



The Scope of Wisdom

The study of “wisdom” and all that is included under that term has undergone a revolution in biblical studies. In previous generations the so-called wisdom literature of the Old Testament (Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes) and the Apocrypha (Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon) tended to be relegated to the periphery of Old Testament studies. In New Testament studies the same can be said, since only the Epistle of James can be classified as wisdom literature explicitly, and to put it mildly, that letter has not had much attention.

But times have changed. Wisdom literature has come into its own as an area of vital interest. In Europe it was primarily Gerhard von Rad who charted new avenues in the study of wisdom literature. On this side of the Atlantic, James Crenshaw and Roland Murphy have been two leading pioneers, and both have written essays appearing in this issue. Not only has wisdom literature been investigated in its own right. Wisdom traditions and concepts are now seen to exist in other types of biblical literature, and theological topics of all kinds are now being illuminated and seen in new ways through the insights of recent wisdom research. These topics include creation, the law (in both ancient Israel and the Judaism of the New Testament era and beyond), apocalyptic, christology, and ethics.

Essays in this issue of the journal reflect the impact of this new look at wisdom in recent years and they contribute to the new look itself. *Diane Jacobson*, in the opening essay, introduces us to the meaning of the term “wisdom,” maps out the various avenues of research going on, and discusses briefly the theological significance of it all. *James Crenshaw* probes into the background of Israel’s wisdom movement to seek a coherent picture, or understanding, of how knowledge was acquired and taught by the sages of Israel. After discussing the more obvious relationship of teachers and pupils, he goes on to the more complex problem of the acquisition of knowledge, suggesting that it came about by three ways-observation of nature and human behavior, the search for analogies between inherited creed and present realities, and an encounter with God. *Roland Murphy* leads us to take a second look at Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth), a book

that is usually taken to be highly skeptical. But he says that the author of this book was actually a person of great faith. He shows how this is so and discusses the relationship between faith and disbelief both within this book and in light of it. *Ronald Duty* examines the Book of Proverbs and shows how the author holds history and nature (or creation) together and considers ethics a matter of conforming to the moral order inherent in creation. But history (human action collectively) does not always conform to the moral order of creation; therefore the need for divine redemption of both history and creation is envisioned in later wisdom literature. *Pheme Perkins* has written an essay on Wisdom christology . She surveys New Testament passages in which Jesus is portrayed as the embodiment of Wisdom, substituted for traditional Old

Testament images of Wisdom, depicted in Wisdom categories in christological hymns, and proclaimed as the Incarnate Word (already linked to Wisdom in Jewish tradition). She suggests that Wisdom christology can provide a non-androcentric imagery for describing God's sustaining compassion and self-revelation in Jesus. *W. C. Bouzard* suggests that wisdom traditions also made their impact on Paul. While it is commonly assumed that Romans 1 and 2 reflect "natural theology" derived primarily from Hellenism, he maintains that the underpinnings of this section of Paul's letter are to be found in Israel's wisdom theology. Finally, *Amy Tolpingrud* discusses portions of the wisdom literature which speak of Wisdom as the self-expression of God and then turns to New Testament imagery of Christ as God's self-revelation, relating the two. She concludes that a reading of Scripture along these lines can lead both women and men to liberation from bondage to stereotypical concepts and self-understandings and into reconciled community, "and men and women will be trusted companions of one another."

With this issue we introduce anew feature in the Resources section. Called "Face to Face," it provides the opportunity of airing current issues briefly from two different points of view-not necessarily in conflict. On this first occasion the issue is whether biblical "inerrancy" is a church dividing issue, and the essays are by *Lowell Erdahl* and *Richard Nysse*. To this we add an informative essay by *Marc Kolden*, in which he surveys dialogues which Lutherans have had with other major denominations (Roman Catholic, Reformed, Anglican, and Methodist), asking about issues which seem to pose problems for present and future relationships. Then the Texts in Context essay by *Sheldon Tostengard* covers a portion of the Epistle to the Romans assigned for coming weeks in the lectionary.

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