely involved, hands-on, like a potter artist,[33] or a midwife:

> then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. (Gen 2:7)

The Hebrew word for "ground"—*'ăḏāmāh*—is in the feminine form.[34] Formed from *dust,* the man is destined for *death,* but Divine Breath means he is willed into existence, an image of God, loved by God, created to be in relationship with God.[35] The image of *God's hands on the man* anticipates already the tension between human dependency and

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[33]Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 20.

[34]Leonard Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Women* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 77.

[35]Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995), 43, 46, 47.

separateness for the child to be.[36] The man comes from the union of *Mother Earth* and *Divine Breath*. The imagery of God breathing life into his nostrils is like a mother kissing her newborn's cheek. God then makes a "cradle" for his child:

> And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. (Gen 2:8)

The garden setting introduces the motif of boundary: a garden is usually marked off by walls. "Eden," meaning "delight," sets the mood—pleasure, satisfaction, joy.[37]

> Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen 2:9)

God generously provides. *Every* tree—not only the tree of life and the tree of knowledge—is pleasing to the eyes, appetizing, and beneficial to eat. The location of the tree of life "in the midst of the garden" marks another boundary within the garden.

The narrative world then expands to suggest that delights are not limited to Eden:

> A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. (Gen 2:10–14)

The man's duty—to care for the garden which provides his sustenance—is now emphasized:

> The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. (Gen 2:15)

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[36]Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire*, 21.

[37]Gowan, *From Eden to Babel*, 40–41.

God then utters his *first words* in the narrative, significantly *a command*:

> And the Lord God commanded the man: "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall die." (Gen 2:16–17)

God's command, notably, is one of *permission and prohibition*. God allows free eating of every tree except one—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The importance of this enigmatic tree lies not so much in its polyvalent meanings but in what it symbolizes: while the tree is appealing and beneficial like the rest, *it is declared off limits by God's Word*. God's command establishes the motif of *boundary*, and introduces the conflict and image of the God-human relationship: like a good Parent, God sets boundaries, provides freedom and limits for his son's movement and appetite. The consequence—"in the day that you eat of it you shall die"—is also the reason for the command, like a parent restricts a child by focusing on a negative outcome, "Don't climb that chair, or you will fall and hurt yourself."

Significantly, God does *not* prohibit the tree of life. But the fact that God does not mention this tree means that, in the narrative world, the man is not made aware such a tree exists. All throughout, only the audience is told of it. The man is made aware only of the tree of knowledge, ironically by the fact that it is off limits. Its being forbidden may heighten its appeal, but in the context of God allowing access to all the other just as delightful trees, may also render it marginal, in the periphery.

Also, significantly, the "you" in God's command (2:16–17) is in the *singular* form.[38] This signifies the personal relationship between God and the man: the man hears God's command directly, first-hand. God expects trust and obedience from *him*.

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[38]James G. Williams, *Women Recounted: Narrative Thinking and the God of Israel* (Wiltshire: Almond Press, 1982), 68.

Scene 2. And Woman Makes Three (2:18–24)

God's work is not yet done:

> Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper as his partner." (Gen 2:18)

Like a wise parent, God does not simply impose what is good for the child, but creatively finds a way for the man to recognize his need for a human companion and partner:

> So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. (Gen 2:19)

As language—naming—is among the first things a child learns, so the man names the animals, developing and showing his capacity to discern similarity and differences:

> The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man, there was not found a helper as his partner. (Gen 2:20)

Perhaps, seeing the animals in pairs, the man senses that unlike the animals, he stands solo.[39] The man is ready for a "helper as his partner."

The Hebrew terms for "partner" and "helper," it is significant to point out here, connote equality, not subordination. The Hebrew for "partner"—*kanegdō*—means "counterpart," i.e., suitable for him; its root verb *ngd* from *neged* means "to place opposite, before, confront with"; the word is connected to *nāgad* which means "to go before."[40] As S. Terrien points out, the term connotes achievement, pioneering

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[39]Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books Publishers, 1981), 30. He cites a rabbinic midrash in *Bereshit Rabba 17:5*.

[40]Felix Garcia-Lopez, "ngd," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* IX, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), 174–75.

risk, and deliberate thrust into the unknown.[41] The place of the *partner* is thus to be *visible*, not behind, but alongside, an equal, to support, lead, or oppose, if need be!

The Hebrew word for "helper"—*ʿēzer*—implies no inferiority either. God is often the the subject of the word; the Hebrew word *ʿāzar,* from which the noun *ʿēzer* derives, means "to succor," "to save or deliver from death."[42] God is *ʿēzer*, helper, savior of Israel, e.g., "The LORD is our help and shield" (Ps 33:20); "My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth" (Ps 121:2). Thus, as Terrien notes, far from being a subordinated servant, woman as "helper" of the man is to be *savior* of the man.[43] The woman is "conceived," so to speak, to be *God's agent* of salvation for humankind.

God's creation of woman is thus a climactic moment in the narrative:

> So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. (Gen 2:21–22)

God puts the man to sleep to symbolize the making of woman is God's work alone, and thus highlights God's own intimate relationship with the woman.

Unlike the rest of creation, woman is unique, she does not come from the earth.[44] She comes from a living human being—*hāʾādām's* "rib," in Hebrew *ṣēlāʿ*. It is significant that it is only in this Biblical text that the word *ṣēlāʿ* is used as part of the human body, because in other contexts, *ṣēlāʿ* is used to refer to architectural support for the

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[41]Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings*, 11.

[42]Eduard Lipinski, "Azar," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* XI, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, et al. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000), 13.

[43]Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings*, 10–11.

[44]Trible, "A Love Story Gone Awry," 96, 102.

sacred sanctuary, e.g., *side* chambers of the temple, or the shell of the ark of the covenant.[45]

The association of the word *sela* evoking the construction of the *sanctuary* suggests a notion that man and woman are the dwelling place of the divine, and they fulfil the destiny for which they are created, in union as husband and wife, and *as God's temple.*[46]

The imagery of the *sela,* the *side,* as bone-and-flesh rib, is also interesting. Anatomically, the *rib* or *side* is close to the heart—seat of affectivity, love, reflection, discernment and the will. Also, tickling the *ribs* induces laughter, thus the expression "rib-tickling" story; the rib as the funny-bone suggests that the man and woman bring delight and laughter to each other. The symbolic imagery denotes, as Westermann says, the personal community of man and woman in the broadest sense—bodily and spiritual community, mutual help, understanding, joy, and contentment in each other.[47]

The architectural imagery of *ṣēlāʿ* is amplified in the verb used in the narrative—"God made" (v. 22)—which connotes "to build."[48] God thus *builds* the woman to be of *sturdier* stuff. After all, bearing and birthing a human being is no small feat.[49]

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[45]Heinz-Josef Fabry, "Sela," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* XII, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, et al. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003), 402; Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings*, 12.

[46]Fabry, "Sela," 402.

[47]Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 232.

[48]Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings,* 12.

[49]From the author's personal experience in Lamaze childbirth preparation classes, the strength of the uterus to expel a baby from the womb is often described as sufficient to push a grand piano from one end of a theatre stage to the other.

However, that the woman is the one separated from the side of the man seems contrary to real life where it is from the woman that human beings are separated to be born into the world. This imagery of the man who bears the "woman within" is depicted in a painting by Filipino artist Duddley Diaz entitled "Fertile is the Night:"[50]



The image graphically suggests that the man carries within him qualities associated with women such as nurturing, compassionate, non-violent, home-maker, listener, follower. In Hebrew Scriptures, the imaging of God—while male-sexed—does not exclude the maternal (cf. Is 42:14). Corollarily, the woman's coming from the man suggests that she bears within her qualities associated with men such as initiative, reason, aggressiveness, autonomy, independence. Biological difference is real; only a woman can birth children. But amazingly, this Genesis story critiques the rigid cultural-social stereotyping of characteristics as *either* feminine *or* masculine.

For Rosenblatt and Horwitz, the imagery of the woman being separated from the *side* of the man also suggests that man and woman are two halves of a larger whole.[51] This implies that man and woman will seek and find wholeness only in union with each other. At the same time, the reality of *man/woman*, or male/female, representing *two opposites* cannot be denied. N. Leibowitz relates *this profound reality* to

[50] *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (Inquirer News Service), April 11, 2005, page D1.

[51] Rosenblatt and Horwitz, *Wrestling with Angels*, 28.

the meaning of the passage in Gen 2:18: "It is not good that the man should be alone":

> The fact of man and woman's opposite characteristics is not by itself a guarantee that a combination of both will dispel the "not good" inherent in their isolation from each other. Only if they combine harmoniously in conformity with the will of God will these two opposites merge into a single whole. If they do not show themselves worthy, the result will be disharmony—a clash of opposites.[52]

The drama now unfolds, for, having built the woman, God brings her to the man, like a father bringing his daughter to her bridegroom. Seeing the woman, the man breaks out into a rhapsody. The first words by a human character in the narrative—and the Bible—are by the man, notably, in *poetic verse*, a love song:

> The man said:
> "This at last is bone of my bones
> and flesh of my flesh;
> this one shall be called Woman [ishshah]
> for out of Man [ish] , this one was taken." (Gen 2:23)

The triple repetition "This at last … this one … this one!" emphasizes the man's satisfaction. The man's declaration—"This is bone of *my* bones, flesh of *my* flesh"—defines the woman from *his* reference point. But her presence also gives him a new social identity. He is no longer simply "man" ***hāʾāḏām*** but also now *ʾîš, her man,* "husband."[53] He calls her "woman," in Hebrew*ʾiššāh*; it is a wordplay for it sounds like *ʾîš,* Hebrew for "man" or "husband"; the terms emphasize they are partners whose nature is the same as fellow creatures.[54] The terms *ish* and *isha*

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[52]Nehama Leibowitz, *New Studies in Bereshit*, trans. Aryeh Newman (Jerusalem: Hemed Press, no publication date), 14.

[53]Simkins, *Creator and Creation*, 184.

[54]Panagiotis Bratsiotis, "'ish, 'ishsha," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* I, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), 226.

also imply recognition of their physical similarity and difference, thus suggesting the *awareness already here of sexuality and sexual differences.*[55]

The expression "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" is an idiom in the Old Testament to denote kinship;[56] but C. Westermann notes that it is used here as a formula for a *permanent* relationship.[57] This relationship is the most intimate one—*marriage*—as indicated now in the narrator's words:

> Therefore a man *[ʾîš]* leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife *[ʾištō]* and they become one flesh. (Gen 2:24)

The reference to the husband and *ʾištō* "his wife" suggests a type of marriage formula. The relationship, the passage suggests, demands much—more—from the man.

Indeed, this famous passage, Gen 2:24, is significant. First, it runs counter to patriarchal culture where it is the woman who leaves her family to join her husband's household.[58] The statement does not sound like an etiology of patriarchal marriage. Of course, it may refer to the man heading his own patriarchal family when he marries, devoting his life no longer to his parents.[59]

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[55]Bratsiotis, "'ish, 'ishsha," 226; see also Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings*, 12–16; Reuven Kimelman, "The Seduction of Eve and the Exegetical Politics of Gender," in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Alice Bach (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 251.

[56]Gowan, *From Eden to Babel*, 50.

[57]Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 232.

[58]The passage may echo the custom where the man becomes part of his wife's household, e.g., Jacob in Gen 29–31. See W. Gunther Plaut, "Genesis," in *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of Hebrew American Congregations, 1981), 31.

[59]Cassuto, *A Commentary*, 137.

Still, the passage in Gen 2:24 suggests a radical reversal of values: the precedence of *maritality* over male filiality, the marital bond over the natal one; i.e., the man's first loyalty is to his wife.[60] S. Terrien notes that the Hebrew word for "leave"—*ʿāzaḇ*—means not only "to depart from" but "to forsake," to drop everything, as in putting oneself away from idols or pagan deities. The man is thus to *abandon parents* in favor of his wife. To "cling to his wife" means not simply an outward commitment, but the inner compulsion of love.[61]

Nowhere else in the OT is the phrase "one flesh" found.[62] The language, sensual and spiritual, suggests a theology of marriage. K. Schelkle says that the Hebrew word for "flesh"—*bāśar*—means "the whole person." "One flesh" suggests an indissoluble communion of two people becoming one person, a union possible only between *one* man and *one* woman; thus the term suggests the ideal of monogamy.[63] "One flesh" is not referring to an offspring nor to being clones, but the union of differences. This statement, says C. Westermann, talks of marriage not as an institution for begetting descendants, but primarily as a relationship of love and commitment between man and woman.[64]

Interestingly, says Trible, the identification of the man with "father and mother" suggests that the woman is independent. Though she is called *ʾiššāh* "his woman," she is not the man's possession but rather the one in whom he finds fulfillment. The man does not control her but moves *toward her* for union.[65] Indeed, the woman is perceived here as the stronger autonomous spouse. This counters assumptions that

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[60]Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings*, 15; Meyers, "Eve," 80.

[61]Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings*, 15.

[62]Gowan, *From Eden to Babel*, 50.

[63]Karl Hermann Schelkle, *The Spirit and the Bride: Woman in the Bible* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1979), 9.

[64]Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 233.

[65]Trible, "A Love Story Gone Awry," 104.

women are the weaker, more needy sex. In many cultures, young girls are conditioned to find their identity and security in the protection and providence of men—be it fathers, brothers, husbands. Even today, the image of a "clinging vine" automatically conjures up a woman. The notion of a husband "clinging to his wife" may seem strange, for it suggests the man's *dependence* on his wife for security, safety, salvation.

What is also striking is that the imperative for marital union in Gen 2:24, requiring abandoning filial ties, is addressed to the *man*. The man is to find his fulfillment, belongingness and wholeness not as "son" but as "husband." This famous passage, Gen 2:24, not only suggests a theology of marriage. This article proposes that the statement also serves a critical function in the narrative as family drama. The narrator is *not* necessarily stepping out of the narrative world when he refers to a "man leaving his father and mother and clinging to his wife." The statement also anticipates the dramatic conflict between divinely-set boundaries and marital union that unfolds in Act II.

Act II. Partners Walking with(out) God: Gen 2:25–3:24

The creation of woman establishes the "love triangle," the tripartite partnership of God-man-woman. God, who had earlier dominated Act I, now drops out of the scene.

Scene 1. Boundary Blurred (2:25–3:1–5)

While the couple are married, they are also still like little children learning to walk. U. Cassuto compares their state to Deut 1:30: "And your children who this day have no knowledge yet of good or evil."[66]

> The scene opens, signifying the couple's state of lack of awareness:[67]
> And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed. (Gen 2:25)

[66]Cassuto, *A Commentary*, 112.

[67]Richard Clifford and Roland E. Murphy, "Genesis," in *The New Jerome Biblical*

Lack of shame at their nudity reflects their ignorance or lack of self-consciousness.

Enters now the trickster serpent.

> Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. (Gen 3:1)

The narrative here indulges in wordplay: the couple are "naked," in Hebrew *ʿārōm*; the serpent is "crafty," in Hebrew *ʿārûm*.[68] The naked smooth-skinned children are about to encounter a smooth operator. The serpent asks the woman about God's prohibition:

> He said to the woman: "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (Gen 3:1b)

Asking the woman if God said *not* to eat from *any* tree, the serpent wants to confuse her. The pronoun "You" in his quotation of God—"You shall not eat"—is now in the plural form, as it will be in the woman's reply also.[69]

The woman's use of "we" establishes that she has been told of God's command and considers herself included in the command. The woman quickly corrects the serpent. She echoes both God's *permission* and *prohibition*:

> The woman said to the serpent: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die'." (Gen 3:2–3)

Commentary, ed. Raymond E. Brown, et al. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 12. The authors propose likewise that this section begins with Gen 2:25 and ends with 3:1–7 as the episode plays on the theme of awareness about nakedness.

[68]Herbert Niehr, "Arom," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* XI, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, et al. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998), 352; Vawter, *On Genesis*, 25.

[69]Fretheim,"Book of Genesis," 360.

Her quotation of God's prohibition "but God said" shows modification, and needs interpretation. First, interestingly, the woman does *not* refer to the forbidden tree by its name "knowledge of good and evil." Rather she calls it "the tree that is in the middle of the garden." *This* is a confusing detail. Earlier the narrator had said that the tree "in the midst of the garden" was the tree of life (2:9) which was *not* included in God's prohibition (2:17). Does the confusing detail reflect simply the author/redactor's lapse, attributable to the process of composition? The subsequent exchange shows the woman and serpent both refer to the forbidden tree of knowledge.

This article proposes that perhaps the confusing detail is put in for a dramatic purpose. Assuming that the narrator's locating the tree of life "in the midst of the garden" (2:9) is no lapse, the woman's reference to the forbidden tree being "in the middle of the garden" (3:3) suggests the woman is a bit confused: the boundary has begun to blur, the line dividing the forbidden from permitted is hazy. The trees after all look the same.[70]

Also intriguing are the woman's words "nor shall you touch it," clearly an addition to the prohibition. This suggests that the wo/man accepts the gravity of God's command. If the trees look alike, it is possible to imagine that she or her husband may have gone near the forbidden tree but suddenly stopped, reprimanding either one, "No, don't touch it!" An analogy would be a parent who tells a toddler about to get an ordinary looking box of matchsticks on the table, "No, no, don't touch!"

The problem in the story about the forbidden tree is *not* that it looks enticingly *different* from the rest, but rather that it looks *no different* from the rest and begins to look too familiar; it is off limits only because God says so. The man's naming the animals shows *he* has a capacity to

[70]R. Kimelman notes that the woman's description of the tree by its location "makes it seem like a nondescript tree." See Kimelman, "The Seduction of Eve," 245.

discern sameness and difference, but *when the forbidden looks too much like the permitted, the challenge of discernment is real*. Such a predicament—when the forbidden is part of the scenery—was real for people like elect Israel, set apart yet living among the nations. Even in contemporary life, what is considered unacceptable (e.g., unwed pregnancy) or bizarre (streaked hair) becomes, with continual exposure, less forbidding. The blurring boundary thus suggests a problem for the wo/man who is quite fastidious, even anxious about obeying God's command, that she has added "Don't touch it" as an extra precaution.

As for the warning, God's original words were: "for in the day that you eat of it, you shall die" (2:17). The woman's version still echoes "you shall die" (3:3) but omits the urgent tone "in the day that you eat of it." That the warning sounds less ominous may suggest that their experience of God is not that of a fearsome threatening figure, but a familiar one, for as the text later mentions, God "walks in the garden at the time of the evening breeze" (3:8). That the woman does remember the warning shows she does not take God's word for granted.

Overall, the woman's reply to the serpent shows she knows God's command, modifies it a little, but defends it and abides by it. This suggests that the wo/man is obedient and contented staying within the boundary set by God.

The serpent now tries to show off that he has one up over her. Implying "I know something you don't," he gives an alternative version of God's command:

> But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die, for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God [gods], knowing good and evil." (Gen 3:4–5)

The craftiness of the serpent lies in taking away the sting of the warning. Saying "you shall not die" makes the forbidden tree look *even more* like the permitted trees. He also passes on information (from the garden grapevine?) that eating of the fruit will make them possess a divine attribute—"be like God, knowing good and evil," a claim which God's words later do validate (3:22). But the serpent cheekily insinuates that God's prohibition is motivated to protect Divine self-

interest. The serpent tries to make trouble in God's relations with the couple by trying to cast doubt on God's benevolence, making God look like a despot.

Scene 2: Stumbling and Crossing the Boundary (3:6–8)

Given the serpent's description of its benefits, the tree—formerly the "don't-touch-tree in the middle of the garden"—now becomes the object of the woman's attention:

> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. (Gen 3:6a)

The woman's discernment process—"she saw the tree was good for food, a delight to the eyes"—echoes almost verbatim the narrator's earlier description: "every tree was pleasant to the sight and good for food" (2:9). This dramatizes how, in the woman's eyes, the blurred boundary disappears. The "don't-touch" tree is now just like any other permitted tree, but is also more appealing, "to be desired to make one wise," in reference to its fruit of knowing good and evil. Interestingly, the woman's thought process *does not echo* the serpent's words "to be like God," but focuses only on the tree's delights, the wisdom it can bring. She is like a child dominated by the senses, a boldness to risk reaching out for what seems reasonably appealing—wisdom. The narrative suggests, as L. Forman says, that the woman's motive is not pride but a sense of adventure and curiosity.[71]

The woman takes and eats, believing that it will bring her good, not harm. She does not consult her husband. Hers is an *individual* action, reflecting her autonomy. Significantly, nothing happens. Instinctively, she turns to share with her husband what she considers as beneficial. She does not seduce, taunt, persuade, nor twist his arm:

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[71]Lore Forman, "Bereshit: Untold Story of Eve," in *The Woman's Torah Commentary: New Insights from Women Rabbis in the 54 Weekly Torah Portions*, ed. Elyse Goldstein (Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000), 51.

> she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. (Gen 3:6b)

That her husband was "with her" may suggest that the whole time she and the serpent were talking, her husband heard the exchange, but did nothing. Considering that *he* received the command first-hand from God, he would be expected to refuse or at least to remind her.

However, his reaction is instant: "and he ate"; his wife had at least pondered on her decision. His immediate reaction may suggest passivity, taking the line of least resistance—"Whatever *she* decides is okay with me," or "It's a bother to go against the tide." The narrative, C. Westermann points out, is not characterizing the relationship between the sexes by saying that the woman is more susceptible and then *she* becomes the man's "temptress"; rather, the man's conformity, joining in as "tag-along," shows the human inclination to avoid making a decision whenever possible.[72] In the context of a love story, the husband may also be too dependent on his wife's affection to stand apart.

But the language—that he was "with her"—could also mean that he is totally *one* in agreement with his wife and her action. His conformity may indeed reflect a deeper drama: the fact that he is not seduced, persuaded, nor did he pause to deliberate suggests that *he* is bone of *her* bones and flesh of *her* flesh. His crossing the boundary ironically dramatizes Gen 2:24, how becoming "one flesh" means turning his back on God's command. The narrative here eloquently shows the dilemma and underside of marital union: as C. Westermann says, because human beings are subject to error, marital union is depicted here as ambivalent.[73] The partnership created *by* God can lead to partnership *with God* or *away from* God.

Curiously, it is only after the man eats the fruit that the effect of their action begins. This suggests that the *man's disobedience* is central to the drama:

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[72]Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 232.

[73]Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 249.

> Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked and they sewed fig leaves together, and made loincloths for themselves. (Gen 3:7)

Their eyes opening in awareness that they are naked dramatizes a change that is not a sexual awakening or awareness of sexual differences.[74] The awareness that they are naked and the move to cloth their loins may symbolize, not shame at their sexuality, but rather, a growth in self-consciousness, that they are human, *different from animals that go naked*; being human means it is not proper to be nude, or unclothed.[75] The wordplay tinges the scene with comic irony: it is through the action of the animal that is crafty—*arum*—that the humans discover they are naked—*arom*.[76]

The move to cover their nakedness may also imply their new experience or "knowledge" of vulnerability, having crossed a boundary. Indeed, the other radical change is their reaction of hiding upon hearing God's presence:

> They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. (Gen 3:8)

Hiding—separating themselves from God—creates a boundary. But God seeks them out.

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[74]J. Milgrom reads this scene as symbolizing sexual awakening, i.e., sex not simply as carnal relations but as creative impulse and power which can either build a world (good) or destroy it (evil). See Jacob Milgrom, "Sex and Wisdom: What the Garden of Eden Story is Saying," *Bible Review* (December 1994), 52. Others argue, however, that this view implies that sexual relations had been banned, a notion that lacks textual support and goes against the grain of the positive attitude towards procreation that involves both commandment and blessing. See Kimelman, "The Seduction of Eve," 251.

[75]James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 11; also Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 251.

[76]Ellen van Wolde, *Words Become Worlds: Semantic Studies of Genesis 1–11* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1994), 7.

Scene 3. Crossroads (3:9–19)

God now conducts a fact-finding counseling-cum-disciplinary session. Exercising tough love, he deals firmly with his misbehaving children. God elicits their admission of wrongdoing, and respects their freedom to explain their action.

> But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." (Gen 3:9–10)

That God calls "to the man," addressing him in the singular "you," indicates the priority of the man's relationship with God. The man's reply "I was afraid" suggests, perhaps for the first time, a "fear of God." God clearly holds *him* accountable for the command:

> He said, "Who told you that you are naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Gen 3:11)

The man's explanation, usually called blaming, actually reflects the marital dilemma:

> The man said, "The woman *[ishsha]* whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit from the tree, and I ate." (Gen 3:12)

His explanation refers to his earlier delight receiving from God his wife as partner-helper, his receptivity to her and oneness with her, leading to his action and decision to eat.

God now addresses the woman for the first time, to elicit also her admission:

> Then the LORD God said to the woman: "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate." (Gen 3:13)

The explanation—that she was "tricked" by the serpent—means, in B. Stratton's words, that the woman thought her decision was made with good intentions, but she now recognizes the negative effect of the serpent's words; her action was a mistake.[77]

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[77]Stratton, *Out of Eden*, 90.

That the woman was "tricked" rather than "tempted" would further nuance interpretation of her motives. In Filipino, a tempted person says, "Natukso ako." It connotes admission of being inclined, perhaps from the start, to do wrong. However, the earlier discussion suggested that before the serpent's disclosure of information, the wo/man was content to stay within the boundary God set. The word "tricked" suggests being surprised, duped, taken for a ride; in Filipino, "Naisahan ako." It connotes being outwitted, fooled. An analogy would be like this. A tea lover receives a *balikbayan* box full of flavored teas. She is shown one box of tea bags that looks just like the rest but, she is told, has a strange pungent taste. With many other tea boxes, that pungent tasting tea would not be noticed, or if seen, would just be put aside. Along comes a prankster who says that the pungent tasting tea is in fact the best tasting and has a hidden treasure in it! She would inevitably look for the marginalized tea, only to find that it does taste pungent, there is no treasure, and it gives her a terrible stomach ache. The person would say, "I was tricked!"

Being tricked therefore means that the woman was more impulsive and gullible than malicious. Crossing the boundary would be equivalent to being *tripped up* by the serpent; the "fall" would not be from high places caused by pride but rather, a *stumbling to the ground* caused by vulnerability, like a toddler learning to walk.

God believes the woman's story and curses the trickster serpent. God does not question the serpent; only humans are accountable for their actions:

> The LORD God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals, and among all wild creatures; upon your belly shall you go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." (Gen 3:14–15)

God castigates the serpent for his mischief by separating him from other animals and creating mutual hostility between him and humans.

God turns to the woman and man, but does not curse them. The words "sin" and "punishment" do not appear in the narrative but do

so only in the next chapter on Cain and Abel (Gen 4:6, 13). God's words, like disciplinary measures of a parent guiding and correcting children, "open their eyes" to their partnership and labor for the human family: *reproduction* for the woman as child-bearer; *production* for the man as provider.

That God's words to the woman are not prefaced with the phrase "Because you—" suggests that God's words are not punishments but "reality bytes" to teach her how to be partner and helper. Built from the side of her man, the woman gets sustenance from him but *must care for him too.* Her husband's being one "with her" means she must also consider him:

> To the woman he said: "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you." (Gen 3:16)

That God, who built the woman's body for childbearing, will *greatly increase* her pains may mean she will experience *frequent pregnancies.* God's words can mean "I will increase your work and pregnancies"; in ancient times this was a blessing—even a necessity!—given the context of agrarian life where large families are needed to work the land.[78] God's words may also refer to the pains that do *intensify progressively* from pregnancy to birthing. But that despite such hardships—work, pregnancy, childbirthing pains—the woman shall *still* "desire her husband," i.e., seek conjugal sex, reflects a paradox in women's experience that is *not* a punishment: many women, writhing in extreme pain of labor transition before the baby's head crowns, do swear they will never have sex again. But the joy that follows birthing dissipates the pain. Motherhood can be so fulfilling that many a wife welcomes conjugal union and pregnancy again—more so when society or the woman values fecundity and motherhood as part of her self-worth.

The statement "yet your desire shall be for your husband" suggests moreover the vitality of woman's sexuality not simply for childbearing

[78]Meyers, "Eve," 81; Simkins, *Creator and Creation*, 190.

but also for communion as wife and lover to her husband. God's words even hint that a wife's initiative in sex is to be expected, if not encouraged—a surprising notion from antiquity. The emphasis on desire for "your husband" commands the wife to be sexually faithful, perhaps to establish paternity over her offspring. To balance her capacity for autonomy, the woman will channel her *desire* to be wise (Gen 3:6) *toward intimacy* with her husband. God's words recognize that men and women have *different* sexual needs and attitudes, and this affects conjugal sexual intimacy. A wife especially in post-childbearing years may have little or no more desire for sex, unlike her husband. God urges the wife, for the sake of marital union, to consider her husband and his needs. God here is like a mother advising a strong-willed self-sufficient married daughter to welcome her husband's need for intimacy through sexual union as a core expression of marital love. This is the meaning and context of the words "your husband shall rule over you" (Gen 3:16b). In the narrative context of a husband who is enamored with his wife, God's words cannot be taken as a decree to subjugate, subordinate, humiliate women in the conjugal sexual relationship. Ultimately, God's words recognize the ambivalence of women's lives—the *burden and* responsibilities as well as the *blessing* and fulfilment of being wife and mother.

As for the man, God delivers a longer reprimand to him. Unlike in the case of the woman, God's words to the man are prefaced with "Because you," thus suggesting a *consequence* of his action. Taken from the earth, the man must care for the earth from which he derives sustenance; however, God lays out a regimen of discipline to develop the man's "backbone" by cursing the earth to make it resistant:

> And to the man he said: "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it', cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Gen 3: 17–19)

God reprimands the man for "listening to the voice" of his wife rather than heeding God's command. Having received the command firsthand from God, the man is accountable not only to God but also to, and for, his wife. God scolds the man, repeating "eat" five times. The man's eating is more reproachable to God considering the privilege and responsibility of his having received God's Word. The androcentric story turns out to be a critique of the man, suggesting that, from the one who has more privilege, more accountability is demanded. God expects more from the one who has "priority"—in the story, in society, in the world.

Also, God's strongly worded reprimand shows that the relationship with God supercedes and guides all other human relationships, even marriage. Marriage is a *love triangle:* God is not simply "the third party" but "the first party."

The consequence of eating of the forbidden tree is not death or mortality. As earlier noted, being formed out of dust means the man is mortal, destined to die. Rather, with God cursing the ground, what the man faces is "work, work, work, until you die." Backbreaking daily toil and struggle may represent a dying in itself.

Scene 4. Standing Up Again (3:20–21)

The couple does not complain. The man honors his wife. Like a parent who helps children stand up after they stumble, God honors the couple. There is no estrangement here, in the marriage, or between God and the couple.

> The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all who live. And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife and clothed them. (Gen 3: 20–21)

Exalting Motherhood, the man pays tribute to his wife when he names her "Eve" or "mother of all living," the first personal name mentioned in the Bible. It establishes the woman as the bearer, giver and sustainer of life; in her, from *her,* human beings will be formed. The name may also suggest that Eve's risk-taking behavior will mark the way of humankind.

That God makes skin garments for each of them depicts God's continuing personal relationship with each one. Replacing their fig loincloths with divinely made skin garments, God affirms their efforts to cover themselves. The investiture confirms their dignity and honor as human beings. It also symbolizes a wedding rite: God blesses the couple as husband and wife.

Scene 5. God Sets New Boundary (3:22–24)

God now turns to his heavenly court:

> Then the LORD God said: "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat and live for ever." (Gen 3:22)

God confirms the serpent's claim (3:4–5) that eating of the tree of knowledge would enable the wo/man to become "like God, knowing good and evil." Is God upset and angry, or sympathetic and amused, accommodating his children into the divine domain of knowing good and evil? God does express concern about the wo/man's access to the tree of life. The narrative ends with the couple leaving Eden, but it is significant that the language imbues the departure with a sense of mission and purpose:

> therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. (Gen 3:23)

The wo/man is "sent out" to fulfill the purpose of human creation—to till the earth as stated in Gen 2:5. This means that Eden is just a cradle.

Exercising sovereign freedom, God sets up a new boundary: the tree of life is off limits. God acts to prevent human access to it.

> He drove them out of the garden, and at the east of the garden of Eden, he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life. (Gen 3:24)

Without access to the tree of life, humans lose the chance or possibility to live forever. And *this,* the story suggests, is why human beings die. Created mortal, human beings did not lose immortality; rather they

lost *access to* immortality, to a life without dying.[79] The story is saying: To be human is, like God, to know good and evil. But unlike God, to be human, or "adam," is to be *mortal.*

In the end, God's word is fulfilled: "If you eat of the tree of knowledge, you will die." But the story ends, not tragically, but with hope. That God clothes the couple himself means that they journey into the world with a measure of divine protection.[80] Their partnership with God is not dissolved. They leave Eden to fulfill their mission to care for God's earth and for one another. Unaware of the tree of life, they leave Eden, *not knowing what they have missed, the chance to live forever.* They leave Eden as mortal as the day they were created, bearing their dignity as image of God, knowing good and evil. Given life's hardships, death itself is a blessing, a welcome rest. Their story is a good beginning for humanity.

Epilogue: Fruitful Life Outside Eden (4:1)

Chapter 4 opens with the birthing of offspring from the union of the couple.

> Now the man knew his wife Eve and she conceived and bore Cain saying, "I have produced a man with the help of the LORD." (Gen 4:1)

Eve's declaration—the first religious utterance in Scripture—suggests that leaving Eden did not result in the alienation of humankind from God. The generation of human offspring thereafter, attributed by Eve to the help of the Lord, signifies the divine-human partnership for posterity, the kind of immortality that would mark the human race.

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[79]Barr, *The Garden of Eden*, 108; William H. Propp, "Eden Sketches," in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Interpreters*, ed. William Henry Propp, et al. (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 192.

[80]Armstrong, *In the Beginning*, 33.

Summary and Conclusion

The Eden story dramatizes the Divine-human relationship in ways that reflect what W. Brueggemann finds in the OT in general: human persons, like Israel, are God's partners, living an intense mutuality in relationship with God. Situated in the midst of Yahweh's sovereignty, they are to live on Yahweh's terms; when those terms are violated, trouble comes. Yet, Yahweh's love transcends boundaries of the moral system:

> The amazing thing is that in the midst of sanctions that Yahweh pronounces, in the face of guilt and in the face of mortality, in the face of both situations in which the human person is helpless, Yahweh is attentive. Full of steadfast love and compassion, Yahweh is like a father who pities, like a mother who attends …. That is the hope of humanity and, in the end, its joy.[81]

As family drama cum love story, the story yields some insights. First, human life is a tripartite partnership—God, man-woman. But no human communion, even marriage, can supersede or replace the primary place of God in this alliance. God expects to be "No. 1" in his children's life. This is echoed in the Babel story in Genesis chapter 11.

This androcentric story—of God giving the command to the man, holding him primarily accountable—also highlights *obedience* as a mark of the human relationship with God, a theme also depicted in the story of Abraham. But that the motif of *marital union* is the device to test the man's obedience is an interesting ambivalence in the story. On the one hand, the story locates the marriage relationship within the primordial order of creation as the original Divine Blessing. The call to marital union is particularly addressed to the man who "must leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). On the other hand, this same marital union can constitute a dilemma, for the man's choice to be *with* his wife becomes shared trespassing of God's boundary. The story suggests there are limits to marital union when obedience to God's Word is at stake.

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[81]Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 69–70.

Sifting the grain from the chaff in this androcentric story, the reading yields some insights on marriage. Marriage is a practical partnership: the wife balances her autonomy and fulfillment as mother with attentive consideration for the husband who must toil to feed the family. Most of all, marriage is a permanent relationship of union in mutual love and care. It is not surprising that in the New Testament, Jesus of Nazareth alludes to the Eden story in relation, not to sin or mortality, *but to marriage:*

> From the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. (Mark 10:6–9; also Matthew 19:4–6)

Reading the Eden story as a family drama cum love story uncovers nuances often missed before, showing the story to be not melancholic but delightful even in its ambivalence. The reading invites us to view "Adam and Eve," one another, even God, in a softer light—and chuckle. The story offers a glimpse of the faith of Israel, a faith that embraces with tears not only of sorrow but also of laughter the wonder of being human—man and woman, mortal, loved by God, created for love and union, stumbling and standing again, journeying through life together outside Eden, for better or for worse.

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IMAGES OF PERSONIFIED WISDOM

Abigail Ramos Teh

> She seems to be essentially a changeable being …. It is not really possible to reduce all these identities to a unity.
>
> – Roland E. Murphy

Wisdom (*ḥokmāh*; pl. *ḥokmôṯ*)[1] basically means "effectiveness or mastery in relation to some physical task (skill) or, in the case of intellectual wisdom, life as a whole";[2] the wise person (*ḥāḵām*) is one who possesses such skills. In the Hebrew Scriptures, *ḥokmāh* ranges from technical and artistic skills in building (Exod 28:3; 31:6), skill in the arts of magic (Exod 7:11; Isa 3:3), political and diplomatic *savoir faire* (1 Kgs 3:28; 5:21; Jer 50:35; Isa 11:1–6), knowledge of nature (1 Kgs 4:33) to the judicious choice of words and speech (Prov 12:6, 18; 15:2; 16:21, 23; 18:21; 22:11; Job 12:20).[3]

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[1]Words in the same semantic range are *yāḏaʿ* ("to know"), *daʿaṯ* ("knowledge"), *bîn* ("to understand"), and *bînāh* ("understanding").

[2]Gerald Wilson, "Wisdom," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* 4, ed. Willem Vangemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 1277.

[3]Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15*, New International Commentary

For Israel, its most important component is religious—relationship with God constituting its ground and beginning (Prov 1:7; 9:10; 30:3). In practice, wisdom is discernment; "through perceptive observation and experience … increasingly [knowing] the appropriate human response to each life moment"[4] (1 Kgs 3:16–28). According to the Hebrew sages, wisdom is gained through (1) careful observation and reflection on one's experience with creation and human relationships; (2) learning from one's elders; and (3) encounter with God.[5]

The Book of Proverbs represents a collection of Israel's conventional wisdom. It is "the baseline for all that follows in Judaism concerning the wisdom tradition … provid[ing] a consensus teaching that is the foil for dissenting sapiential statements of … Job and Ecclesiastes."[6] The true achievement of Israel's wisdom movement is allowing conventional wisdom to stand side by side with voices challenging it in the canon. They are not to be read as "opposing views" but as "complementary statements marking out the parameters of faith …. The appropriate stance of faith is to hold these diverse statements of truth together in holy tension so that each is heard …. "[7]

Historical and Social Setting of the Book

General consensus sees the book as the product of a long process of writing, collection, and editing that most likely began as early as

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on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 76–78.

[4]Wilson, "Wisdom," 1277.

[5]Leo Perdue, *Proverbs*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2000), 7–8; Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 12.

[6]Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 305.

[7]Wilson, "Wisdom," 1282–83.

the time of the monarchy (tenth century B.C.E.) and lasting up to the Persian period (third century B.C.E.).[8] A significant portion of the book of Proverbs is believed to have started out as oral tradition which was subsequently collected and put into writing. Solomon, a patron and catalyst for its production but not its author, is named in the book thrice (1:1; 10:1; 25:1). The peace and prosperity enjoyed by Israel during Solomon's long reign as well as international contact with the nations around them served as the backdrop for the spur in literary and intellectual activity. The wisdom texts of Israel show much foreign flavor and influence, among them Prov 22:17–24:34, which evidence heavy borrowing from the Egyptian *Instruction of Amen-Em-Ope,* and material attributed to non-Israelites Agur (30:1) and King Lemuel's mother (31:1). In Prov 25:1, Hezekiah is also named as one who promoted the collection and transmission of wisdom material. Inference can be drawn that by Jeremiah's time, a collection of wisdom material was available along with the torah and prophetic material (Jer 18:18).[9]

While the individual sections most likely originated at various times and in diverse contexts, a structure has been editorially imposed on the book.[10] Owing to its highly theological content and aesthetically stylized composition, Proverbs 1–9 is seen as the final piece that was

[8]Perdue, *Proverbs*, 1.

[9]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 4–5, 17.

[10]See Anthony Ceresko, *Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom: A Spirituality for Liberation* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2000), 47–48 for evidence of the complex numbering scheme that demonstrates coherent order placed on the diverse material. For example, there are 10 sections, 7 of which bear titles. The consonants of Solomon in Hebrew bear the numerical value of 375; this is the number of single-line proverbs in 10:1–22:16, a section attributed to Solomon (10:1). The same patterns holds true for the section attributed to Hezekiah (25:1) whose numerical value is 140 as well as Solomon, David, and Israel (1:1), the combined values of which (930) equal the total number of lines in the book!

added to the book during the post-exilic period.[11] It functions as the theological introduction to chapters 10–31.

Both Proverbs 1–9 and 10–31 are united by the prime importance placed on "the fear of the Lord" (1:7; 9:10; 31:30); an exposition of what this entails (1:2–6; 31:10–28) forms an *inclusio* for the whole book as well as for Prov 1–9 (1:2–6; 9:1–18). In both sections, assertive women are prominent, with the final poem on the good wife (31:10–31) echoing the figure of Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9.[12]

The primary venue for education in Israel and thus the transmission of wisdom materials was the home where both father and mother taught their children, and this is reflected in the instruction form in Proverbs 1–9. Another significant source of the wisdom material would be the schools for the royal courts and wealthy class as preparation for their assuming positions of public authority.[13]

Literary Genres of Proverbs 1–9

In terms of literary genre, the material in Proverbs can be broadly classified into two types: (1) instructions into which didactic poems or poetic "speeches" have been inserted (Prov 1–9), and (2) various

[11]Perdue, *Proverbs*, 2; cf. Roland Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (NY: Doubleday, 1990), 18–19 for a divergent view.

[12]Dianne Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature: A Liberation-Critical Reading* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997), 78. See also Thomas McCreesh, "Wisdom as Wife: Proverbs 31:10–31," *Revue Biblique* (1985): 25–46.

[13]Perdue, *Proverbs*, 15–23; Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 5. The existence of schools in Israel remains disputed, though not that of the royal courts (Brueggemann, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 306).

collections of proverbial sayings (Prov 10–31), mostly one-liners with a "random quality" to them.[14]

The personification of wisdom is found in Proverbs 1–9. Extended poems about and "speeches" of wisdom are interwoven into father-son instructions. Fox counts ten such "lectures" or "instructions" (1:8–19; 2:1–22; 3:1–12; 3:21–35; 4:1–9; 4:10–19; 4:20–27; 5:1–23; 6:20–35; 7:1–27) and five "interludes" (1:20–33; 3:13–20; 6:1–19; 8:1–36; 9:1–18). Of the "interludes," only the second and third (3:13–20; 6:1–19) are not cast as first-person poetic speeches of Wisdom.[15]

Personification of Wisdom

Personification is "the assigning of human or divine qualities, abilities, or actions to a non-personal entity or thing, whether it is an attribute (e.g., righteousness), some other sort of abstraction (e.g., Truth), or a thing (e.g., a tree)."[16] It gives an inanimate object or abstract idea "a consciously *fictional* personality"[17] with human traits and qualities such as emotions, desires, sensations, physical gestures and speech. An example would be Psalm 85:10: "Steadfast love and

[14]Brueggemann, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 305. Among the latter are proverbial sayings attributed to Solomon (10:1–22:16; 25:1–29:27), "sayings of the wise" closely related to the Egyptian *Instruction of Amen-Em-Ope* (22:17–24:34), and sayings attributed to Agur and Lemuel's mother (Prov 30–31) which contain several graded numerical sayings and refer to the deity as Eloah instead of YHWH (Kathleen Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?: A Commentary on the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*, International Theological Commentary [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991], 21; Ceresko, *Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom*, 60).

[15]Michael Fox, "Ideas of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116:4 (1997): 614, 616.

[16]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 37.

[17]James Paxson, *The Poetics of Personification*, Literature, Culture, Theory Series 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 6, citing Jon Whitman.

faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other." Other examples in the Hebrew Bible are Job 11:14; Prov 20:1; Ps 96:11–12; and 85:13.

Utilizing this definition, a reading of Proverbs 1–9 shows that Wisdom is personified in the following texts: 1:20–33; 3:13–20; 4:5–9; 7:4–5; 8:1–22, 22–30; and 9:1–6.[18]

Metaphor 1: Wisdom as a Street Prophet (Proverbs 1:20–33; 8:1–4)

PROVERBS 1[19]

20 Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice.
21 At the busiest corner she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:
22 "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?
23 Give heed to my reproof;[20] I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you.
24 Because I have called and you refused, have stretched out my hand and no one heeded,
25 and because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof,
26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when panic strikes you,

[18]Roland Murphy ("*Proverbs*," in *Word Biblical Commentary* XXII [Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1998]) agrees on the personification of wisdom in these texts: 1:20–33 (8, 11–12); 3:13–20 (22); 4:5–9 (29); 7:4–5 (43, 45); 8:1–21; 22–30 (49–55); 9:1–6 (57–63). Fox excludes 4:5–9 and 7:4–5 from his list (Fox, "Ideas of Wisdom," 616, 624–33).

[19]All Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (*NRSV*) unless otherwise indicated.

[20]Several translations do not agree with the *NRSV* translation in seeing the imperfect verb *tāšûḇû* as an imperative. Murphy (*Proverbs*, xxxii) translates the phrase as "turning away at my reproof?" while the New International Version renders it as the protasis of a conditional statement "If you had responded to my rebuke."

27 when panic strikes you like a storm, and your calamity comes like
a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you.
28 Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek
me diligently, but will not find me.
29 Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the
LORD,
30 would have none of my counsel, and despised all my reproof,
31 therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with
their own devices.
32 For waywardness kills the simple, and the complacency of fools
destroys them;
33 but those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease,
without dread of disaster."

This passage is a wisdom speech. It is a unique genre whose only parallels are Proverbs 8–9 and Sirach 24. In all three passages, Wisdom speaks in the first person about her qualities. The genre functions "to undergird the authority of the instructions" in the rest of Prov 1–9 and "to persuade the listener to follow wisdom."[21]

In 1:20–21, personified Wisdom is pictured as a street preacher or prophet who confronts and initiates contact with people in the busiest places of their lives—"in the streets," "in the public squares," "on the highest walls," and "at the entrance of the city gates." "Public squares" are "broad area[s] for commercial trade and public meetings in contrast to the city's narrow streets."[22] "On the highest walls" are the most advantageous points to be seen and heard while "gates" refer to "the monumental edifices shading the narrow passageway through it and the side chambers where the elders sat on stone benches to adjudicate and discuss local affairs."[23] These settings show that wisdom is for

[21]Roland Murphy, *Wisdom Literature: Job*, *Proverbs*, *Ruth*, *Canticles*, *Ecclesiastes*, *and Esther*, Forms of the Old Testament Literature XIII (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 55.

[22]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 202.

[23]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 202.

commerce, court, and public governance and not confined to religious settings[24] nor to "some esoteric scholarly pursuit of wisdom."[25]

Not only is her boldness apparent, the manner by which Wisdom calls out shows urgency and fervency. The verb *tāronnāh* (Prov 1:20; 8:3; root *rnn*) signifies a fervent and emotional situation, such as deep human distress (Gen 45:2; Jer 22:20), threat (Ps 46:7 [8]), a lion's roar (Job 2:11; Amos 1:2; 3:4) and the singing of birds at creation (Ps 104:12).[26] The noun *tōḵaḥaṯ* ("correction," "reproof," "rebuke") appears in 1:23, 25 and 30 and unifies the passage.[27] Wisdom is "no gentle persuader. She shouts, pleads, scolds, reasons, threatens, warns, and even laughs."[28]

The figure of Wisdom in these passages has been variously described as that of a town crier going through the village calling out to a large group of people,[29] wisdom teacher,[30] and prophet.[31] The tone and content of 1:20–33 seem to point to the last designation.

Personified Wisdom begins her sermon with a denunciation (vv. 24–25) and ends with a judgment (vv. 26–27).[32] The words *ša'ăwâ* ("panic"), *'êd* ("calamity"), *ṣārāh* ("distress") and *ṣûqāh* ("anguish") in 1:27 are

[24]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 202.

[25]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 45.

[26]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 202.

[27]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 10.

[28]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 202.

[29]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 45.

[30]According to McKane, this image is possibly drawn from the practice of sages who taught in the city gate and called out to draw a crowd (Cited by Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 45).

[31]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 10.

[32]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 205.

common in prophetic and apocalyptic literature to describe coming destruction.[33] The use of *šûḇ* (1:23, 32), regarded as "the most important term for repentance in the Bible,"[34] also resonates with prophetic tones, although the time for repentance seems to be past. Wisdom hurls her condemnation, without inviting the audience to listen or discuss. As Murphy writes, "[s]he is not inviting the audience to listen (as many translations indicate); she is hurling her condemnation at them."[35]

The reasons for the coming destruction are given in language common in the prophets (vv. 24, 28).[36] Calling and not receiving an answer (1:24–25) is a complaint that the Lord makes about his covenant people in the prophetic corpus (Isa 50:2; 65:1–2; 66:4; Jer 7:13, 24–27; Zech 7:13).[37] Judgment will come upon the people for not heeding God's words (1:26–27; Jer 6:19; 11:11); God in turn will not listen to the people when they call (1:28–30; Jer 11:11).

Perhaps most striking is the tone of the speech. The motif of laughing at the calamity of others (1:26) is commonly encountered in the psalms (Ps 2:4; 37:13; 59:8) where it refers to the Lord laughing at the disaster befalling the wicked.[38] Waltke calls it "shock tactics" by which Wisdom seeks to persuade her audience to heed her cry. Wisdom uses the judgment that falls upon the wicked as an object lesson for her audience (1:22, 33). "Truth has a hard edge, and Wisdom does not dull

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[33]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 11.

[34]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 203.

[35]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 10. Refer to n. 20 on page 108.

[36]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 10.

[37]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 10; likewise Farmer sees 1:20–33 having similarities with some oracles of the prophets (*Who Knows What is Good?*, 29).

[38]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 207.

it …. [Thus b]y all sorts of rhetorical devices Wisdom strives to wake up her complacent and unresponsive audience to their dreadful plight."[39]

Yet there remain sapiential motifs in the passage. The failure of the people is described in wisdom language: failure to respond to the fear of the Lord and knowledge (1:29) and to Wisdom's counsel and reproof (1:23–27, 30).[40] Personified Wisdom speaks as a prophet but without any messenger formula. "On her own authority she proclaims that whoever refuses to listen will be struck with calamity and destroyed, whereas the one who does listen will dwell secure without fear of evil."[41] To dissuade her audience from their misguided choices, she offers them life (1:32–33; 8:35–36).

PROVERBS 8

1 Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?
2 On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand;
3 beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out:
4 "To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live.

In 8:1–4, Wisdom is portrayed in similar fashion, with virtually the same locales and the same verb *tāronnāh* ("cry out"; v. 3) used in 1:20. But there are differences. Instead of addressing the simple and foolish only (1:20–33; 8:5), she expands her audience to humanity in general (*bənê āḏām* in 8:4). Wisdom is not *gnosis* or secret knowledge; it is available to anyone willing to take instruction.[42] In place of the denunciation and announcement of disaster in Proverbs 1, she speaks in chapter 8 of her rewards (8:5–21) and credentials (8:22–31).

[39]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 207–8.

[40]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 10–11.

[41]Elizabeth Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God: A Biblical Basis for Non-Androcentric Christology," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 61 (1985): 264.

[42]John Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 499.

Significance of the Metaphor

One of the ways personified Wisdom has been thought of is as a sage or wisdom teacher. Parallels have been drawn between the speeches of Wisdom and the parental instructions in Proverbs 1–9. Essentially the speeches of Lady Wisdom are echoed in the parental instructions and not only there, but also in individual proverbs throughout Proverbs 10–31.[43]

Camp has identified the manner of sages, particularly women sages, as marked by indirection, subtle trickery and gentle persuasion to achieve their goals.[44] This indirect manner is forced on women by their lack of power and status in a male-dominated world. Citing the examples of Rebekah, Tamar, Esther, and the wise woman of Tekoa, Camp concludes that "[t]he consistent use of indirect but effective means by the female characters … provide a point of contact with wisdom thought and may, indeed, help elucidate why Wisdom is personified as female."[45]

Taking the narrative of the wise woman of Tekoa in 2 Sam 14, Moore shows the process of the "wise mediator" in conflict resolution: she fashions a juridical parable, embellishes the parable with revealing metaphors and symbols, then succeeds in inviting David to enter this imaginary world and resolve the conflict which has hitherto paralyzed him.[46] Analyzing Prov 1:20–33, Moore disagrees with Camp that Wisdom is utilizing a mediatorial or indirect style, eventually concluding

[43]Claudia Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, Bible and Literature Series 11 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985), 191–208.

[44]Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, 139–40.

[45]Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, 139.

[46]Michael Moore, "'Wise Women' or Wisdom Woman? A Biblical Study of Women's Roles," *Restoration Quarterly* 35.3 (1993): 154–56.

that "there seem to be few genuine affinities between the real world of the wise women and the literary world of the Wisdom Woman."[47]

How does the description of Wisdom in 1:20–33 and 8:1–4 expand the conventional image of the sage? Where lies the semantic twist that opens the text to new ways of seeing?

In these passages, the wisdom teacher is seen through the lens of a prophet. To be a prophet is to be a spokesperson of God, the virtual "mouthpiece of God" (Exod 4:12, 15–16). In Proverbs 1, there is a preponderance of prophetic terminology and motifs while in Proverbs 8, there is a focus on speech and speech organs—"mouth" (8:7–8) and "lips" (8:6–7).

To be a prophet means to have an intimate relationship with the Lord so as to speak with God's authority. The absence of any messenger formula does not minimize the *gravitas* of these speeches. Just as in Prov 2:6, the sage can proclaim "For the LORD gives wisdom; from his *mouth* come knowledge and understanding," so the sage can also put in the words of Wisdom: "for my *mouth* will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my *mouth* are righteous; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them. They are all straight to one who understands and right to those who find knowledge" (Prov 8:7–9; italics supplied). Murphy writes:

> An astonishing feature of Wisdom's speeches is that she speaks like the Lord. The references to prophetic language given above are an indication of this. What was referred to God is now referred to her. It is she who feels rebuffed, and who threatens those who refuse to listen. She has divine authority, and she hands out reward and punishment. She does not mention the Lord; she does not urge conversion to God, but to herself![48]

Similarly Farmer writes: "Nearly everything that is said about wisdom in this speech has been said about God in other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures …. The rejection of the Gift (Wisdom) may be understood

[47]Moore, "'Wise Women' or Wisdom Woman," 157.

[48]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 12.

as a symbol for the rejection of the Giver."[49] In Prov 1:29, knowledge is parallel to fear of the LORD. "Rejecting what wisdom has to offer is virtually the same as refusing to give reverence to the LORD …."[50]

This is indeed an astonishing claim of the sages of Israel. As the prophets claimed divine authority for their call for the people to return to proper observance of the Torah, the sages claimed similar God-given authority for their observations of life and reflections on experience. Just as the prophets alerted the people to matters of life and death for the nation, so too the sages' instructions concern matters of life and death for individuals (1:32–33; 8:35–36) and the nation (8:15–16). And just as the prophets railed passionately for God and against the enemies of God, so Wisdom shows the urgency of her call by her mocking and indignant manner, particularly in 1:25–27. In this way, she puts forward the urgency of choice.

Yet the tension remains. The sage remains a sage with the use of sapiential motifs and language.

Metaphor 2: Wisdom as Bride and Lover (Proverbs 4:5–9; 7:4–5)

The first picture of personified Wisdom as a strident, angry, mocking prophet who uses shock tactics and negative motivation to get people's attention is balanced by the next picture of wisdom as a wife and lover to be desired and pursued. Proverbs 4:5–9 and 7:4–5 are part of longer passages identified in terms of literary form as "instruction."[51]

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[49]Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 30.

[50]Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 29–30.

[51]Murphy, *Wisdom Literature,* 51. This literary form has three elements: (1) an appeal—usually couched in a father-to-son address, e.g., "Listen, children, to a father's instruction" (4:1), "My child, keep my words" (7:1, 24); (2) counsel or advice—seen in imperative verbs, e.g., "listen," "be attentive," "do not forsake," "get," "do not forget," etc. (4:1–5) and "keep," "store up," "bind," "write," "say," "call," etc. (7:1–4); and (3) motivation—either benefits for obeying or harmful

PROVERBS 4

5 Get wisdom; get insight: do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth.
6 Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you.
7 The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever else you get, get insight.
8 Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her.
9 She will place on your head a fair garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown."

In Prov 4:1–9, the father's instruction and teaching are equated with wisdom. Just as one is to gain insight and not forsake the father's teaching (4:1–2), so one is to acquire wisdom and not forsake her (4:5–6). The importance of the instruction can be seen in the fourfold use of the imperative ***qənēh*** "get" (4:5 [2x], 7 [2x]). The word ***qnh*** basically is a trade term that means "to acquire moveable goods through a financial transaction"; in other words, "to purchase."[52] It is the same word used for the "transaction" whereby Boaz "acquires" Ruth in marriage (Ruth 4:8–10).[53]

Proverbs instructs its readers to "get," "love," "prize" (or "esteem"), and "embrace" wisdom. Wisdom is likened to a bride for whom a groom pays dowry, no matter how much it costs him. The commands to love, esteem, and embrace her (4:6, 8) reinforce the inference to a husband-wife relationship.[54] "To embrace" (***ḥbq*** v. 8) is the same

effects of disobeying, e.g., rewards of Wisdom (4:6–9), and warning—"to keep one from the loose woman and from death" (7:5–23, 25–27).

[52]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 279.

[53]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 26, n. 7a.

[54]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 279–280; Murphy sees the actions in these verses are the actions of a person, so that personification seems undeniable in vv. 5–9 (Murphy, *Proverbs*, 27).

word used for embracing a woman (Cant 2:6; 8:3; etc.).[55] The use of the verb *qnh* implies that the pursuit of wisdom entails a cost. But it will be worth it; wisdom will reciprocate by exalting the one who embraces her and adorning him with *liwyāh* ("gracious wreath") and *ʿăṭārāh* ("royal crown") [vv. 8–9]. "To exalt" means "to elevate from a base level, thus to elevate a person in status and authority."[56] In the only other occurrence of the word in the Hebrew Bible, *liwyāh* is used of parental teaching in Prov 1:9.

The word *ʿăṭārāh* appears twenty-four times, the majority of which refer to a royal crown. In Cant 3:11, *ʿăṭārāh* is a crown given to the king on the occasion of his wedding, and thus reinforces the image of Wisdom as a wife.[57] More importantly, the post-exilic text Isa 62:1–5 describing the marriage of YHWH to the new Jerusalem uses the exact phrase *ʿăṭereṯ tip'eret* "crown of beauty/splendor" given to the bride (Prov 4:9; Isa 62:3). Ezekiel 16:12 also uses the same phrase in the context of YHWH's covenant with Israel (cf. Ezek 23:42).[58]

In other texts, *ʿăṭārāh* is used in parallel to "glory" (Job 19:9; Isa 28:1) and refers to what brings someone honor, such as a good wife (Prov 12:4); riches (14:24); gray hair of the wise and righteous (16:31); and even grandchildren (17:6). *Liwyāh* and *ʿăṭārāh* are tangible signs of success and achievement in the world, things all people aspire for as signs of a life well-lived.

Is the pursuit of Wisdom simply seen as a "sound investment," a business transaction yielding a profitable cost-benefit ratio, where Wisdom is seen as "a patroness rewarding her lover," "a life partner

[55]Richard Clifford, *Proverbs*, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 62.

[56]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 282.

[57]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 27.

[58]Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, Anchor Bible 19B (NY: Doubleday, 2003), 236.

… bestowing all manner of benefits"?[59] While admittedly reflective of the patriarchal values of Israelite society, there is something more going on.

"Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you" (4:6) is a command set in covenantal terms. Moran has shown that the command "to love" in the Sinai covenant draws from a rich background in ancient Near Eastern treaties.[60] Love is not simply an affective term but a covenantal one that means "to set one's sincere affections on God as expressed in loyal service."[61] Covenantal love (Deut 6:5; 10:12, 19; 11:1; 13:3; 30:6) is love that can be commanded, is related to fear and reverence, and expressed in unqualified obedience and service.[62] The rewards of such love and service in Prov 4:6—"she will keep (*šmr*) you", "she will guard (*nṣr* = "protect", "preserve") you"—are likewise reminiscent of the language of the covenant (Deut 7:9, 12; 32:10). Therefore, though the metaphor on the literal level is cast in highly personal affective terms of the husband-wife relationship, figuratively it is connected to covenant fidelity.

Against whom or what will Wisdom preserve or guard the hearer? The following chapter, Proverbs 5, issues a stern warning against the temptations of the "strange woman" (*'iššāh zārāh*). In fact, the rhetoric of Proverbs 4–7, located at the midpoint of Proverbs 1–9, is propelled by the contrast between personified wisdom/lawful wife and this "forbidden woman." The word *ḥbq* "embrace" for wisdom in 4:8 finds an echo in the warning against the embrace of an adulteress in 5:20.[63]

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[59]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 282; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 62.

[60]William Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 24 (1963): 77–87.

[61]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 280.

[62]Moran, "Ancient Near Eastern Background," 78. In the New Testament, it finds expression in such verses as John 14:15, 21 and 15:10.

[63]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 32–33.

A fuller treatment of the identity of the strange/outsider woman will be given below.

PROVERBS 7

4 Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," and call insight your intimate friend,
5 that they may keep you from the loose woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words.

The likelihood that the reference to "sister" and "intimate friend" here conveys more than kinship is high. In Cant 4:9–10, 12 and 5:1, "sister" occurs four times in parallel to "bride." "Sister" is also a term of endearment for one's beloved in the Ugaritic Aqhat epic, 18th Dynasty Egyptian love poetry (ca. 1500–1200 BCE), and Mesopotamian marriage songs.[64] In the Torah, one also finds the sister-wife motif in the accounts of the patriarchs and their wives (Gen 12:10–20; 20:1–16; and 26:1–33).

The parallel term *môḏa'* ("intimate friend") is translated "kinsman" or "relative" in Ruth 2:1; 3:2, where it refers to Ruth's future husband Boaz.[65] Disagreeing that there is a marital context here, Baumann cites that "sister" is not used in Proverbs in the sense of "bride." Murphy counters Baumann's doubts with the observation that clearly erotic language is intended, especially in light of the motivation: "that they may keep you from the loose woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words" (7:5).[66] Marriage is seen as the action by which "one may avoid the temptation to illicit lust."[67]

The next passage (7:6–23) confirms this point by presenting the temptations posed by the "strange woman" (*'iššāh zārāh*) and the

[64]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 87; Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 370.

[65]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 87.

[66]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 45.

[67]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 370.

"outsider" (*nokriyyāh*). 7:6–23 is a narrative poem[68] of a young man being lured to adultery by a woman identified as an *'iššāh zārāh* and *nokriyyāh* and described in v. 10 as attired like a "prostitute" (*zônāh*). The instruction-warning structure of Proverbs 7 is similar to that of Proverbs 4 and 5 where the instruction to acquire Wisdom is followed by the warning against the same woman *zārāh/nokriyyāh* (5:3; 20).

Whether one takes "sister" as a reference to bride or close kin, the father/teacher exhorts his son/student to love Wisdom and enter into an intimate lifelong commitment with her.

Who is the "Forbidden Woman"?

There is a complex of words used to describe this woman, a composite character who stands for anything and everything that can entice a man from faithfulness to the community's values and relationships. The two words used frequently and interchangeably are *'iššāh zārāh* and *nokriyyāh*.

'Iššāh zārāh (translated by the *NRSV* as "loose woman") literally means "strange woman." The basic meaning of *zûr* is "turn aside, deviate, go away," hence *'iššāh zārāh* is "someone who turns away, deviates."[69] Seven out of the fourteen occurrences of *zārāh* in Proverbs refer to a sexually promiscuous woman (2:16; 5:3, 10, 17, 20; 7:5; 22:14) while the other seven refer to strangers in general (6:1; 11:15; 14:10; 20:16; 23:33; 27:2; 27:13).

Nokriyyāh (root: *nkr* "foreign," "other," "strange"),[70] in majority of its uses outside of Proverbs, occurs in the context of Israel's covenantal

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[68]Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (NY: Basic Books, 1995), 54–61.

[69]L. A. Snijders, "זור/זר *zûr/zār*," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* IV, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 53; Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 120.

[70]B. Lang, "נכר *nkr*," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* IX, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 424–25.

relationship with YHWH. The word refers to people other than Israel, thus it can be translated as "pagan foreigner"[71] (Exod 2:22; Deut 14:21; Judg 19:12; 1 Kgs 8:41; Isa 2:6). Six of its nine uses in Proverbs refer to a woman who, without reference to her ethnic identity, nevertheless becomes an "outsider" because she has disregarded community mores (2:16; 5:10, 20; 6:24; 7:5; 23:27).[72]

In 2:16–17, the *'iššāh zārāh* and *nokriyyāh* is someone "who abandoned the companion of her youth" and "forgot the covenant with her God."[73] *Nokriyyāh* is translated as "adulteress" by the *NRSV* in Prov 2:16; 5:20; 6:24; 7:5; 23:27. Aside from 2:16–17, *'iššāh zārāh* and *nokriyyāh* are used in parallel in 5:20 and 7:5.

'Iššāh zārāh and *nokriyyāh* are the primary terms used to describe the "outsider woman" in Prov 4–7. *Zônāh* "prostitute" is used only as a term of comparison, with the "outsider woman" losing out even in the comparison. The prostitute (*zônāh*) is only after money while the other woman "stalks a man's very life" (6:26). In 7:10, the "strange woman" imitates the attire of a prostitute.

Proverbs 6 introduces us to other terms which show the strong emotional and social backlash against the "outsider woman." The *nokriyyāh* is identified as an adulteress in Proverbs 6, being mentioned in parallel with *'ēšet 'îš* "the wife of another man" (6:26); *'ēšet rē'ēhû* "the wife of his neighbor/friend" (6:29); and *'ēšet rā'* "an evil woman" (6:24). The man who is caught in her wiles "commits adultery" (6:32).

Both *zārāh* and *nokriyyāh* are adjectives to designate "a woman who has deserted her place in society."[74] According to Snijders, an implicit air of menace surrounds this woman; she is "loose, unrestrained,

[71]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 121.

[72]The remaining three uses speak of *nkr* as the "stranger" (20:16) and "foreigner" (27:2, 13) in general.

[73]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 119.

[74]Snijders, "זר/זור *zûr/zār*," 56.

unchaste."[75] Both feared and loathed, she is someone "whose behavior endangers the existence of the group because [she] stands outside the laws of the community."[76]

Personified wisdom and the lawful wife (5:15–19) serves as a foil to the "strange woman"/"outsider"/"adulteress"/"another man's wife." Faithfulness to wisdom as exemplified in the parent's instruction in 4:5–9 and 7:4–5 will preserve the youth from this woman. The way of wisdom will help him walk on straight paths (4:11, 25–27) and avoid her path (5:3–6). In Proverbs 5, following a narrative poem[77] of the charms of the strange woman whose lips drip honey but whose talk leads to bitter results, there is again an exhortation to marital fidelity as a safeguard against the adulteress' temptations. Prov 5:15–19 gives counsel to stay faithful to one's wife and "rejoice in the wife of [one's] youth." An equivalence is introduced here between wisdom and "the wife of [one's] youth" in 5:18; both will protect against the strange woman.

In like manner, Prov 6:20–35 warns against adultery with *'ēšeṯ rā'* "the evil woman," *noḵriyyāh* "the foreigner" (v. 24), and *'ēšeṯ rē'ēhû* "another man's wife" (v. 29). The man who commits adultery is described as *ḥăsar-lēḇ* "without sense" (v. 32). But those who heed the parents' instructions will be spared the dire consequences of adultery.

Proverbs 7 is the tenth and final instruction in Proverbs 1–9, and the fourth of five explicit warnings against the *'iššāh zārāh* (2:16–19; ch. 5; and 6:20–35; 9:13–18).[78] The entire chapter of Proverbs 7 is devoted to the *zārāh* and *noḵriyyāh*. In another narrative poem, the father warns the son by recounting an incident of a youth lured unsuspectingly

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[75]Snijders, "זוּר/זר *zûr/zār*," 56.

[76]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 120.

[77]Alter, *Art of Biblical Poetry*, 179–84. Though lacking in narrative development, Proverbs 5 achieves the same purpose by the elaboration of imagery and the use of direct discourse. Alter alerts us to the movement within the imagery: from outside to inside and inside to outside.

[78]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 84.

to the house of a loose woman through her smooth and deceptive speech. She pretends to be religious and observing her vows, but he unfortunately is just one of many victims (v. 26). Her path will lead to Sheol and death (v. 27) just like in Prov 5:5.

The "Strange Woman" in Israel's Consciousness

Murphy follows Ploger in seeing "the strange woman" as an open-ended character,

> a kind of collective concept or catch word that embraces all the pertinent texts of chapters 2–7, without determining whether the woman is a foreigner or simply the wife of another, whether native or not …. [T]he concept of 'stranger' simply lacks clarity and prevents a specific interpretation.[79]

As a composite of several "women,"[80] she came to represent all forbidden relationships. Yet clearly there is another level of meaning present. The warning against the seductive and alluring prostitute or loose woman is stock wisdom material.[81] The New Kingdom *Instruction of Any* from Egypt warns against "a woman who is a stranger, one not known in her own town" while the Babylonian *Counsels of Wisdom* warns against unsuitable marriage partners. Unlike Proverbs though, the women in these texts do not figure in any life-or-death scenario.[82] For parallels, Clifford looks to ancient Near Eastern epics, such as Babylonian and Ugaritic texts, where a goddess of love makes an offer of love or marriage to a youth (Ishtar in Gilgamesh and Aqhat

[79]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 45.

[80]Roland Murphy, "The Personification of Wisdom," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton*, ed. John Day, et al. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 225.

[81]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 37.

[82]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 27.

in the Ugaritic epic) which in fact will bring him death or transform his human life.[83]

Israel's own historical experience and associations with adultery, however, may be a closer, more potent parallel. Streete attributes sociological and religious factors to how adultery, particularly female adultery, became virtually a code word in Biblical literature for all forbidden sexual behavior and even forbidden nonsexual behavior like apostasy.[84]

By the sixth century B.C.E., the adulterous or sexually promiscuous woman became the symbol of religious and social chaos for Israel. First the northern kingdom, then the southern kingdom were indicted as the unfaithful wife of YHWH by the prophet Hosea in the north and followed by the southern prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Second Isaiah. Those who compiled and edited the Deuteronomistic history attributed the moral collapse of the kingdom to the Israelite and Judahite kings' worship of foreign gods at the instigation of their foreign wives. In the post-exilic period, Nehemiah and Ezra required Israelite men to divorce their foreign wives.[85]

> Female adultery, from the perspective of the exilic and postexilic writers and editors of the Tanakh, thus represents a dangerous

[83]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 27.

[84]Gail Corrington Streete (*The Strange Woman: Power and Sex in the Bible* [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1997], 5–6) relates how in traditional patrilineal and patrilocal societies such as Israel's, ensuring the biological paternity of children was very crucial. Illegitimate children were a threat to the stability and integrity of the family unit. In that context, sexual behavior which could produce an illegitimate male heir was viewed with great disfavor, something that pollutes and defiles. From being a solely private and family concern, it became a public and community concern, with the community being tasked with the responsibility and even obligation to punish it. The further complication in Israel's context was that the threat of producing non-Israelite heirs, i.e. ethnic impurity, was considered a threat to Yahwistic purity.

[85]Streete, *Strange Woman*, 7.

> subversion of the hegemony of familial, ethnic, and religious male authorities and of the male God of Israel. Even when Israelite males are themselves charged with committing adultery, it is because they are seduced by powerfully alluring "strange" or "outsider" women. When they commit apostasy, the religious crime often spoken of as adultery, the same "foreign" or "strange women" are again responsible …. These are outsiders who are most wholly "other": female rather than male, non-Israelite rather than Israelite, worshipers of "other" gods and goddesses than YHWH.[86]

It is the mark of patriarchal societies that the onus for sexually illicit behavior, regardless of the fact that it requires male participation and may even be initiated by men, falls principally upon the female participants.[87] Accompanying this image in the exilic and post-exilic literature, the portrayal of virtuous women was also uniform—faithfulness to one husband.[88]

Blenkinsopp correlates the portrayal of the "strange woman" in Prov 1–9 with the historical threat of a goddess cult in Israel. The goddess cult continued well into the neo-Babylonian and Persian periods (Ezek 8:5; Jer 44:15–19; Zech 5:5–11) as a popular cult, the practice of the "people of the land" who were not exiled to Babylon, as well as a component of the state or royal cult. Such a cult is depicted in texts such as Isa 57:3–13, similarly post-exilic like Prov 1–9.[89]

Isaiah 57:3–13, a denunciation of a woman who entices to false worship, shares many correspondences in vocabulary with the "strange woman" texts in Proverbs, such as "prostitute" (Isa 57:3; Prov 7:10); "bed" (Isa 57:7, 8; Prov 7:17); "offer sacrifice" (Isa 57:7; Prov 7:14); "door" (Isa 57:8; Prov 5:8; 9:14); "Sheol" (Isa 57:9; Prov 5:5; 7:27; 9:18);

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[86]Streete, *Strange Woman*, 8.

[87]Peggy Day, "Introduction," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 4.

[88]Streete, *Strange Woman*, 9.

[89]Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 165–66.

"perfume" (Isa 57:9; Prov 7:17); and "journey" (Isa 57:9–10; Prov 7:19). Shared ideas without shared vocabulary include: sleep with lovers (Isa 57:8; Prov 7:16–18); mouth (Isa 57:4; Prov 7:21).

Blenkinsopp sees both Third Isaiah and Proverbs 1–9 as reflecting concerns about the religious and socio-economic consequences of exogamous marriages during the early stages of the reestablishment of Judah, a concern shared by Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 9–10; Neh 10). "'The young man who succumbs to the outsider woman's wiles will lose his property to strangers and will end up in all sorts of trouble in the *qāhāl* (Prov 5:7–14)."[90] Wisdom issues a strong warning to avoid the "strange woman" at all costs.

Significance of the Metaphor

The sages took this figure of notoriety—the "loose woman"/"foreigner"/"adulteress"—and turned her into the quintessential opponent of wisdom and fidelity to God against whom the readers of the book of Proverbs are warned. She is the very "personification of the seduction of evil."[91]

In Proverbs 1–9, the same warning against the "strange woman" is given against dangerous deceiving men (2:16–19; 2:12–15); sinners in general (1:8–19), and those called "wicked," "evildoers," and "violent" (4:10–19). Likewise, the language of the "strange woman" in Prov 7 echoes the language of the sinners who entice the naïve and foolish youths in 1:11–14 with such words as "Come!", "lie in wait," and "find," with "Sheol" as the common destination.[92] That the metaphor refers to evil in general is also supported by the fact that the emphasis on

[90]Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 166.

[91]This borrows Rick D. Moore's appellation for the female figure in the Qumran text *The Wiles of the Wicked Woman*. The Qumran figure is a midrashic commentary on the strange woman of Proverbs 1–9 ("Personification of the Seduction of Evil: 'The Wiles of the Wicked Woman'," *Revue de Qumran* 10:4 [Dec 1991]: 505).

[92]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 84.

adultery and sexual excess in Proverbs 1–9 is disproportionate to the references in Proverbs 10–31 to adultery (22:14; 23:27; 29:3).[93]

Murphy explains: "Just as Wisdom is personified as a woman, and is more than the teachings contained in Prov i–ix, so the strange woman is more than sexual seduction, and [later] becomes personified as Lady Folly [in Proverbs 9:13–18]."[94] Thus Murphy connects the figure of the "loose woman" to Israel's historical experience of unfaithfulness to God. She serves as a warning for all to avoid departing from the right path of allegiance to God.[95]

> [Wisdom] clearly stands for the fullness of life promised by the sages to those who follow in her way (viii 35). But the author has also framed her against the background of Israel's sad history by the sexual emphasis, and [later in Proverbs 9] by the contrast between Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly. The issue is now life and death, fidelity to the Lord or infidelity.[96]

Through the use of the metaphor of Wisdom as a wife and lover, the pursuit of wisdom is not confined to intellectual or ethical terms. It engages one's affect and whole being and lifelong commitment. As Clifford quipped, "Living in Wisdom's house is as challenging and rewarding as living with one's spouse."[97]

But likewise, it is not confined to a personal or individual decision on behavior. It involves one's very identity and future destiny as a member of the community of YHWH. Ignorance and neglect of wisdom will yield the same potential dire consequence of chaos and exile as it did for the nation in the 8th and 6th centuries B.C.E.

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[93]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 45.

[94]Murphy, "Personification of Wisdom," 225.

[95]Murphy, "Personification of Wisdom," 226.

[96]Murphy, "Personification of Wisdom," 226.

[97]Clifford as cited by Murphy, *Proverbs*, 63.

Metaphor 3: Wisdom as Royal Adviser (Proverbs 8:14–16)

Proverbs 8 presents readers with the most complex and thought-provoking portraits of personified wisdom. The chapter represents the two prominent roles of the wisdom tradition: "wisdom's role in a historical community as the adviser of kings, as politician and instructress of men in the good life" (8:1–21) and "wisdom's place and precedence in the cosmological context."[98]

Waltke calls the whole chapter a "hymn of self-praise."[99] Mesopotamian hymns in which a deity utters self-praise in the first person are seen as the background for Proverbs 8.[100] Wisdom's longest speech in the book is the companion piece to Prov 1:20–33. As noted earlier, connections can be made between 1:20–21 and 8:1–4 in terms of setting, addressees, vocabulary and conclusions. Wisdom speaks with the same impassioned urgency—*tārōnnāh* "cries out" (1:20; 8:3). But while she spoke harshly in Prov 1 and threatened to walk away from those who reject her, she is more inviting here as she extols her virtues and promises good gifts to all who follow her. In Prov 1, Wisdom gives only one promise among so many threats; here she issues only one threat in the midst of her promises.[101]

Connections can also be made to Prov 7. Unlike the "strange woman" who invites the youth to the privacy of her home at night (7:7–9), Wisdom speaks in broad daylight in the public square for all

[98]Judith Hadley, "Wisdom and the Goddess," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton*, ed. John Day, et al. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 236.

[99]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 392–93.

[100]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 393.

[101]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 93–94.

to hear.[102] Prov 7 features an extended speech by the "strange woman" (vv. 14–20) in the same way that Prov 8 has an extended first-person speech by Lady Wisdom. The warning against straying over to the path and house of the "strange woman" because they lead to death and Sheol (7:24–25) is contrasted by the appeal to wait by the gates and doors of Wisdom because they lead to life and favor from YHWH (8:32–34).

As in 1:20–33, Wisdom appears in public, addressing all but mentioning in particular the *pəṯā'yîm* "inexperienced" and the *kəsîlîm* "foolish" (vv. 1–5). *Pəṯā'yîm* can be a neutral term in the sense of "untaught" or "inexperienced" (Ps 19:8; 116:6; Prov 1:4; 9:4), but its parallel *kəsîlîm* suggests "culpable ignorance."[103] Still this shows that Wisdom holds out hope even for such people.[104] In Proverbs 1, they are denounced while here Wisdom praises her own excellence and rewards in order to win their allegiance.

After assuring her audience that her words are truthful and righteous (vv. 6–11), she begins to speak more about herself: her royal associations (vv. 12–16) and the material benefits she brings to those who love her—riches, honor and skill to govern (vv. 17–21). Her authority comes from her unique relationship with YHWH and humankind during creation (vv. 22–31) and she urges everyone to wait at her door and gates as her learners (vv. 32–36).[105]

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[102]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 94. While there is warrant to Clifford's arrangement seeing Proverbs 7 as forming a chiastic structure with chap. 8–9, with the outer frames (7:1–27; 9:13–18) talking about Wanton Woman and Woman Wisdom forming the inner sections (8:1–36; 9:1–12), this author prefers to group the passages based on the nature of the metaphors used. See Richard Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible*, CBQ Monograph 26 (Washington: CBAA, 1994), 181–182.

[103]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 94.

[104]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 94.

[105]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 93; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 49.

PROVERBS 8

12 I, wisdom, live with prudence, and I attain knowledge and discretion.
13 The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.
14 I have good advice and sound wisdom; I have insight, I have strength.
15 By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just;
16 by me rulers rule, and nobles, all who govern rightly.
17 I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.
18 Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and prosperity.
19 My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver.
20 I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice,
21 endowing with wealth those who love me, and filling their treasuries.

Murphy identifies two "I" passages here. The second (8:17–21) is framed by the word "love."[106] The relationship between Wisdom and her student is stated in the traditional biblical language of love. "Those who love me I also love" (8:17) conveys reciprocity[107] while "seeking" and "finding" (8:17) echo similar vocabulary in Cant 3:1 and 5:6.[108] This love language continues the metaphor of wife and lover in Proverbs 4 and 7. However, while in these preceding texts, the focus was on humans loving her, here it is Wisdom's love which results in her bestowal of riches, honor, and substance upon those who reciprocate.[109]

[106]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 51.

[107]Roland Murphy, "Wisdom and Eros in Proverbs 1–9," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (1988): 601.

[108]Murphy, "Wisdom and Eros," 601; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 95.

[109]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 51.

The first "I" passage (8:12–16) enumerates an escalation of Wisdom's claims which Murphy calls "mind-boggling."[110] Proverbs 8 starts with "modest" claims such as those Wisdom had already made in earlier chapters: truth, righteousness, value that is more precious than gold or silver. Then there is an escalation as Wisdom claims extraordinary qualities—sound advice and strength that enable her to guide kings and rulers in governing justly (8:14–16).[111] "Wisdom speaks like a stateswoman or counselor to a king or queen … offering more than advice, but also perception and power."[112] In other words, Wisdom increases her arena of influence—from everyday activities to national governance.

Significance of the Metaphor

Wisdom as royal adviser reflects "the traditional association of wisdom with kings and the art of governing (vv. 14–16). Kingship was one of the institutions through which divine wisdom was mediated to human beings (2 Sam 14:20; 1 Kgs 3; 4:29–34; 10:1–10)."[113] Wisdom played a vital role in Solomon's reign (1 Kgs 3:9) and is mentioned first in the qualities of the ideal Davidic king of Isaiah 11:1–9.

Among the qualities mentioned in Isa 11:2 are "wisdom," "understanding," "counsel/advice," "power/might," "justice," "righteousness," and "fear of the Lord," terms also found in Prov 8. Fox sees these attributes, though desirable in a king, are not limited to royalty. He also remarks that wisdom is the common ground shared by rulers of all nations. "The author recognizes that the potentates of all nations have access to wisdom and can exercise it in ruling justly."[114]

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[110]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 54–55.

[111]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 54–55.

[112]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 47.

[113]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 95.

[114]Michael Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, Anchor Bible 18A (NY: Doubleday, 2000), 273–74.

In this metaphor, Wisdom stakes her claim on being the resource for righteous rulership and effective governance.[115] In Wisdom's self-portrait, she describes herself as "adamantly on the side of righteousness and justice and opposed to evil … she is the one through whom just governance is established on the earth (8:15)."[116] By this, she claims authority to order and guide affairs on earth. This ties in to the next claim of Wisdom in 8:22–31. She claims authority for all areas of life and for all creation.

Metaphor 4: Wisdom as Companion of YHWH and Humanity (Proverbs 8:22–31; 3:13–20)

PROVERBS 8

22 The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.
23 Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
24 When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water.
25 Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth;
26 when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil.
27 When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
28 when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep,
29 when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
30 then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always,
31 rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

[115]Fox, *Proverbs*, 274–75.

[116]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 264.

Though scholars cannot agree on the interpretation of several key words in this passage, they do agree on the function of this passage. First, Wisdom stakes her claim to authority on her origin from God and her primacy in creation. Wisdom antedates creation; before everything else was created, she already was. Second, Wisdom also has a claim to authority due to her "comprehensive knowledge of human affairs."[117] She was at God's side during creation. Third, Wisdom's authority is derived from YHWH himself. The same word for God's decrees setting limits on creation (*ḥōq*; 8:29) is used for Wisdom's decrees in human society (8:15). "Just as God's decrees set the boundaries for the whole created order, so Wisdom's decrees give enduring structure to human society …. [C]ivil order reflects in miniature the divine cosmic order."[118]

Scholars dispute the meaning of two words: *qānānî* from the root *qnh* "created"/"possessed" (v. 22) and *'āmôn* "workman"/"child" (v. 30). It may be best to understand these words as polyvalent, with the sages intending word-play or double-meaning, owing to the metaphorical nature of the texts. However, as Hurowitz argues, most likely there is a primary meaning which is determined by asking which meaning suits the context best.[119]

How is Wisdom related to YHWH?

Prov 8:22 "The LORD *acquired/possessed/created* me"

The variety of proposals can be grouped into three, each with its strengths and weaknesses, and utilizing the same biblical texts for support.

[117]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 407.

[118]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 407.

[119]Victor Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect? אמון and the Role of Wisdom in Proverbs 8, 22–31," *Biblica* 80 (1999): 391–92.

1. "Acquire"/"possess" (KJV, ASV, NASB, Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, Jerome)

"Acquire" is the most common rendering of *qnh* in its eighty-two occurrences throughout the Hebrew Scriptures[120] as well as its thirteen other occurrences in the book of Proverbs. A study of its usage in Proverbs[121] reveals the object of the verb is always *ḥokmāh* and its parallel terms *bînāh, lēḇ*, and *da'aṯ*. Only once is it used differently, i.e., in a commercial sense—to purchase (20:14).[122] As discussed earlier, Proverbs 4:5–9 used *qnh* four times as an imperative to express the importance of gaining wisdom.

With this rendering, Prov 8:22 seems to be a play on words. Just as humans are instructed to "acquire" wisdom, YHWH is shown as "acquiring" wisdom also. This interpretation also harmonizes with Job 28 where God is described to have discovered wisdom (28:27), not to have created it.[123] A close affinity is the translation of *qnh* as "possess" which personifies wisdom as an attribute of God.[124]

Those who disagree point to the fact that meaning does not reside principally in etymology as much as in context. The reading "acquire" hardly suits the context where one expects to hear something about the origin of Wisdom.[125] It does not explain the origin of Wisdom except to depict it as a given. In addition, other instances of the root outside of the book of Proverbs make more sense translated as "create" (Gen 14:19, 22; Ps 139:13) or "beget"/"give birth to" (Gen 4:1).[126]

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[120]Bruce Vawter, "Prov 8:22: Wisdom and Creation," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99:2 (1980): 208; Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 408.

[121]Prov 1:5; 4:5 [2x], 7 [2x]; 8:22; 15:32; 16:16 [2x]; 17:16; 18:15; 19:8; 20:14; 23:23.

[122]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 408.

[123]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 408; Vawter, "Prov 8:22," 406.

[124]Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 54; Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 44.

[125]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 44.

[126]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 44.

2. "Create"/"form"/"fashion" (RSV, NRS, NJB, NLT, LXX, Targum, Syriac)

This translation fits the context since the passage speaks of Wisdom and creation as coming into existence. Evidence from Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Hebrew texts support "create" as one of the meanings of *qnh*. In Gen 14:19, 22, El Elyon is called "creator (*qōnēh*) of heaven and earth." In Deut 32:6, *qnh* is parallel to "make" and "establish."[127] Several uses of the word outside Proverbs are likewise best rendered in this way (Deut 32:6, Ps 139:13, Gen 4:1; 14:19, 22), with Ps 139:13 being the strongest: "For it was you who *formed* my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb (italics supplied)."[128]

A major difficulty with this view though is that it appears to portray Wisdom as a separate entity from YHWH.

3. "Bring forth" (NIV, Waltke)/"beget" or "be the parent of" (NAB, Irwin)

This view is closely related to the second but adds a biological sense. Wisdom's origin is described in the language of birth. The verb used parallel to ***qānānî*** is ***ḥôlāltî*** "brought forth" (root: ***ḥyl***; used

[127]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 96.

[128]Vawter disagrees, seeing *qnh* in these four texts as "possess" or "acquire." The choice of *qnh* in Gen 4:1 seems to be a pun on the name Cain, a choice for sound rather than precise meaning. He also argues that procreation is different from creation. Deut 32:6 takes up the context of rescuing and adopting a people as God's own, with no mention of creation. In fact, as the ASV translation of Deut 32:6 ("bought") reflects, "[w]hat the Lord has done for Israel has been expressed more than once in Old Testament tradition by the commercial metaphor 'purchase' or 'acquire'" (Vawter, "Prov 8:22," 211).

Likewise, Vawter sees it best to translate Gen 14:19 and 22 as "lord/master" of heaven and earth in the sense of "someone who takes possession of." Even Ps 139:13 can be understood as "you have possessed my kidneys" as "you have understood my thoughts," as how Theodore of Mopsuestia translated it, with "kidneys" signifying the innermost being of a person, particularly his intellectual and emotional life. This is the weakest argument since the context of Psalm 139 is creation and forming of the human person (Vawter, "Prov 8:22," 209–212).

2x in 8:24–25); it is used to refer to the pain and travail of childbirth contractions (Deut 32:18; Job 39:1; Isa 51:2; Ps 90:2).[129]

Proponents point to the cognate languages of Hebrew for support. The title *'Ēl 'Elyôn qōnēh* translated "God Most High, maker of heaven and earth" (Gen 14:19, 22) can be related to Canaanite cultic epithets which mean "be/become the parent of." For example, Ugaritic texts use the epithet *qnyt 'lm* "procreatress of the gods" for the goddess Asherah.[130] *Qnh* as "create"/"beget" also makes sense for Gen 4:1 and Deut 32:6.

Proverbs 8 then is a poetic description of the birth of Wisdom.[131] "YHWH brought me forth" signifies that wisdom comes from God's essential being unlike the rest of creation which is outside of and independent of God's being.[132] Similar to the objection for the second proposal "create"/"form," Wisdom appears to be a separate entity from YHWH.[133]

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[129]Leo Perdue, "Wisdom in Revolt: Metaphorical Theology in the Book of Job," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 112 (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1991), 36.

[130]Vawter, "Prov 8:22," 209.

[131]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 43.

[132]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 409.

[133]The translation "beget" played into the Arian controversy in the fourth century C.E. about the nature of Christ as created and subordinate to God the Father. The description of Wisdom as pre-existent and a participant in creation had been transferred by New Testament writers to Christ (John 1:1–4; Col. 1:15–17). Prov 8:22–31 was used both to support and refute Arianism, the view that Christ, being equated with the "wisdom of God", was therefore created and therefore subordinate to God the Father. This was eventually resolved by the Council of Nicaea (325 C.E.) which declared the Son as "begotten, not made" and of the same essence and status (consubstantiality) as God the Father (Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 54).

Evaluation of the Proposals

However this word is understood, what is clear is that Wisdom is present at creation, and this forms the authority and legitimacy of her teachings. YHWH "possessed"/"created"/"brought her forth" as the first of his creative acts. In effect, she says to those who question her credentials, "You can trust what I say about the structures and the intricacies of life, because I was there to see how it was all put together in the first place."[134]

Is Wisdom to be understood as an attribute of God or separate from God? "Acquired" implies that wisdom "pre-existed" and originated outside the created order without any explanation of its origins, an influence perhaps of non-Israelite ideas of an uncreated wisdom separate from YHWH.[135] *Qnh* as "create" or "beget" can also give the impression that Wisdom is an entity independent of God.

"'Possessed me' leaves open the possibility that Wisdom should be understood as a personification of an attribute of God … rather than an entity in its own right."[136] This reading echoes the picture of Wisdom in Prov 3:19: "The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens."

Here we see an instance of the danger of misreading metaphorical language. The texts of Proverbs themselves give us a clue not to read the metaphors of personified wisdom literally. The metaphors reveal to us different facets of wisdom. They refuse to be harmonized and domesticated. The metaphor opens up to multiple readings.

Whether understood as acquired, established, conceived, formed or created by God, these are all metaphors for YHWH's "act of creation." Whatever interpretation is to be accepted, Wisdom is associated with

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[134]Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 55–56.

[135]Vawter, "Prov 8:22," 205–6.

[136]Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 54.

God through some action of YHWH's, either through creation, birth or acquisition.[137]

Vawter "warns against trying to reduce the various figures of wisdom in Proverbs to a single one."[138] If we move away from insistence on a literal understanding of the passage as well as a singular identification of personified wisdom, then it can be easily understood.

Can the use of *qnh* in 8:22 be a word-play, utilized because it can mean both "acquire" as well as "create" or "come out of God"? Metzger argues that "*qōnēh* means both 'owner' and 'creator' in creation contexts, for God possesses (therefore directs and oversees) what he creates."[139] Irwin argues also for double-meaning, with "begetting" as the primary idea and "acquiring" secondary, since "what God sired is his."[140] People are enjoined to *qnh* "acquire" wisdom just as YHWH *qnh* "acquired" wisdom before he created the world.

One implication of seeing Wisdom as metaphorically created by YHWH is Wisdom can be seen as separate from YHWH and thus can be the basis of natural theology recognized by nations outside of Israel.[141]

How was Wisdom involved in creation?

Prov 8:30 "then I was beside him, like *an artisan/child/heavenly mediator*"

'Āmôn as currently vocalized in the Masoretic text is a *crux interpretum* that has been the subject of debate since ancient times. At least five proposals have been put forward, all of which require changes in vowel pointing

[137]Hadley, "Wisdom and the Goddess," 237.

[138]Vawter, "Prov 8:22," 215.

[139]Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 34, n. 2.

[140]William Irwin, "Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 30 (1961): 142.

[141]R. B. Y. Scott, "Wisdom in Creation: The *'Amon* of Proverbs VIII 30," *Vetus Testamentum* (1960): 205–6.

and/or emendations. The two most common proposals have been "artisan"/"master worker" and "nursling"/"ward"/"small child."[142]

1. 'ommān = "artisan"/"craftswoman"

This reading requires changing *'āmôn* to *'ommān*, a word which appears in Cant 7:2 (7:1 EV) translated as "skilled workman" (*ASV*), "master hand" (*NRSV*) or "craftsman" (*NIV*). Jeremiah 52:15 also has what appears to be the word *hā'āmôn* (root *'môn*) "artisans." In addition, the intertestamental work Wisdom identifies Wisdom as *technitis* or "craftsman" (7:22; 8:6).[143] The morphology of the *qāṭôl* form indicates profession. The meaning "artisan" is also supported by the LXX.[144] In this reading, Wisdom participates in creation alongside YHWH.

Scott, however, disputes *'āmôn* in Jer 52:15. First of all, it is the wrong form as a plural. Second, the parallel text in 2 Kgs 25:11 has the word *hehāmôn* (root *hmôn*) and translates it as "multitudes." Jeremiah 52:15 in the LXX omits the word entirely.[145] Third and more importantly, the Hebrew Scriptures consistently depict YHWH as the sole creator.

Dahood and Rogers seek to avoid this problem by suggesting that *'āmôn* in 8:30 is in apposition to "beside him," reading the phrase as "then I was beside him, a master worker," since in Hebrew, no preposition appears before *'āmôn*. Thus "master worker" refers to YHWH, not Wisdom.[146] *'Āmôn* is also in the masculine, not feminine,

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[142]Scott, "Wisdom in Creation," 205–6; Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect?," 391; Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 501.

[143]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 44.

[144]Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect?," 392.

[145]Scott, "Wisdom in Creation," 214.

[146]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 419; Cleon Rogers III, "The Meaning and Significance of the Hebrew Word אמון in Proverbs 8, 30," *Zeitschrift fur die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 109 (1997): 220–221.

form. In this way, the notion of Wisdom as co-creator is avoided. This view though has not gained wide acceptance in scholarly circles.

2. 'amun = "nursling"/"small child"/"ward"

This reading requires a change to *'amun*, a passive participle meaning "one cared for, reared (as a child)." "Child" seems suited to the context where Wisdom talks about her origins using birth imagery (vv. 24–25). The figure of a little child is appropriate to one who is YHWH's "delight" (*ša'ăšu'îm*) and who "plays" **(***məšaḥeqeṯ***)** continually in his presence.[147]

Disputing this, Scott points out that the word for "delight" expresses not only the delight of a father in his child, but also that of a farmer in his vineyard and the pious student for the Torah (Isa 5:7; Ps 119:24). Similarly the word for "play" *šḥq* is not limited to child's play but is also used of worship and cultic singing and dancing (2 Sam 6:5, 21), sporting contests (2 Sam 2:14), the gamboling of beasts, even Leviathan, merrymaking in general, and even the sporting of a practical joker (Job 40:20; Ps 104:26; Jer 15:17; Prov 26:19).[148] In Job 38:7, the divine beings worshipped by singing together and shouting for joy at the dawn of creation.[149] The association with the metaphors of birth and play, for Scott, is merely "superficial." Wisdom derives her claim for authority from her primacy in creation. "For this high claim to grave authority the imagery of gay, thoughtless childhood is inappropriate."[150]

Hurowitz argues though that *'āmôn* is a "life-cycle term" and fits the context where Wisdom is narrating her origins and maturation process. "Since every other statement of hers [in Prov 8:22–31] relates to her gestation, birth, early childhood, and growing up, it seems that

[147]Scott, "Wisdom in Creation," 217.

[148]Scott, "Wisdom in Creation," 218.

[149]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 421–22.

[150]Scott, "Wisdom in Creation," 219.

[*'āmôn*] too should designate some stage or aspect of this process."[151] Wisdom claims authority by virtue of her receiving education and training by watching the creator of the universe at work. "As God's daughter she has inherited His wisdom."[152]

3. 'omen = "binding, uniting" (LXX, Syr, Vulg, Scott)[153]

In this reading, Wisdom personifies the principle of coherence and order in the world YHWH is creating. Support for this comes in later exegetical traditions. It seems to be the only way to account for such verses as Sirach 43:26: "By his word all things hold together"; Wisdom 1:7 which depicts the Spirit of the Lord as "that which holds all things together"; and Col 1:15–17 which declares that Christ is "the firstborn of all creation; … he himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together."[154] In this reading, Wisdom is the living link who binds creation and all reality together.[155]

4. 'amen = "continually, steadfastly, faithfully" (Symmachus, Theodotion, Targum)[156]

Reading the root as *'mn* "to be firm, faithful," this translation makes better sense of the parallels of 8:30b–31:

And I was	beside him	*faithfully*	
And I was	delighting	daily	
	rejoicing before him	at all times	
	rejoicing		in his inhabited world
And	delighting		in human beings.[157]

[151]Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect?," 396.

[152]Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect?," 396.

[153]Scott, "Wisdom in Creation," 219–220.

[154]Scott, "Wisdom in Creation," 219–220.

[155]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 418, n. 134.

[156]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 420.

[157]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 420; Scott, "Wisdom in Creation," 220. Because the translation "child" is unlikely, "play" is also unlikely (Clifford, *Proverbs,* 97).

5. 'ummanu="scribe, sage; heavenly mediator" (Clifford)[158]

Clifford cites Babylonian texts which ascribe the arrival of wisdom and culture to the human race through pre-Flood and post-Flood divine and semi-divine sages called ***apkallu*** and ***ummanu***. Ahiqar in the Aramaic tale is called the last *'ummanu*. If *'āmôn* is a corruption of *'ummanu*, then Wisdom can be seen as a (heavenly) sage, that is, a heavenly figure mediating to humans the knowledge they need to live good and upright lives.[159]

Support for the existence of heavenly mediators who accompany YHWH at creation can be drawn from texts such as Gen 1:26 and Job 38:6 as well as the texts that talk about the divine council of YHWH (1 Kgs 22:19; Isa 6; Job 1:6; 2:1; etc.). According to Whybray, the members of the divine council do not assist YHWH in making decisions but in carrying out his commands.[160]

Contextually, Hurowitz also grants that this translation has some support. In 8:4 and 8:31, Wisdom's interaction with humans forms the wider context to interpret Wisdom's "autobiography." In 8:14–16, "Wisdom proclaims her usefulness to kings and other rulers, which is a function of advisors."[161] The concept of YHWH's dominion in the cosmos is also given stress in Prov 8, such that Wisdom as YHWH's mediator or advisor to humanity would fit, although Hurowitz regards this as a secondary interpretation.[162]

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[158]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 100–101.

[159]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 26.

[160]R. N. Whybray, *The Heavenly Counsellor in Isaiah XL:13–14: A Study of the Sources of the Theology of Deutero-Isaiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 84. See also Simon Parker, "Divine Intercession in Judah," *Vetus Testamentum* 56 (2006): 76–91.

[161]Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect?," 398.

[162]Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect?," 398.

Evaluation of the Proposals

Owing to the preponderance of ANE mythological references in Proverbs 8–9, this last translation as "heavenly mediator of wisdom" seems to fit the evidence and context best.[163] In the end, any resolution is at best tentative. Similar to *qānānî* discussed above, this is most likely another word with multivalent meanings.[164]

For the wisdom movement, creation is the rationale for the human quest for wisdom. In the Hebrew Scriptures, creation is consistently associated with the divine attributes of power and wisdom (Jer 10:15=51:15; 32:17; Ps 65:7). Intimate with YHWH, Wisdom "can mediate a like intimacy to human beings."[165] Wisdom enjoys being with God and her position of honor. Her joy is especially intense as she watches God create, just as the heavenly beings in Job 38:7 sang as they watched God create.

As Wisdom delights in God "daily" (v. 30b), so her reader is to wait upon her "daily" (v. 34). The relationship between Wisdom and her followers on earth in vv. 32–34 mirrors the relationship between Wisdom and YHWH in heaven. "The very wisdom by which YHWH created the world is available to all who seek it. Wisdom thus mediates between the all-wise YHWH and the human seeker."[166] As the companion of YHWH, she now offers herself as companion to humanity.

Wisdom as Transcendent Figure

Precisely because 8:22–31 challenges and destabilizes conventional ideas of God and of wisdom, different exegetical traditions have arisen

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[163]Cf. Hurowitz ("Nursling, Advisor, Architect?," 399) who sees "nursling" or "ward" as primary meaning and "advisor" as only secondary.

[164]Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect?", 399–400.

[165]Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 179.

[166]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 97; Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 181.

with vastly different translations of these words. In the same manner, different proposals for the theological meaning of personified wisdom in Prov 8:22–31 have arisen.[167]

Is Wisdom a *personification of an attribute of God*? Prov 3:19–20 says: "The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew." Is Prov 8:22–31 merely a poetic way of saying the same thing, as Caird contends?[168]

Is Wisdom a *personification of the whole body of wisdom teaching* in Israel's wisdom schools? The figure becomes "little more than a didactic help to impress the male Jewish students with the worth and desirability of their learning."[169]

Metaphor does not possess merely emotive content, nor is merely ornamental, but possesses cognitive content and has the power to redescribe and redefine reality. These first two views cannot account for the subsequent development of the metaphor that enabled "personified Wisdom [to become] a rich source of reflection and expression for the Lord Jesus."[170] From being a personification of a divine attribute, she has become, according to Ricoeur,

> … a transcendent feminine figure. She is a divine reality that has always existed and that will always exist. She lives with God and she has accompanied creation from its very beginning. Intimacy with Wisdom is not to be distinguished from intimacy with God.[171]

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[167]Johnson ("Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 271–74) gives five views in her excellent summary, four of which will be given here.

[168]"Wisdom represented as a master-builder … is a metonymic and picturesque way of talking about what God in his wisdom does" (G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980], 137).

[169]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 272.

[170]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 261.

[171]Paul Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 88.

How then have scholars attempted to explain the transformation of Wisdom to a transcendent figure approaching divine status? One attempt is to see Wisdom here as a *personification of the cosmic order*, i.e., of the ordering principle God has implanted in creation. In his book *Wisdom in Israel*, von Rad argues that Wisdom is not an attribute of God but an attribute of the world which humans are commanded to seek out.[172] Nevertheless, while it is true humans can scrutinize creation and learn something of the creator's design and purpose in it, personified Wisdom is not to be identified with her effects. This view also fails to account for those passages that speak of Wisdom existing prior to the creation of the world![173]

Another attempt is to see personified Wisdom as a *hypostasis*. Oesterley-Box famously defined hypostasis as a "quasi-personification of certain attributes proper to God, occupying an intermediate position between personalities and abstract beings."[174] Ringgren proposed that post-exilic Judaism developed hypostases as its view of God grew more transcendent and distant. Hypostases like the Spirit, Name, Glory, Word and Law of God were intermediaries that enabled Judaism to maintain contact with God and a way to speak more concretely of God's actions. Yet strictly speaking, Judaism of this period did not achieve full hypostatization, such as what happened later during the trinitarian debates or in later Jewish texts. Ringgren's thesis is that the strict monotheistic belief of Israelite religion did not allow the hypostases to become real deities. Proverbs 8 is a quasi-personification

[172]Gerhard Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1972), 170–76.

[173]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 42. Other arguments against it are its failure to incorporate other metaphors for wisdom such as wisdom as a prophet (Prov 1 and 8), housebuilder and banquet host (Prov 9), as well as its inability to account for the richness and depth which led to further development of this metaphor in later literature.

[174]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 272–73.

of one of God's attributes.[175] Currently the hypostatization view has fallen into disfavor with scholars.[176]

Personified Wisdom as a Borrowing of Goddess Imagery

Wisdom's astounding claims in 8:22–31 have led many scholars to believe the only way to account for them is the influence of goddess imagery. Johnson avers that as to her origin, there is "virtual unanimity of scholarly opinion … that an extra-biblical figure of a female deity influenced the biblical depiction."[177] Acknowledging the international influence on Proverbs, personified Wisdom is deemed an adaptation of the goddess traditions of Israel's neighbors. The incorporation of goddess imagery is clearest in the following passage:

PROVERBS 3

13 Happy are those who find wisdom, and those who get understanding,
14 for her income is better than silver, and her revenue better than gold.
15 She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.
16 Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.

[175]Witherington (*Jesus the Sage*, 37–38, 43) concurs, saying that personification is the best way to describe the Woman Wisdom material in Proverbs, Job, and Sirach, though in the Wisdom of Solomon, the author may have progressed to the stage of hypostatization of Wisdom.

[176]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 273.

[177]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 267–68. Proposals have ranged from the Canaanite love goddess Astarte (Wisdom depicted as bride, spouse, and beloved sister); the Semitic mother goddess set at YHWH's side by the Jews at Elephantine; the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar; the Egyptian goddess Ma'at who represented law, world order, and justice; a Hellenized version of the Egyptian goddess Isis who praises herself for her mighty deeds and is described as the creator of the universe and presiding over all its elements (Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 237).

17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.
18 She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy.
19 The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens;
20 by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew.

The precursor of the reference to the "tree of life" (3:18) most likely is the Asherah cult image of Canaan, usually represented in ANE iconography by a stylized tree flanked by two ibexes or lions. Traces of Asherah worship have been found in Palestine, specifically Lachish, dating as early as the thirteenth century B.C.E.[178] Asherah is the fertility goddess *par excellence* and given the title of "procreatress of the gods."[179] Another link of Asherah to personified Wisdom is that the former is considered the consort or companion of the progenitor deity and high god El in Ugaritic texts.[180] Asherah (called Astarte) is also the consort of Baal and, like Wisdom, is depicted as bride, spouse, and beloved sister in various texts. Seal impressions, tomb reliefs, and statues depict humans reaching out to touch the tree as well as animals eating the leaves and buds of the tree.[181] The invitation in Prov 3:18 to "lay hold" and "hold fast to" Wisdom, the tree of life, makes allusion to this.

Two other goddesses most commonly associated with personified Wisdom are Ma'at and Isis. Ma'at is the Egyptian goddess of truth and justice—the foundation principle of Egyptian society. Her role in Egyptian religion is described in language that has significant verbal affinities with Proverbs texts.[182] In one Egyptian myth, she is the first

[178]William Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 235, n. 70 and 75.

[179]Refer to discussion on p. 136.

[180]Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 73.

[181]Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 61–62. See fig. 2–4.

[182]Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 500.

creation of the creator god; in other texts, she is both daughter and master plan by which he creates (cf. Proverbs 8). She is often depicted as holding an *ankh*, the symbol of life, in one hand and a scepter, a symbol of power, in the other. In Prov 3:16, Wisdom holds long life in her right hand and riches and honor in her left hand.[183]

The goddess Isis claims "to be the eldest daughter of the sun-god Re, to be the ruler of all lands, to have set down laws for humanity, to control the rise and fall of kings, and many other accomplishments."[184] A Hellenized version of the Egyptian goddess Isis is found in a text to praise herself for her mighty deeds; she is also described as the creator of the universe and presiding over all its elements.[185]

Proverbs 3:13–20 clearly shows borrowing of goddess imagery. The last point of contact in 8:1–31 and 3:13–20 is the shared rhetoric between Wisdom's role in creation (3:19–20; 8:22–31), which grounds the extraordinary claims of her value (3:13–18; 8:1–21), and the subsequent appeal for humans to live with her (3:21–25; 8:32–36). Prov 3:13–20 is the only other passage in the entire book that talks about God's act of creation. In 3:19–20, Wisdom is clearly identified as an attribute of God.

Significance of the Metaphor

To say that the description of Wisdom is modeled after ANE goddesses is not to say that she was thought of among the Hebrew sages as a goddess herself.[186] The biblical writer has borrowed the imagery and incorporated them into a Yahwistic framework.

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[183]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 22.

[184]Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 500.

[185]Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 500.

[186]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 41. For views of Wisdom as a goddess in her own right, see Hadley, "Wisdom and the Goddess," 242–43.

> The controlling context of meaning remained the Jewish faith, with borrowings being assimilated to that faith, while at the same time through the use of new categories Jewish beliefs about God and God's ways with the world were expressed in a way that matched the religious depth and style of the goddess literature and cult, and counteracted its appeal.[187]

Through the adaptation of goddess imagery, the sages of Israel could be seen to be offering an alternative to the worldview provided by the fertility religions of the region. "[A]ll that one actually sought from these other religions was to be found in YHWH, whose attribute it was not merely to have Wisdom and life, but to bestow it on his creation and creatures."[188]

Israel's sages borrowed goddess imagery in order to transform it. But in so doing, they also transformed the image of Wisdom. The double-back effect of metaphor was to inject an element of the feminine-transcendent in the figure of wisdom. As we shall see later, once the figure of wisdom was connected with the divine in some way, it opened the door for the feminine element to begin to be attached to the divine as well.

Lady Wisdom as a Metaphor for God Immanent

There is a fifth and final proposal for the theological meaning of the transcendent figure of wisdom in Prov 8. For Johnson, she is the *personification of God's own self in creative and saving involvement with the world***.**[189] Here Wisdom is YHWH, the metaphor being a way of asserting the transcendent God's nearness to the world in such a way

[187]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 271.

[188]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 48.

[189]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 273. Johnson cites James Dunn who similarly used the hermeneutical key of transcendence/immanence to interpret Wisdom's appearance.

that God's transcendence was not compromised.[190] For support, there is a functional equivalence between the deeds of Wisdom and those of God. How personified Wisdom is described and what she does are also attributed to God.[191]

Two scholars who agree with this view are Murphy who refers to personified Wisdom as a "surrogate for YHWH"[192] and Terrien who explains her as the "theology of presence"[193] of the sages of Israel. Lady Wisdom is how the sages spoke of access to the divine presence. Like the person of Jesus much later, she is "the bearer of a divine presence in a human personality."[194]

To speak of Wisdom is to speak of God's relation to the world, in its nearness and activity and summons. This also makes the attribution to Jesus of Wisdom's many descriptions in the New Testament era that much more meaningful. Jesus is God immanent and incarnate in a way that Wisdom could only hint at!

The multivalent descriptions of Wisdom are not meant to be harmonized. The imagery for wisdom is a complex phenomenon: wisdom in some cases is an attribute of God, in some cases an attribute God has bestowed on creation, and in some cases a gift that God can give to human beings that they are called upon to embrace and live with.[195]

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[190]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 273.

[191]Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 273. Refer also to the discussion on the metaphor of wisdom as a prophet earlier in this article.

[192]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 280.

[193]Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 352, 355.

[194]Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, 361.

[195]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 39.

Metaphor 5: Wisdom as a Housebuilder and Host (Prov 9:1–6)

The imagery of Wisdom as a transcendent figure continues with this final metaphor. Proverbs 9 consists of a two-part wisdom poem (9:1–6, 13–18) that sandwiches an instruction (9:7–12). The wisdom poem contrasts Lady Wisdom (9:1–6) with her archrival Lady Folly (9:13–18). The intervening verses (9:7–12) echo Proverbs 1:1–7 and function as an *inclusio* for Proverbs 1–9 as a whole.[196] The verse that summarizes the whole wisdom tradition—"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (1:7; 9:10)—is fittingly found only in these two passages.

PROVERBS 9

1 Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars.
2 She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table.
3 She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls from the highest places in the town,
4 "You that are simple, turn in here!" To those without sense she says,
5 "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.
6 Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight."

Wisdom is a banquet host inviting people to a feast in the house that she has built. The seven pillars (v. 1) are not decorative columns but supports on which a house rests (Judg 16:25, 26, 29).[197] *ʿAmmûḏ* "pillars" is the same word for the pillars that hold up the tabernacle (Exod 38–40) and the Solomonic Temple (1 Kgs 7). It is also used of the columns founded upon the earth (i.e. the mountains) to hold up the sky (Job 9:6; 26:10–11; Ps 75:4).[198]

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[196]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 105.

[197]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 106.

[198]Leo Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*: *The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), 95.

Various conjectures have been given for what the seven pillars or seven columns represent.[199] Seven signifies perfection, so the seven pillars can connote completeness and grandeur, which means Wisdom has built the perfect house or home.[200] "Considering the restrictions of space in ancient Israel's cities, seven supporting pillars point to an exceptionally large, grand, and stately structure where numerous guests are expected."[201]

Is a temple in view? The temple of Aphrodite on Cyprus was named "The Holy Place of the Seven within the Stelae."[202] The sanctuary and Temple is referred to as the "house of God" (Exod 23:19; 1 Sam 1:7, 19, 24, etc; 1 Kgs 5–7). If so, this passage has borrowed another goddess motif to depict personified Wisdom as a transcendent figure with cosmic and mythological dimensions.[203]

The Banquet Motif

In the ancient Near East, the banquet symbolizes joy and celebration. A banquet is often held to mark a great victory or success. In the *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian story of creation, Marduk hosts a great feast to celebrate his victory over Tiamat. Stories of religious and victory feasts are likewise common in the Hebrew Bible (Exod 12:43–47; 1 Sam 9:12–13; 1 Chr 12:38–40). In postexilic prophecy and Jewish apocalyptic texts, the banquet came to symbolize the blessings expected in the end-time, combining the lavish meal with the imagery of divine marriage (Isa 54:1–55:2; 65:11–14). This motif is later taken up in the New Testament

[199]See Murphy, *Proverbs*, 58 for a list by Greenfield of what the "seven" stand for.

[200]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 48, n. 145; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 106.

[201]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 433.

[202]Stelae represented deities in Canaanite sanctuaries (Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 95).

[203]Personified Wisdom is being presented as an alternative to Aphrodite, the goddess of love (Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 48).

in the imagery of the Church as the bride of Christ (Matt 8:11; 22:1–12; the Last Supper texts; Eph 5:31–32; Rev 19:6–21).[204]

Numerous ANE texts associate a feast with the dedication of a building (cf. 1 Kgs 8:62–66). In particular, the scene depicted in 9:1–3 resembles the dedication of Baal's palace in Ugaritic texts where Baal declares: "My house I have built of silver,/My palace of gold." In preparing his feast, Baal slays oxen and other animals, "He calls his brothers into his house … he supplies the gods with rams and wine … while the gods eat and drink …."[205] What this means, according to Clifford, is that

> [s]ince Baal no longer needs to live in El's palace, his house symbolizes his authority. Wisdom's house … symbolizes her great authority and dignity, which was stated so strongly in chap. 8, especially in vv. 22–31. Those who come to her banquet acknowledge her authority and rejoice in her company.[206]

The Guest List

Wisdom celebrates the completion of her house by sending out her maidservants to invite the *peṯî* "simple" and *ḥăsar-lēḇ* "those without sense" to come (9:4).

For the sages of Israel, the world can be divided into four groups of people based on their willingness to learn wisdom: the *peṯî/pəṯā'yîm*[207] "simple"/"youth"/"naïve," the *kəsîl/kəsîlîm* "fool," the *lēṣ/lēṣîm* or *'ĕwîl/'ĕwîlîm* "mocker," and the *rāšā'/rəšā'îm* "wicked." There is frequent overlap among the last three groups.

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[204]"banquet, eschatological (or messianic banquet)," in Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green, eds., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period: 450 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 75–76.

[205]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 432; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 103.

[206]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 103.

[207]*Pəṯā'yîm* can also be spelled *pəṯāyîm* (Prov 1:22, 32) and *pəṯāyyîm* (22:3).

The *peṯî* are considered the "mildest" sort of fools. In qal, the root *pty* means "being easily misled." These people are "malleable, capable of being shaped and improved by education (1:4; 8:5; 12:25; 21:11) and still have hope of joining the company of the wise (1:22; 9:4)."[208] In other words, they are still teachable. In various texts, they are described as young (1:4; 7:7), *ḥăsar-lēḇ* "lacking in sense" (7:7; 9:4, 16), not shrewd (14:15, 18) nor insightful (19:25) nor wise (21:11), but weak-willed (22:3; 27:15), and easily seduced (7:7, 21–22).[209] However, their ignorance carries moral and religious culpability and danger to themselves. "[U]ntil they opt no longer to remain uncommitted to wisdom, they are wayward …. Until they repent, they are grouped with morally culpable fools and mockers (1:22, 32; 8:5)."[210]

Compared to the *peṯî* who is still teachable, the *kəsîl*/*ʾĕwîl* "fool" is fixed in the correctness of his opinion and lifestyle and despises discipline and correction (15:5, 20).[211] There is an escalation with the *lēṣ* "mocker/scoffer," who is more hardened in his ways than the fool,[212] and the *rāšāʿ* "wicked," regarded as the opposite of the *ṣadîq* "righteous."[213]

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[208]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 111.

[209]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 111.

[210]Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 111.

[211]Fools lack wisdom (10:14, 21; 14:33), have poor speech (10:8, 10; 17:28; 27:3; 10:18; 12:23; 15:2; 19:1), lack self-control and are hot-tempered (12:16; 20:3; 19:11), morally insolent, intractable, and incorrigible (12:15; 24:7; 15:14; 17:10; 18:2; 26:5, 11; 28:26) (Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 112).

[212]He hates the wise (9:7–8; 15:12) and even takes pride in getting away with his deviation from wisdom (14:6; 21:24). He is destructive of community values (29:8) and needs to be driven out for order to be restored (22:10). In the end, the tables are turned as Wisdom scoffs at him (Prov 1:26) and the Lord cuts him down, along with tyrants and evildoers (Isa 29:20) (Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 114).

[213]His thoughts, deeds and lifestyle are characteristically self-serving at the expense of his community. *Rāšāʿ* appears in parallel with terms such as "perverse"

In Prov 1:22, Wisdom addresses the *pəṯā'yîm* "simple ones," *lēṣîm* "mockers," and *kəsîlîm* "fools." In Prov 8:5 as in chapter 9, she narrows her audience to the *pəṯā'yîm*, holding out hope that they can learn wisdom. However, she is not the only one targeting them.

A Rival Invitation

PROVERBS 9

13 The foolish woman is loud; she is ignorant and knows nothing.
14 She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the high places of the town,
15 calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way,
16 "You who are simple, turn in here!" And to those without sense she says,
17 "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant."
18 But they do not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

A second woman presides at her private "house" (9:14) and issues dinner invitations.[214] The identity of Lady Wisdom's rival is unmasked as Lady Folly in verse 13: "The foolish woman (*'ēšeṯ kəsîlûṯ*) is loud; she is ignorant (*pəṯayyûṯ*) and knows nothing." She is described with the abstract noun forms of the same words for *kəsîl* "fool" and *peṯî* "ignorant"/"simple"/"naïve."

The description of the meal is weighted in Wisdom's favor. She offers meat, wine and bread (9:2), signifying the best.[215] In contrast, the meal offered by Lady Folly consists of "stolen water" and "bread eaten in secret" (9:17). This points back to the stolen tryst the "strange

(10:32), "treacherous" (2:22); and "evildoer" (6:18; 14:19; 24:20). They are described as "greedy (10:3; 21:10), violent (10:6), threaten innocent life (12:6; 24:15), practice deceit (12:5) and cruelty (12:10) and speak perversely (10:32; 11:11; 15:28; 19:28). The Lord detests them and their ways (15:9, 29), including their sacrifices (15:8; 21:27) (Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 110).

[214]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 58.

[215]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 49.

woman" in Prov 7 enticed the young man with. Lady Folly's invitation for the youth to partake of "stolen water" (9:17) is seen as having sexual overtones, water being a common Hebrew euphemism for sexuality (Prov 5:15–17). "Stolen water" refers to the stealing of sexuality belonging to another, in other words, adultery. This constitutes another connection to the forbidden woman of chapters 2, 5, and 7.[216] In Prov 4:17, the bread and wine of the wicked and evildoers is described as wickedness and violence.

Described with the same traits of the forbidden woman of chapters 2, 5 and 7, Lady Folly is *hōmiyyāh* "loud" (9:13; 7:11), without *da'at* "knowledge" (9:13; 5:6), and her path leads to death and Sheol (9:18; 2:18; 5:5; 7:27).[217] Other shared vocabulary are "house" (7:6, 8, 11, 19, 20, 27; 9:1, 14); *'ōbēr* "passing by" (7:8; 9:15) and *derek* "way" (7:8, 25; 9:15).[218]

As Proverbs 1–9 reaches its climax, Lady Folly merges with the figure of the strange woman of chapters 2, 5 and 7 to serve as the foil or nemesis of Lady Wisdom.[219] Lady Folly represents "the essence of the opposite of wisdom."[220] Both compete for the attention and allegiance of the simple and those lacking in sense (9:4, 16). Both utilize the same strategy of inviting them for fellowship and hospitality in their house. Even the invitation is couched in similar language (9:4–5, 16–17), but the similarity ends there. Accepting Wisdom's invitation leads to life (v. 6); accepting Folly's invitation leads to death (v. 18).

The structure of this chapter, with the first six verses about Lady Wisdom and the last six about Lady Folly, highlight this life-and-death choice between Wisdom and Folly. Even the structures of the two

[216]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 107; cf. R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes,* Anchor Bible (NY: Doubleday, 1985), 76.

[217]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 104.

[218]Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 182.

[219]Murphy, "Wisdom and Eros," 603.

[220]Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 57.

stanzas are parallel. Both start off with a third-person description of the personified figures, followed by invitations to the unlearned in first-person speech. The stanza about Lady Folly though returns to the third-person description, detailing the surprise that awaits the youth who accept Folly's invitation. They discover that those who attend Folly's banquet are the dead.[221]

Proverbs 1–9 ends with this summons to a final decision regarding wisdom or folly. Depicting Wisdom and Folly in close similarity dramatizes the need for discernment. Because "folly can be disguised as wisdom"[222] and "use Wisdom's ways to lure the unwary,"[223] people need discernment to distinguish the right path. Not only is Proverbs 9 a fitting conclusion to Proverbs 1–9, it also serves as introduction to the second major section of the book, which consists almost entirely of short sayings from which truth needs to be carefully sifted.[224]

Significance of the Metaphor

Derek or "way" is one of the primary motifs of the wisdom movement.[225] "Way" connotes movement. In Prov 1–9, *derek* is accompanied by verbs of motion such as *hālak* "walk"/"go" (1:15; 2:20; 3:23), *bô'* "go in/enter" (4:14), *'āšar* "go straight, walk" (4:14), *rāḥaq* "depart" (5:8) as well as the noun form of *'āraḥ* "wander, journey" (2:8; 9:15).

"Way" is also a metaphor for customary behavior or way of life that one must preserve or keep oneself in (6:23; 8:20; 9:6). "A path

[221]Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 94.

[222]Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 57.

[223]Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 59.

[224]Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 59.

[225]Norman Habel, "The Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9," *Interpretation* 26:2 (April 1972): 133.

is a social product, made by many feet over a period of time"[226] and connotes a destination and a will.

> A path does not … exclude movement in any direction. It only makes its own direction the easiest, most natural, most logical way of proceeding. As each individual "freely" chooses to walk the path, that act incises the path more deeply. Finally, a path orders the world in a particular way as it establishes relations between place and place ….[227]

Just as important, "way" implies destination. The destination of the way of wisdom is the house of wisdom, where there is rest and feasting. There is a sense of coming home after the culmination of a journey; there is celebration, joy, abundance, and a warm welcome to be found at home. In contrast, the way of Folly leads to Sheol and death (7:27), hence, the warning not to go near the door of her house (5:8).

What is this house or Temple of wisdom? Various suggestions have been made: the world, the wisdom tradition, the book of Proverbs, and the poem itself. The world metaphorically presented as a building, even a sacred one, is not uncommon in the ancient Near East.[228] "The house which Wisdom builds is but another way of describing the world she has constructed through her divine counsel (in 8:22ff), or what is more likely, that her house, like ancient temples, is the earthly counterpart of the cosmic superstructure."[229]

Perdue cites other suggestions which see the house of wisdom as the wisdom school where students study and live, or even the poem of Proverbs 9 itself for its "imaginat[ive] construct[ion] of reality in

[226]Carol Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy Day (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 147.

[227]Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," 147.

[228]Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 96.

[229]Habel, "Symbolism of Wisdom," 156.

which wisdom and folly struggle for domination and rule."[230] For Murphy, the book of Proverbs is the only house of Woman Wisdom (Prov 14:1 and 24:3).[231] But most likely the whole Wisdom tradition is considered by the sages as the house of Wisdom. "The wisdom tradition does not consist merely of learned insights by intelligent people or practical advice about how to get on in life, but is a teaching that is grounded in the fundamental structures of the cosmos and the nature and character of God."[232]

People are asked to enter the door of Wisdom's house (8:34), and not the door of the house of the strange woman (5:8) or Folly (9:14). The metaphor of the pathway thus "maps" both the instruction (the way of wisdom) and the response to it (how one walks), imbuing them with a sense of dynamic, mutual engagement.[233]

Conclusion

While the five metaphors of personified wisdom have been isolated for the purpose of analysis, interconnections among them can be discovered so that Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9 comes out as a "complex, composite, and highly stylized"[234] figure.

Prov 1:20–33 is connected to Prov 8 by the image of the street prophet. The personification of Wisdom as bride and lover in Prov 4:5–9 and 7:4–5 intersect with the banquet host and house builder in

[230]Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 97. An alternative proposal is that of Skehan who sees the seven pillars of wisdom as the seven poems in Proverbs 2–7 (Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 356, n. 72).

[231]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 58–59.

[232]Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 96.

[233]Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 33.

[234]Moore, "'Wise Women' or Wisdom Woman," 157.

Prov 9, not only because of the gender-stereotyped roles described but also because of the protection she provides against another stylized feminine figure—the "strange woman" in Prov 4–7/Lady Folly in Prov 9. In Prov 8:1–21, personified Wisdom engages in self-promotion of her benefits, recalling the language of Prov 4. The figure of Wisdom as royal adviser in Prov 8:14–16 is echoed by the image of the transcendent figure-companion of YHWH in Prov 8:22–31 and 3:13–20.

While saying that the various depictions of wisdom are not to be harmonized, we nevertheless have found that Lady Wisdom unites the various metaphors for wisdom in a way that does not lead to reductionism. Camp calls Lady Wisdom a "root metaphor."[235] Root metaphors are "dominant" images that organize metaphorical statements into metaphorical networks rather than leave them isolated.[236] Some examples are God as King, Father, Husband, Lord, Shepherd, and Judge as well as Rock, Fortress, Redeemer, and Suffering Servant.[237]

Root metaphors have the affective depth and structural power to generate and organize other metaphors.[238] They bring together the partial metaphors borrowed from our diverse experiences in a way that gives them both stability and conceptual diversity. By carrying a whole constellation of associations, the use of a root metaphor evokes the

[235]Claudia Camp ("Woman Wisdom as Root Metaphor: A Theological Consideration," in *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in Honor of Roland E. Murphy*, JSOT Supplement Series 58, ed. Kenneth G. Hoglund, et al. [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987], 45–76) calls Lady Wisdom the root metaphor for wisdom, although for R. C. Leeuwen, it is not Lady Wisdom but the polarities of Wisdom/Folly, good/wicked, life/death, which reflect the limits God has placed on life (Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 22).

[236]Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (Toronto: University Press, 1991/1997), 244.

[237]Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 64.

[238]Camp, "Woman Wisdom as Root Metaphor," 49.

whole network. They assemble and scatter—"assembl[ing] subordinate images together … [and] scatter[ing] concepts at a higher level." This enables the continuing vitality of the metaphor that leads to an unlimited number of potential interpretations at a conceptual level.[239]

[239]Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 64; Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 244.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LADY WISDOM:
A Ricoeurian Synthesis

Abigail Ramos Teh

> The beauty of metaphors … is that … you cannot control them. It flows. Like water, it will find its level. It will seek new paths.
>
> – Karl Gaspar, CSsR

According to Ricoeur, symbols and metaphors have a certain "logic" which gives rise to meaning. The iconic statement of Ricoeur is: The symbol gives, and what the symbol gives rise to is thought.[1] Symbols interrogate, challenge, address, and ask questions from us. They have a richness which prevents premature closure. The symbols' exploratory function is its contribution to understanding.[2]

"Primary 'spontaneous' symbolic expressions … born in living emotional experiences … lead first to the developed language of myth, then to the elaborated language of gnosis"[3] or, in other words,

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[1]Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (NY: Harper & Row, 1967), 348.

[2]Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, 5.

[3]This is how Habel (Norman Habel, "The Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9," *Interpretation* 26:2 [April 1972]: 133) summarized Ricoeur's metaphorical process.

conceptual language. Symbols "rescue feeling and even fear from silence and confusion; they provide a language for avowal, for confession."[4] Symbols and metaphors, which are but the linguistic expressions of symbols, retain the emotional depth and inarticulable mystery of human experience while rational conceptual language is already an abstraction several removes from it and is often reductionistic in its attempt to systematize our experience of reality. McFague speaks of the relationship between metaphorical and conceptual language in this way:

> Conceptual language tends toward univocity, toward clear and concise meanings for ambiguous, multileveled, imagistic language. In this process something is lost and something is gained: richness and multivalency are sacrificed for precision and consistency …. The relationship, however, is symbiotic. Images "feed" concepts; concepts "discipline" images. Images without concepts are blind, concepts without images are sterile …. Images are never free of the need for interpretation by concepts, their critique of competing images, or their demythologizing of literalized models. Concepts are never free of the need for funding by images, the affectional and existential richness of images, and the qualification against conceptual pretensions supplied by the plurality of images.[5]

Because of this, metaphorical language "does not just tolerate interpretation but *demands* it."[6] It is interpretation that uncovers the multiple meanings of symbols and metaphors.[7] In fact, Ricoeur boldly declares: "It is by interpreting that we can hear again."[8] By this he is not referring to

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[4]Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, 350.

[5]Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 26.

[6]McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 22.

[7]Habel, "Symbolism of Wisdom," 132–33 quoting Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 9, 12.

[8]Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, 351.

allegorization, which in the process of attempting to unmask the image for any hidden meaning renders the image useless afterwards.[9]

Applying to metaphor what Ricoeur said about genres, "[t]he mistaken assumption here would be to take these forms of discourse as simple literary genres [or metaphors] which ought to be neutralized so that we can extract their theological content. They are not a mere rhetorical motif to be eliminated, but a constitutive element."[10] Ricoeur proposed: "What we need is an interpretation that respects the original enigma of the symbols, that lets itself be taught by them, but that, beginning from there, promotes the meaning, forms the meaning in the full responsibility of autonomous thought."[11]

The aim is to bring the incoherent to coherence, not through the first naïvete of pre-critical interpretation but, passing through modern critical thought with its attention to historical and literary questions, to a second naïvete that is restorative and non-reductionistic, one that appreciates the symbol as symbol. By holding together "the immediacy of the symbol and the mediation of thought," it can lead to a "revivification" of conceptual thought.[12]

This requires that metaphorical interpretation not stop with metaphors but move beyond to religious/theological language,

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[9]Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, 348. Allegorical interpretation, for example, would treat the bread and wine in Prov 9 as non-literal; Clement of Alexandria, in fact, interpreted it as the celebration of the Eucharist (R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002], 246, 120).

[10]Paul Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 91–92.

[11]Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, 349–50.

[12]Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, 350–51. McFague (*Metaphorical Theology*, 26) explains: "In a metaphorical theology, there is no suggestion of a hierarchy among metaphors, models, and concepts: concepts are not higher, better, or more necessary than images, or vice versa."

precisely to avoid taking metaphors and symbols of a particular historical and cultural context and absolutizing them for all times and all contexts.[13] In the end, the whole process is envisioned to lead to better understanding of self and our relationships in the world through post-critical appropriation.[14]

The Significance of Lady Wisdom for Israel

The "world of the text" of the book of Proverbs is the acquisition of wisdom,[15] the search for meaning and order in life. It is grounded on the belief that God has an orderly design embedded in the cosmos. It remained for other wisdom books like Job and Ecclesiastes to set this quest for meaningfulness in the context of limit-situations such as mystery, suffering, and death. But in the book of Proverbs, the wise proceed by way of the experience of the created world to encounter God as the very source of wisdom.[16] Like a folding fan which has several panels all proceeding from a single source or joint, the metaphors of Wisdom can be viewed as different modes of YHWH's creative and saving involvement with the world that the wise experience.

"The symbol gives rise to thought, thought which proceeds according to the metaphor."[17] In the previous article,[18] the five metaphors for personified wisdom were examined: the street prophet

[13]McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 22.

[14]Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, 355–56.

[15]Thomas Dailey, *The Repentant Job: A Ricoeurian Icon for Biblical Theology* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1994), 159.

[16]Dailey, *Repentant Job*, 167–68.

[17]Elizabeth Johnson, "The Symbolic Character of Theological Statements about Mary," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22:2 (Spring 1985): 327.

[18]Abigail Teh, "Images of Personified Wisdom," *Landas* 22:1 (2008), 103-161.

(Prov 1 and 8), the bride and lover (Prov 4 and 7), the royal adviser and transcendent figure who is the companion of YHWH (Prov 3 and 8), and the house builder and banquet host (Prov 9). What we find is that the metaphors of personified wisdom connect the pursuit of wisdom to three overlapping levels: personal human experience, Yahwistic religion, and the cosmic-mythological dimension.[19] Because these levels overlap and should not be seen as mutually exclusive, we can note several intersections.

The first level—that of personal human experience—is seen in the metaphors of wisdom as a prophet (Prov 1 and 8), bride and lover (Prov 4 and 7), and house builder and banquet host (Prov 9). These passages lay the reality and responsibility of choice before the individual. In wisdom's world of "binary contrasts,"[20] there is a forced dichotomy, only two choices to choose from, whether it is the way of one's father and mother or the way of the fools; the embrace of one's bride or the embrace of the strange woman; the banquet invitation of Lady Wisdom or that of Lady Folly. In the end, the person alone can decide his/her path and subsequent destiny. The first level of personal human experience is also the focus of texts that predicate the pursuit of wisdom on the individual's desire for fullness of life—chief of which would be long life, well-being, prosperity, honor, harmony. Seeking wisdom will lead to personal gain.

The second level of Yahwistic religion is seen overlapping in the metaphors of wisdom as street prophet (Prov 1 and 8), bride and lover (Prov 4 and 7), royal adviser and companion of YHWH (Prov 8). These metaphors succeed in linking the whole wisdom enterprise to YHWH, with the result that the sayings of the sages, which consist of common-sense observations and reflections from daily life, come to

[19]Habel ("Symbolism of Wisdom," 134–57) identifies these three as overlapping zones or "locales" in life that wisdom impinges on but limits the discussion of symbols to the two ways, two hearts, and two companions.

[20]Habel, "Symbolism of Wisdom," 135.

be backed up with the authority of YHWH because of the connection to prophetic motifs and hence Israel's covenant. The sense of urgency and inevitability of judgment for wrong choices is communicated through the language of life and death (Prov 1:12, 19; 5:5–6; 7:23, 27; 9:11, 18) which in turn echoes the vocabulary of the covenant call to choose life over death, blessings over curses (Deut 30:15, 19; etc.). The pursuit of wisdom is a matter of life and death, not to be trivialized or considered frivolous or extraneous.

The metaphor of bride and lover (Prov 4 and 7) speaks to both the first and second levels. On the level of personal experience, it functions to communicate the injunction to avoid sexually illicit behavior, and on the level of Yahwistic religion, the warning to avoid the strange woman, historically and symbolically associated with Israel's spiritual apostasy. The metaphor of Wisdom as royal adviser (Prov 8) also speaks to the first two levels. Wisdom, traditionally understood as a divine endowment to Israel's kings, is "democratized" and promised to all who would follow her.[21]

This complex layering reflects what Wells calls the "contextualizing character" of Israel's wisdom literature. Traditionally the wisdom movement that Israel shared with her ancient Near East neighbors found wisdom in the experience of engagement with the world. For them, "[a]ll wisdom is one, and all wisdom, even from beyond Israel, comes from God."[22] Hence, Israel's wisdom writings "do not stress revelation in the specific sense but see knowledge and discovery as an active human enterprise."[23] Wisdom does not consist of "imperatives but intellectual and experiential activity coupled with religious behavior to provide a guide for living well and living properly. Wise behavior is

[21]Similarly, the exilic prophet Second Isaiah democratized the promises of the Davidic covenant to the whole people in Isa. 55:3–5.

[22]Harold Wells, "Trinitarian Feminism: Elizabeth Johnson's Wisdom Christology," *Theology Today* 52:3 (October 1995): 332.

[23]Wells, "Trinitarian Feminism," 332.

not grounded here in the Mosaic law, but in what may be called spiritual good sense and a sagacious reading of the world and its realities."[24]

The wisdom literature is silent about the distinctives of Israel's faith, such as the exodus, the law, the Sinai covenant and the priestly cultus. These central aspects of Israel's faith, however, are not absent; they are simply assumed and bracketed out,[25] since in this way the sages are able to engage with other important issues and concerns such as everyday spirituality, the limit-situations of innocent suffering and death, the existential meaning of life, all of which are reflected in the wisdom writings of the ancient Near East. This general universal knowledge was placed in interaction with the Torah sometime in the post-exilic period. The authority of the Torah also came to cover wisdom's proverbial sayings and observations of life.

> … an editing process [can be discerned] in which Torah and prophetic materials are sapientialized, that is, nonwisdom traditions are interpreted in terms of wisdom through a process of redaction. In this way wisdom interpretations legitimate the Torah and its authority for a new generation by demonstrating how Torah informs the here-and-now concerns of practical ethical life. On the other hand, Torah remains central and basic; wisdom is grounded in the fundamental authority of the superior canonical Torah traditions, which allows wisdom its own relative authority as a guide to righteousness.[26]

This "intra-canonical process" is parallel to today's interpretive approaches which place other fields of human knowledge, for example, social-scientific analysis and scientific discoveries, in conversation with

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[24]Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), 23.

[25]Wells, "Trinitarian Feminism," 332.

[26]Wells, "Trinitarian Feminism," 333 quoting Gerald Sheppard, *Wisdom as Hermeneutical Construct: A Study in the Sapientializing of the Old Testament* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 118–19, 159–60.

the Scriptures. Scriptural revelation remains essentially dominant but is in turn enriched by practical worldly wisdom and experience.[27]

Alternative Symbolic System, Alternative Reality

Something similar happens when personified Wisdom is described in terms borrowed from goddess imagery. This is the third level of the sages' theological reflection—cosmic-mythological.

The metaphors of wisdom as companion of YHWH during creation (Prov 3 and 8) and that of house builder and banquet host (Prov 9) demonstrate extensive use of the metaphors of mythological motifs borrowed from Israel's ANE neighbors. At the same time, with the contrast to personified Folly that ends Prov 9, wisdom, even as it reaches the heights of cosmic symbols, is once more linked to the level of personal human experience: Don't make foolish choices with one's life.

Apart from the clearly cosmic symbolism of Prov 8:22–31, Wisdom's building of a house in Prov 9:1–6 also carries mythological overtones. In the ancient world, the building and maintenance of temples and sanctuaries by the gods and rulers are considered the way to maintain the order of the world and society. Thus in Israel, the tabernacle and Temple were built based on strict compliance with divine instructions. The building of a house imitates this mythical metaphor. Humans are thought to reactualize divine creation when they construct their habitation. The activity of house-building then is normally accompanied by rituals and celebrations "designed to place the structure within the durative order of the cosmos."[28]

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[27]Wells, "Trinitarian Feminism," 333.

[28]Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt: Metaphorical Theology in the Book of Job*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 112 (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1991), 39.

Another mythological metaphor for wisdom which reinforces the transhistorical claim for Israel's wisdom is that of wisdom as "tree of life" (Prov 3:18), part of the common stock of mythological imagery shared by both the ancient Near East and Israel (Gen 2–3; Exod 31:3–5, 7–9).[29] In the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh, a special tree or plant is accorded powers to bring renewal and rejuvenation. It represents fertility, life in all its potency, and everlasting life. It is known in Canaan as a symbol for Asherah and is carved on the pillars at the Temple entrance.[30]

The metaphor claims primordiality for wisdom by her acclamation as "the tree of life." In Gen 2–3, it is the tree that everyone should choose, unlike the choice of Adam and Eve in the Adamic Myth.[31] "Those who travel the way of wisdom will reach the tree of life. The tree of life … was a tangible cultic symbol of eternal vitality and cosmic power located within the temple itself at the navel of the earth."[32] The tree of life is the "cosmic center."[33]

Commonly the borrowing of mythological imagery is seen as polemical. Confronted with competition from attractive female deities of the surrounding culture, wisdom's personification arose as a way of "co-opting or ruling out goddess worship in Israel by attributing to YHWH the very attributes that others were finding in pagan goddesses."[34]

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[29]In the New Testament, the tree of life appears again in the eschatological heavens and earth (Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19).

[30]William P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 59–60, 75.

[31]Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 59–60, 75.

[32]Habel, "Symbolism of Wisdom," 151.

[33]Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 59–60.

[34]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 39, n. 103.

> The controlling context of meaning remained the Jewish faith, with borrowings being assimilated to that faith, while at the same time through the use of new categories Jewish beliefs about God and God's ways with the world were expressed in a way that matched the religious depth and style of the goddess literature and cult, and counteracted its appeal.[35]

The borrowing of goddess imagery can be seen to serve another important function. In the absence of symbols of the covenant and cult in the wisdom corpus, Israel looked to her ancient Near Eastern neighbors for an alternate symbolic system. The creative adaptation of goddess imagery enabled Israel, drawing on international wisdom, to craft an alternate frame of reference to speak to a wider audience and prove the sustainability and viability of Yahwistic wisdom among competing claims. The cosmic-mythological connection indicates a universality and timelessness in the wisdom movement that go beyond the nation of Israel and beyond their historical experience.

Brueggemann considers this inculturating tendency "a major theological, intellectual achievement" because it "casts the claims of Israel's faith in terms credible to a larger, quite sophisticated intellectual environment that may have regarded the historical-covenantal traditions of ancient Israel as somewhat primitive."[36] Israel's faith proved that it could break out of its strictly Israelite confines and the "sectarian markings of Israel's covenantal tradition" to "accommodate broader intellectual assumptions."[37]

Personified Wisdom thus connects to key resources within Israel's tradition while at the same time re-interpreting other elements to create new ways of thinking, speaking and acting for Israel! The use

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[35]Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God: A Biblical Basis for Non-Androcentric Christology," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 61 (1985): 271.

[36]Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 307.

[37]Brueggemann, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 314, 307.

of metaphorical language proved crucial for Israel for the development of theological thought.

> … metaphor is not just heuristic or illustrative, but epistemologically necessary if new learning [and change] is to take place … the old framework no longer can encompass our experience and only metaphor—which connects both with what we already know *and* with what we are groping to know—provides the movement that is the distinctive mark of learning [and change].[38]

Theological Affirmations

Behind the metaphors of personified Wisdom lie the theological meaning and truth claims of the text. These are the constant elements that can be drawn from the diverse metaphors and portrayals of wisdom.

- First, wisdom is a primary source of authority for life, deriving this authority from wisdom's primordial association with YHWH before the creation of the world (Prov 8:22–31). Wisdom antedates the world and the historical experience of Israel, and even the Torah.
- Second, wisdom is embedded in creation so that study of the world and of everyday life yields wisdom (Prov 8:22–31; 3:19–20). "The divine ordering, however, is not easy or obvious. Its observation requires attentiveness, discernment, and a right orientation in order to perceive."[39] The sages proceeded by the collection of data and formulating of hypotheses based on the data of many cases; furthermore, wisdom teachings are subject to change and revision once new data arrives. Brueggemann compares the "scientific method" utilized by the sages with the mode of knowledge through

[38]McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 199, n. 19.

[39]Brueggemann, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 309.

divine revelation, and concludes that Israel validates both. In this way, faith and reason hold together in wisdom.[40]

> [T]here is an empirical basis to this 'creation theology' that is quite in contrast to the revelatory, 'top-down' mode of disclosure known at Mount Sinai. The fact that the teaching is inductive and established case by case, however, makes the teaching no less formidable theologically, because wisdom asserts that the God who decrees and maintains a particular ordering of reality toward life is a sovereign beyond challenge whose will, purpose, and order cannot be defied or circumvented with impunity.[41]

- Because of this order in creation, non-Israelite people are able to discover wisdom. This is the third theological affirmation. "'The quest for wisdom is a universal quest, not limited to Jews or Christians.'"[42] This wisdom is knowable and teachable to all. As Ricoeur put it,

> Wisdom finds its literary expression in wisdom literature. But wisdom also surpasses every literary genre …. [It] aims at the individual behind the people of the Covenant, and through him, every human being. Wisdom overflows the framework of the Covenant, which is also the framework of the election of Israel and the promise made to Israel.[43]

- Disregarding this "nature of things," this ordering of reality toward life, leads to death.[44] This is so because ultimately wisdom is thoroughly theological. This is the fourth theological affirmation of the metaphors of wisdom. Every aspect of life is referred back

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[40]Brueggemann, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 308, 311, 314.

[41]Brueggemann, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 310.

[42]Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs*, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 33.

[43]Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," 85.

[44]Brueggemann, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 308.

to the rule of God,[45] locating its parameters or boundaries in "the fear of YHWH," which is the beginning, that is, the origin and source of all wisdom as well as its end and goal.[46] Von Rad puts it this way: Israel certainly was aware of the fact that

> the search for knowledge can go wrong, not as a result of individual, erroneous judgments or of mistakes creeping in at different points, but because of one single mistake at the beginning. One becomes competent and expert as far as the orders in life are concerned only if one begins from knowledge about God.[47]

- Fifth, the acquisition of wisdom is both a divine gift as well as a human task. The quest for wisdom takes place in the context of "a drama … charged with conflict"[48] with competing voices and claims vying for supremacy in one's life. Discernment is needed.
- Lastly, the personification of Wisdom indicates that wisdom is primarily a relationship, not a list of do's and don'ts. Wisdom is more than performing or avoiding certain actions. Wisdom itself is ineffable, not a set of rules or laws or even abstract principles, but a relation to YHWH. It can be expressed in, but is not reducible to, laws, rules or principles.

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[45]Brueggemann, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 307.

[46]*Yir'at YHWH* "the fear of the Lord" appears sixteen times in the whole book. It is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7; 9:10) and consists of knowledge of God (2:5), trust and confidence in YHWH (14:26; 29:25) and obedience to God (24:21; here "fear the Lord" is an imperative-direct object construction). It is also equated to love of knowledge and humility to receive instruction (1:29; 15:33) and its opposite, hatred of evil (8:13; 16:6; 22:4). Wisdom is better than earthly treasure (15:16), though she also rewards her followers richly with long life (10:27; 14:27; 19:23), security (19:23; 29:25) and riches and honor (23:17).

[47]Gerhard Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1972), 67–68.

[48]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 32–33.

As Clifford puts it, the book of Proverbs is "concerned with wisdom as a fundamental option in life rather than specific wise actions. So intense is its focus on wisdom that it reifies and even personalizes it …."[49]

The Contemporary Significance of Lady Wisdom

"In order to complete the process of interpretation, according to the … hermeneutics of Ricoeur, an 'appropriation' of the truth of a [text] is necessary."[50] The book of Proverbs is the text of a faith-community in their quest for wisdom through concrete human experience. This is the world of the text. The biblical text carries truth-claims addressed to the faith community couched in the language, concepts, and images of the time of writing. The aim of appropriation is to allow these truth-claims to emerge and invite the transformative participation of the contemporary reader.[51]

The Social Construction of Meaning

Language is a social product, embodying the conventions and ideologies agreed upon by the community using a particular language. At the same time, language constructs meaning, shaping and maintaining the consciousness of the users of that language.[52]

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[49]Clifford, *Proverbs*, 32.

[50]Dailey, *Repentant Job*, 159.

[51]Sandra Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1999), 180.

[52]Thelma Kintanar, "Textual Analysis," in *Gender-Sensitive & Feminist Methodologies: A Handbook for Health and Social Researchers*, ed. Sylvia Guerrero (Diliman, QC: University of the Philippines Center for Women's Studies, 1999), 250.

Of the five metaphors examined in chapter 3, it is the twin portrayals of wisdom as a bride and lover and her foil, "the strange woman," that raise the most concern among contemporary women reading Proverbs. The classic Madonna-whore paradigm that these metaphors represent, if not interpreted sensitively, is feared as contributing to the perpetration of gender inequality and stereotyping.

As a social structure, patriarchy looks at all relationships in terms of superiority and inferiority, and achieves social cohesion by means of dominative power. Patriarchy differentiates males and females not as individuals but as members of a social class, according to sexual difference. Females are subjected to the male construct of "femininity," being "defined" by relinquishment of power and the indirect or manipulative exercise of power. What is more insidious is when the power and authority is believed to derive from God's will and is exercised in the name of God. Any insubordination to authority is seen as a direct challenge to God.[53]

"Much of women's self and social image is derived from religious values."[54] Unfortunately Scripture has been used to maintain subjugation and marginalization of women, leading to the internalization of a "false consciousness" by women. The resulting oppressive structures of belief and institutions prevent not only women but also men from becoming fully human. Therefore while accepting that the text reflects the limitations of language and culture of the time of writing, care and exegetical sensitivity must be exercised by those who preach and teach the Scriptures in order to read these texts for our time.

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[53]Karen Bloomquist, "'Let God be God': The Theological Necessity of De-Patriarchalizing God," in *Our Naming of God: Problems and Prospects of God-Talk Today*, ed. Carl Braaten (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), 47.

[54]Mary John Mananzan, "Woman and Religion," in *Woman and Religion: A Collection of Essays and Personal Histories*, 3rd ed., ed. Mary John Mananzan (Manila: St. Scholastica's College Institute of Women Studies, 1998), 4.

Language is a powerful tool for ideology and reflects the power relations operative in the society. Garcia-Dungo illustrates this powerfully in her poignant ethnographic study of urban poor women in Manila. The women cope with the tensions and tragedies of spousal abuse and poverty by using "concealing" and "faking" symbols and language to interpret their situation to themselves and to their children. Examples of the women's coping language are: "Lamang talaga sa ginhawa ang kalalakihan," "mababa talaga ang posisyon ng babae sa lalaki," "pagkukunwari," "pagtitimpi," "pagtitiyaga"/"pagtitiis," and "ipasa-Diyos"/"magdasal."[55] Only with such social construction of the meaning of subordination/domination within their families are they able to live under the ever-present reality of psychological and physical abuse.[56]

With the understanding that words are not merely words, the critical reader's task is to open up or "deconstruct" the text by focusing on the "aporias" or impasses of meaning in the text and thus exposing the "oppositional systems (binary, hierarchical oppositions)" underlying it. By showing "how the seemingly authoritative text undercuts it and its own logic," liberating elements may be seen through the inherent contradictions and inconsistencies found in the text itself.[57]

In this section, we will seek to answer this question: What does the femaleness of personified Wisdom contribute to our understanding of wisdom and conversely to our understanding of the female? Before proceeding, it is best to be reminded that "[t]he literal sense has to

[55]"Men really have an easier life than women," "women are lower in status than men," "using pretense," "controlling my emotions," "enduring the suffering," and "leaving it all to God"/"praying" (Nanette Garcia-Dungo, *The Social Construction of Subordination/Domination Among Women in Urban Poor Household* [Diliman, QC: University of the Philippines College of Social Sciences and Philosophy Publications, 1999], 14, 24–27).

[56]Garcia-Dungo, *Social Construction of Subordination/Domination*, 4.

[57]Kintanar, "Textual Analysis," 251.

be left behind so that the metaphorical sense can emerge; the literal reference must collapse so that the heuristic fiction can work its redescription of reality."[58]

Wisdom is not literally female, and yet to say that the femaleness does not affect the figure is to disregard the "double-back" quality of metaphor. Though difficult, one must hold on to the multivalent and elusive character of metaphors. Only in this way can one fulfill "the [task] of each generation … to appropriate the tradition, to enrich and purify it by living interaction with it, and to transmit it to the next generation."[59] How can believers in the twenty-first century, both female and male, appropriate the metaphors of wisdom in ways that liberate and impart dignity to women's experience and not falsify or dismiss it?

Deconstructing the Femaleness of Wisdom

According to James J. Paxson, author of the first full-scale study of personification,[60] personifications were almost exclusively female in ancient writings. "In Hellenic, Roman, and much medieval art and allegorical literature, personified abstractions (i.e. virtues, vices, emotions, natural forces, philosophical concepts) were exclusively female."[61] In the West, writers started to use male personifications along with female ones only beginning in the thirteenth century C.E. A famous example is John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) where the overwhelming majority of personified characters are male.[62]

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[58]Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 68.

[59]Schneiders, *Revelatory Text*, 71.

[60]James J. Paxson, *The Poetics of Personification*, Literature, Culture, Theory Series 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[61]James Paxson, "Personification's Gender," *Rhetorica* 16:2 (Spring 1998): 149.

[62]Paxson, "Personification's Gender," 151.

Modern scholars have attempted to account for this situation with various theories, the most popular and generally accepted of which is grammatical formalism.[63] The female gender of personification simply reflects the feminine gender of most abstract nouns. Biblical scholar Bernhard Lang agrees. "Languages whose grammatical structures give male or female gender to 'things' invite personification."[64] A case for grammatical gender leading to female personification can be made in the Hebrew language, where abstract nouns can be either masculine or feminine in gender.[65]

Following this, *ḥôkmāh* "wisdom" is grammatically marked as feminine and thus wisdom is personified as a female. This can explain the metaphor of wisdom as a prophet in Prov 1:20–33 and 8:1–4 where the gender of the personification does not affect the meaning. However, gender dominates the metaphor of wisdom as bride and lover in Prov

[63]A second theory offered by literary critics and rhetoricians is that female personification reflected the ancient world's asymmetrical gender relations. Women were virtual blank entities on which could be projected virtue or vice. For example, in late Roman culture, the trivialization of women led to an automatic association between women and "mortal sinners" and other powers that society might fear. The third theory of female personification, called the creativity (or procreativity) theory, is a corollary to the second. As the embodiment of motherhood, women best fit the role when the demand is for symbols of "universal genesis, divine creativity, emanation, marriage, parturition, and nurturing or nursing." Certainly this generative power accounts for the preponderance of goddess figures in the fragile ancient world where life and fertility were always in the balance (Paxson, "Personification's Gender," 157–59).

[64]Lang as quoted by Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 37. Lang cites as examples Job 11:14; Prov 20:1; Psa 96:11–12 and Psa 85:13.

[65]Psalm 85:10–11, 13 is a good example. Nouns marked grammatically masculine like *ḥeseḏ* "steadfast love" (v. 10), *ṣeḏeq* "righteousness" (vv. 10, 11, 13), and *šālôm* "peace" (v. 10) are accompanied by masculine verbs and pronominal antecedents. Only *ĕmeṯ* "faithfulness" (vv. 10, 11) is marked feminine in grammatical gender and uses a feminine imperfect verb. However, no extensive personification takes place with masculine nouns to allow us to make a more definitive conclusion.

4:5–9 and 7:4–5 as well as the rivalry between Lady Wisdom/faithful wife and the strange woman/Lady Folly.

Feminist critique has consistently maintained that the biblical text is a product of a patriarchal society in which men dominated if not monopolized public discourse. Women have been rendered invisible and their voices silenced. The history of interpretation of the Church has served to perpetuate the biases present in unreflective male readings.

> The result is that women in the biblical text are often marginalized when they are not omitted entirely, pornographically reduced to their sexuality (because they are presented as they are seen by and function for men), demonized (by male projection), or trivialized (as nonparticipants in the spheres of male activity that alone is deemed significant) …. We get the picture of women that men created, which corresponds to the male understanding of women and their place in society at the time of writing of these documents.[66]

Newsom points out that the author/s of Proverbs 1–9 invite the reader to take the posture of a son being taught by his father. Immediately this imposes the authority structure of a patriarchal family as the authority structure for wisdom. The reader is subject to the authority of the father, which is seen as right and fitting and beyond question. In turn, this perpetuates the authority of the father as head of the patriarchal family unit and urges the son to replicate the status quo.[67] Indeed, feminist theology sees divine command models as reinforcing women's subjection to male authority.[68]

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[66]Schneiders, *Revelatory Text*, 182.

[67]Carol A. Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 149–50; Peggy L. Day, ed., "Introduction," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 6.

[68]Susan Ross, "Women, Beauty and Justice: Moving Beyond Von Balthasar," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 25:1 (2005): 81.

This is not the only element in the personification of wisdom that demonstrates gender stereotypes. The image of women in Proverbs 1–9 serves as a boundary marker. As Newsom puts it, in a male-dominated and -defined context, the woman is the quintessential other. She serves to identify the boundary and what must be repressed or excluded.[69]

The same description for wicked acts and the same warning against the "other woman" is given against dangerous deceiving men (2:16–19; 2:12–15); sinners in general (1:8–19), and those called "wicked," "evildoers," and "violent" (4:10–19). Yet woman becomes the focal point rather than wicked men because she is a figure of ambivalence, both frightening and attractive, both pleasure and danger.[70] "Her femaleness of course is irreversible, irreducible, always posing threat. The contradiction and dissonance can no more be eliminated than can sexual difference itself."[71]

"Because normative humanity is defined as male, woman is an available symbol of the frontiers."[72] Both Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly symbolize the margins, limit or borderline of the symbolic order. The strange woman/Lady Folly represents the entrance to chaos, death and Sheol; Lady Wisdom symbolizes the entrance to life and heaven.[73]

Day remarks: "Newsom's analysis is a caution to those who wish to embrace the 'positive' figure of female Wisdom, for she, like her antithesis, the strange woman, is the symbolic product of a worldview

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[69]Newsom, "Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," 148.

[70]Newsom, "Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," 148. The strange woman is described as having "smooth" speech (2:16; 6:24; 7:5, 21) and her lips drip with honey; the inside of her mouth is smoother than oil (5:3).

[71]Newsom, "Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," 149.

[72]Day, "Introduction," 6–7.

[73]Newsom, "Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," 156–57.

wherein the male is normative and central."[74] While at first glance, this characterization may appear positive, it is not. Because women are regarded by men as the most desirable possession, wisdom is portrayed as female. But in real life, women are no more inherently wise or seductive than men.[75] It is the men who prescribe the politically correct demeanor, behavior and sphere of life for the women.

Even the idealization of personified wisdom, if we take it as representative of women, can perpetuate the patriarchal system. "It is widely recognized in women's studies … that idealized female imagery does not always support women's equality. Indeed, the higher the pedestal and the further removed from the life of real women, the more likely such an image may be used to repress through negative comparisons."[76]

In the Filipino psyche, this is the classic Maria Clara syndrome. The good wife in Proverbs 31:10–31 can be seen as a paradoxical picture; while it portrays the woman as multi-talented and capable, she is praised in the end for her ability to enable her husband to have an outstanding reputation in the community.

The negative assessment of the strange woman/adulterer in Proverbs 1–9, if unchallenged, can perpetuate the double-standard in sexual morality and the vilification of women as the reason behind the failure of men. This is unrealistic particularly in contemporary contexts where male infidelity is the more frequent occurrence. Drawing a parallel from the prophet Hosea's use of husband-wife metaphor for God and unfaithful Israel, Yee comments: "'The gender

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[74]Day, "Introduction," 7.

[75]Dianne Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature: A Liberation-Critical Reading* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997), 98.

[76]Claudia Camp, "The Female Sage in Ancient Israel and in the Biblical Wisdom Literature," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, eds. John Gammie and Leo Perdue (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 199.

specific imagery … throws up obstacles for women in listening to God's Word."[77]

Not all feminist scholars take a negative view of the personification of wisdom. Camp sees the figure of personified wisdom as having a literary and social function. The personified figure unites the multi-faceted proverbs collection and is a reflection of the role of women in post-exilic Jewish society.[78] One of Camp's key insights is that in a patrilineal, patrilocal society, women's authority lies in the domestic and informal sphere—raising up and educating the children and the management of the household. Contexts of social ferment where there is a collapse of formal authority, such as in the pre-monarchic and post-exilic periods, lead to the recognition and validation of women's leadership and contributions for the survival of the community.[79]

Others focus on the goddess imagery utilized in Proverbs 8 and 9. Lang goes to the extent of contending that we take Lady Wisdom as a metaphor that justifies embracing a relationship with God as Goddess. Witherington, however, quickly shoots this down, arguing that it flies in the face of the historical evidence itself. "The search for

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[77]Gale Yee, "Hosea," in *New Interpreter's Bible* VII, ed. Leander Keck, et al. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 232.

[78]Claudia V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, Bible and Literature Series 11 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985), 215.

[79]Camp, "The Female Sage in Ancient Israel," 186–88. In the Scriptures, this is affirmed by texts like Exod 1–2, Judg 4, Sam 14, 20. Exod 1–2 shows us the role of women: the midwives who refused to massacre the infants; the mother and sister of Moses who defy the Pharaoh's decree to hide him in the river; and the Pharaoh's unnamed daughter who adopts Moses. Judg 4 chronicles the leadership of Deborah and the courage of Jael. 2 Sam 14 and 20 give us a glimpse of the work of the wise women of the cities of Tekoa and Abel to call men back to responsible living. Still, while Camp posits an enhancing of the status of Israelite women during the post-exilic period, the attitudes demonstrated by Ezra 9–10 and Nehemiah 10 towards exogamous marriages resulting in forced divorces for Israelite men with non-Israelite wives paint a sobering picture.

the feminine attributes or traits of God, as they are expressed in the biblical literature is a worthwhile endeavor, but it is not well served by ignoring or dismissing the way the personification of Woman Wisdom is in fact used in its original historical and literary context."[80]

Hadley nuances this view by arguing that the attribution of seemingly divine attributes to Lady Wisdom, while placing her "still very much 'under the thumb' of YHWH," may be seen as "an attempt at satisfying [an] apparent need for the feminine to be represented in the deity."[81] Lady Wisdom meets a vacuum in the religious consciousness of Israel. Much can be made of the willingness of Israel's sages to re-image God (or a transcendent figure who is companion to God) in female imagery.

"When metaphors … become literalized to the point that they exclude other metaphors for the same subject or target domain, particularly in the case of God, they function as idols. Put theologically, if any metaphor, no matter how profound, becomes absolutized, as though it were considered ultimate, idolatry becomes the norm."[82] In this way, Woman Wisdom provides a necessary counterbalance to God perceived as solely male.

Newsom concludes: "Israel's wisdom tradition never examined its patriarchal assumptions."[83] It is that task to which we are called for our present generation—to open the text to conversation with contemporary historical consciousness. The text has a surplus of meaning that engages contemporary believers who, to paraphrase

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[80]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 39.

[81]Judith M. Hadley, "Wisdom and the Goddess," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton*, ed. John Day, et al. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 243.

[82]Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 10.

[83]Newsom, "Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," 159.

Schneiders, because of their very formation in the Scriptures, have come to see the moral unacceptability of patriarchy.[84]

Reconstructing the Metaphor

What are we to do with this predominantly male view of woman? Discard the text? Or reinterpret? How do we reinterpret? The challenge is "to find ways of insisting upon the importance of female experience that are appropriate to historical inquiry."[85]

We cannot erase the history of Israel's patriarchal bias against women. But we can move beyond it to read it in ways that adopt a more liberating stance towards women. *In reality, the metaphor of personified wisdom itself is inherently subversive.* The liberating elements need to be uncovered and highlighted. First, the open-endedness of metaphor lends itself to fresh readings in new contexts. Second, just as the figure of women shows ambivalence, metaphors possess a tensive quality of "is"/"is not." Third, not only the metaphors, but wisdom itself has a dialectical stance.

By dialectical is meant that humans are to seek wisdom; at the same time, wisdom is seeking humankind. Wisdom is investigating natural and human phenomena and deducing practical lessons from them; at the same time, wisdom is something that God must reveal if anyone is to know it. Individual proverbs show the dialectical nature of wisdom; each proverb is not a hard and fast rule, but requires appreciation of the right context when it is appropriate to be applied.[86]

Wisdom as Partnership: Alternate Paradigm of Response to God

Proverbs calls for obedience to wisdom's tenets, but this is not blind obedience but one based on reasoned analysis of experience and

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[84]Schneiders, *Revelatory Text*, 176.

[85]Day, "Introduction," 3.

[86]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 22–23.

discernment. Implicit in the instruction genre of Proverbs 1–9 is the understanding that the father is precisely preparing the son for the latter's assuming more independence for his life. The voice of *ḥokmôṯ* is an extension of the voice of the father. "Where the father is the authoritative voice in the family, *ḥokmôṯ* is the corresponding public voice."[87] There is an impending transfer of authority to wisdom, whose primary mode of instruction is observation, reason and discernment. Wisdom makes appeals to reason, common sense, reward, sense of order and fittingness, not merely authority for the sake of authority, although admittedly that is also present.

Feminist theologians are uncomfortable with hierarchical divine command models that tend to reinforce women's subjection to male authority. They prefer models that emphasize human partnership, in particular, focusing on women's concrete and creative ways of engagement and participation rather than obedience as the paradigm of response to God.[88] McFague argues for language about God that is not hierarchical, dualistic, and unchanging but highlights mutuality and participation.[89] Ricoeur himself wrote, "It is through participation in wisdom that someone may be said to be wise."[90]

The metaphor of wisdom as companion, someone who accompanies YHWH during creation (Prov 8:22–31) and guides humans along the path to life (Prov 4:5–19, etc.), would be a key input to the paradigm of wisdom as participation and partnership. There is no denial of the appeal to authority of wisdom (Prov 1:20–33), only the recognition that our present context warrants focus on the alternate paradigm. Wisdom is not primarily seen as the path of moral absolutes (although wisdom tenets do not violate the Torah) but motive for following is

[87]Newsom, "Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," 146.

[88]Ross, "Women, Beauty, and Justice," 81.

[89]McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 2.

[90]Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," 88.

found in the rightness, sense of order, beauty and rhythm that wisdom brings to one's life.

The distinction Bernard Loomer makes between unilateral power vs. relational power is insightful. Unilateral power is the common understanding of power: "'the capacity to influence, guide, adjust, manipulate, shape, control … to advance one's purposes,' and to be affected as little as possible in the process."[91] One's gain in power always results with another's loss of power. In contrast, relational power leads to mutual transformation. It is "the ability both to produce and undergo an effect," since one should not try to exert influence without an appreciation for the situation and person/s one is trying to influence. God exercises both unilateral and relational power. In allowing Abraham and Moses to "bargain" to influence His decision to punish Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19) and the people of Israel (Exod 32–34; Num 13–14), God deals with them using relational power.[92] In the New Testament, Jesus allows his conversation with the Canaanite woman to change his decision (Matt 15:22–28).

Certainly the divine-human partnership is not an equal partnership. There is a qualitative difference when we speak of God in human terms, such as speaking of God and humans as co-creators. Yet the alternative paradigm effects a significant and substantial change in the power structure.

Wisdom as Relationship: Alternate Understanding of Wisdom as Subject, not Object

There are two important implications to the portrayal of wisdom as a personified figure. First, it counteracts the human tendency to objectify wisdom, that is, to equate wisdom with mastery of a collection

[91]Bernard Lee, "The Social Matrix of Religious Obedience," *Review for Religious: A Journal of Catholic Spirituality* 67:3 (2008): 295.

[92]Lee, "The Social Matrix of Religious Obedience," 295, 298.

of wisdom sayings in a book or even many books. Wisdom cannot be mastered; the exhortation is to seek it for the duration of one's life.

For Israel, wisdom is relationship with God, as expressed in the phrase "The fear of YHWH is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 1:7; 9:10). Only God knows the way to wisdom (Job 28). Who can ever master relationship, wisdom, or God? Wisdom also entails relationship with the sages and elders who go before those who wish to learn wisdom. As von Rad put it, "Wisdom does not turn towards man in the shape of an 'It', teaching, guidance, salvation or the like, but of a person, a summoning 'I'."[93]

The writings of educator Parker Palmer on relational knowing help to shed insight on this. "Truth has nothing to do with manufacturing a world, keeping it at a distance, manipulating it to suit our needs, or owning it as property. Nor does it mean projecting our psyches on [it]. Rather, truth involves entering a relationship with someone or something genuinely other than us, but with whom we are intimately bound."[94] Far from learning a list of do's and don'ts, wisdom invites engagement, involvement, cultivation, vulnerability in a relationship that is "mutually accountable and transforming … forged of trust and faith in the face of unknowable risks,"[95] dare one say, on the part of both parties—God and human.

Second, wisdom as relationship means humans always need to factor in the inscrutable freedom of God. Even in a book such as Proverbs, traditionally seen as the prime exponent of the strong deed-consequence nexus of conventional wisdom, six proverbs which speak

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[93]Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* I: *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (NY: Harper & Row, 1962), 444.

[94]Parker Palmer, *To Know as We are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 31.

[95]Palmer, *To Know as We are Known*, 31.

about the operation of the freedom of God in human life were identified by von Rad (Prov 16:9; 19:21; 21:2=16:2; 20:24; 21:30–31).[96]

In Brueggemann's words, "[t]hese serve to make wisdom penultimate, for it is YHWH who is ultimate. These teachers produce not a system of moral calculation; rather, they attest to a relationship that is characterized by inscrutability and mystery, but that has immense concrete implications."[97] While the sages claimed "divine authority for the integrity and truth of what they taught (2 Sam 16:23), they normally avoided a dogmatism that made their teachings absolute, unyielding, and unresponsive to the times, specific circumstances, and human experience. They readily admitted there were limits to their knowledge …."[98]

The embodiment of wisdom in Jesus also points to the relational aspect of wisdom. The horizon of the seeker of wisdom must continually be open to new possibilities and creative engagement in the complexity of life.

Wisdom as Openness to the Other: Alternate Valuations for Truth

In a patriarchal context, the woman is the quintessential and irreducible "other." God is the essential "Other" to humans. Wisdom models what it means to be open to the horizon of others. Israel's wisdom authors borrowed material from pagan non-Israelite sources to invigorate their theological reflection. Similarly our task is to utilize non-Christian sources of knowledge, language and symbols to shed light on our continuing quest to understand God and our Christian mission.

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[96]Brueggemann, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 313.

[97]Brueggemann, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 313.

[98]Leo G. Perdue, *Proverbs*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2000), 8.

The sages' creative adaptation of goddess imagery stands in marked contrast to the early Church's reaction against Gnosticism. Gnosticism allowed the female principle in its concept of the godhead. Without oversimplifying things, an argument could be made that the Church Fathers' reaction against this contributed in some measure to the ecclesiastical patriarchalization that conditions the minds of the Christian community up to today.[99] Contrast the liberating attitudes of Jesus toward women that can be seen in the Gospels. Does this precisely show the danger of failure to acknowledge and theologically adapt contemporary cultural forms, knowledge, and worldviews?

Wisdom as Female: Alternate Images and Language for God

Perhaps Lang and Hadley have a valid point in positing that Lady Wisdom challenges the prevailing male notion of God and affirms the importance of strengthening the association of the feminine element with God. Mananzan points out that archaeology shows that early "religions existed with a goddess as dominant divine image or together with a male God."[100] The Filipino word for God, *Bathala*, consists of *Ba* (*babae* "female"), *Tha* ("light" or "spirit") and *La* (*lalake* "male"). Data from the earliest civilizations in Sumer, Babylon, Egypt, and India show that "the most ancient human image of God was … female," the dominant image being the goddess of fertility.[101] Swidler and Bloomquist concur that the divine was first worshipped as female, with the latter attributing it to the mystery with which the ancients regarded the female ability to bear life, the male role in conception being unknown at that time.[102]

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[99]Mananzan, "Woman and Religion," 7–8.

[100]Mananzan, "Women and Religion," 4–5.

[101]Mananzan, "Women and Religion," 4–5.

[102]Leonard Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Women* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 22–23; Bloomquist, "Let God be God," 52.

The Hebrew Scriptures use many female images for God. God is portrayed as a mother giving birth to Israel (Deut 32:18), in birth pangs (Isa 42:13–14), with a womb (Job 38:28–29; Isa 46:3–4; 63:14–15), nursing (Num 11:12; Isa 49:14–15) and comforting a child (Ps 131:1–2; Isa 66:12–13). God is also portrayed as the mistress of a house (Ps 123:2) who provides and prepares food (Ps 23:5; Exod 16:35; 17:6), a midwife (Ps 22:9), and a seamstress who clothes people (Gen 3:21; Ps 102:26; Matt 6:30). In truth, God has no gender, being freely portrayed in both male and female imagery in the Scriptures. As Murphy succinctly put it: "God is no more female than male"[103]; Swidler calls God "androgynous."[104]

Patriarchal monotheism was correct in its sensitivity to the need of a polemic against pagan goddess worship and the sexual rites that often accompanied it. The problem was the tradition did not absorb the feminine images of God in such a way that would lead to the liberation of the social structures. While not the only factor, when the feminine element in God is lost or underrepresented, this leads to a loss of status for women. A recovery of the feminine image of God can help lead to a "stripping away of women's false consciousness."[105] Camp even calls for a reform in traditional Jewish and Christian worship and the creation of woman-centered worship traditions that would speak more meaningfully to women (and men).[106] This is not to take away from the picture of God we already have but to make the picture more complete.

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[103]Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, Word Biblical Commentary XXII (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1998), 286.

[104]Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations*, 35.

[105]Mananzan, "Women and Religion," 14.

[106]Claudia V. Camp, "Woman Wisdom as Root Metaphor: A Theological Consideration," in *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in Honor of Roland E. Murphy*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 58, ed. Kenneth G. Hoglund, et al. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 61.

The realization that language is socially constructed points us to the need for discernment in the use of language for God. The "false consciousness" of religious language needs to be unmasked and redeemed as well. "'The inherent patriarchalism in the Bible should not be allowed to dominate its message.'"[107] This is as true for other uses of language in Scripture that show the limitations of language, e.g., the Divine Warrior image, God as Father and King.[108] Care must be taken to present a more rounded view of God that reflects the diversity of images and complementing theologies in the Scriptures.

> [D]escriptions of God will reflect the personalities and … sex of the writers. Divine revelation comes via the human personality; it is because human beings are made in God's image that they can speak of God in a way which reflects who they are as human beings. But it is only when we have men and women together that we have the divine image represented, and all this therefore suggests that … *male insights on God which emerge from the Bible have to be complemented by female ones* (italics supplied).[109]

Hermeneutical Appropriation: The Liberating Potential and Limitations of Metaphor

Camp asked "whether [Lady Wisdom] can function as an authoritative image for theology, and especially for feminist theology today, and if so, what would constitute her gifts and limitations."[110] While she sought the answer in the socio-historical reality of Israel and literary data of women in Israelite society, this study has sought

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[107]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 286.

[108]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 286; McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 145–52.

[109]John Goldingay, "Hosea 1–3, Genesis 1–4 and Masculist Interpretation," in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 168.

[110]Camp, "Woman Wisdom as Root Metaphor," 47.

the answer in the nature of the metaphor and the truth-claims of the text itself.

Thus the figure of Lady Wisdom, while admittedly the product of patriarchal forces, can also be a factor for liberation of the text. Since each generation that has inherited the Scripture text is a product of its own *Zeitgeist*, we as well harbor our own biases and oppressive presuppositions. Reading the Scriptures therefore needs to be an occasion for self-examination, self-awareness, confession, and repentance.

"The only access to a relatively unbiased and therefore nonoppressive approach is to become self-aware and explicit about one's social location and the effective historical consciousness to which it has contributed and then to methodically criticize and thereby neutralize as much as possible the ideological effects."[111] In that way, our hermeneutic can become one of restoration, uncovering the liberating potential of the text, instead of stopping prematurely at suspicion only.

Patriarchy is not an "ontological given" but something that emerged in history.[112]

In the end, though Israel never examined its patriarchal assumptions (much like the early Church could not critique the practice of slavery in their society), what keeps it open is the wisdom tradition's commitment to the centrality of discourse and its capacity to embrace dissident voices such as found in Job and Ecclesiastes. The wisdom tradition was the location within Israel where radical challenges could be made against the dominant symbolic order.[113] It was true back then; it continues to be true today.

> "[L]anguage … the medium by which we express what we perceive, shapes perception itself because of the accumulated cultural meanings attached to the words we use …." Words are not just words: they

[111]Schneiders, *Revelatory Text*, 183.

[112]Bloomquist, "Let God be God," 51.

[113]Newsom, "Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," 159.

> are loaded with meanings that are generated by the experiences of individuals in specific social situations …. Words are extremely important because they give definition and meaning to reality. How we see the world and the things in it are to a great extent structured by the types … of words we use.[114]

Yet language is also the way out. Liberation comes in language also. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits" (Prov 18:21).

A caveat though is in order. Caution must be exercised that in re-languaging God and women's experience, women are not given a "safety valve" to release the pressure of the patriarchal situation while leaving the socio-politico-cultural and religious frameworks unchallenged. Garcia-Dungo points to women's jobs outside the home affording them temporary relief even while the pattern of domination/subordination continues in their marital life.[115] Here the limitation of metaphor as a change agent has to be acknowledged. The creation of an egalitarian structure that will enhance the full humanity of women and men, rather than the preservation of the status quo, must be the continuing task of the Church.

"The importance of the personification of Wisdom cannot be overemphasized. It is an idea that, once introduced into the biblical Wisdom tradition, took on a life of its own and grew in importance in complexity, and in depth as time went on."[116] Personified Wisdom became a way of talking about the central figure of the faith, for Judaism the Torah, and for Christianity, Jesus.[117]

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[114]Garcia-Dungo, *Social Construction of Subordination/Domination*, 27, quoting James Doyle.

[115]Garcia-Dungo, *Social Construction of Subordination/Domination*, 1.

[116]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 50.

[117]Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 50.

Even with its inherent limitations and contradictions, it remains a useful and powerful means of communication and theological reflection. Her value today is to point out the problem of the place of women in a patriarchal society.[118] The metaphor of Lady Wisdom continues to stimulate discussion, reflection, and attempts to language our faith in a better way.

Borrowing what Murphy said, "… Lady Wisdom is a divine communication: God's communication, extension of self, to human beings."[119] In that sense, she continues to speak to us today.

[118]Murphy, *Proverbs*, 277.

[119]Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 147.

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