

THE GETTING OF WISDOM
A Study in the Theology of Proverbs

Dissertation for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Theology, Section 1.
Old Testament and Hebrew at the University of Cambridge

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Dedicated to my dear wife Claire whose mouth has been for me wisdom and whose torah
has been kindness (Proverbs 31:26)

PREFACE

The stimulus for this topic did not originally come from a study of Proverbs but rather from my interest in four other disciplines. First and foremost, my involvement as a Lutheran pastor for nearly eleven years in the task of religious education at a secondary level at Luther College in Melbourne and then at St. Peters Lutheran College in Brisbane, Australia, led me to seek guidance from the teachers of wisdom in the Old Testament and to appreciate some of their insights into the difficult and yet challenging business of teaching the living God to young people.

Secondly, my passion for English literature which I have taught with so much enjoyment for most of my teaching career has made me aware of how much ideas of wisdom from the Old Testament and intertestamental literature have influenced the tradition of European literature since Dante and Chaucer and curious to retrace this stream to its sources in the Old Testament.

Thirdly, the study of Church History has increasingly alerted me to the discrepancy between the prominence given to wisdom in the theological reflection and the teaching of spirituality in Christianity until the Enlightenment and the tendency of much modern study of the Old Testament until the last decade to dismiss it as basically peripheral, if not alien, to the main concerns of the Old Testament, and has consequently focused my attention especially on Proverbs with its puzzling passages on Dame Wisdom.

Fourthly, my all-too-amateur philosophical cogitations on the problems of religious epistemology have drawn me via Paul's meditation on wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1-2 back to Proverbs and its stress on certain prerequisites for proper knowledge of God.

Since the beginning of work on this topic, I have moreover come to see how much various notions of wisdom have influenced the formation of the Old Testament as a canonical book and its use in the intertestamental period as well as how important this whole tradition was in shaping the New Testament and the literature of rabbinical Judaism. Much of the relevant material for this has been assembled and analysed recently by M. Küchler in *Frühjüdische Weisheitstraditionen*. These later influences however cannot be rightly appreciated without a proper understanding of what the book of Proverbs, the fountainhead of it all, has to say about wisdom and its getting. It is to be hoped then that this study makes some contribution to that end.

To the best of my knowledge there has been no single treatment of the getting of wisdom in Proverbs, although the matter has come up for discussion incidentally in most works on Proverbs. Two authors, both of whose books were published in 1970, have, each in his own way and in connection with other issues, raised the problems and gone some of

the way to their solution. They are G. von Rad in *Wisdom in Israel* and W. McKane in his commentary on *Proverbs*. I am much indebted to both these scholars for their fine insights whose help I freely acknowledge in the course of my work. Yet, since neither deals directly with the topic, the synthesis here presented which draws on many of their insights is substantially my own.

I wish finally to thank the various bodies and people who have made their contributions to this dissertation. I am deeply grateful to the Lutheran World Federation and the Lutheran Church of Australia who together have provided the scholarship for two years of study at the University of Cambridge. Special thanks must also go to my supervisor, Dr. G. I. Davies, for his helpful encouragement in the inception and development of the dissertation, to Dr. R. P. Gordon for his kindness in checking and criticising the final manuscript, and to Mrs. C. Diamond for typing it. I am also deeply grateful to Dr. J. T. E. Renner for initiating me so wisely into the study of the Old Testament, to Dr. D. B. Grope, the President General of the Lutheran Church of Australia, for so generously making the provisions necessary for our stay at Cambridge, and to my wife Claire for supporting me so well in my work. Most of all I thank my Lord Jesus who is Himself Wisdom for that measure of wisdom which I have gained from His words and Spirit.

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration with anyone else.

John W. Kleinig
May, 1981

Precis of the Dissertation

In its present form the book of Proverbs deals among other things with the process of getting wisdom. This dissertation attempts to discover what the sages considered the objective and subjective prerequisites for its getting. It builds upon the work of G. von Rad in his *Wisdom in Israel* and W. McKane in his commentary on *Proverbs* to develop the thesis that wisdom is gained by the reception of instruction which is described from three different, yet complementary points of view.

Firstly, wisdom is held to come from obedience to the traditional instruction of the sages whose aim is so to socialise their students that they are able to learn from their experience and benefit from proper involvement in their respective communities. So by living rightly a person gradually acquires wisdom which is given to those who are mentally and morally qualified for it.

Secondly, the personification of Dame Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9 stresses that wisdom is herself an active power in life who qualifies the student for herself and so makes him increasingly wise. She administers her instruction to her students through the internalised teaching of the sages which illuminates and is illuminated by the students own experience. She imparts herself to those who are personally devoted to her and so supervises the course of their lives that they not only gain her many benefits but also are admitted by her into a position of favour with YHWH Himself.

Thirdly, wisdom which originates in God is given by Him to those who submit to His instruction as it is delivered for Him by the sages and by Wisdom herself in the school of life which fits His servants for service in His royal administration. So since wisdom properly belongs to God it is reserved for those who duly fear Him in the circumstances of their daily lives. From their knowledge of God they gain His wisdom and receive insight from Him.

THE GETTING OF WISDOM
A STUDY IN THE THEOLOGY OF PROVERBS
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Chapter 1. The Instruction of the Sages

- a. **The Getting of Wisdom in Proverbs 10-31**
- b. **The Getting of a Heart in Proverbs 15:32 and 19:8**

Chapter 2. The Instruction of Dame Wisdom

- a. **Proverbs 1:20-33**
- b. **Proverbs 4:1-19**
- c. **Proverbs 8:1-36**
- d. **Proverbs 9:1-6**

Chapter 3. The Instruction of YHWH

- a. **Proverbs 1:7**
- b. **Proverbs 2:1-22:7**
- c. **Proverbs 3:1-35**
- d. **Proverbs 9:7-12**

Conclusion

Bibliography

Table of Abbreviations

Introduction

The basic question of this dissertation is put most succinctly in Proverbs 17:16 (RSV.):

'Why should a fool have a price in his hand to buy wisdom, when he has no mind?'

We have here the recognition that, even though wisdom is somehow gained from instruction, it cannot be acquired, unless the student has the mind for it. This proverb which seeks the presuppositions for the getting of wisdom does not however give a clear answer to its own question. That is given elsewhere in the book of Proverbs.

To the best of my knowledge Gerhard von Rad was the first to call attention to the importance of this question in the sapiential tradition. In chapter four of his pioneering work *Wisdom in Israel* he notes that the question arises only peripherally in what he considers the older sentence wisdom collected in Proverbs 10-29.¹ These collections regard the acquisition of wisdom as a straightforward, human activity open to all comers. They deal with how a wise man acts for his own good and the good of his society rather than with how a man becomes wise. When the problem surfaced for the first time as a result of reflection on human folly which deliberately spurned what was good, the sages recognised that the getting of wisdom did not just depend on native intelligence fostered by instruction but also on the character of individuals whose minds had been shaped by faith in, and respect for, a divinely ordered world.² They therefore came to assert that the fear of YHWH which inculcated 'the right attitude of man to God' was the basic prerequisite for wisdom.³ Knowledge of God was thus regarded as the foundation for expertise in living and competence in dealing with the problems of life. Such wisdom came finally to be viewed in Proverbs 1-9 as a gift of God.⁴

Later on in the same work von Rad picks up the matter once again in his discussion on the figure of wisdom as 'the primeval world order.'⁵ He claims that the personification of wisdom was not an extravagant figure of speech for either the

¹ G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 53ff.

² G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 55ff.

³ G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 69.

⁴ G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 54-55.

⁵ G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 161.

divine or human attributes of wisdom but rather 'the most precise expression'⁶ for wisdom as 'an ordering power'⁷ in creation whose voice not only addressed man from creation to direct and correct him but also courted him to bestow herself on him and win him for herself. Very little is said about the prerequisites for what von Rad terms 'the self-revelation of creation.'⁸ Mention is made quite incidentally of the need to heed Dame Wisdom's call and of the sage's desire to refer his student to 'that voice which sounded through the medium of creation and to bring him to the point of entrusting to this form of revelation his life.'⁹ Above all he stresses the receptive stance of the student whose proper response to Dame Wisdom's offer of love should be reciprocated love.'¹⁰

The only other scholar who has dealt at any length with this topic is W. McKane in his commentary on *Proverbs* where he attempts to demonstrate that *Proverbs* is the result of a 'Yahwistic' reinterpretation, under prophetic influence, of material from an older tradition of wisdom which was basically pragmatic and secular in character.¹¹ Whereas von Rad approached the subject from a traditio-historical point of view, McKane comes to it from a form-critical analysis of the genre of instruction in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. He claims that instruction, whether by the sages or by YHWH, is central to the getting of wisdom. A student gains wisdom by assimilating and practising traditional instruction.¹² The new tradition of 'Yahwistic' interpretation, wisdom however, differs from the older tradition of wisdom not only in its conception of the nature and source of wisdom but also in its understanding of the prerequisites for its acquisition. He says:

'The acquisition of knowledge and wisdom does not now depend on a severe educational discipline in which submission is made to the authority of a teacher and the pupil's attitudes formed by his assimilation of a body of traditional, empirically based wisdom. The context is now one of piety rather than of education, and the source of authority is Yahweh. Without this basic reverence for Yahweh and submission to him, there can be no acquisition of wisdom.'¹³

⁶ G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 174.

⁷ G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 155.

⁸ G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 169. This is the title of chapter IX.

⁹ G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 164.

¹⁰ G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 164. See also 172-73.

¹¹ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 263ff. He first propounded this thesis for the whole wisdom tradition in his *Prophets and Wise Men*.

¹² W. McKane, *Proverbs*. See especially 303-04, 332ff.

¹³ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 264.

With the shift from the instruction of the sages to the instruction of YHWH there is thus a shift from the intellectual to the moral the prerequisites for getting wisdom.

McKane then diverges considerably from von Rad. Whereas von Rad highlights the experience of Wisdom's presence as an ordering, articulate power which addresses man from creation, McKane concentrates on the importance of instruction in the getting of wisdom.¹⁴ This dissertation undertakes an exegetical re-examination of the data in Proverbs to determine to what extent the two approaches complement each other and to what extent they require modification. It goes beyond their work in points of detail and especially in its final theological synthesis.

Because of limitations in length questions of historical development are largely ignored and discussion is focused on the final canonical text. Text critical problems will be handled only in so far as they directly affect the interpretation of the passages considered. The discussion on the presuppositions for the getting of wisdom in Proverbs will deal with the nature of wisdom and the character of the student, as they are conceived in the various texts, for the conception of wisdom will determine the conditions for its acquisition by the sage. Two aspects of the matter come up for special consideration. On the one hand, there are the objective circumstances and external means for the transmission, mediation and operation of wisdom; on the other hand, there are the subjective conditions and internal predispositions for its reception, appropriation and internalisation. The process of getting wisdom will be considered from both these angles.

¹⁴ N. C. Habel, 'The Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9,' 131ff., takes a position which is very much akin to W. McKane with its stress on the internalisation of instruction.

Chapter 1

The Instruction of the Sages

a. The Getting of Wisdom in Proverbs 10-31

There is in Proverbs 22:15 the clearly articulated view that, because of the innate attachment of the heart to folly, no one is born wise, nor does he become wise of himself. Since folly is incompatible with wisdom, instruction which includes discipline, constraint and even punishment,¹⁵ is necessary to sever the mind from its attachment to folly,¹⁶ or else, like a dog with its vomit, the fool will repeat his folly (26:11). Even the immature who have had no instruction inherit folly and its consequences, unless they are set on the right way.¹⁷

Folly is held to exclude wisdom. In 24:7 there is a contrast between the magnitude of wisdom and the small-mindedness of the fool. Wisdom is too high for the fool to comprehend and possess. The implication is that he must either change or be changed, if he is to have access to it and take his place in the public assembly. Because of their state of mind which is unsound (15:7^b) and finds such delight in executing mischief, and even sin, that the avoidance of evil is utterly abhorrent (10:23; 24:9), fools continue to feed on their folly rather than on knowledge (15:14^b). They refuse to listen and learn.¹⁸ Hence, according to 14:33 wisdom is a stranger to them and finds no room to lodge with them in their minds.¹⁹ If that is true of the fool, it is even more true of the arrogant scoffer who, as long as he remains a scoffer cannot, even if he wants to, find wisdom (14:6^a).

Such statements on the peril of folly form the backdrop for the contention of those responsible for the compilation of Proverbs that instruction (מוסר) and correction (תוכחת) are not only necessary for a successful life²⁰ but also for the

¹⁵ 22:15; 26:3; 29:15.

¹⁶ 17:12 and 27:22 recognise that this may be impossible.

¹⁷ 14:18; 22:3//27:12

¹⁸ 12:15; 14:12; 15:5

¹⁹ There are two ways of understanding תודיע in 14:33. We may either follow the LXX in inserting לא before תודיע or else take it with W. Thomas, 'The Root yd^a in Hebrew,' 302-03, as the Niphal of a root attested in Arabic which means 'to submit.'

²⁰ 13:18; 15:10; 19:18; 22:6; 23:13-14.

acquisition of wisdom.²¹ Such instruction consists of advice,²² commands²³ and direction on how to live.²⁴ Only if a person is prepared to take advice (13:10) and is humble enough to submit to instruction (11:2) will wisdom come his way. Hence the first and basic requirement for the getting of wisdom is to listen to the words of the wise and to apply the mind to their instruction.²⁵

But more is required than just that. The aim of instruction is to shape a person's way of life as well as his way of thinking, for wisdom has to do with right living. There is thus a necessity for correction and even physical punishment.²⁶ While physical punishment does not change the scoffers who are set in their ways, it does bring the immature to their senses.²⁷ For those who are discerning all that is needed, when they are in error, is verbal correction.²⁸ In fact, a sensible person will welcome such correction²⁹ as being to his advantage, since instruction leads to knowledge (12:1) of the right way to live (19:2) and so to life itself in all its fullness (14:4; 15:24).

Instruction is given first and foremost by the parents,³⁰ for it is they who are to initiate a child in the right way (22:6). Wisdom thus has its starting point in the family. This point is made with special force by a sage in the small unit of instruction found at 23:22-25 where the insertion of 23:23 into what is otherwise a call obedience to, and reverence of, parents³¹ connects the getting of wisdom with filial respect for parents. This insertion, however, creates what are probably intentional ambiguities. The first has to do with קנה which elsewhere in Proverbs means to 'acquire' but here has the sense of buying in parallel with the use of מכר, 'purchase'. Then there is אמת which means both 'faithfulness' and 'truth.' By obedience to his parents a son gains their faithfulness and the truth by which they live.³² The student is urged not to sell אמת (19:2). This could refer to the exchange either of parental teaching or of his allegiance to them for what seems more profitable than these. We

²¹ 12:1; 15:31-32; 19:20, 25, 27; 23:22-23; 29:15.

²² עצה. See 12:15; 19:20; cf. 9:21.

²³ מצוה. See 10:8; 13:13; 19:16.

²⁴ תורה. See 13:14; 28:4, 9; 29:18.

²⁵ 22:17; 23:12

²⁶ 29:15. See also 10:13; 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14; 26:3.

²⁷ 19:25//21:11.

²⁸ See the use of יכח in 15:12; 19:25; 24:25; 28:23 and its noun תוכחת in 10:17; 12:1; 13:18; 15:5, 10, 31, 32; 27:5; 29:1, 15.

²⁹ 17:10; 27:5; 28:23; cf. 9:8.

³⁰ See 13:1; 15:5; 23:22; cf. 13:24; 19:18; 29:15, 17.

³¹ 23: 23 is absent in the LXX and so probably did not originally belong here.

³² There is, perhaps, an echo of 3:3 in 23:23. The possibility of a covenantal sense is reinforced by the occurrence of צדיק in 3:24.

can also take wisdom, instruction and insight as under an embargo as well as אמת, in which case these list what it is that אמת yields. Lastly, we could also take *qanah* as governing wisdom, instruction and insight, in which case they are what the son gets from his loyalty to his parents and their way of life. So wisdom which is equated with instruction and insight is considered the product of filial obedience. Such obedience makes for a son who is both righteous and wise, for filial righteousness, as commanded by the Decalogue, is regarded as the prerequisite for wisdom.³³

Instruction is, however, not only given by parents. It is also given by other members of the community such as the sages³⁴ or other righteous men.³⁵ Since they embody and transmit wisdom,³⁶ the sensible student will seek their company and copy their way of life so that he himself will become wise (13:20). He must furthermore not only hear but also heed their instruction, if he is to retain the knowledge encapsulated in the words of the sages (19:27). If his ear heeds the correction which makes for life rather than death, then he will come to lodge with those who are wise (15:31),³⁷ since he thereby has himself become wise. So by living as the sages indicate a person gains wisdom, but not immediately. According to 19:20 wisdom does not issue directly from instruction. It comes to the student afterwards as the outcome of his obedience and persistence in the application of instruction to his life.

Instruction aims to win the 'heart' (לב). In 23:26-28 the wisdom teacher, and through him wisdom itself,³⁸ lays claim to the 'heart' of the student.³⁹ This claim on the 'heart' is more than just a call for attention and dedication to study;⁴⁰ it is a call for trust and self-surrender as in 3:5.⁴¹ Those who follow the sage in his wisdom and entrust themselves to his direction will be able to observe⁴² his ways which are also

³³ Such connections between wisdom and righteousness are also glimpsed in 4:10-18; 9:9; 10:31; cf. Deut 4:5-8.

³⁴ 13:14, 20; 15:2, 7; 22:17-21.

³⁵ 10:31-32.

³⁶ 10:13, 31; 13:14; 15:2, 7.

³⁷ Whether we take 15:31 as a single sentence, or a case of synthetic parallelism, as W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 480, suggests, the meaning remains the same, except perhaps that the latter equates life with lodging among the wise.

³⁸ While it is true that the speaker here is the sage (so C. H. Toy, *Proverbs*, 436-37., and W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 390), the uniqueness of his appeal to his ways, the demand for loyalty and the warning against the rival demands of the harlot make it likely that the sage

³⁹ See also 3:5.

⁴⁰ For such a claim, see 2:2; 22:17; 23:12.

⁴¹ See W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 389.

⁴² We follow Q and the LXX in reading תצורה, since neither the sage nor wisdom needs the student's approval, and read 23:26^b as a final clause to give a sharper sense.

the ways of wisdom.⁴³ The student must choose between the teacher and his wisdom and the harlot with her destructive seductions.⁴⁴ It is ultimately a matter of personal allegiance. Through loyalty to the sage the student discovers, follows, and understands his ways.⁴⁵ Thus through personal initiation the student enters in on the way of wisdom.

We may then discern a general educational pattern in the scattered proverbs in chapters 10-31. There is the view that wisdom comes from heeding the instruction of parents and teachers on how to live. Wisdom is thus a very practical matter, for it enables a person to adjust properly to and uphold the various orders which govern human life and determine success or failure in it. By shaping their charges' lives the parents and sages aim to shape their minds, so that the wisdom of the past could govern their thinking and acting in the future. Such wisdom and knowledge are not theoretical and speculative but moral and practical, for they have to do with negotiating the right way through life (19:2).

At two points only in chapters 10-31 is this practical concern exceeded and that is at 15:32-33⁴⁶ and 30:1-6.⁴⁷ In 30:1-6 profound speculative questions on the getting of wisdom are raised and answered.⁴⁸ On the one hand, we have in 30:2-4 an ironical and sceptical disavowal of knowledge about the divine origins and workings of the cosmos such as played an important part in ancient mythologies.⁴⁹ Such wisdom can be known only to the one who created and controls the universe.⁵⁰ Since no man has done this, nor can do this,⁵¹ no man has learned the wisdom which produced the universe nor can he possibly know the Holy Creator. Thus the possibility of cosmogonic knowledge and cosmological wisdom is emphatically

⁴³ See also 3:17; 4:10-13; 8:20-21, 32; 9:6.

⁴⁴ The contrast here is between the teacher and the harlot rather than between wisdom and the various embodiments of folly in chapters 1-9

⁴⁵ The mention of eyes with נָצַר leads to the sense 'understand' or 'observe.'

⁴⁶ We shall deal with 15:32-33 in the next section.

⁴⁷ See W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 644-45, for a discussion on the insoluble textual problems of 30:1. I am inclined to read and translate: 'I have wearied myself, o God; I have wearied myself, o God, and cannot endure it.'

⁴⁸ Since 30:1-14 is found after 24:22 in the LXX its present location near the end of Proverbs may come from the final redactor's hand

⁴⁹ See M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 263.

⁵⁰ The questions in 30:4 are reminiscent of Job 38-41

⁵¹ The expected answer to 30:4 is thus 'No one.' Or is it meant in the light of 3:19-20 and 8:22-31 to be 'Wisdom'?

denied. On the other hand, we have in 30: 5-6,⁵² by way of contrast, a confident assertion about the reliability of God's revelation.⁵³ This assertion, however, is not based on unbridled speculation but on the words of God Himself.⁵⁴ They map out that way to wisdom which has been tried and tested⁵⁵ by past generations,⁵⁶ for they urge men to take refuge in God who is present to accompany and guide them on the way that leads to wisdom and the knowledge of Himself. 30:5-6 is thus not so much a reply as a correction to 30:2-4, for it does not claim access to cosmic secrets but rather claims that God has made Himself accessible to those who heed His word and take refuge in Him. It thus shifts the emphasis from theoretical knowledge of creation to a practical knowledge of the Creator.

We have then in 30:5, as McKane so rightly remarks,⁵⁷ a significant shift from the sayings of the sages to God's sayings, from the instruction of the wisdom teacher to divine instruction from submission to the sage to submission to God Himself.⁵⁸ The teaching of the sages is thus regarded as God's word.⁵⁹ The prohibition on adding to God's words in 30:6, which is usually taken to have been borrowed from Deuteronomy 4:2 and 13:1 and therefore redolent of legal piety,⁶⁰ rather urges adherence to established sapiential tradition which expresses what God has fixed and is therefore an unalterable part of the cosmic order.⁶¹ Those who go beyond this and act otherwise will be found out and corrected by God Himself who will demonstrate the nature and extent of their self-delusion.⁶² Thus 30:6 warns against seeking some other way of access to God and to wisdom than the sure,

⁵² These verses probably come from the same hand as Proverbs 2. Compare 2:7 with 30:5. It contrasts the way of cosmogonic speculation in 30:1-4 with the way of revelation. See C. H. Toy, *The Book of Proverbs*, 523, and W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 643, 647-48.

⁵³ See W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 649.

⁵⁴ 2 Sam. 22:31/Ps. 18:31 seems to be quoted here. Yet the use of the archaic form אלוה raises the question whether 30:5 may in fact be older than these, especially as this form does not otherwise occur in Proverbs.

⁵⁵ The verb צרף is used similarly in Ps 12:7 and 119:40 for the refinement of God's word.

⁵⁶ B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 556, maintains that the redactor regarded all of Proverbs as such words of God.

⁵⁷ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 649.

⁵⁸ The intent of this is not to drive a wedge between the two but to combine the two so that the sages are regarded as instructors in Yahweh's school.

⁵⁹ If R. N. Whybray, 'Yahweh - Sayings and their Contexts in Proverbs 10:1-22:16,' is right in his claim that the sayings about God are placed so as to interpret and to be interpreted by adjacent sayings. then the juxtaposition of 19:20-21 makes a similar point. The 'counsel' (עצה) which a student receives in his 'instruction' (מוסר) is 'the counsel of YHWH' (עצת יהוה) which will be established.

⁶⁰ M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 261, shows that such borrowing is most unlikely. Rather Deuteronomy may have employed a sapiential formula in 4:2 and 15:1.

⁶¹ See Eccl 3:14.

⁶² The use of the verb מוחיך 30:6 echoes 3:11-12 in making God the subject of correction.

tested way which He Himself has ordained and which is sketched out in the teaching of the sages. Since the book of Proverbs consists of God's words, it is worth more than any speculative wisdom, for through it the wisdom and knowledge of God are made accessible to human beings.

While the getting of wisdom is the main concern of Proverbs 10-31, it nevertheless is touched on in a number of significant places. Folly is held to exclude wisdom. No one is born wise, and human beings have a natural attachment to folly. A person normally gains wisdom from the instruction of his parents and the sages who set him on the right road and correct him, when he goes astray. Such instruction claims the personal allegiance of the student who gains wisdom from his association with the wise and from heeding what they have to say. Lastly, by the placement of 30:1-6 the redactor suggests that this kind of instruction is ultimately supervised by God Himself who speaks to the wise through the articulated experience of their ancestors, and through the wise to their students who have taken refuge in Him.

b. The Getting of Heart in Proverbs 15:32-33 and 19:8

In 17:16 the sage queries the fool's attempt to get wisdom by paying for instruction. Taken by itself the proverb could be read as an ironical quip about the necessity of intelligence for the acquisition of wisdom.⁶³ But folly is not the same as lack of intelligence.⁶⁴ A fool is a person whose way of life is false, whose actions are evil and whose will is set against instruction.⁶⁵

The phrase 'lack of heart' (לב אין)⁶⁶ is the key to the proverb. The expression seems to stem from Egyptian Instruction where it was used of an untaught and unteachable person.⁶⁷ While this phrase does not again occur in Proverbs, its synonym לב חסר occurs frequently enough to make its sense quite clear. Three different kinds of 'mindlessness' came within its range of reference. It is used firstly of a person who lacks the common sense necessary to make a living.⁶⁸ Secondly, it characterises the gullible mentality of an 'immature' (פתי) young man

⁶³ So W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 504-5.

⁶⁴ See G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 64-65.

⁶⁵ The term 'fool' is used thus already in the epilogue of Ptahhotep 1: 575ff., and Merikare 40 and 54-56. See M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol 1, 74-75, 100-1.

⁶⁶ The term occurs elsewhere only in Jer 5:21 and Hos 7:11; cf. 16:33.

⁶⁷ See H. Brunner, *Altägyptische Erziehung*, 111-12.

⁶⁸ 12:11; 17:18; 24:30.

who is easily misled and much in need of instruction.⁶⁹ Lastly, it comes close to a lack of moral sensibility and conscience⁷⁰ as revealed in malicious speech and the enjoyment of folly.⁷¹ Such 'mindlessness,' which leads ultimately to death, can be checked, if at all, only by physical punishment.⁷² The 'heartless' person therefore not only lacks common sense but also a sense of judgment and morality.⁷³ Hence 17:16 queries whether there is any point in such a person enrolling for instruction, since he lacks the prerequisites for it.

If an immature and uneducated person lacks 'heart,' then the purpose of instruction is to 'gain a heart.'⁷⁴ This expression which, though rare,⁷⁵ is nevertheless typical of sapiential modes of thought occurs in 15:32 and 19:8. While the former treats the means by which a 'heart' is acquired, the latter deals with the meaning and consequences of such acquisition.

In 15:32 the getting of a 'heart' is said to result from listening to correction and instruction. There is, however, no direct indication of its agents. Furthermore, the gain of a 'heart' is contrasted with the loss of 'life/soul' (נפש).⁷⁶ The ambiguity of the latter seems intentional, for by spurning instruction a person spites his own self and so throws his life away. Instruction has to do with a person's life and being as well as his thoughts and behaviour. A 'heart' which is necessary for self-possession and self-survival is thus acquired by following the direction and correction of instruction.

This single sentence, which could by itself be taken in a secular way,⁷⁷ is given a decidedly religious interpretation by the juxtaposition of 15:33⁷⁸ which links the instruction for a 'heart' with the instruction by and in wisdom⁷⁹ and identifies both

⁶⁹ 7:7; 9:4,16

⁷⁰ See H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, 54.

⁷¹ 11:12; 15:21

⁷² 10:13, 21

⁷³ Job 12:24-25 shows that those who once had a 'heart' can, like drunkards, be deprived of it, so that they become totally disoriented. Likewise in Hosea 4:11-14 orgiastic idolatry is said to deprive its drunken participants of their mental, moral and spiritual senses.

⁷⁴ 15:32; 19:8. In Job 11:12 the unusual verbal form ילבב is used to assert that 'an empty man' (איש נבוב) can no sooner 'get a heart' than a wild colt give birth to a man.

⁷⁵ The nearest equivalents to 15:32, 19:8 are in Ps 90:13 and Sir 51:20. In the latter case we probably have a remaking of this formula. *The Prologue of Amenemope*, M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, 148, holds that the entry of the heart into the body is the purpose of instruction.

⁷⁶ See C. H. Toy, *The Book of Proverbs*, 317-18. There is no warrant for McKane's assertion, *Proverbs*, 480, that נפש here means life rather than self except for the parallel expression in 8:35.

⁷⁷ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 480, takes it thus.

⁷⁸ Both these verses are editorially significant as they conclude the section of chapters 10-15 and give evidence of an attempt to set this material within a 'Yahwistic' framework. Both P. Skehan, *Studies in*

with 'the fear of YHWH'.⁸⁰ By rejecting instruction a man rejects both YHWH and the wisdom which He gives through instruction to those who fear Him.⁸¹ Those who humbly submit to instruction and YHWH's will as expressed in instruction gain 'wisdom' and 'glory' for themselves.⁸² So then by leading a God-fearing life a person gets a 'heart'; with it he gains his self⁸³ as well as life, wisdom and glory for himself. The possession of a heart is thus closely associated with the possession of wisdom.⁸⁴ Both together shape his character and determine his fate.

The main ideas of 19:8 are very much like those in 15:32. The getting of a 'heart' is connected with the love of self/life,⁸⁵ while heart is coupled with understanding (תבונה), a common synonym for wisdom in the book of Proverbs.⁸⁶ That understanding enables a man both to find for himself⁸⁷ what is good and to prosper.⁸⁸ So by getting a 'heart' he gains 'himself' (נפש) and with himself the capacity for understanding which leads to good judgment, moral discernment and prosperity. By gaining a 'heart' he thus gains 'life' (נפש) for himself. He who has such a 'heart' is thus considered wise-hearted.⁸⁹ By providing him with a 'heart' instruction thus shapes his character, ability and destiny.

The getting of a heart is thus an important part of the getting of wisdom. Its getting does not consist merely in the assimilation of information or even in the

Israelite Poetry and Wisdom, 17ff., and J. Becker, *Gottesfurcht im Alten Testament*, 212, postulate that the collection of proverbs in 14:26-16:15 was added to make up 375 proverbs, to correspond with the numerical value of the name Solomon, in 10:1-22:16.

⁷⁹ מוסר חכמה can be taken as the instruction given by wisdom or the instruction which leads to wisdom. The emphasis seems to be on the latter as חכמה, 'wisdom,' is parallel to לב, 'heart.'

⁸⁰ R. N. Whybray, 'Yahweh-Sayings and their Contexts in proverbs 10:1 - 22:16,' 159, considers that in 19:33 both the correction and instruction mentioned in 15:31-32 are identified with the fear of Yahweh.

⁸¹ According to F. Delitzsch, *The Proverbs of Solomon*, 333, the Mishnah held that לב, 'heart,' in 15:32 was חכמה שנתונה בלב, 'wisdom that was given in the heart.' It was therefore regarded as a gift of God and a synonym for wisdom. See also Job 34:14 where לבו, 'his heart,' is glossed as רוחו, 'his spirit,' and both are taken together with נשמתו, 'his life breath,' as gifts of God's own faculties to man.

⁸² See also 22:4; cf. 3:35.

⁸³ Heart (לב) can refer to a man's self. See H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, 54-55.

⁸⁴ See Job 34:2, 10, 34, where 'the wise' (חכמים) are called 'men of heart' (אנשי לבב), as well as 12:2-3 with its parallel of 'wisdom,' (חכמה) and 'heart' (לבב).

⁸⁵ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 528, maintains that here נפש must mean 'life' by virtue of its parallel with טוב, 'goodness.' But the distinction between 'getting a heart' and 'keeping understanding' points to synthetic rather than synonymous parallelism.

⁸⁶ The nearest parallels to this are found in Hos 4:11 and 14 where those who 'have no heart' are described as 'not able to discern' (לא יבין), and 1 Ki 3:12 where God promises Solomon 'a wise and discerning heart' (לב חכם ונבון).

⁸⁷ למצא can be taken either as a third person masculine singular imperfect with a prefixed ל or as an infinitive construct with ל in the sense of 'is likely to.' See W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 494.

⁸⁸ The noun טוב can mean both 'what is good' (2:9; 3:4; 11:27; 14:22 etc.) and 'prosperity' (12:14; 13:2, 21, etc.).

⁸⁹ See 10:8; 11:29; 16:21; cf. Ex 28:3; 31:6; 35:10, 25; 36:1, 2, 8; Job 9:4; 37:24.

training of a mind but in the formation of the student's mind and the training of his character. Instruction, however, does not by itself shape a person thus. It needs to be put into practice and lived out in everyday life. Those who put it into practice and so demonstrate their fear of YHWH gain for themselves a heart of wisdom,⁹⁰ for they have that frame of mind which is properly attuned to wisdom.

⁹⁰ The theological reworking of the sapiential tradition about the gain of a heart states quite explicitly that such a heart is the gift of Yahweh. It must be given by Him for Israel to understand the events of the Exodus (Deut 29.3; cf. Is 6:10; 44:18), to know and fear Him (Jer 24:7; 32:1; cf. 5:20-23) and to live as His people and obey Him (Ezek 11:19-20; 36:26-27; cf. 18:31).

Chapter 2

THE INSTRUCTION OF DAME WISDOM

a. Proverbs 1:20-33

It is worth noting that this is one of the three passages in Proverbs 1-9 where Dame Wisdom addresses her audience.⁹¹ Hence these ideas receive special emphasis, for these three speeches form the framework which brackets and therefore interprets the discourses in Proverbs 2-7.⁹²

While this speech exhibits certain features of prophecy⁹³ such as a call to repentance (1:22-23) and invective coupled with threats (1:24-31) the basic form is an address by a wisdom teacher⁹⁴ introducing his instruction and appealing for attention.⁹⁵ It deals, in part, with the apparent partiality of wisdom which is acquired by some and not by others. Why do some not get wisdom? Is wisdom by its very nature esoteric and therefore available only to some select initiates? Or are some just not properly equipped for its reception due to their lack of intelligence or some other deficiency?

The introduction of 1:20-21 emphasises the public nature of wisdom.⁹⁶ Her voice is not only heard in the privacy of some schoolroom or in the secret chambers of some secret society but also out in the streets and in the public places of the city.⁹⁷ Nor does she address herself only to her initiates or even the most likely candidates. Instead she concentrates her attention on those who lack her, the immature (פתיים),⁹⁸ the scoffers (לצים) and the fools (כסילים). She makes quite clear in 1:23 that her benefits are available also to them.

⁹¹ See also 8:1-36 and 9:1-6 (7-12?).

⁹² 1:8-19 and 9:7-18 which seem to fall outside this framework are, in fact, part of it. While the warning against the deceptive enticement of sinners in 1:8-19 stands in contrast to wisdom's honest appeal in 1:20-33, 9:7-12 is an extension of 9:1-6, and the invitation of Dame Folly in 9:13-18 is the counterpart of 9:1-6.

⁹³ H. Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom*, 96, B. Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos*, 23-24, and C. Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1-9*, 120 ff., have explored these resemblances.

⁹⁴ So B. Lang, *Frau Weisheit*, 25ff.

⁹⁵ So W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 276-77.

⁹⁶ In 8:1-36 wisdom again appears in public to solicit her audience, while in 9:1-6 this is done for her by her maids.

⁹⁷ See B. Lang, *Frau Weisheit*, 25, and G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 158.

⁹⁸ 'Simple' is a misleading translation as it suggests mental deficiency rather than immaturity. See W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 273.

There seems to be some gradation in docility in the use of these three terms which represent two or three disparate, yet interlocking groups.⁹⁹ The פתים are uninstructed and uncommitted youths (1:4) who lack responsibility and so are easily misled (7:6-9). As they do not yet have a mind of their own,¹⁰⁰ they lack that careful prudence (ערמה) which comes from reflection on experience and ensuing foresight.¹⁰¹ Although they have deliberately chosen to remain uninstructed and therefore unsocialised,¹⁰² there is hope for them provided that they leave their fellows and heed wisdom's call.¹⁰³ If, however, they turn away from wisdom, they will commit moral and spiritual suicide (1:32).

Then there are the fools.¹⁰⁴ They hate and reject that knowledge of themselves and of God which wisdom offers (1:22). Since they know best for themselves what to do,¹⁰⁵ they refuse to submit to instruction¹⁰⁶ and instead are instructed and ruined by their own folly.¹⁰⁷ Since they not only do evil (24:9) but delight in it (10:23), they refuse to turn from their evil (13:19) as they are blind to the consequences of their way of life (14:8) and complacent in their folly (1:32). Unlike the immature they do have minds of their own but they are disordered and set against knowledge. Hence Wisdom requires them in 8:5 to order their heart,¹⁰⁸ even though this is most unlikely as they are basically incorrigible.¹⁰⁹ Folly is thus a moral term for those who wilfully reject instruction and knowledge.¹¹⁰

Lastly, there are the scoffers (לצים), the loud mouths, who delight in ridiculing what is right (1:22). Too proud to admit where they are wrong,¹¹¹ they hate, abuse and even injure those who dare correct them.¹¹² Since they disrupt a community by their cynicism (22:10), they are characterised in 9:7 as wicked (רשע),

⁹⁹ See W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Book of Proverbs*, pp. lxxxiv ff., and T. Donald, 'The Semantic Field of Folly in Proverbs, Job, Psalms and Ecclesiastes,' 285 ff., for an analysis of these terms.

¹⁰⁰ The expression לב חסר in 7:7; 9:4, 16, describes the unformed state of their minds.

¹⁰¹ See 1:4; 8:5, as well as the contrast in 14:15, 18; 22:31/ 27:12, between the immature and the prudent.

¹⁰² This element of choice comes out in 1:29.

¹⁰³ 9:4-6. See also 1:4; 19:25; 21:11.

¹⁰⁴ I shall not distinguish between כסיל and אויל as they are so often used synonymously. T. Donald, 'The Semantic Field of Folly in Proverbs, Job, Psalms and Ecclesiastes,' 287, claims that the former is more sinister.

¹⁰⁵ 12:15; 28:26

¹⁰⁶ 1:7; 15:4

¹⁰⁷ 10:21; 12:15; 14:3; 16:22; 18:7; 19:3.

¹⁰⁸ Read הכינו with the LXX; cf. Ps. 78:8.

¹⁰⁹ 26:11; 27:22. See also W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 273.

¹¹⁰ See G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 64-65.

¹¹¹ 21:24. See also the contrast with the עניים in 3:34.

¹¹² 9:7-8; 13:1; 15:12

spurned by God (3:34) and condemned by men (19:29; 24:9). As an extreme type of fool¹¹³ they are utterly incapable of wisdom (14:6).

By piling up verbs to describe the attitude of these, wisdom in 1:24-25, 29-30 shows that they are not ignorant from lack of intelligence or opportunity. They have 'refused' wisdom and not 'responded' to her; they have not 'consented' to but have instead 'avoided'¹¹⁴ her counsel; they have not 'consented' to but have 'despised' her correction; they have in short 'hated' the knowledge given by her and so have not 'chosen' the fear of YHWH. The element of will is thus highlighted by the choice of verbs, for instead of heeding wisdom's counsel (עצה), they have deliberately followed their own plans (מעציהם) and have gone their own way (דרכם) (1:31).

Since their ignorance and lack of wisdom is due to error rather than inability wisdom calls on them to turn¹¹⁵ to her for 'correction.'¹¹⁶ Like the rejection of wisdom, this is an act of will. The word תוכח, 'correction,' is used both in judicial and sapiential contexts for the determination of what is right and the correction of those who are in the wrong.¹¹⁷ Wisdom thus calls on those who have rejected her to submit to her as their judge and to let her set them right. Thereby she will not only correct their wrong behaviour but also integrate them into the community over which she presides. If they allow her to correct them, she promises to let her 'spirit' flow upon them and make her words known to them (1:23).

Since the sense given to רוח is so crucial to any understanding of this passage, the use of the term elsewhere with 'wisdom' merits some consideration. The phrase רוח חכמה, 'spirit of wisdom,' occurs thrice in contexts which diverge considerably from this one in Proverbs, in Exodus 28:3; Deuteronomy 34:9 and Isaiah 11:2. In each case it is considered a special endowment rather than innate ability. In fact in Isaiah 11:2 it is equated with God's own spirit. Furthermore Exodus 28:3 is later qualified by 31:3 and 35:31, where the creative ability of Bezalel, the leader of the artisans and craftsmen commissioned to build the tabernacle, is

¹¹³ See T. Donald, 'The Semantic Field of Folly in Proverbs, Job, Psalms and Ecclesiastes,' 287.

¹¹⁴ For this sense of פרע see also 4:15; 8:33; 13:18; 15:32.

¹¹⁵ The opposite of this 'turning' to wisdom in 1:23 is the 'turning away' (משובה) from wisdom by the immature in 1:32.

¹¹⁶ F. Delitzsch, *The Proverbs of Solomon*, 70, rightly observes that wisdom does not ask these to turn to someone or something else as a result of her reproof but to turn to her and place themselves under her reproof.

¹¹⁷ Both W. J. Boecker, *Redeformen des Rechtslebens im Alten Testament*, 45ff., and G. Liedke 'חֲכָמָה/יָכָח', in *THAT* 1, cols. 730ff., stress the judicial sense of the word.

attributed to the presence of God's spirit. In Exodus 28:3, Deuteronomy 34:9 and Isaiah 11:2 the spirit of wisdom describes the practical ability of someone who does something for God,¹¹⁸ the ability of those who created the temple and its furnishings (Ex 28.3; cf. 1 Ki 7:14) and the ability of a leader who knows how to win the allegiance of his people (Deut 34.9) and to rule justly (Isa 11:2). In Exodus 28:31 and 35-36 this wisdom consists of a wide range of arts and crafts. In Isaiah 11:2 the spirit of wisdom, which is connected with the 'knowledge and fear of YHWH' as in Proverbs 1.29, is the power of the messianic king to discern and uphold God's righteous order which includes both the social and natural realms.¹¹⁹ So in each of these three cases the 'spirit of wisdom' is held to be the ability to do some special task for God.

Wisdom's spirit is thus her life-giving, life-ordering, life-sustaining power.¹²⁰ It is, as she later explains in 8:12-21, her knowledge of what makes for right order in the world (8:12-14) and her ability to maintain this right order which comes from her living according to it (8:20; cf. 8:12) and from her intimacy with the Creator (8:22-31). The gift of this creative, ordering power which becomes like a bubbling spring inside the receiver¹²¹ is coupled with the disclosure of her words to him. The two are in fact virtually synonymous. By revealing her words Dame Wisdom 'pours out'¹²² her spirit upon him.

The promise of wisdom to make her words known is at first sight rather puzzling as it is not her words but the words of the sages which follow this preamble.¹²³ The point of the promise is to identify herself as the source of sapiential instruction and the sages as her mouthpieces. Her promise is to take possession of the student by her spirit so that he like the sages will understand her ideas,¹²⁴ speak for her and act under her power. Wisdom's speaking is thus closely connected with the teaching of the sages.

¹¹⁸ See especially Ex 31:6; 36:1

¹¹⁹ See also 1 Ki 3:9-12, 28.

¹²⁰ See H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, 34ff., for a discussion of spirit as power.

¹²¹ So W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 274.

¹²² The use of נבע, 'flow,' in 1:23 underlines this connection. It usually describes the 'flow' of words either from a sage (18.4; cf. Ps. 78.2, 119.171; 145.7) or else from a fool (15:2, 28; cf. Ps 59:7; 94:4). Only in 1:23 is it used for the flow of the spirit.

¹²³ There is in Proverbs frequent reference to the 'words' (דברים; e.g. 1:6; 4:4, 20; 22:17) or 'sayings' (אמרים; e.g. 1:2; 2:1; 4:5, 10, 20; 5:7; 7:1, 24; 19:27; 23:12) of the wise, but we hear of Wisdom's words only in 1:23 and of her sayings only in 1:21 and 8:8.

¹²⁴ H. Brunner, *Altägyptische Erziehung*, 155, interprets 'words in Ptahhotep 30-50 as 'thoughts' which is how the R.S.V. understands 'spirit' in 1:23. Through the words of the sages the student comes to understand the mind of wisdom and so becomes empowered by her.

This connection comes out clearly in 6:20-24 where the sage requires the student so to assimilate parental instruction that it not only becomes part of his very being but also begins to act upon him as an inner guide which leads, protects, and speaks with him.¹²⁵ By speaking with him the internalised teaching thus comes to lead the student in the right way of life and to preserve him from evil. This inner guide is very much like wisdom herself who enters the heart of the student by obedience to instruction.¹²⁶ In 8:6-9 wisdom herself describes her own speaking. She claims that she not only speaks what is 'noble' (נגידים), 'truthful' (אמת), 'straight' (נכחים), 'upright' (ישרים) and in accord with 'right order' (בצדק), but also creates 'equity' (מישרים) by what she says, for she creates right order by her speaking.¹²⁷

The practical and experiential nature of this disclosure of her words needs to be emphasised. 1:23 describes the experience of illumination whereby wisdom takes possession of the student and gives him that frame of mind needed for him to understand her speaking. McKane maintains:

'The intention here may be to represent wisdom as a charismatic, spirit-filled person, who pours out on those who are receptive and submissive the spirit of wisdom. This is a disclosure or a revelation.'¹²⁸

Yet more is implied here than just inner illumination; wisdom's spirit and her words which are available only to those who heed her correction and follow her counsel empower the student to advance on the right way through life, for according to 4:10-18 it is only by walking in the way of wisdom that a person comes more and more into the light.¹²⁹ Hence the stress on turning and correction in 1:23! Only those who are set by wisdom herself on the right way can receive her spirit and know her words.¹³⁰

Wisdom's knowledge is the knowledge of the right way which comes from living the right way (1:22, 29). By this knowledge a man comes to recognise and

¹²⁵ שִׁיחַ is the verb for speaking here. It describes that kind of meditation where someone speaks to himself imperceptibly or out aloud. See Job 5:10; Ps 55:17; 77:3, 6, 12; 119:15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 148; 145:5. By such meditation wisdom begins to speak within the student.

¹²⁶ The shift from the masculine plural suffixes in 8:21 to the feminine singular in 8:22 has led W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Book of Proverbs*, 14; C. H. Toy, *Proverbs*, 133f., and B. Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos*, 41, to regard Dame Wisdom as the subject of the main clauses in 6:22.

¹²⁷ See 8:14-21, 34-35 for the effectual power of wisdom in human life.

¹²⁸ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 274.

¹²⁹ See also 6:23; 8:20-21, 32-35; 9:6.

¹³⁰ The coupling of עצה, 'advice,' with תוכחת in 1:25, 30, underlines the positive aspect of 'correction.'

avoid the threat of evil (1:33). It is therefore rightly equated with 'the fear of YHWH' (1:29; cf. 1:7), for it is ultimately knowledge of Him and His holiness (2:5; 9:10).¹³¹ It is that moral and spiritual insight which issues from constantly listening to wisdom herself in the daily experience of living (1:33).

Access to wisdom is thus a complex matter determined both by the nature of wisdom and of man. On the one hand, this passage stresses that, since wisdom is offered to all, including those who refuse her, lack of wisdom is due to a deliberate frame of mind and self-chosen way of life which excludes wisdom and her benefits. Wisdom then is theoretically available to all comers. On the other hand, this is qualified by the threats of wisdom in 1:26-28. They make it quite plain that she is available only on her own terms and for a limited period of time to those who reject these terms. If humans fail to accept her correction in time, then she will not only withdraw herself and cease to address them but she will abandon them to the consequences of their self-chosen way of life and deride their panic-stricken reactions to their calamities.¹³² There is therefore a time for the getting of wisdom as for everything else in life.

In sum: wisdom here identifies those who wilfully exclude her and her benefits by their way of life and their attitude to her. There is hope for them only if they submit in time to her correction and direction. If they do so, they will be empowered by her spirit to live wisely and gain knowledge of God; if they do not, the time will come when they will be abandoned by her to their destructive folly. A person's acceptance or rejection of wisdom herself decides whether he receives wisdom and her gifts.

b. Proverbs 4:1-19

This composite section¹³³ consists of a passage of paternal instruction.¹³⁴

¹³¹ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 275, notes that wisdom lays claim to, and speaks with, divine authority here in the manner of the prophets to promulgate the instruction of Yahweh Himself.

¹³² The closest parallel to wisdom's derision is God's derision of the wicked in Ps 37:13.

¹³³ The composite nature of the piece is indicated by the fluidity of the text at 4:4-5, 7 in the LXX and the intrusion of poetic fragments in the style of 3:13-18 at 4:6, 8-9. This fluidity led R. N. Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs*, 44, to argue for the editorial conflation of two texts and W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 39, to postulate a secondary expansion of 4:6-9.

¹³⁴ See W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 304.

While it still retains some of the directives against wrongdoing (4:14-15) so characteristic of traditional Instruction,¹³⁵ its positive commands have to do either with the reception and retention of paternal instruction (4:1, 2, 5, 10) or the getting of wisdom and attachment to her (4:6, 8, 13). There is thus a shift of emphasis from the activity of the student, as expressed in concrete directives on correct behaviour, to his receptiveness to instruction and the operation of wisdom in his life.¹³⁶ The traditional form seems to have been modified to indicate the connection between instruction by the sages and instruction by wisdom herself.¹³⁷

In 4:1-2 the father/teacher hands on the tradition which he himself has received from his own father/teacher. By appeal to his own example he commends his instruction and gives 'direction'¹³⁸ to his own sons/students on how to live, for it is by following in the same way that they too will gain insight (4:1).

In 4:3-9 he recalls his own instruction, begun, when he was still young. The first part of this instruction in 4:4 consists of a conventional injunction to memorise and practise the commandments of his father coupled with the consequent promise of life.¹³⁹ The body of this instruction then goes on to mention the specific commands which he was urged neither to forget nor disregard. He was to get wisdom and insight,¹⁴⁰ to love, embrace and not forsake her.¹⁴¹ With these appeals the priority and urgency of getting wisdom and insight is highlighted by the repetition of the commands in 4:5^a in 4:7.¹⁴² The command to get wisdom and insight is thus the basic content of this instruction.

The commands to get wisdom and insight in 4:5^a can be taken in two ways. On the one hand, they could make wisdom synonymous with 'insight.' If such an equation is correct, insight here, as in 7:4, must be taken as a personal power by virtue of the personification in 4:6-9 rather than merely a human faculty or the object of human knowledge as in 4:1. On the other hand, the second command could be

¹³⁵ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 51ff.

¹³⁶ See a similar shift in 2:1-22; 3:13-26; 8:1-36; 9:1-6.

¹³⁷ The use of terminology redolent of YHWH piety in 4:18-19 noted by W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 308ff., could hint at a wish to link these with instruction by YHWH.

¹³⁸ תורתי, 'my teaching,' in 4:2 foreshadows וירני, 'and he taught me,' in 4:4. According to G. R. Driver, 'Hebrew Notes,' 250-51, the latter is the Hiphil of a root which means 'to go.' תורה is thus a directive on the way to take through life.

¹³⁹ See also 3:1-2, 21-22; 4:20-22; 6:20-23; 7:1-2. This promise is absent in the LXX.

¹⁴⁰ The location of these commands differs in various manuscripts of the LXX, and both are absent in the LXXB.

¹⁴¹ We take the nouns in 4:5^a as the logical, if not grammatical, object of אל תשכח אל, 'do not forsake.'

¹⁴² 4:7 is absent in the LXX.

taken as the logical outcome of the first so that the possession of wisdom is considered the prerequisite for the possession of insight.¹⁴³ If that is so, then we may equate insight in 4:5 and 7 with 4:1 and take 4:6, 8-9 to refer to Dame Wisdom in 4:5 and 7.¹⁴⁴ Whatever the case, the insight mentioned in 4:1 as the object of paternal instruction is subordinated to, and attendant on, the acquisition and retention of wisdom. Wisdom is in 4:6 a personal power which supervises and protects the student's life. She requires the personal commitment and even love of the student,¹⁴⁵ for she is not only interested in the course of his life but also lays claim to his personal allegiance. So in a sense the possession of wisdom is really possession by wisdom.

4:7-9 repeats the basic ideas of 4:5-6 for emphasis. At the same time it clarifies the nature and role of wisdom. At first sight 4:7^a seems rather tautological. It is, however, probably meant to be taken as a riddle whose solution depends on the distinction between two different usages of the word wisdom. On the one hand, it is used of Dame Wisdom, a divinely bestowed, personal power, who like a noblewoman¹⁴⁶ or a lady in court¹⁴⁷ supervises the career of her protégé and secures his advancement.¹⁴⁸ 4:6 has prepared us for this less usual sense of the word. On the other hand, it is most commonly employed for the human faculty of wisdom which Dame Wisdom claims to bestow upon her devotees.¹⁴⁹ Thus 4:7^a is not as tautological as it seems¹⁵⁰ but rather enunciates the profound conviction that the basis and beginning¹⁵¹ of wisdom as a human faculty is possession of and by Dame

¹⁴³ GK 110h cites Pr 20:13^b and Deut 2:24 as instances of imperatives not linked by a *waw* to indicate subordinate consequence but does not mention this verse.

¹⁴⁴ Although *בִּינָה* would by virtue of its proximity be the most likely subject, the personification of wisdom in 1:20-33; 2:10-15 and 3:13-18 is probably meant to carry over to this passage.

¹⁴⁵ 4:6; cf. 7:4; 8:17.

¹⁴⁶ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 305-06, argues that 4:6-9 describes wisdom as the patron of her protégé rather than the bride of a student.

¹⁴⁷ N. Habel, 'The Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9,' 154, makes the interesting suggestion that wisdom in 8:14-17 acts like a queen mother as the power behind the throne. Such a person could be envisaged here.

¹⁴⁸ See 2:10-19; 3:13-18; 6:22; 8:4-36; 9:1-6.

¹⁴⁹ See 1:7; 2:6; 5:1; 8:11; 9:10. This distinction stands out most clearly in 8:10-11 where Dame Wisdom herself speaks of her instruction and knowledge as 'wisdom.'

¹⁵⁰ Contra C. H. Toy, *The Book of Proverbs*, 88.

¹⁵¹ The sense of *אִשָּׁר* has occasioned considerable discussion. We tend to follow H. Blocher, 'The Fear of the Lord as the "Principle" of Wisdom,' 3-28, and especially 12ff. He argues that the parallel use of *תְּחִלָּה* in 9:10 supports the sense of 'basis,' 'logical beginning' or 'first principle.' Such an interpretation does not, however, exclude the notion of wisdom as 'chief,' 'choice,' or 'foremost thing,' which both H. Ringgren, *Sprüche*, 26, and W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 305, opt for as its value is obviously derived from its function. If wisdom is a first principle, it is obviously of supreme worth and a matter of priority.

Wisdom. Only those who have Dame Wisdom as their patron and live by her direction become wise. Apart from her no one is wise. Thus the presupposition for wisdom is wisdom herself.

4:7^b also exhibits some characteristics of a riddle. Insight could be either a personified power identical with Dame Wisdom as in 7:4 or else the human faculty of discernment as in 4:1. Perhaps both senses are intended. Furthermore the stress in 4:7^b is either on the need for the student to sacrifice all his possessions to gain insight¹⁵² or else on the priority of insight over all the other gains from wisdom.¹⁵³ While the former sense is confirmed by 8:10-11, 16:16 and 23:23, the latter receives some support from 3:13-18 and 8:14-21 which mention the many benefits of wisdom.¹⁵⁴ I am inclined to take it both ways and regard it as a kind of riddle.

After this stress on the priority and urgency of getting insight 4:8-9 states the benefit of attachment to wisdom, which will not accrue to the student, unless he has insight. The student is told to embrace and cling to¹⁵⁵ wisdom rather than seek his own advancement, for she will in due course gain a position of honour for him, when he has the insight necessary for it. He will then be vindicated by her for his devotion to her and share in her life and glory.¹⁵⁶ Thus through Dame Wisdom the student can enter the realm of wisdom and be acknowledged by her as a member of her circle.¹⁵⁷

Once he has given this resume of the traditional instruction which he claims to transmit, the teacher once again recommends his teaching. It has set the student on 'the paths of uprightness'¹⁵⁸ which make up 'the way of wisdom.'¹⁵⁹

¹⁵² Taking the *beth* as a *beth pretii*.

¹⁵³ Taking the *beth* as an indication of accompaniment.

¹⁵⁴ A third less likely possibility is to take 4:7^b as a statement of consequence and קנינך, 'your getting,' to refer to the acquisition of wisdom. The sense would then be that the more one gained possession of wisdom, the more insight would one gain from wisdom.

¹⁵⁵ The verb חבק is used in 5:20 for the embrace of the promiscuous woman who is wisdom's counterpart in the contest for the student's allegiance.

¹⁵⁶ See C. Bauer-Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1-9*, 111ff., for a discussion on the imagery of the garland/crown to symbolise vindication, glory and participation in divine life in Ancient Egypt.

¹⁵⁷ Whether we take garlanding as an image from feasting or from the bestowal of honour by someone in authority, wisdom's actions in 4:9 indicate the elevation of the student to a position of confidence and honour in her household or court. As the student was promised a position in YHWH's cabinet in 3:32, so he is assured a place in the retinue of Wisdom here.

¹⁵⁸ ישר מעגלי, 'paths of an upright person,' could recall 2:7 and 21 which make uprightness the condition for wisdom.

¹⁵⁹ Taken by itself דרך חכמה would best be taken as the wise way or else perhaps the way that leads to wisdom. But in view of wisdom's personification in 4:4-9 it could also be the way which wisdom goes and on which she leads her protégé. See also 8:20, 32.

Provided that he remains on this way, he will have safe passage through life (4:12). What the teacher fears most is that the student will enter the way of the wicked whose meat and drink is evil doing and violence. This way leads to a state of darkness so total that like blind men they cannot even see what makes them stumble (4:19). So to forestall such an eventuality the teacher recommends a firm and constant attachment to instruction in 4:13.

This recommendation is striking. Whereas we would expect him to insist that the student cling to his instruction,¹⁶⁰ he urges attachment to instruction as a person and speaks of it as a woman despite the masculine gender of the noun.¹⁶¹ The reason is that Dame Wisdom is here identified with instruction which she embodies absolutely.¹⁶² The sages are her agents. Hence commitment to their instruction is commitment to her and her instruction.¹⁶³ 'Instruction', alias Dame Wisdom, is 'life to the student, not only because she enlivens and revitalises him but also because he cannot retain his vitality and remain alive apart from her.'¹⁶⁴ Hence the need to cling to her as his constant companion in the journey through life.

The way which the sage teaches and on which 'Instruction' leads the student is described in 4:18 as 'the path of the righteous.' This path not only proceeds more and more into ever brighter light but also leads the student into the same.¹⁶⁵ This enlightenment does not occur from within by some mystical process or even as a result of reflection on the teaching of the sages but from without as a result of a passage along the way of wisdom through life whereby the student is made more alive (4:13) and is introduced into increasing light (4:18). The image of light which seems to have been left purposely unexplained is richly suggestive. The most likely applications from the context are to vitality (4:13), longevity (4:10), security (4:6, 12), honour (4:8-9), goodness (4:2), and perhaps summarily to insight

¹⁶⁰ See 1:8; 4:1; 5:12-13.

¹⁶¹ Note the feminine suffix to נצרה and the feminine pronoun היא .

¹⁶² This identification is required by the linkage of 4:10-19 with 4:4-9, for, if the essence of the teacher's instruction by his father was the command to gain and retain Dame Wisdom, some mention of this is required in his instruction as well.

¹⁶³ 4:13 recalls wisdom's offer of correction in 1:22-33 and foreshadows the later discussion in 8:10 and 33 on wisdom's instruction. As in 6:20-23, paternal instruction is coupled with the instruction by wisdom.

¹⁶⁴ 4:13; cf. 3:18; 8:35.

¹⁶⁵ Both darkness and light are here considered states which determine the fate of those who enter them.

(4:1, 5, 7) and wisdom (4:5, 7, 11). The possible theophanic connotations of נגה¹⁶⁶ and the reference to righteousness could hint that such a journey with wisdom is a transition into YHWH's presence, since wisdom is always there with Him.¹⁶⁷

So in spite of some awkward transitions Proverbs 4:1-19 is a carefully crafted composition on the way of wisdom. While it is true that the teacher in his instruction initiates the student in this way by mapping it out for him and setting him on it, he needs to gain and retain Dame Wisdom herself as his patron and teacher, if he is to continue and advance on it. Apart from commitment to her and her instruction there is no progress on the way and a distinct likelihood of entering its rival. Hence her acquisition and retention is a matter of urgency and priority. She herself leads him on the way of life- giving insight, promotion in her service and increasing enlightenment. All this is made to hinge on the relationship of the student with Dame Wisdom. As long as that is in order, everything else will fall into place in its own good time.

c. Proverbs 8:1-36

The address in 8:4-5, 32, the imperatives in 8:5-6, 10, 32-33 and the motive clauses in 8:7-9, 11, 35-36 show that this is a passage of instruction where wisdom herself addresses and teaches her students.¹⁶⁸ The self-commendation of wisdom which Gemser notes¹⁶⁹ and which resembles the self-introductions by gods and goddesses in the Ancient Orient¹⁷⁰ is a subordinate element within the basic framework of instruction where it has been incorporated in such a way that its basic character is changed. The imperatives stress the receptivity rather than the activity of the student. They are indeed rather overshadowed by reference to the role of Dame Wisdom with her students. Thus the gratuitous element in the getting of wisdom and her benefits is formally endorsed as in Proverbs 4.

¹⁶⁶ Although the image of light occurs in Proverbs for teaching (6:23), life (13:9) and the king's favour (16:15), the noun נגה, 'brightness,' is found only here. Its verbal root, which occasionally is used of celestial phenomena (Isa 13:10; 60:9; Joel 2:10; 3:15), is often employed in theophanic contexts for the divine advent (2 Sam 22:13//Ps 18:12; Isa 4:5; 60:3; Ezek 1:4, 13, 27, 28; 10:4; Hab. 3.4) either to punish the wicked (Hab 3.11; cf. Amos 5:20) or to vindicate the righteous (2 Sam 22:29; 23:4; Job 22:28).

¹⁶⁷ See 8:30; cf. 3:32; 9:1-6; Job 29:2-5.

¹⁶⁸ Contra R. N. Whybray, 'Yahweh-sayings and their Contexts in Proverbs 10:1-22:26, 72-73. See W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 342-43.

¹⁶⁹ B. Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos*, 37.

¹⁷⁰ See C. Bauer-Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1-9*, 86ff., and B. Lang, *Frau Weisheit*, 59ff., 66ff.

In this chapter Dame Wisdom addresses her audience for the second time. She calls all men to her as they are all either immature or foolish and therefore in need of her instruction. The immature, who are so impressed by the apparent sophistication and shrewdness of evildoers, are urged to discern that true sophistication and shrewdness (ערמה) lead to the discerning and avoidance of evil.¹⁷¹ The fools are to 'order'¹⁷² their 'hearts' aright. The context shows that more is meant by 'heart' (2) than just intelligence¹⁷³ or mental capacity.¹⁷⁴ It includes a moral sense (8:6-13) and spiritual sensitivity (8:13).

In 8:6-9 Dame Wisdom appeals to her prospective students to attend to her instructive words, for they are not only free from all deception and taint of wickedness (8:7-8) but faithfully produce what accords with the divinely sanctioned world order.¹⁷⁵ She declares and champions what is noble, straight, true, righteous, plain and upright (8:6-8), and this is evident to all those who have insight and knowledge (8:9). There is thus no credibility gap between what she says and what she does. Men should therefore accept her instruction, which is of incomparable worth, and her wisdom, which is more desirable than anything else (8:10-11).

Wisdom's instruction yields the kind of knowledge and wisdom described in 8:12-13. Because she herself lives shrewdly (8:12) and embodies insight (8:14), she possesses the 'knowledge' to cope with the problems of life (דעת מזמות), gives effective 'advice' (עצה) which leads to 'success' (תושיה), and has the 'power' to put her good policies into practice (גבורה).¹⁷⁶ Though practical, this knowledge is not merely pragmatic, for it is governed by a sense of morality which is respectfully obedient to YHWH and so deliberately rejects arrogant self-assertion, the way of evil and verbal subversiveness as means to its ends (8:13). Wisdom therefore enables those in power to decree and rule according to what is just (8:15-16). Wisdom thus not only conforms with right order (8:7-9, 13, 20) but effectively

¹⁷¹ 8:4; cf. 8:12-13.

¹⁷² The repetition of *לב הבינו* and the singularity of the expression *לב הבינו* give support to the emendation: *הכינו* from *LXX ἔνεθεσθε*. The Hiphil of *כון* occurs with *לב* in a similar sapiential context in Job 11:13 where it stands in contrast to the 'empty-headed man' (*נבוב*) in 11:12 who can no more get a heart than a man can be born of an ass. See also Ps 78:8 where it is used negatively of that frame of mind which was characteristic of Israel's rebelliously wayward and faithless ancestors. If the MT is retained, then *לב* is not the agent but the object of discernment. We would then have to translate: 'Discern what it is to have a mind.'

¹⁷³ Contra Delitzsch, *Proverbs of Solomon*, 24.

¹⁷⁴ Contra W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 345.

¹⁷⁵ See H. H. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung*, 97, for this sense of *בצדק*.

¹⁷⁶ See Isa 11:2; 36:5.

promotes it in her instruction which aims so to shape the student's character and way of life that by conformity with this order he receives her ensuing benefits (8:20-21). But that depends on an eager search for, and faithful love of,¹⁷⁷ wisdom herself; for just as the search for wisdom is the prerequisite for gaining her, so love of her is the condition for her continuing care.

The discussion of YHWH's production¹⁷⁸ and acquisition of Dame Wisdom as the first principle of His way in creating the cosmos (8:22-33),¹⁷⁹ of her primordial relationship with Him in creation (8:24-30^a), and of her intimacy with Him and mankind (8:30^b-31) not only accounts for the claim she makes for herself in 8:4-21 but also establishes the basis for her extraordinary demands and promises in 8:32-36. By virtue of her relationship with YHWH and her priority to His creation she embodies and mediates life. But even more than that; since YHWH delights in her, she enjoys constant and privileged access to Him¹⁸⁰ and thus like some royal favourite she can gain a favourable hearing from Him for her clients.¹⁸¹ Hence those who miss her destroy themselves and choose death, for by despising her they have deprived themselves of the enlivening favour of YHWH.

Since Dame Wisdom mediates the favour of YHWH, her claims are neither exaggerated nor blasphemous. All depends on listening to her and her instruction which involves copying and keeping to her ways.¹⁸² Like eager suitors or suppliants, her students should 'listen' for her by maintaining a vigil at the gates of her house and awaiting her advent (8:34). The house of wisdom, which is the entrance to life and favour from YHWH,¹⁸³ is the positive counterpart of the strange woman's house which is the mouth of Sheol and opens up to death.¹⁸⁴ By heeding Dame Wisdom, then,

¹⁷⁷ שנאתי, 'I hate,' in 8:13 stands in contrast to אהבתי, 'I love,' in 8:17 and 21.

¹⁷⁸ This sense of קנני is suggested by the use of חוללתי, 'I brought forth,' in 8:24-25.

¹⁷⁹ See B. Vawter, 'Prov. 8.22: Wisdom and Creation,' 205ff., who argues that wisdom here is a possession which YHWH has acquired. There is then a contrast between His getting of wisdom as a principle of His Creation and man's getting of wisdom from Him.

¹⁸⁰ See N. Habel, 'The Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9,' 150, for the cosmological role of wisdom as the divine 'way,' which determines man's way in the world.

¹⁸¹ However the crux אמן is to be taken, 8:30 does emphasise wisdom's privileged position with YHWH and her delight in pleasing both Him and mankind.

¹⁸² רצון מיהוה, 'favour from YHWH,' should be linked to לפניו, 'before His face,' in 8:30. Its usage resembles the courtly terminology in 16:15 which mentions both the 'life' (חיים) and 'favour' (רצון) issuing from the king's 'presence/face' (פנים). The courtly use of רצון is evident in 14:35; 16:13 and 19:12 where it describes a favourable hearing rather than the wrath of the king. When used of YHWH רצון denotes what is acceptable to Him (11:1; 12:22; cf. 10:32), acceptance by Him (11:20; 12:2; 14:9; 15:8), and the favour resulting from such acceptance (11:27; 18:22).

¹⁸³ 8:32; cf. 8:20; 4:11; 9:6.

¹⁸⁴ Her house, which is the place of life and divine favour, could perhaps be the temple in Jerusalem.

¹⁸⁴ See W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 359.

men become wise (8:33). In her they find vitality;¹⁸⁵ through her they are both accepted and favoured by YHWH.¹⁸⁶ Thus through her instruction she brings her students to YHWH and prepares them for a favourable position in His court.

In this chapter we have the clearest example of modification in the traditional form of instruction to stress the active role of Dame Wisdom in the getting of wisdom. Hence the stress on the nature of her words in 8:6-9, her character in 8:12-17, her benefits in 8:10-11,18-21, and her close relationship with YHWH in 8:22-31. The imperatives that do occur all stress receptiveness to her instruction. She publicly and actively seeks out those who lack her and makes herself with her resources available to those who listen to her instruction so that they can be integrated into the beneficent order of creation and become wise by keeping to her ways. This offer of herself calls for much more than mere mental concentration and intellectual effort to grasp her words; it calls for a listening stance before her; it calls for a constant love of her which is eager to find her, ready to follow in her way and is daily vigilant for an invitation into her house as her favoured guest. Only such devoted students become truly wise. They not only find her, but life in her and divine favour through her.

c. Proverbs 9:1-6

Wisdom's call to receive instruction in 8:1-36 culminates at 9:1-6 in her invitation to festal celebration with her. After building her house which could be the universe¹⁸⁷ or else the household created by the marriage of the young man¹⁸⁸ or more probably the temple in Jerusalem,¹⁸⁹ she as a devotee (or priestess) of Yahweh¹⁹⁰ prepares a sacrificial meal¹⁹¹ for her guests and summons them to enjoy it with her so that they may receive life and be set on the way of insight through it.

¹⁸⁵ 8:35; cf. 3:18, 22; 4:13; 6:23.

¹⁸⁶ Compare 8:35 with 3:32-35 where membership in YHWH's 'cabinet' (τιο) results in the reception of 'blessing' (8:33), 'favour' (ין 8:34) and 'honour' (8:35).

¹⁸⁷ According to C. H. Toy, *The Book of Proverbs*, 185, this is the interpretation of the Midrash, Procopius and Rashi.

¹⁸⁸ See Pr 14:1; 24:3-4.

¹⁸⁹ See L. G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult*, 151. W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 364-65, argues tentatively for the linking of her cult with worship at Jerusalem.

¹⁹⁰ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 364, notes that she appears as a devotee rather than a goddess, since she is not the object of this worship.

¹⁹¹ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 363-64.

The figure of Dame Wisdom has, as was demonstrated by Boström,¹⁹² been formed by contrast with ancient fertility goddesses such as Ishtar who through their hierodules offered to initiate the young man sexually into the secrets of life. In 9:13-18, which serves as a counterpart to 9:1-6, the fertility goddess with her servants, the prostitute (5:1-6), the adulteress (6:24-35) and the devotee to her cult (7:5-27) is unmasked as the seductive embodiment of Dame Folly who leads her novices into the realms of death and darkness.¹⁹³ By contrast Dame Wisdom builds a house and establishes a cult¹⁹⁴ which gives that insight and life which the fertility goddesses failed to give. Like Dame Folly she vies for the total allegiance of the young man. His ultimate fate is decided by which of these two invitations he accepts.

Although the poet does not disclose the identity of the maidens who could be either the sages¹⁹⁵ or the brides of the young men,¹⁹⁶ the invitation is clear. It is issued to those who are 'immature' (פתי) and 'mindless' (חסר לב), those whose minds and personalities are unformed since they are uninstructed and, as yet, uncommitted. These receive wisdom's invitation as they, unlike the fools, are not yet in the grip of folly, nor are they, like the wise, yet attached to wisdom. They are therefore open to her call and in need of her patronage. They must, however, leave their fellows,¹⁹⁷ become her guests and eat at her table, in order to gain life and proceed in the way of insight. Wisdom's instruction is thus summed up in these three requirements to which she attaches the promise of life and insight (9:6).¹⁹⁸ The context interprets these two gifts theologically. The sacrificial meal bestows the life which comes from Yahweh's good favour (8:35), and the insight which results from knowing God (9:10). Thus through heeding Wisdom's invitation and participating in the worship supervised by her the immature young man is set 'on the way of insight.'

¹⁹² G. Boström, *Proverbiastudien*, 160ff.

¹⁹³ See L. G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult*, 154.

¹⁹⁴ In this Wisdom resembles Solomon, to whom the proverbs are ascribed in 1:1.

¹⁹⁵ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 360, argues that, even though they speak like wisdom teachers, their gender and youth make this identification unlikely. This objection, however, seems excessively literal.

¹⁹⁶ The emphasis given to the wife of the student in 5:10-19 and 31:10-31 lends weight to this interpretation. In chapter 5 the student's hatred of instruction (5:13, 23) is marked by his seduction from the path of life by the prostitute and his rejection of his wife as his fountain, while in 31:26 the good wife is commended as the source of wisdom. Thus, just as the strange woman is the source of folly and death, so a man's wife is the source of wisdom and life. If that is so, then the meal in spite of its sacrificial overtones could originally have been a figure for cohabitation and sexual consummation in marriage. See also the Song of Solomon 1:2; 2:3-5; 4:10-11, 16; 5:1; 8:2.

¹⁹⁷ פתאים is thus taken as the object of the verb and not emended to פת from ἀφροσύνη in the LXX.

¹⁹⁸ The second and third imperatives indicate the result of leaving the company of fools. See GK 110f.

To conclude: wisdom here appears as the patron of the cult which she herself has established for the benefit of her followers. Her cult is probably the worship of YHWH in the temple at Jerusalem. There she resides and presides.¹⁹⁹ There she calls those who will come. There she initiates her novices into insight rather than folly, into life rather than death. Through her table she mediates between YHWH and her followers so that they are brought into contact with the life and insight which comes from God.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ See Sir 24:8-22.

²⁰⁰ The addition of 9:7-12 and especially 9:10-11 to 9:1-6 makes this theological interpretation quite explicit.

Chapter 3

THE INSTRUCTION OF YHWH

a. Proverbs 1:7

This summary sentence performs a decisive function in the final redaction of Proverbs.²⁰¹ After a statement of editorial purpose in 1:2-6 this single proverb voices the main theme of Chapters 1-9 and perhaps even of the whole book. Becker maintains:

‘Wenn nämlich Spr. 1-9 der Kanon des Verständnisses für das ganze Buch ist, so steht Spr. 1, 7 als programmatischer Titel am Anfang von Spr. 1-9, formuliert dessen Grundabsicht und wird dadurch bestimmend für das Verständnis des ganzen Buches.’²⁰²

This proverb makes the getting of knowledge and wisdom the central concern of Proverbs in its final redaction.

There is an implied contrast between 1:7 and 1:2-6. The ultimate source of knowledge is not the words of insight (1:2) which are put in pithy form by the wise (1:6), handed on by tradition (1:5), and transmitted by instruction (1:2), but rather YHWH Himself (1:7). Its essential nature²⁰³ is not just practical and moral insight (1:3-5) but the fear of YHWH.²⁰⁴ Such knowledge does not come merely from the mastery and comprehension of traditional instruction (1:2-6) but from a respectful attitude to YHWH and to one's fellows. As the first principle of knowledge the fear of YHWH is the foundation of knowing and the quintessence of what is known.²⁰⁵ It is also that attitude of reverent humility and docile trust which is the mark of those who live according to His covenant.²⁰⁶ As the quintessence of what is known the fear of

²⁰¹ ‘If, indeed, Proverbs 1-9 is the key for understanding the whole book, then Pr 1:7 is the programmatic heading at the beginning of Proverbs 1-9, formulates its basic purpose, and is thereby determinative for the understanding of the whole book.’ See J. Becker, *Gottesfurcht im Alten Testament*, 212-13.

²⁰² J. Becker, *Gottesfurcht im Alten Testament*, 212.

²⁰³ J. Pedersen, *Israel*, 3-4, 300-01., maintains that ראית is the first or chief thing in a series whose characteristics it fully embodies.

²⁰⁴ 1:7; cf. 2:5; 9:10.

²⁰⁵ דעת can be taken both as a gerund (1:2; 4:1) and a noun (1:22, 29; 2:5, 6, 10, etc.).

²⁰⁶ See 8:13; 15:33; 16:6; 22:4; cf. 3:7; 14:2. G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, pp. 65ff., lays special stress on this aspect.

YHWH may be equated with this revelation of Himself and His will for creation.²⁰⁷ So knowledge is given by YHWH to those who fear Him and submit to instruction.

The maxim of 1:7 does not deny the validity of traditional wisdom but rather attempts to define its nature more fully by reference to YHWH. It shifts the focus of attention from the instruction of the sages to the instruction of YHWH, for it claims that all knowledge and wisdom are ultimately derived from YHWH Himself, even if they come to a man through the teaching of the sages and the experience of living rightly. Hence the stress here is on the fear of YHWH rather than on the appropriation of tradition as the prerequisite for knowledge. 1:7 thus correlates the instruction of the sages with the instruction of YHWH. On the one hand, it introduces a limiting and corrective principle to the tradition of the sages in that it sets certain moral and theological parameters for the gaining of knowledge;²⁰⁸ on the other hand, it does not subordinate wisdom to morality or reduce it to piety²⁰⁹ but rather extends its potential scope to encompass all that is included in the term 'the fear of Yahweh'²¹⁰ in the traditional domain of wisdom.²¹¹ It thus gives warrant to that kind of reflection on God's operation in the social circumstances of people's lives which is found in Deuteronomy, the prophets, the wisdom psalms, Job, and Ecclesiastes.

The polemical front of 1:7 is directed against 'the fools.' Since they go their own way and delight in doing evil, they despise all instruction, whether it be from the sages or from YHWH. Their attitude to instruction reveals their basic attitude to YHWH and vice versa. They act as if they were morally, spiritually and intellectually autonomous.²¹² Hence they lack the basic presupposition for wisdom,

²⁰⁷ The fear of YHWH can be chosen (1:29), understood (2:5) and trusted (14:27). It is equated with the knowledge of YHWH given by YHWH (2:6; 9:10; cf. 1:29). Furthermore, it prolongs life (10:26), is the fountain of life (14:27), and gives instruction in wisdom (15:33). It is thus not merely a subjective attitude of devotion to Him but an objective entity that is virtually synonymous with the religion that He has established.

²⁰⁸ See H. Blocher, 'The Fear of the Lord as the "Principle" of Wisdom,' 16-17, and G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 97ff.

²⁰⁹ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, seems to imply this in 264, 275, 368, 474, etc.

²¹⁰ The fear of YHWH is well suited as the key element in this synthesis as it is common both to traditional Yahwism (Gen 20:11; Ex 20:20; Deut 5:7.9, etc.) and the sapiential tradition (Pr 10:27; 14:26, 27; 15:16; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17).

²¹¹ J. Becker, *Gottesfurcht im Alten Testament*, 217, maintains that the author puts wisdom on the same level as the fear of the LORD and considers them of equal significance. He says: "Aus unserer Deutung von Spr. 1,7 und 9,10 geht hervor, dass der Verfasser weder die Weisheit als der Gottesfurcht überlegen hinstellen will, noch auch die Gottesfurcht als die Weisheit überlegen... Sie sind für ihn gleichermassen anerkannte Werte."

²¹² See H. Blocher, 'The Fear of the Lord as the "Principle" of Wisdom,' 18-19.

the fear of YHWH, which marks a right relationship with God and their fellow countrymen. They are thus incapable of knowledge.

The getting of wisdom then hinges on the fear of YHWH which is shown in a docile attitude to instruction. The fear of YHWH is so fundamental, because He himself is involved both in the process of instruction and the getting of knowledge through instruction. He uses instruction to give wisdom and knowledge to those who fear Him.

b. Proverbs 2:1-22

While this section exhibits certain similarities to the preamble of a text of instruction, such as in Amenemope,²¹³ it is more like the body of instruction in its content, which has to do with attentiveness to teaching (2:1-4), the gaining of insight (2:5-11) and the avoidance of evildoers (2:18-19). As to form, on the other hand, there is the difference that the imperatives are replaced by a long conditional sentence.²¹⁴ There is a shift of emphasis from the activity of the student to the activity of God and of wisdom in the student's life. The receptivity of the student is correspondingly stressed both in the implied imperatives in 2:1-4 and in the implied promises in 2:5-22. The old form of instruction seems therefore to have been reshaped to make it an appropriate vehicle for a new kind of Instruction which is concerned as much with the reception of divine gifts as with adjustment to divine order.

In this chapter we have a father/teacher addressing his pupil rather than wisdom herself calling those who have spurned her, as in 1:20-33. So too the approach throughout is positive with no mention of correction, for the pupil, it seems, is already on the right way.

The initial focus is on the teaching of the sage which is authoritative and mandatory both in content and form.²¹⁵ This teaching is, however, not an end in itself, even though the student must appropriate, memorise and obey it (2:1). It is rather the means by which the student is qualified for, and introduced to, Wisdom whose mouthpiece the sages are. Its aim is to alert the student to the voice of

²¹³ See M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, 148-49.

²¹⁴ See W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 277ff.

²¹⁵ See W. McKane's remarks on מצוה, *Proverbs*, 282, 308.

Wisdom and to win his commitment to her.²¹⁶ Through the sages and their teaching God gives wisdom (2:6). Yet it is not given willy nilly to all comers; like hidden treasure (2:4) it is reserved for the 'upright,' for those who 'walk in integrity' and are 'loyal' to YHWH. And it would seem that the student is one of these.

Since weight is given to these terms, it is necessary to examine their usage more closely. The three terms qualify each other and are, in turn, qualified in 2:7-8 by the image of the right way. The upright are those who 'walk in integrity' which is described as 'the paths' of justice and the 'way' of those loyal to YHWH. This way is contrasted with the 'way' of evil in 2:12 which is travelled by men of perverted speech who desert the 'paths' of uprightness for crooked, devious 'paths' and the 'ways' of darkness (2:13-15) and by the strange woman who has left the 'paths' of life for the 'path' of the shades (2:16-19). So the three terms under consideration describe those who live the right way.

The 'upright' follow 'the paths of uprightness.'²¹⁷ The basic sense of ישר as what is 'straight' rather than 'crooked'²¹⁸ is still evident in the verbal forms of the root employed in 3:6, 9:15 and 11:5 for walking straight along a way. In its various forms ישר occurs often in Proverbs with the metaphor of the right way of life.²¹⁹ The upright are contrasted with the 'devious' (גלוז)²²⁰ who have deviated from the right way and the 'treacherous' (בגדים) who have betrayed their own community.²²¹ The way of the upright is more than just the way of social custom and conventional morality, for those who walk in it are called 'righteous'²²² and those who deviate from it 'wicked.'²²³ These words are basically theological, voicing as they do the divine verdict of approval or disapproval upon a person in Proverbs.²²⁴ The upright go along the way of those loyal to YHWH (2:8). Hence 'walking in uprightness' is in 14:2 equated with the 'fear of YHWH.' Those who are upright are said not only to enjoy His 'favour,'

²¹⁶ While להקשיב may define the verbs in 2:2 more exactly, as suggested in GK 114.4.0, it seems more natural to take it as expressing the purpose either of the sage's teaching or of learning his teaching.

²¹⁷ See 4:11 where ארחות ישר is equated with the way of wisdom.

²¹⁸ So G. Liedke, 'ישר /jsr,' *THAT*, vol. 1, col. 791.

²¹⁹ See 3:6; 9:15; 11:5; 15:21 for the verbal form, 2:13; 4:11; 14:2 for the nominal form, and 12:15; 4:12//16:25, 16:17; 21:2, 29; 28:10; 29:27 for the adjectival.

²²⁰ See 2:15; 3:32; 14:2 and the use of the verb לזוז as 'depart' or 'deviate' in 3:21 and 4:21.

²²¹ See 2:22; 11:3, 6, and M. A. Klopfenstein 'בגד/bgd,' *THAT*, vol. 1, cols. 261ff., for the social-legal use of the word.

²²² 2:20; 21:18

²²³ 2:22; 12:6; 14:11; 15:8; 21:18, 29.

²²⁴ So W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 15-16, 420-21.

(14:9) but also such intimacy with him (3:32) that He delights to hear their prayer (15:8). The upright then are those who are 'straight' with their fellows and with God.

In 2:7 the upright are described as those who 'walk in integrity'.²²⁵ Like *ישׁר* the various forms of the root *תָּמַם* are often conjoined in Proverbs with the metaphor of the right way²²⁶ to describe the life of a person who is integrated in himself and with his community. Those who 'walk in integrity' are contrasted with the 'crooked' (*עֲקָשִׁים*) whose 'crooked heart' (11:20) is revealed in crooked 'speech'²²⁷ and a 'crooked' way of life.²²⁸ Such persons bring about their own disintegration (6:12-15). Integrity has to do with a sense of solidarity with a community and a way of life which promotes the solidarity of a community.²²⁹ Like 'uprightness' it is both a moral and a theological term. Those who walk in integrity are called the 'righteous' (2:20-21; 20:7) whose righteousness paves the way through life for them.²³⁰ YHWH who delights in their ways (11:20) is Himself their shield (2:7) and refuge (10:29).

As the 'upright' (2:21) walk in 'paths of uprightness' (2:13), so 'the men of integrity' (2:21) walk in 'integrity.' Thus the terms 'upright' and 'integrity' are used here and elsewhere in Proverbs to denote an objective state and a subjective stance, a norm and an attitude to this norm, a way to live and a way of living, right order and adjustment to right order. That this is so is clear from 2:8 which develops the idea of God's protection for those who walk in integrity by maintaining that he guards 'the paths of justice' which constitute His order for the world²³¹ as well as the 'way of those loyal to Him.'²³² He maintains both the environment necessary for the right life and the course of those who live right lives in this right environment. This distinction is continued in the latter part of the chapter where the image of two ways is used for a normative state or way to live²³³ as well as a subjective stance or way of

²²⁵ See also 10:9; 19:1; 20:7; 28:6 and the related expression *הלך תָּמַם* in 28:18.

²²⁶ For *תָּם* see 2:7; 10:9, 29; 13:6; 19:1; 20:7; 28:6; for *תָּמָה* see 11:3; and for *תָּמִים* see 2:21; 11:5, 20; 28:18.

²²⁷ 19:1. See also the nominal form *עֲקָשׁוֹת* in 4:24 and 6:12 as well as the related term *תְּהַפְכוֹת* in 2:12; 8:13; 10:31, 32; 16:28.

²²⁸ See 2:15; 10:9; 28:6, 18, and the discussion by W. Brueggemann, 'A Neglected Sapiential Word Pair,' 234-58.

²²⁹ See W. Brueggemann, 'A Neglected Sapiential Word Pair,' 238ff.

²³⁰ 11:5; 13:6. See also the use of its antonym *רָשָׁעִים* in 2:21; 11:5; 13:6.

²³¹ So W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 282-83. See also the use of *מִשְׁפָּט* in this way in Is 28:26; 42:1, 3-4; Jer 5:4-5; 8:4-7; Hos 6:5; Zeph 3:5.

²³² The pronominal suffix in *וּלְיְהוָה* indicates that covenant loyalty to YHWH rather than solidarity in the community is the concern of the writer. Contra W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 283.

²³³ Besides 'the paths of justice' we find 'every good path' (2:9), 'the way of evil' (2:12), 'paths of uprightness' (2:13), 'ways of darkness' (2:13) and 'paths of life' (2:19).

living.²³⁴ So ultimately wisdom is reserved for those who are loyal to YHWH and conform to His moral order, that is, those who fear Him (2:5). This kind of student is addressed in this chapter as the recipient of wisdom.

The upright student who walks in integrity needs to do more than just 'receive' and memorise the tradition of his teachers (2:1); through it he must acquire 'wisdom' and with it 'understanding' and 'insight'.²³⁵ This requires attentiveness and wholehearted commitment to wisdom and its attendant understanding. The heart (לב) and the ears are mentioned in 2:2 for they are the organs for its reception and assimilation.²³⁶ While לב is perhaps best translated as 'mind' here²³⁷ and elsewhere in the Old Testament²³⁸ it should be remembered that the Hebrew language does not separate the physical from the mental as we do. Hence heart refers to the physical organ as well as all the inner faculties of a man²³⁹ including what could be called the emotions²⁴⁰ and the will²⁴¹ as well as the whole person or self by employment of synecdoche.²⁴² Thus in 2:2 we have the demand for wholehearted attention and total commitment to the voice and presence of wisdom.

The student must, however, be more than just passively attentive to the voice of Wisdom. He should not only listen for her²⁴³ but also call out and speak to her (2:3) and so inaugurate a kind of dialogue with her. Yet even more than that, he needs to 'search' diligently for her, if he is to 'find' her,²⁴⁴ for she is hidden away²⁴⁵ like treasure and known only on her own terms which are ultimately God's terms.²⁴⁶ This is perhaps one of the reasons for the personification of wisdom in Proverbs 1-9, for just as a person is known only in a personal relationship, so wisdom is not known

²³⁴ Besides 'the way of those loyal to Him' (2:8), we find 'crooked paths' (2:15), 'devious ways' (2:15), 'her paths' (2:8), 'the way of the good' (2:20), and paths of the righteous' (2:20).

²³⁵ For the association of wisdom with understanding, see 2:6; 3:16, 19; 5:1; 8:1; 19:8; 21:30; 24: 3, and with insight see 4:5, 7; 7:4; 8:14; 9:10.

²³⁶ See also 18:15; 22:17; 23:12. For the heart as the organ for the reception of instruction in Egypt, see H. Brunner, *Altägyptische Erziehung*, 110ff.

²³⁷ So W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 213, 292.

²³⁸ See H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, 46ff.

²³⁹ C. H. Toy, *Proverbs*, 33, paraphrases it with 'the whole inward, perceptive nature.'

²⁴⁰ See 12:25; 13:12; 14:10, 13, 30; 15:13, etc., as well as the remarks of A. R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual*, 77ff., and H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, 44-45.

²⁴¹ See 6:14, 18, 25; 12:20; 16:1, 9; 19:21; 24:2, and H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, 51ff.

²⁴² So A. R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual*, 2. See 3:5; 23:26.

²⁴³ 2:2; cf. 1:20-21, 33; 8:1-3, 32-33; 9:3.

²⁴⁴ 2:5; cf. 1:28; 3:13; 8:9, 35; 24:14.

²⁴⁵ See Job 28.

²⁴⁶ See the stress on 'the fear of YHWH' as the beginning of wisdom in 1:7; 9:10; 15:33, and on wisdom as God's gift in 2:6.

apart from commitment to her. The search for wisdom requires constant dedication and continuous commitment, for, unlike treasure, it is not a thing which can be possessed but a power²⁴⁷ present to a greater or lesser degree in the life of the student. The protases of 2:1-4 therefore do not state the temporary but rather the constant conditions for the gift and possession of wisdom. Hence we have the conditional rather than imperative form in which the instruction is couched.²⁴⁸ The conditional form thus makes the acquisition and possession of insight in 2:5 and 9 contingent on the constant attitude of the student in 2:1-4.

The content of the apodases is surprising in two respects. Firstly, from the protases which have to do with attentiveness to wisdom, we would expect the apodases to treat the acquisition of wisdom. Instead, they refer to the growth of insight and the expected apodases are expressed in the motive clauses of 2:6-8 and 10-19. Secondly, whereas the protases seem to identify wisdom with insight, the apodases clearly distinguish between the gift of wisdom in 2:6-8,10-19 and the development of insight in 2:5, 9. Hence the concern of the passage is less with the getting of wisdom than with the development of insight with the aid of wisdom.

With wisdom God bestows a number of other attendant gifts (2:6-7). There is 'knowledge' of Him and His will²⁴⁹ as well as 'understanding' which has to do with the practical ability of a person who knows how things work.²⁵⁰ Then there is 'competence' (תושיה),²⁵¹ which is both the capacity for success and success itself.²⁵² In 3:21 it is coupled with the possession of that wisdom and understanding used by God to create the world and with 'resourcefulness,' (מזמה),²⁵³ while in 8:14 it comes together with the other gifts of wisdom such as insight, counsel and physical power

²⁴⁷ Both F. Delitzsch, *The Proverbs of Solomon*, 61, and G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 155, 159, highlight this characteristic of wisdom.

²⁴⁸ While W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 279, notes this change, he does not find any reason for it. Instead he attributes it to a homiletic tendency to ramble.

²⁴⁹ 2:6; cf. 1:29; 2:5. The phrase דעת אלהים is, according to H. W. Wolff, *Hosea*, 67, 79, 120, the result of Israel's covenant with YHWH. He maintains (120): "To know him is to experience him and live in communion with him in trust and obedience. For Hebrew thought these essential components are inseparably bound to the cognitive functions." Hence in 1:7, 29; 2:5; 9:10 it is linked with 'fear of YHWH' which combines moral rectitude with piety.

²⁵⁰ תבונה is, as W. McKane remarks (*Proverbs*, 295), 'a convenient and colourless synonym' of wisdom. It usually describes the ability of a practical person who knows what to do (See 10:23; 11:12; 14:29, etc.) and how to do it (See 3:19; 15:21; 20:5; 24:3; 28:16).

²⁵¹ See W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 282.

²⁵² It could be the Hebrew equivalent of the Egyptian *mnh*. See H. Brunner, *Altägyptische Erziehung*, 122.

²⁵³ See 1:4; 2:11, and W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 265, 283-4.

needed by kings to rule justly and effectively.²⁵⁴ Lastly, there is the protective presence of God with His saints.²⁵⁵

By wisdom and its attendant gifts YHWH conserves 'the paths of justice' constituted by Him 'for the right ordering of common life'²⁵⁶ in the covenant community and preserves 'the way of those loyal to Him.' Such a way of life, made possible as it is by the gift of wisdom, leads to 'religious insight'²⁵⁷ which comes from reflection on the experience of true success and the protective presence of God in the community of His saints (2:5). A life lived according to wisdom thus leads to insight into the fear of YHWH²⁵⁸ and to the knowledge of God.²⁵⁹ The student thus not only makes sense of His religious heritage but also becomes aware of God and His present activity. So religious insight comes from the presence of Wisdom with those who fear God.

Yet that is not all; 2:9-11 which is introduced by the same words 'then you will discern' (אז תבין) as 2:5-8 stresses the growth of 'moral insight'²⁶⁰ from the active presence of wisdom in the student's life. Like religious insight it issues from a moral life supervised and governed by wisdom (2:10-19). By its advent into the student's heart wisdom brings three other attendant gifts. The first of these is 'knowledge.' This is the recognition of what is good and the avoidance of what is evil.²⁶¹ This knowledge which is odious to fools who delight in the perversion characteristic of evil

²⁵⁴ The equation תושיה with fear of YHWH's name in Micah 6:9 suggests that competence and success come from cooperation with the divine activity in the world.

²⁵⁵ The image of the shield occurs also in 30:5. While this figure is employed in a few places for the king's protection of his people (Ps 47:9; 84:9; 89:18), it usually describes God's protection of those in His covenant - Abraham (Gen.15.1), the Messianic King (2 Sam 22:3, 31, 36; Ps 3:3; 28:7; 144.2), or Israel (Ps 33:20; 115:9-11, 119:114).

²⁵⁶ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 283.

²⁵⁷ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 283.

²⁵⁸ The phrase 'the fear of YHWH' seems to have been chosen for its breadth. According to J. Becker, *Gottesfurcht im Alten Testament*, it spans the numinous, cultic, ethical and legal aspects of Israel's relationship with God. It is thus equivalent to Israelite religion (so Whybray, *Proverbs*, 96). Becker, however, attempts to restrict the sense here to the ethical aspect (218ff.). He argues that, since both fear and knowledge of God result from an ethical attitude, they are then ethical in character. Hence for him knowledge of God here and in 9:10 is ethical knowledge given by God. Such an exclusively ethical understanding of the fear and knowledge of God is not only called into question by 3:6 but also by the link of the fear of YHWH with worship in 3:7-10 and trust in YHWH in 14:26.

²⁵⁹ 2:5; cf. 3:6; 9:10; 30:3.

²⁶⁰ H. Ringgren, *Sprüche*, 18, and W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 283.

²⁶¹ See 3:7; 4:14, 27; 13:19; 14:16; 16:6, 17; 22:3//27:12. See 11:23; 12:14; 13:2, 21; 16:20; 17:20; 18:22; 19:8; 24:25; 28:10.

(1:22; 2:14) will turn out to be pleasant to the student,²⁶² because moral goodness is correlated with prosperity.²⁶³ The second gift is that 'cunning resourcefulness' (מזמה) needed by the student to see through and evade the seductions of those who are evil (2:12-19).²⁶⁴ The third gift is a practical 'understanding' (תבונה) which knows how to act in a given situation. These last two gifts are thus practical faculties which not only 'protect' (2:11) the student from error but 'rescue'²⁶⁵ him, when he has erred.

The danger to the student is embodied in the figures of the perverse man and seductive woman. On the one hand, he can be drawn away from wisdom by the company of those who have established a kind of evil counterculture whose proponents subvert proper order and create moral chaos. Since they have chosen the 'ways of darkness' they are so devoid of any moral sense that they 'rejoice in doing evil' and 'delight in the perverseness of evil' (2:14). By forsaking the right way (2:13) they are as devious as the paths they have chosen (2:15). Since they walk in darkness and are therefore not forthright, the raw student needs cunning and skill to deal with them. On the other hand, he can readily be drawn away from wisdom the sexually seductive woman who lives outside the sacral-moral order of society, because she has broken with God and her husband. Those who follow her therefore 'step outside the framework of YHWH's order' and so enter the realm of the dead.²⁶⁶ Hence the student needs the ability to see through her 'smooth words' (2:16) to the reality of her situation and evade the consequence of intercourse with her.

Just as wisdom maintains the right relationship of the pupil with YHWH in the company of those loyal to Him, so it also protects and rescues him from the company of those who would abstract him from this fellowship. Just as the experience of God's protective presence leads to religious insight, so experience of wisdom's salutary supervision leads to moral insight which is the discernment and grasp of 'what is right and just and straight' (2:9). These three terms which refer to the divinely fixed orders for human life define 'the paths of goodness,' which are both characterised by, and lead to, what is 'good' in all senses of the word. Insight into

²⁶² 2:10; cf. 3:17; 24:13-14.

²⁶³ See 11:23; 12:14; 13:2, 21; 16:20; 17:20; 18:22; 19: 8; 24:25; 28:10.

²⁶⁴ See W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 283.

²⁶⁵ 2:12, 16. See also 11:6; 12:6; 14:25, which ascribe this power to righteousness.

²⁶⁶ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 288.

these paths is thus insight into 'the basic orders of this world,'²⁶⁷ as well as the right way of living within these orders.

The ultimate consequence of the possession of wisdom is that the student will be included among the righteous, who not only live the right way (2:20) but are allowed to remain in the land of Israel (2:21). Since God dwells with His people²⁶⁸ in the holy land,²⁶⁹ wisdom which comes from God (2:6) is at home with YHWH and His people in the land of Israel.²⁷⁰ Hence the wicked and the treacherous cut themselves off from God and His wisdom, when they break with the righteous, and are themselves cut off from the land.²⁷¹

This chapter has to do with the way YHWH uses the instruction of the sages and the gift of wisdom to instruct and direct His people. He Himself gives wisdom as the power for order and right living in community to the upright who walk in integrity and remain loyal to Him. Thus wisdom is given to those students who have learnt from the teaching of the sages to be vocally and searchingly attentive to her. It is she who enables the student to live the right way, which in turn leads to increasing religious and moral insight. This ensures that he will dwell with the righteous in Israel where God is present with the gift of wisdom and her attendant powers. All this comes to hinge on the gift of wisdom from God which proceeds from the mouth of God and can therefore not be had apart from Him.

c. Proverbs 3:1-35

This chapter is a passage of instruction²⁷² with hymnic insertions in 3:13-20. It is, however, unlikely that 3:1-12 and 21-35 originally formed one unit, as there is no obvious transition from 3:12 to 3:21. We have five blocks of material, then, in this chapter, 3:1-12, 13-18, 19-20, 21-26, 27-35, which were probably conjoined for a particular theological purpose. As the chapter now stands 3:1-2, which introduces the passage, is followed by five stanzas with commands which have to do with the

²⁶⁷ H. H. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung*, 97.

²⁶⁸ See Ex 25:8; 29:45-46; Lev 26:11-12; Num 5:3; 11:20; 14:9, 14; 16:3; Deut 1:42; 4:7; 6:15; 7:21.

²⁶⁹ See Num 35:34.

²⁷⁰ This idea, which is already present in embryonic form in Jer 8:8-9 and Ps 37:30-31, is clearly articulated in Deut 4:5-8 where wisdom is connected with God's presence and considered the consequence of living according to His statutes and ordinances in the land of Canaan.

²⁷¹ 2:22; cf. 1:26-27, 31-32.

²⁷² See W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 289.

student's relationship with YHWH. This is followed by a poem in praise of wisdom (3:13-18) which is equated in 3:19-20 with the divine creative wisdom of YHWH.²⁷³ The next unit of instruction in 3:21-26, which is governed by the imperatives in 3:21-26, traces the connection between the possession of cosmic wisdom²⁷⁴ and the presence of YHWH.²⁷⁵ We next have five prohibitions in 3:27-31 as a counterpart to the five commands in 3:3-12,²⁷⁶ which cover the student's relationship with his neighbour.²⁷⁷ The composite unit is concluded by four antithetical motive clauses which give the basis not only for the demands of 3:27-31 but for the content of the whole chapter.

In 3:1-2 the teacher of wisdom introduces this chapter with the injunction to retain and practise his 'teaching' (תורה) which consists of 'directives' (מצות) on how to live and the promise of a long, full life characterised by increasing 'harmony' and social 'well-being' (שלום). These directives are then listed in 3:3-12.

The first command in 3:3-4, which harks back to 2:8 with its reference to those loyal to YHWH, stresses the covenant virtues of loyalty (דח) and faithfulness (אמת) which characterise God's relationship with His people and constitute His basic requirements of them as His people.²⁷⁸ The words of the teacher presuppose that the student already possesses or rather is possessed by these virtues.²⁷⁹ The emphasis is thus not on gaining but retaining them by dedication to them²⁸⁰ and internalisation of them,²⁸¹ so that the student, governed and fully assimilated by them into the community of the covenant, becomes acceptable and truly successful with

²⁷³ For similar hymnic material, see Job 12:13-25; 26:5-13; 36:5-16, 26-37:13; Ps 104; Jer 10:12-13//51:15-16; Am 4:13; 5:8-9; 9:5-6.

²⁷⁴ Although W. McKane (*Proverbs*, 298) and the R.S.V. transpose 3:21^a and ^b as ילדו has no subject, the MT seems to imply that its subject is the three nouns in 3:19-20: wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. The present text seems to be the result of a deliberate, editorial juxtaposition to link תשיה and מזמה with the notion of cosmic order in 3:19-20. See F. Delitzsch, *Proverbs of Solomon*, 96.

²⁷⁵ Because W. McKane (*Proverbs*, 297) fails to connect 3:21-26 with 3:13-20 he finds no 'convincing unity' in this passage and, contrary to his principles, as he himself acknowledges, considers 3:26 rather than 3:21 as 'the primary element' in the passage.

²⁷⁶ These could correspond with the distinction between religious and moral insight in 2:5-8 and 9:19.

²⁷⁷ There is no telling reason to divide this section at 3:30 as W. McKane does (*Proverbs*, 299) apart from a doctrinaire separation of the secular and religious strands in instruction.

²⁷⁸ Ex 34:5-7; Ps 25:10; Hos 4:1; 6:6

²⁷⁹ This could echo the promise in Hos 2:21-22.

²⁸⁰ C. Bauer-Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1-9*, 108ff., derives the metaphor of instruction as a necklace in 1:9; 3:3, 23; 6:21, from the chains worn by Egyptian officials to symbolise their dedication to Maat (cosmic order).

²⁸¹ 3:3^b, which is absent from the LXX and is identical with 7:3^b, could be a later addition to link the verse with Jer 31:33.

God and his fellows. The stress is thus on the reception of the benefits of living in the covenant which can be lost unless deliberately retained and maintained.

As one who is assured of God's loyalty and faithfulness the student is urged in the second command (3:5-6) to trust in YHWH²⁸² with his whole heart for insight on how to live, which is, like wisdom, a gift of God. This is contrasted with reliance on his own insight which, it is implied, may lead him astray.²⁸³ This command is amplified in 3:6 where 'with all your heart' is complemented by 'in all your ways' and 'trust in YHWH' by 'know Him.' Moreover reliance on his own insight (3:5^b) is contrasted with God's guidance (3:6^b). Thus total reliance on YHWH is correlated with knowing Him in all the circumstances and events of his life.

The imperative 'know him' (דעה) is rather remarkable in its singularity, even though it is to some extent foreshadowed by the mention of the knowledge of YHWH in 2:5.²⁸⁴ This knowledge of YHWH is personal in that it involves the student personally in a relationship of trust with YHWH,²⁸⁵ cognitive in that it has to do with insight²⁸⁶ and practical in that it occurs as the student lives out his life.²⁸⁷ It is the fruit of a life lived in, and according to, God's covenant with His people.²⁸⁸ Hence by trusting in Him the student gains insight in how to live as he gets to know YHWH Himself in the daily circumstances of his life. The practical result of this²⁸⁹ is that YHWH will so straighten and direct the course of the student's life that it will be successful and accord with His purposes for him.²⁹⁰ Thus by trust in YHWH the student comes to be instructed by Him and gets to know Him.

3:7-8 picks up the idea of self-reliance in 3:5^b and equates it with the self-confident presumption of wisdom on the part of the student.²⁹¹ The student is urged

²⁸² See 14:26; 16:20; 22:19; 28:25; 29:25.

²⁸³ See 28:26 which tells of a fool's trust in his own heart.

²⁸⁴ There is perhaps some connection with the tradition of Hosea and Jeremiah where there is frequent reference to knowing God (Hos 2:22; 5:4; 8:2; 13:4; Jer. 2:8; 4:22; 9:2, 5, 23; 10:25; 22:16; 31:34) as well as to the knowledge of God (Hos 4:1; 6:6; cf. 4:6).

²⁸⁵ Similar commands to know God are found elsewhere only in Jer 31:34 and 1 Chr 28:9 in the context of religious instruction. In 1 Chr 28:9 David's command to Solomon to know God is linked with the command to serve Him, while in Jer 31:34 it is a distinctive feature of the new covenant.

²⁸⁶ H. W. Wolff, 'Wissen um Gott bei Hosea als Uniform von Theologie,' *Gesammelte Studien*, 182-205, develops this cognitive aspect of the word and argues for its priestly origin.

²⁸⁷ F. Delitzsch, *The Proverbs of Solomon*, 87, speaks of the 'practico-mystical' sense of דעה.

²⁸⁸ Compare 3:3 with 2:7-8.

²⁸⁹ 3:6^b is perhaps best taken as a final clause. See Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos*, 20, and Ringgren, *Sprüche*, 19.

²⁹⁰ The occurrence of וישר recalls the use of the same root in 1:3; 2:7, 9, 13, 21.

²⁹¹ The presumption of wisdom which is the mark of a fool (26:5), or a sluggard (26:16), or a rich man (28:11), is regarded in 26:12 as worse than even folly.

to shun such presumption of insight, which all too often leads to evildoing and disorder, and to fear YHWH, which results in the avoidance of evil²⁹² and to his total health.²⁹³ This fear of YHWH is further defined in the next two commands in cultic and experiential terms.

In 3:9-10 the student is told to fulfil what is the basic cultic requirement of every Israelite.²⁹⁴ By these sacrifices he participates in 'the beneficent spheres of cosmic, social and cultic order established and maintained by the deity for the blessing of the righteous.'²⁹⁵ This command which is the only cultic injunction in Proverbs seems to have been set here deliberately to ensure that this aspect of fearing YHWH would not be overlooked.²⁹⁶

The fifth and final command which caps this section refers to the instruction of YHWH (מוֹסֵר יְהוָה).²⁹⁷ This term occurs only here in Proverbs, even though there is frequent reference to instruction in general,²⁹⁸ to the instruction of parents/teachers,²⁹⁹ and the instruction of Dame Wisdom.³⁰⁰ Likewise this is the only place in Proverbs which mentions YHWH's correction.³⁰¹ God is thus cast in the role of a wisdom teacher in the school of life. The pupil of the wisdom teacher is hence YHWH's pupil. The term מוֹסֵר covers the whole educational process from physical and verbal correction to instruction, from learning to the discipline and content of study. In Israel, as in Egypt,³⁰² it aimed at the formation of the student. It is however the aspect of physical and verbal correction which is highlighted here. Even though the student who fears and honours YHWH is promised health and prosperity (3:2, 8, 20), this does not exclude the possibility that YHWH may have to rebuke (3:11) and make him suffer (3:12).³⁰³ Such onerous experiences should however be welcomed as a mark of God's personal interest and loving concern for the progress of His

²⁹² 3:7; cf. 4:15; 8:13; 14:27; 16:6; 23:17. See also Is 5:20-23.

²⁹³ 3:8; cf. 10:27; 14:27; 19:23; 22:4; 28:14.

²⁹⁴ See Ex 23:14-19; Deut 26:1-15.

²⁹⁵ L. G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult*, 146.

²⁹⁶ See J. Becker, *Gottesfurcht im Alten Testament*, 85ff., for an extensive discussion on the cultic dimensions of this term.

²⁹⁷ Note the stress placed on these two words by the inverted word order. F. Delitzsch, *The Proverbs of Solomon*, 90, translates the term rather graphically as 'the school of YHWH.'

²⁹⁸ 4:13; 5:12, 23; 6:23; 10:17; 12:1; 13:18; 15:10, 33; 16:22; 19:20; 23:12, 23; 24:32.

²⁹⁹ 1:8; 4:1; 13:1, 24; 15:5; 19:27; 22:15; 23:13.

³⁰⁰ 8:10, 33

³⁰¹ תוֹכַחַת. Elsewhere of God only in Ps 39:11; Ezek 5:15; 25:17. The verb is, however, used with Him as its subject more often, such as in Job 5:17; 13:10; 22:4; Ps. 6:2; 38:2; 50:8; 105:8.

³⁰² See H. Brunner, *Altägyptische Erziehung*, 4.

³⁰³ Read ויִכָּאֵב with the LXX. Similar ideas of YHWH's instruction of Israel occur in Deut 11:2; Ps 50:17; Jer 2:30; 5:3; 7:28; 17:23; 32:33; 35:13; Zeph 3:2, 7, and of the individual in Job 5:17; 36:10.

pupil.³⁰⁴ Only if he submits to such instruction will he gain insight (3:5) and wisdom (3:7) from YHWH.

3:13-20 appears thematically out of place, unless it is realised that the instruction in the knowledge and fear of YHWH in 3:3-12 describes how to get the wisdom and understanding described in 3:13-20. Hence the juxtaposition of this poem in praise of wisdom's worth (3:13-18) and the stress in the hymnic fragment of 3:19-20 on wisdom's connection with YHWH. The gain of such wisdom³⁰⁵ is of such surpassing value, since she is the source of all that the student could legitimately desire such as 'riches' (עשר), 'social status' (כבוד), 'longevity' (ארך ימים), 'enjoyment' (נעם), 'total wellbeing' (שלום) and 'vitality' (חיים). This is so, because the wisdom which the student is to grasp and clasp is the same wisdom employed by YHWH to create and regulate the universe.³⁰⁶ He who has her (3:13, 18) and adjusts himself to her order in his life (3:17) is thus truly happy, for he has in his possession 'the constructive principle' of YHWH's creation.³⁰⁷

3:21-26 is consequential on 3:1-20. The student is urged in 3:21^a to fix his attention on the wisdom, understanding and knowledge given by YHWH to those who entrust themselves to His instruction. Such constant vigilance is required, since, though once possessed, these powers can easily be lost. As God has ordered and still governs the world with these powers (3:19-20), the student who has them also has the 'resourcefulness' (מזמה)³⁰⁸ and 'competence' (תשיה)³⁰⁹ necessary to gain 'vitality' (חיים),³¹⁰ achieve 'acceptability' (ן)³¹¹ and live securely (3:23-25). But all these gifts including the gift of wisdom depend on the protective presence of YHWH with His student.³¹²

³⁰⁴ The second address of the student in 3:11 (cf. 7:24) indicates that 3:11-12 are a kind of resumptive conclusion to 3:3-10, as each of these commands has to do with proper submission to YHWH's instruction.

³⁰⁵ The feminine singular suffixes in 14 can be taken both subjectively and objectively.

³⁰⁶ See the discussion on the connection between wisdom and the Egyptian belief in Maat in C. Bauer-Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1-9*, 93ff., R. N. Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs*, 54ff., and H. H. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung*, 49ff., 96ff.

³⁰⁷ B. Gemser, *Sprüche*, 22.

³⁰⁸ See also 1:2; 2:11.

³⁰⁹ See also 2:7.

³¹⁰ See also 3:2, 16-18.

³¹¹ 3:22; cf. 3:2, 16-18.

³¹² 3:26. בַּכְּסֵל could be taken as 'in your loins' or "'your confidence' (R.S.V., AV), or 'at your side.' M. Dahood, *Proverbs and North West Semitic Philology*, 10, adduces the Vulgate, Peshitta, and the Ugaritic use of *ksl* to argue for the last of these.

The prohibitions in 3:27-31 give a profile of the character and behaviour of the 'deviant' person (גלוי)³¹³ who as a 'fool' (כסילים)³¹⁴ and 'scoffer' (לצים)³¹⁵ is regarded as 'wicked' (רשע).³¹⁶ Such people not only lack wisdom but are spurned by YHWH (3:32-34). As those who are an 'abomination' to Him (תועבה),³¹⁷ they are under His curse³¹⁸ and excluded from His presence.³¹⁹ But the 'upright' (ישרים),³²⁰ those who are characterised as 'righteous' (צדיקים),³²¹ 'humble' (ענוים or עניים)³²² and 'wise' (3:35), are, like the prophets³²³ and certain other God-fearing men,³²⁴ 'members of YHWH's cabinet' who are 'in the inner circle of His confidence.'³²⁵ As His courtiers they are blessed,³²⁶ favoured,³²⁷ and honoured³²⁸ by Him. They are therefore in a position to know Him personally (3:3). Thus the ultimate purpose of YHWH's instruction is to prepare the upright young man for a position in His royal administration and civil service,³²⁹ just as the purpose of instruction in the court schools of Egypt was to prepare a young man for the position in its royal bureaucracy. The teachers of wisdom were, as it were, employed by Him.

So then in this chapter, which is the first fully-fledged unit of instruction in Proverbs, the teacher of wisdom enrolls the student for instruction in the royal school of YHWH so that by the possession of Wisdom and her attendant powers he may be fitted for admission to His cabinet. As she is God's own creative and regulative power, Wisdom can be had only by those who trust in Him and fear Him. Only the

³¹³ 3:32; cf. 2:15.

³¹⁴ 3:35; cf. 1:22, 32.

³¹⁵ 3:34.

³¹⁶ 3:33.

³¹⁷ See also 6:16; 11:1, 20; 12:22; 15:8, 9, 26; 16:5; 17:15; 20:10, 23; 21:27; 28:9.

³¹⁸ See 2:22 as well as the related notion of blessing in 3:8, 10.

³¹⁹ See W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 301, for a discussion on the origin and use of this term in wisdom literature. It seems to refer to attitudes and actions which disqualify a person in God's eyes. Hence in 3:22 the perverse are disqualified from YHWH's *סוּב*, His council, by reason of their perversity.

³²⁰ 3:32; cf. 2:7, 21.

³²¹ 3:33; cf. 2:20.

³²² 3:34; cf. 3:5-8.

³²³ See Am 3:7; Jer 23:18, 22.

³²⁴ See Job 15:8; 29:4, and especially Ps 25:14; cf. 111:1.

³²⁵ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 301.

³²⁶ 3:33; cf. 3:9-10; Job 29; Ps 25:12-14.

³²⁷ 3:34; cf. 3:3-4, 22.

³²⁸ 3:35; cf. 3:16

³²⁹ It is interesting to speculate to what extent royal imagery shaped the composition of this chapter. Like a king, YHWH demands of His servants (3:32) loyalty (3:3), submission (3:5-6), obedience (3:7), tribute (3:9), an appreciation of His way of ruling in His kingdom (3:19-22) and integrity in dealing with His subjects (3:27-31). Like a king, He too corrects (3:11-12), protects (3:26), favours (3:4, 34), rewards (3:33) and honours (3:35) His servant, and through His rule He bestows peace (3:2, 17) and vitality upon His kingdom (3:2, 18, 22).

student who is the servant of YHWH gets to know Him, receives His guidance on how to live, and enjoys the many benefits of His wisdom.

d. Proverbs 9.7-12

This collection of sayings which is wedged between the final invitation of Dame Wisdom in 9:1-6 and the counter-invitation of Dame Folly in 9:13-18 enlarges on 'wisdom's role as an instructress³³⁰ and derives her and her instruction from YHWH Himself (9:10). It could either be taken as the words of the sage³³¹ or, more probably, as a rather awkward but necessary expansion of wisdom's speech in 9:4-6,³³² in which she addresses her maids.³³³ It is probably a later addition from the hand of the final redactor who wished to qualify 'the buoyant optimism'³³⁴ of 9:1-6 and define the offer of insight in 9:6 more theologically.

9:7-8 defines the human limits to the instruction offered in 9:4-5. These limits exist, because the gain from instruction does not just have to do with what a person knows, thinks and does, but is also influenced who he is, how he regards himself, and where he stands with others. Thus nothing can be gained by instructing and correcting a scoffer who 'actively rejects, despises and mocks the true principles of life.'³³⁵ By his rejection of instruction he belongs to the 'wicked' who reject God and are rejected by Him (9:7). Such a man not only fails to benefit from such instruction but 'blemishes'³³⁶ his teacher by his abuse and hatred. His attitude is deeply rooted in his soul which is full of pride and set against God. It is 'constitutive of him in the most inward characteristics of his selfhood.'³³⁷ The lack in the fear of YHWH shown in his scoffing not only determines his attitude to instruction and wisdom but also his sense of self and his ultimate fate (9:12^b). The arrogant scoffer is thus quite incorrigible and indisposed to wisdom.

³³⁰ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 360.

³³¹ See B. Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos*, 40. We would then have to emend בִּי in 11 to בָּהּ to make it agree with דַּעַת, בִּינָה, or חִכְמָה.

³³² See H. Ringgren, *Sprüche*, 43.

³³³ The person who expanded the speech apparently understood the maids in 9:6 as the teachers of wisdom.

³³⁴ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 368.

³³⁵ C. H. Toy, *Proverbs*, 193.

³³⁶ מוֹמוֹ is so unexpected that it has led to attempts to find a more exact parallel to קָלוּן. It could refer either to a physical injury from the scoffer or else a moral stain (cf. Job 11:15) from retaliating to the hatred of the scoffer.

³³⁷ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 369.

On the other hand, the wise man is by his very nature disposed to instruction just because he is wise and is dedicated to wisdom. Such a wise man who fears YHWH shows that he is 'righteous' by his attitude to instruction which has to do with his relationship with YHWH and his fellows. He therefore not only accepts correction but loves him who corrects him (9:8^b). He does not take correction as a destructive threat to himself but as a constructive confirmation of himself in his relationship to God and to other people, since it either restores or deepens his sense of community with them. So both the teacher and the student gain, when a wise man instructs a wise man. The teacher gains the love of his student (9:8^b) and the student gains in wisdom, since his capacity for learning and his learning³³⁸ are thereby increased (9:9).

The getting of wisdom is thus a continuous process. No one is completely wise but always more or less wise depending on his relationship with other wise men and his ability to accept both instruction and correction (9:9). Furthermore, the getting of wisdom is determined by the nature of the person. In turn, the possession of wisdom makes a man what he is (9.12^b) McKane's remarks are apt:

'It (wisdom) is part of the man who has it; it makes
him what he is and no man can take it away from him.'³³⁹

The acquisition and possession of wisdom thus have to do with the self or soul of a man.³⁴⁰

The matter, however, goes deeper than that, for a person's self and sense of self are ultimately determined by God. In 9:10 the beginning of wisdom³⁴¹ is said to be the fear of YHWH,³⁴² which is described as the knowledge of the Holy One.³⁴³ As has been previously argued³⁴⁴ this is both the knowledge given by God³⁴⁵ and the

³³⁸ לקח can mean the reception of tradition (1:5), the tradition which is received (4:2; 7:21), and the capacity to receive it (16:21, 23).

³³⁹ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 369.

³⁴⁰ Hence the stress on the loss and destruction of the self as the result of folly in 8:36. See also 15:32; 19:8.

³⁴¹ H. Blocher, 'The Fear of the Lord as the "Principle of Wisdom"', 14, argues that תחלה is not just the first step in a temporal sequence but a first principle which gives the logical basis and condition for something else.

³⁴² See earlier discussion of this term at 1:7 and 2:5.

³⁴³ קדשים in 9:10 and 30:3 is best construed as a plural of excellence for God. See GK 124 h. It could however also be taken to refer to the angels (Zech 14:5; Job 5:1; 15:15; Ps 89:8) or even to holy men (Ps 34:10; Dan 8:24).

³⁴⁴ See our remarks on 2:5 and 3:6.

³⁴⁵ So J. Becker, *Gottesfurcht im Alten Testament*, 219.

personal knowledge of God.³⁴⁶ Such knowledge which is inseparable from a life of loyal trust in YHWH (3:5-6) is equated with wisdom and insight. But all these go back to the fear of YHWH; wisdom, knowledge and insight belong to Him and are given by Him to those who fear Him. Thus God Himself not only corrects the immature to make them wise and directs the wise to make them wiser but also constitutes and shapes their souls through His life-giving gift of wisdom.

So ultimately wisdom is only given by God to those who are righteous. Since such people are integrated into the life of the covenant community, they fear their God and accept corrective instruction from their fellows. They have the prerequisites for wisdom whose possession is determined by, and determines, the very being of a man. By getting wisdom a person does not so much enter a state of mind as get on a way that leads to increasing insight (9:6) and wisdom (9:9). Hence the fear of YHWH is not just the first stage in the process of getting wisdom but the continuing condition for wisdom's proper operation in a person's life.

³⁴⁶ So W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 368.

CONCLUSION

The acquisition of wisdom through instruction is described from three different, yet complementary points of view in the book of Proverbs. Whether these represent a synthesis from three stages of historical development or the interaction of three contemporary strands of Israelite wisdom, they are now so thoroughly integrated that they tend to complement and qualify each other. These three points of view respectively focus on the roles of the sages, Dame Wisdom and YHWH Himself as the source of wisdom. Each of them cooperates in playing different parts in the process of instruction as well as in the getting of wisdom through instruction. Hence the getting of wisdom is viewed differently in different places depending on which of these three agents is the focus of attention in that particular passage.

First of all, wisdom is mediated by those who are wise, whether they be by parents or professional teachers or prominent members of the community. They themselves have been set on the right way and are integrated into the community by obedience to the wisdom of their predecessors. They have assimilated and internalised this tradition. Their experience of life has tested and confirmed its validity. So, since they themselves embody and possess this traditional wisdom, they are able by word and deed to correct the young man where he has erred and to direct him where he should go. For his part the young man must submit to instruction. However, he must not only listen to this teaching and master it but also put it into practice in his everyday life.

Both von Rad and McKane are in basic agreement with all this. They do, however, diverge somewhat in their understanding of the nature and purpose of this instruction. Von Rad conceives of the getting of wisdom as the process of socialisation into a divinely ordered community.³⁴⁷ The sages do not then teach wisdom but rather teach how to get wisdom from the experience. Experience is thus in a sense the teacher of the person who is properly adjusted to his community. In their instruction the sages therefore urge conformity with the proper orders of society and teach their students how to read the textbook of their experience. The students are taught how to reflect on experience and urged to act according to their subsequent understanding. Since such learning clearly presupposes commitment to

³⁴⁷ G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 88-95.

a particular community, it deals with 'a truth which has to do with character rather than with intellect.'³⁴⁸

McKane, however, envisages the getting of wisdom from the instruction of the sages in much more intellectual terms. It depends on 'a severe educational discipline in which submission is made to the authority of a teacher and the pupil's attitudes formed by his assimilation of a body of traditional, empirically based wisdom.'³⁴⁹ By its internalisation this tradition begins to shape his way of life and makes him what he is.³⁵⁰ For McKane, then, the emphasis is on the mind³⁵¹ which is so shaped by tradition that it can make sense of experience.

It seems to me that these two interpretations complement each other, for both tradition and experience are part and parcel of the getting of wisdom. Traditional teaching sums up the experience of the past which orders the lives, thoughts and actions of people in the present, while reflection on experience, by which the sages set such store in justifying their teaching, validates, reanimates and renews traditional teaching.³⁵² The guiding voice of tradition is thus once again clearly heard and its ordering power consciously experienced. Furthermore, the aim of the sages in their instruction is both intellectual and personal; it requires both mental concentration and personal involvement. On the one hand, by shaping a student's mind and his whole way of thinking their instruction influences his behaviour and determines his character. On the other hand, by correcting his behaviour and moulding his character it forms his mind and increases his capacity to learn.

The role of tradition is thus decisive in the getting of wisdom. It is interested in much more than just the intellectual development of the student. To be sure, it does impart knowledge and does shape the student's way of thinking. But it goes further than just that. It interacts with his experience so that he can make sense of it and gain knowledge from it. It claims his personal allegiance so that it can form his whole being and bring his whole life into conformity with the proper beneficial

³⁴⁸ G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 64.

³⁴⁹ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 264; cf. 304, 310.

³⁵⁰ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 333; cf. pp. 266, 369, 390.

³⁵¹ See especially his interpretation of 'heart' in Pr 2:5 on 345, 4:4 on 304, 15:32 on 480, 17:16 on 504f., 19:8 on 528, and 23:26 on 389.

³⁵² McKane, *Proverbs*, 303f, comes close to a recognition of this connection. Yet here as elsewhere experience tends to be subordinated to tradition in spite of his conviction that it was empirically based.

orders for human existence. As the power which governs the traditional way of life, wisdom is thus acquired by receiving traditional instruction and by living according to it. By shaping a student's way of life it shapes his mind and character in such a way that he gets a 'heart' which is capable of wisdom and its benefits.

Secondly, Dame Wisdom imparts herself through her instruction. This point of view is developed in Proverbs 1-9 where there is a shift of emphasis from submission to the sages to submission to Dame Wisdom herself. Like a teacher of wisdom, she calls the student to submit to her correction and to follow her direction. Unlike a teacher of wisdom, she, however, requires his personal attachment and dedication to herself. Through her words and spirit she takes possession of the mind and life of the student, delivering him from evildoers, leading him on the way of insight, rewarding him with the good things of life, promoting him to positions of honour, admitting him into her presence and sharing her love with him. All this is contingent on his relationship with her and the continuing acceptance of her instruction.

Von Rad rightly sees that the personification of wisdom is much more than just a figure of speech to bolster the sage's authority or a rhetorical device to dramatise the urgency of his instruction. It is rather 'the most precise expression available' for that 'primeval order' which encounters and addresses man in creation.³⁵³ Wisdom is thus an 'attribute' of creation.³⁵⁴ As 'an ordering power'³⁵⁵ she not only governs the world and all mankind but also seeks the willing allegiance of men and their wholehearted participation in her beneficial order. Since she is an attribute of creation, she therefore addresses men and bestows herself in love to them in creation. Von Rad thus speaks about 'the self-revelation of creation' to describe this encounter with Dame Wisdom.

While von Rad has gone much further than his predecessors in accounting for the personal nature of wisdom, there are nevertheless considerable difficulties with his interpretation. Firstly, wisdom can hardly be considered an attribute of creation. It is true that Dame Wisdom is held to be at work in the creation and government of the world in Proverbs 3:19-20 and 8:15-21. Yet 8:22-31 makes it quite clear that wisdom is in a sense prior to creation and therefore independent of it,

³⁵³ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 174.

³⁵⁴ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 155.

³⁵⁵ W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 154-55.

even if she is active in it. She is also not an attribute of God, since He brought her forth. She is rather a supernatural 'person,' with access to Yahweh and mediating between Him and His creation (8:30-36).

Secondly, there are difficulties with his notion of wisdom as the self-revelation of creation. If wisdom does call to man from creation, how and where does this occur? Why do only some hear her voice, and why is there any need for formal instruction? The point of Proverbs 1-9 as a whole is that men are blind to Dame Wisdom's presence and deaf to her voice until they encounter her in the sages and commit themselves to her by heeding their instruction. The advent of Dame Wisdom to those who lack her is thus linked with their submission to instruction. Furthermore she is not introduced in 1:20-33 and 8:1-36 as the voice of primeval order in creation but as a teacher active in a social context where she presents herself to those who will have her. Hence the sages do not confront their students who seek wisdom with the orderliness of the natural world but they initiate them into the workings of their society, for by their involvement in their society and the personal experience of its workings they encounter Dame Wisdom and get to know her as the power that orders them and their community.³⁵⁶

Unlike von Rad, McKane gives due weight to the role of instruction and correct behaviour in the getting of wisdom. Yet he too fails to see how this is connected in Proverbs 1-9 with the activity of Dame Wisdom, because his attention is concentrated on evidence for a 'Yahwistic' reinterpretation of older, secular wisdom. It is hard to see how the personification of wisdom fits in with either of these two stages, for, while it is associated in 3:13-18 and 4:1-19 with the 'older' tradition, it occurs elsewhere in passages of 'Yahwistic' instruction. So the figure of Dame Wisdom plays a rather peripheral role in McKane's interpretation of Proverbs 1-9.

The consequences of this are considerable for his general understanding of certain key points in Proverbs 1-9. Firstly, he does not note that 2:1-22, 4:1-9, and 6:20-24 clearly link the activity of Dame Wisdom with the application and internalisation of instruction. Secondly, he does not realise that the framework of 1:20-33 and 8:1-9:6 indicates that the words which Dame Wisdom promises to make known as her own in 1:23 and 8:6-10 are the words of the sages who are thus her

³⁵⁶ The insights of chapter V of *Wisdom in Israel* about the significance of orders for social behaviour thus need to be brought to bear on the discussion in chapter IX on the personification of wisdom.

mouthpieces. Thirdly, he fails to account for the shift of emphasis from right behaviour, which is normal in instruction, to right attachments and especially attachment to Dame Wisdom rather than to Dame Folly and her associates in Proverbs 1-9. Fourthly, he does not notice the active role of Dame Wisdom in the getting of wisdom so that, whereas the right way of life is normally considered the prerequisite for the getting of wisdom, the possession of her in 2:5-19 and 4:1-19 is the prerequisite for the right way of life. Lastly, in spite of his excellent work on the literary category of Instruction he does not grasp why the imperative has in some cases in Proverbs 1-9 been replaced by what he laments as 'the more diffuse, rambling style of preaching.'³⁵⁷

It is my contention that the passages where wisdom is personified are crucial to the whole discussion on the getting of wisdom. Since Dame Wisdom is a personal power, she comes to the student through other people and claims him personally. Only those who have entered a personal relationship with her by meditation on instruction and proper social involvement with others receive her and her benefits. There are indeed two sides to entry into this relationship. On the one hand, the student must receive and treasure the instruction of the sages, for in it they introduce him to Dame Wisdom and her conversation. He must make this instruction so much a part of himself by assimilating it into his mind and incorporating it into his whole way of life that it begins to act upon him as a person and take control of him, speaking with him, leading him and watching over him. On the other hand, since Dame Wisdom is a personal power, this does not, as in any personal relationship, happen automatically and involuntarily, but depends on his personal acceptance and willing acquiescence to Dame Wisdom. He must constantly seek her presence and desire her more than anything else in life. He must be ever obedient to her voice from within and be continually attentive to her direction from without. He must address himself to her and cry out for her. He must commit himself wholeheartedly to her and follow in her ways, for only if he keeps hold of her will he keep her and her benefits. Above all, he must love and embrace her, for in her and through her he has all that he could ever desire.

Through personal association with Dame Wisdom the student receives her aid and so becomes wise. The getting of wisdom is thus not just a matter of

³⁵⁷ G. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 279.

adjustment to the restrictive orders and rather inflexible conventions of a static, traditional society. There are few such directives in Proverbs 1-9. Rather, by getting Dame Wisdom as his patron a person is possessed and guided by that vital, benevolent power which maintains the just order of an organic society for the welfare of its people and promotes the conditions for human enjoyment and fulfilment in it, so that he too can lead a full, constructive, successful life. Hence the urgency of the command to get Dame Wisdom, which is, surprisingly, considered the essence of traditional instruction in 4:5, 7.

Thirdly, wisdom is regarded as a gift of God. She is therefore not an end in herself, even though she is 'life' and makes what seem to be absolute claims for herself. She is as she is only by virtue of her close association with the Creator. Not only was she with Him when He created the world but through her He founded the universe as an orderly domain fit for human habitation. She not only maintains the moral regime of the world, but, as a member of the divine court, also obtains access to His favour for her protégés. She is thus an agent of God. Through her He administers His instruction. In His royal school and through His cult, she prepares her students for admission to His cabinet and for His service in the world, for knowledge of Him and for the many benefits of association with Him. But like the instruction of wisdom, His instruction is administered through the sages whose words are in fact regarded as His words and confirmed by the test of experience.

McKane develops the notion of YHWH's instruction with considerable clarity and force.³⁵⁸ More than any other commentator he has shown how influential this notion has been in fixing the final shape and content of Proverbs. Yet it seems to me that his interest in international instruction and what he considers the original tradition of secular instruction in Israel has led him to evaluate the notion of divine instruction too negatively as a narrowing down of the range and an attenuation of the content of traditional instruction in the interests of moralistic piety and conformity with 'Yahwistic' orthodoxy. It is true that this notion sets clear limits to the human mind³⁵⁹ but it also brings with it great gains, as von Rad has rightly emphasised.³⁶⁰ It interprets the whole of human existence as the domain of divine providence rather

³⁵⁸ G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 264f., 275, 290, 292f., 368, 487, 649.

³⁵⁹ See G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, chapter VI, on the limits of wisdom.

³⁶⁰ See G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, chapter IV on knowledge and the fear of God, and especially 65ff.

than just certain events in the history of Israel or some of its institutions such as the cult and the monarchy. It is in the everyday circumstances of normal life that the student of YHWH is to be intimate with Him and receive His instruction (3:6, 11-12). The notion of divine instruction does not change the methods of learning or even the content of the curriculum but introduces the true teacher and what His aim is with His students. It makes YHWH Himself the teacher of those who fear Him. And He does this through Dame Wisdom who is at work both in the instruction of the sages and in the life of the student. The gift of Wisdom herself is thus the result of divine instruction.

Since Wisdom is a gift from God, the prerequisite for her reception is a right attitude to Him. On this both von Rad³⁶¹ and McKane³⁶² agree. YHWH gives her to those who, through the instruction of the sages, seek refuge in Him and remain loyal to Him in His covenant with His people, those who are upright before Him and walk in integrity. The qualifications for wisdom are thus predominantly theological. They are summed up in the phrase 'the fear of YHWH.' This includes obedience to the traditions of the sages, loyalty to God and to His covenant community, a wholehearted trust in God and humble acceptance of His correction, acknowledgement of His constant presence and the avoidance of evil, and honouring Him with the prescribed sacrifices. In short, submission to God and His instruction is the basic prerequisite for wisdom.

Like Dame Wisdom, God is more the subject of instruction than its object. In the school of life He instructs His protégés in wisdom through the sages and Dame Wisdom. The purpose of this is twofold. On the one hand, through it He gives His disciples the power of His own wisdom to create a righteous environment for them to live with Him and with each other. On the other hand, He gives them His wisdom so that they will be empowered to live properly in the society which He has established for them and be enabled to gain insight into Him and His ways by knowing Him and living in His ways. So the ultimate purpose of His instruction is to bring them into a cooperative relationship with Himself.

In sum: wisdom comes through the instruction of YHWH administered by the sages and by Dame Wisdom herself in the school of life. It requires willing

³⁶¹ See G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 69.

³⁶² See G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 277.

obedience to the teaching of the sages and proper integration of the student into a right way of life in a society governed by this teaching, as well as attentive attachment to Dame Wisdom and ready acceptance of her benevolent patronage. But, since wisdom which comes from YHWH and brings those who have her back to Him cannot be had apart from Him and a right relationship with Him, the basic prerequisite for wisdom in the book of Proverbs is the fear of YHWH.

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TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BZAW</i>	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>GK</i>	<i>Gesenius-Kautsch, Hebrew Grammar</i>
<i>HAT</i>	<i>Handkommentar zum Alten Testament</i>
<i>ICC</i>	<i>International Critical Commentary</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>LXX</i>	<i>The Septuagint</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>RSV</i>	<i>Revised Standard Version</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SVT</i>	<i>Supplements to Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>TB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>THAT</i>	<i>Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament, I-II. Edited by E. Jenni. München/Zurich, 1978.</i>
<i>TLZ</i>	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
<i>TWAT</i>	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament, I-II. Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, 1970 and 1977.</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>WMANT</i>	<i>Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum alten und neuen Testament</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZThK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

