NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

COURSE CODE: CRS413

COURSE TITLE:WISDOM LITERATURE

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COURSE GUIDE

CRS413
WISDOM LITERATURE

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Introduction

CRS413 Wisdom Literature is a one Semester 2 credit unit course. It will be available toward the award of the undergraduate degree in Christian theology. The course is also available to anybody who is interested in the study of the place of Wisdom in Old Testament studies. The course will consist of 14 units and it will examine a theological study of themes in Wisdom Literature including the five major Wisdom books – Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Songs of Solomon, and with occasional references to Ben Sira and Wisdom of Solomon. The material has been especially developed for students in African context with particular focus on Nigeria.

There are no compulsory prerequisites for this course. The course guide tells you briefly what the course is all about, what you are expected to know in each unit, what course materials you will be using and how you can work your way through these materials. It also emphasizes the need for Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMAs). Detailed information on (TMAs) is found in a separate file, which will be sent to you later.

There are periodic tutorial classes that are linked to this course.

What you will learn in this course

The overall aim of CRS413: Wisdom Literature is to lead you to the study of the theological ideas found in Wisdom Literature with a particular emphasis on God, creation, redemption and the whole concept of theodicy.

Wisdom Literature is a part of Old Testament theology which in turn is part of Biblical Theology. Therefore, our study of the theological themes of Wisdom Literature will include the witness of Wisdom to Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

Your understanding of Wisdom Literature will equip you to explain the Christian faith to other people – Christians and non-Christians.

You will find Wisdom Literature to be an enriching study as you benefit from insights of other Biblical theologians

Course Aims

The aim of this course (CRS 413 – Wisdom Literature) is to study some of the theological themes found in Wisdom Literature – Job, Proverbs, *Qoheleth* (Ecclesiastes) etc. especially the age-long issue of theodicy – why do the righteous suffer? This study will use exegetical methodologies in a canonical order, relating the Old Testament themes to the New Testament, and drawing implications for believing communities in contemporary Africa. This will be achieved by:

- Introducing you to the Methodologies and Currents in Wisdom Literature
- Discussing the nature and attributes of God in Wisdom Literature
- Exposing you to the realities of Wisdom in creation and redemption and the endowments of God to humanity.

- Analysing the importance of suffering and adversities in the practical outworking of Wisdom in humanity's relationship to the God and to one another.
- Attempting to discover the hidden meaning of theodicy – why do the righteous most-at-times suffer and the wicked sometimes prosper? And to explore the provisions made in Wisdom Literature for overcoming adversity and for the triumph of good over evil.
- Equipping you with a better understanding of the dynamics of Wisdom in both human and divine matters.
- Analysing the future of Wisdom Literature in African context.

Course Objectives

To achieve the above course aims, there are set objectives for each study unit, which are always included at the beginning. The student should read them before working through the unit. Furthermore the student is encouraged to refer to the objectives of each unit intermittently as the study of the unit progresses. This practice would promote both learning and retention of what is learned. Stated below are the wider objectives of this course as a whole. By meeting those objectives you should have achieved the aims of the course as a whole.

On successful completion of the course, you should be able to:

- Define the Methodologies and Current in Wisdom Literature
- Define the nature and attributes of God in Wisdom Literature especially the theological issue of theodicy.
- Appreciate the realities of God's wisdom displayed in both creation and redemption.
- Analyse the importance of wisdom in humanity's relationship to God and to one another.
- Discover the Biblical view of theodicy, i.e. the suffering of the righteous or the prosperity of the wicked, and explore the provisions made in Wisdom Literature for its explanation and solution.
- Become equipped with a better understanding of the dynamics of Imagination, Rhetoric and Social location in Wisdom Literature.
- Become conscious and work towards the future of Wisdom Literature in African context.

Working through this Course

To complete this course, you are required to read the study units, read recommended books and read other materials provided by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Each unit contains self-assessment exercises, and at points during the course you are required to submit assignments for assessment purposes. At the end of this course there is a final examination. Below you will find listed all the components of the course and what you have to do.

Course Materials

Major components of the course are:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Textbooks
4. Assignment File
5. Presentation Schedule

In addition, you must obtain the materials. You may contact your tutor if you have problems obtaining the text materials.

Study Units

There are three modules, fourteen study units in this course, as follows:

MODULE 1: WISDOM AND OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY: ISSUES AND APPROACHES

Unit 1: Issues in Wisdom Literature

Unit 2: The Place of Wisdom in Old Testament Theology

Unit 3: Approaches to Wisdom Theology.

Unit 4: Rhetoric and Social Location in Wisdom Literature

Unit 5: Social Location and Moral Discipline.

MODULE 2: THE THEOLOGY OF WISDOM LITERATURE

Unit 1: Theology and Moral Discourse in Proverbs

Unit 2: Theodicy and the Sovereignty of God in Job.

Unit 3: Cosmology and Anthropology in the Testament of *Qoheleth* (Ecclesiastes).

Unit 4: Theology and Praise in the book of Psalms.

Unit 5: Relationship and Redemption in Canticles (Songs of Solomon).

MODULE 3: FORM, RHETORIC AND CONTENT OF WISDOM LITERATURE

Unit 1: Wisdom in the Language of Narratives and Poems

Unit 2: The Metaphors of the Sages in Systematic Form

Unit 3: Sapiential Imagination in Theological Terms

Unit 4: The Rhetoric of Sapiential Language

Please note that Module 1 introduces you to Wisdom Literature and examines methodologies or approaches, Wisdom and Creation, theodicy and other relevant themes. The next Module 2 addresses Creation and Moral Discourse as it impacts on Wisdom and Folly, Justice and Mercy. It also deals with the Theodicy and the Sovereignty of God, Cosmology and Anthropology, Creation and Salvation History, as well as Creation and the practical outworking of Redemption in the various Wisdom books of the Old Testament canon – Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, the Psalms and Songs of Solomon, occasionally referring to Ben Sira and Wisdom of Solomon.

Each unit contains a number of self-tests. In general, these self-tests question you on the material you have just covered or require you to apply it in some ways and, thereby, help you to gauge your progress and to reinforce your understanding of the material. Together with tutor marked assignments, these exercises will assist you in achieving the stated learning objectives of the individual units and of the course.

Textbooks and References

The student is encouraged to buy the under-listed books (and more) recommended for this course and for future use.

1. *The Holy Bible* (RSV or NIV).
2. Adeyemo, T. *African Bible Commentary*. Nairobi: Word Alive, 2006.
3. Ahiamadu, A.E. *Biblical Hermeneutics – Methods and Tools for Interpreting and Applying the Bible to Africa – A Postcolonial Maximalist Approach.* Enugu: SIVC, 2012
4. Albright, W. F. "The Goddess of Life and Wisdom" *AJSL* 36 (1919-1920) 258-94.
5. Bromiley, G.W. (ed) *The Encyclopaedia of Christianity 2 A-D* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.
6. Janzen, Waldemar *Old Testament Ethics – A Paradigmatic Approach.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994.
7. Nyoyoko, V. G. *A Thematic Guide to the Old Testament Literature*. Port Harcourt: University Press, 2012.
8. Perdue, Leo G. "Wisdom in the Book of Job" in In *Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie*, eds Leo G. Perdue et al (Louisville: Westrminster / John Knox, 1993).
9. Perdue, Leo G. *Wisdom and Creation. The Theology of Wisdom Literature*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.
10. Rahner, K. *Encyclopaedia of Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 2000).

Assignment File

In this file, you will find all the details of the work you must submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain from these assignments will count towards the final mark you obtain for

this course. Further information on assignments will be found in the Assignment File itself and later in this Course Guide in the section on assessment.

Presentation Schedule

The *Presentation Schedule* included in your Course materials gives you the important dates for the completion of tutor marked assignments and attending tutorials. Remember, you are required to submit all your assignments by the due date. You should guard against lagging behind in your work.

Assessment

There are two aspects to the assessment of the course. First are the tutor marked assignments; second, there is the written examination. In tackling the assignments, you are expected to apply information and knowledge acquired during this course. The assignments must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the Assignment File. The work you submit to your tutor for assessment will count for 30% of your total course mark.

At the end of the course, you will need to sit for a final three-hour examination. This will also count for 70% of your total course mark.

Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAS)

There are fourteen major marked assignments in this course. You need to submit all the assignments. The best five (i.e. the highest five of the fourteen marks) will be counted. The total marks for the best four (4) assignments will be 30% of your total mark.

Assignment questions for the units in this course are contained in the Assignment File. You should be able to complete your assignments from the information and materials in your set textbooks, reading and study units. However, you are advised to use other references to broaden your viewpoint and provide a deeper understanding of the subject.

When you have completed each assignment, send it together with form to your tutor. Make sure that each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline given. If, however, you cannot complete your work on time, contact your tutor before the assignment is done to discuss the possibility of an extension.

Final Examination and Grading

The examination will consist of questions which reflect the type of self-testing, practice exercises and tutor-marked problems you have come across. All areas of the course will be assessed.

You are advised to revise the entire course after studying the last unit before you sit for the examination. You will find it useful to review your tutor-marked assignments and the comments of your tutor on them before the final examination.

Course Marking Scheme

The table shows how the actual course marking is broken down.

Assessment	Marks
Assignment 1 - 14	Four assignments, best three marks of the four count at 30% of course marks
Final Examination	70% of overall course marks
Total	100% of course marks

Table 1: Course Marking Scheme

Course Overview

This table brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them, and the assignments that follow them.

Unit	Title of work	Week's activity	Assessment (end of unit)
	Course guide	1	
Module 1			
1	Issues in Wisdom Literature	1	Assignment 1
2	The Place of Wisdom in Old Testament Theology	2	Assignment 2
3	Approaches to Wisdom Theology.	3	Assignment 3
4	Imagination, Rhetoric and Social Location in Wisdom Literature	4	Assignment 4
5	Social Location and Moral Discipline.	5	Assignment 5
Module 2			
1	Theology and Moral Discourse in Proverbs	6	Assignment 6
2	Theodicy and the Sovereignty of God in Job	7	Assignment 7
3	Cosmology and Anthropology in the Testament of *Qoheleth* (Ecclesiastes).	8	Assignment 8
4	Theology of Praise and Prayers in the Book of Psalms	9	Assignment 9

5	Relationship and Redemption in (Canticles) Songs of Solomon.	10	Assignment 10

Module 3

1	Wisdom in the language of narrative and poems	11	Assignment 11
2	The Metaphors of the sages in Systematic form	12	Assignment 12
3	Sapiential Imagination in Theological Terms	13	Assignment 13
4	The Rhetoric of Sapiential Language.	14	Assignment 14
15	REVISION	15	
16	EXAMINATION	16	
	TOTAL	**17 wks**	

Table 2: Course Overview

How to get the best from the Course

In distance learning the study units replace the university lecturer. This is one of the great advantages of distance learning; you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suit you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to the lecturer. In the same way a lecturer might give you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your books or other material. Just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate points.

Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives enable you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. You should use these objectives to guide your study. When you have finished the units you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If you make a habit of doing this you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course.

The main body of the unit guide you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from a Reading section.

Remember that your tutor's job is to assist you. When you need help, don't hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it.

1. Read this *Course Guide* thoroughly.

2. Organize a study schedule. Refer to the *'Course overview'* for more details. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Whatever method you chose to use, you should decide on it and write in your dates for working on each unit.

3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason that students fail is that they lag behind in their course work.

4. Turn to *Unit 1*andread the instruction and the objectives for the unit.

5. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given in the 'Overview' at the beginning of each unit. You will almost always need both the study unit you are working on and one of your set books on your desk at the same time.

6. Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or other articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.

7. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study material or consult your tutor.

8. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you can keep yourself on schedule.

9. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also written on the assignment. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any question or problems.

10. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in the *Course Guide*).

Tutors and Tutorials

There are 8 hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, times and locations of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group.

Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignment, keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course.

You must mail your tutor-marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutor by telephone, e-mail, or discussion board if you need help. The following might be circumstances in which you would find help necessary. Contact your tutor if:

- You do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings,
- You have difficulty with the self-tests or exercises'
- You have a question or problem with an assignment, with your tutor's comments on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to have face to face contact with your tutor and to ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussions actively.

Summary

CRS413 intends to introduce you to Wisdom Literature. Upon completing this course, you will be able to answer questions such as:

- What is the meaning of Wisdom Literature?
- Why do the righteous suffer in the midst of a seeming prosperity of the wicked?
- How is theodicy critical in the doctrine of the sovereignty of God?
- How do metaphors help the Theological Imagination?
- Where does Sapiential imagination intersect the Moral Discourse?
- What is the nature of Wisdom and how have sages attempted to obtain her?

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MAIN COURSE

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MODULE 1: WISDOM AND OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

Unit 1: Issues in Wisdom Literature

Contents

1.0 **Introduction**

The Old Testament is a multifaceted and multi-layered book and a greater part of it is what is commonly known as Wisdom Literature. The book of Job through to the book of Songs of Solomon is primarily classified under this heading, not as though there is no wisdom in the other parts of the Old Testament. The fact is that the aforementioned section of the Biblical canon illustrates the personal experiences of sages presented in form of songs, dirges, laments, and poems couched in wisdom or pedagogic language.

This unit aims at discussing the concept of Wisdom, the source(s) of Wisdom Literature and the Theology of Wisdom Literature. A hermeneutical consideration of how Wisdom Literature impacts on the Old Testament piety and morality is given with a view to assessing its implications for the believing community in Africa.

2.0 **Objectives**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the concept and source(s) of Wisdom Literature, and its relevance in the general understanding of Old Testament theology.

- Discuss the hermeneutical considerations of Wisdom Literature especially in the light of a general understanding of wisdom in African context.

3.0 **Main Body**

3.1 **The Concept of Wisdom**

Wisdom is generally understood as the right application of knowledge. Moreover, it is regarded as basic to a theological understanding of the twin concepts of Creation and Redemption, and this extends its relevance to both a discussion of the Old and New Testaments. In specific terms Wisdom is associated with Creation and with Redemption in both Testaments as an illustration of its importance in overall Salvation History. We begin with the place of wisdom in several of the leading presentations of Old Testament theology since the Second World War; the different approaches to understanding the theology of the sages by contemporary wisdom scholars, including Biblical Scholars of African descent; etc.

The Place of Wisdom in Old Testament Theology:

While the dominant trend in Old Testament theology has been either to neglect wisdom literature or to consider it to be outside the mainstream of Israelite faith, some scholars have offered important insights into both the theology of the sages and how it relates to the larger biblical theology. We begin with the place of wisdom in several of the leading presentations of Old Testament Theology since the Second World War, and then move on to the different approaches to understanding the theology of the sages by contemporary wisdom scholars.

The Place of Wisdom in the Theology of the Sages

According to an Old Testament scholar, Wright (1969:70-96) the locus of Old Testament Wisdom Literature is Creation, and not history *per se*. He struggled to answer the fundamental question of how to reconcile Wisdom Literature's emphasis on a right relationship to God and to fellow humans with the Old Testament concept of retributive judgment so clearly imbued in both historical and prophetic literature of the Bible.

He traces the Wisdom of the sages so copiously embodied in Wisdom literature to international origin and character. Although this was a constant source of intellectual agitation for Wright, the problem is solved when one understood that Wisdom in the ancient Israelite folklores, legends and literature were never unique. In other words, the distinctive character of Israelite faith and Wisdom literature is more the result of her predilection for historical preservation of her oracles, but more the result of the preserved oracles of sages in their respective personal encounters with theHighest Deity!

Interestingly, Wright understood creation as both the prologue to history and its eschatological climax in the new heaven and new earth. Creation stands as both the beginning and the end of the divine-human drama, but it have very limited importance for what occurs in between (Gen.3-Rev.20). Wisdom could provide guidance for the moral life, but it did not articulate a distinctive faith centred in the salvific actions of God. In postcolonial critical hermeneutic, we

infer that wisdom is at the heart of both creation and redemption, although it is unravelled by a faith that is not based on a moral, but on a spiritual rebirth.

For his part, Gerhard von Rad (1972:10ff)gives a more important role to creation and wisdom in general Old Testament Theology, but his emphasis continued to be laid on the category of the salvation event. The Old Testament is a book of extensive historical narratives, but only as one comes to the section on Wisdom Literature does one encounter the personal experiences of ancient sages in circumstances and situations in which they by the outworking of divine wisdom experienced transcendental victory. To von Rad Wisdom in ancient Israelite religion and culture were the products of creeds, chants and songs some of which were extant in the neighbouring ancient Near Eastern communities.

Wisdom is therefore Israel's response to the proclamation of the great acts of Yahweh, embodied in the traditions of faith found in the Hexateuch, Genesis through Joshua. Every reader of von Rad would consider this a very curious remark since he makes no reference to the great events of redemptive history in his writings, but only to creation. Von Rad pursues his analysis of the book of Job in association with the laments of the Psalms as Israel's trials and consolation of individual Israelites. He understands Job in terms of the character's being torn between the caring, righteous, saving God of tradition and the God he experiences as a venomous enemy. The conflicts in Job, as in most of Wisdom Literature is however resolved in theophany in which God turns a "smiling face to his creation". Accordingly, the purpose of the divine answer in the book of Job in particular is to glorify God's justice towards his creatures, and the fact that he is turned towards them to do them good and bless them. In other words theodicy – the justice of God – cannot be understood by humans, it can only be adored!

Finally, in the African context wisdom consists in a careful consideration of what proceeds from one's mouth – words! Thus the birth of a new child or at the demise of a loved one, people gather to make incantations suggesting either negatively what should be avoided in the future world, or positively what the affected soul should embrace in the life to come. The book of Psalms, if it is read and recited at the right time, in the right place and a certain number of times releases a secret power that enables one to deal with adverse situations or to affirm admirable conditions as the case might be. The imprecatory psalms 5, 6, 28, 35, 37, 54, 55, 89, 109 etc were embraced by indigenous African adherents of the Christian faith as portent tools for dealing with witches and other subterranean forces of evil, and in promoting the good life. According to David T. Adamo(2001:336-349).

> The fact is that African Christians, like the Yoruba, do not face the same problems as Western Christians. They need a different hermeneutic that takes into cognizance their cultural traditions and the place of the Bible in the solving of their problems. African Indigenous Christians are not passive receivers of Christianity. They make use of whatever they find useful from Western missionaries and adapt it to suit their world view and needs and in so doing they have made a substantial contribution to the interpretation *and use of wisdom literature* (italics mine).

3.1 Self-**Assessment Exercise**

Identify and discuss the concept of Wisdom, and the place of Wisdom Literature in the thinking of Sages.

3.2 **The Source(s) of Wisdom Literature**

Wisdom Literature is the genre of literature common in the Ancient Near East. This genre is characterized by sayings of wisdom intended to teach about divinity and about virtue, the key principle of wisdom literature is the techniques of traditional story-telling used. These books also presume to offer insight and wisdom about nature and reality. The genre of mirror-of-princes writings, which has a long history in Islamic and Western renaissance literature, represents a secular cognate to wisdom literature. Within classical antiquity the poetry of the advice of Hesiod, particularly His works and days have been seen as a like genre to ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature.

Moreover, several biblical scholars have noted that some sections of Wisdom literature especially the 30 sayings of the wise in Proverbs 22:17-24:22 contain similarities to the 30 sections of the Egyptian "Wisdom of *Amenemope"* – an instructional piece that is roughly contemporary with the time of Solomon. Similarly, the personification of Wisdom so prominent in Proverbs 1 – 9 (3:15-18; 8:1-36) can be compared with the personification of abstract ideas in both Mesopotamian and Egyptian writings of the second millennium B.C.E. The role of Hezekiah's men (see Pr25:1ff) indicates that important sections of Wisdom literature were compiled and edited from 715 to 686 B.C.E. This was a time of spiritual renewal led by the king, who also showed great interest in the writings of David and Asaph (see 2 Chro. 29-30). Perhaps it was also at this time that the sayings of Agur (Pr. 30) and Lemuel (Pr. 30 1-9) and other "sayings of the wise" (Pr. 22:17-24:22; 24:23-34) were added to the Solomonic collections, though it is possible that the task of compilation was not completed until after the reign of Hezekiah (Wolf 1985:942).

The Jews sometimes speak of the Old Testament as the Law, Prophets and the Writings. Included within the third division are Psalms, and wisdom materials such as Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. These wisdom books are associated with a class of people called "wise men" or "sages" who are listed with priests and prophets as an important force in Israelite society (cf. Jer. 18:18). Wise men were called on to give advice to kings and to instruct the young. Whereas the priests and prophets dealt more with the religious side of life, wise men were concerned about practical and philosophical matters. Some of their writings, like Proverbs, were optimistic, as they showed the young how to behave in order to live prosperous and happy lives. Other materials such as Job and Ecclesiastes were more pessimistic as they wrestled with difficult philosophical and theological questions such as the problem of evil and the prosperity of the wicked (see also Ps. 37; 73). Both viewpoints – the optimistic and the pessimistic – are also found in the literature of other nations in the ancient Near East.

It is instructive to note that Proverbs could not be interpreted as prophecy or, its statements about certain effects and results, as promises. For instance, Pr. 10:27 says that the years of the

wicked are cut short while the righteous live long and prosperous lives (see Pr. 3:2 etc.) The righteous have abundant food (Pr. 10:3), but the wicked will go hungry (Pr. 13:25). While such verses are generally true, there are enough exceptions to indicate that sometimes, the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper. Normally, the righteous and wicked "receive their due on earth" (Pr.11:31), but at other times reward and punishment lie beyond the grave. Such is the nature of Proverbs that interpreting them as promises or as prophecy misses a vital point!

Hebraic wisdom literature contrasts with the social philosophies developed in Greece that encourages good behaviour for the health of the state, families, or from fear of reprisal. While the wisdom books, particularly Ecclesiastes, note that punishment may follow from poor choices, it is because the laws of goodness and rightness are God's and are ordained by God that they should be followed. While wisdom is represented as the result of human reflection, and thus as the guide in all the affairs of life but predetermination of good remains God's prerogative (in Wisdom of Solomon and in parts of Proverbs and Ecclesiasticus, but not Ecclesiastes)

The wisdom texts emphasize human powers as bestowed directly by God; it is identified with the fear of God (Job 28:28; Pr.1:7; Ecclus 15: 1ff), an extension of which is obedience to the Jewish law (Ecclus 24:23).

In the broad sense, there are seven (7) books in Biblical Wisdom literature: Job (42 chapters), Proverbs (31 chapters); Ecclesiastes or Qoheleth (12 chapters), Sirach or Ecclesiasticus (51 Chapters); Book of Wisdom or Wisdom of Solomon (19 chapters), Psalms (150 chapters), and Song of Songs (8 chapters). Five of them, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Psalms and Song of Songs were composed in Hebrew. They can be found in the Hebrew Bible, and in both the Protestant and Catholic Bibles. Sirach and Wisdom were composed in Greek and are found in the Septuagint and Catholic Bibles only. They are generally called the deutero-canonical books of the Catholic canon.

In addition, biblical Wisdom literature is *a-historical and timeless*. In other words, they have little or no concern with history. They are concerned with questions about the role of God in everyday life. This is based on the fact that the Jewish people came to realize that they can only experience God through the daily events of their lives. As a corollary to this point, wisdom literature or tradition can be found in nearly all cultures. Similar materials are found in the literature of the ancient Near Eastern civilizations and in African oral traditions or oral literature (orature). Significantly, they are expressed in aetiologies, proverbs, riddles, songs and wise sayings. Wisdom traditions in all cultures help to keep alive customs and manners of the people and as such they are only transmitted from one generation to the next, firstly orally and later on in written form. They assist the young to imbibe the wisdom of their elders. Wisdom literatures are generally timeless, in the sense that they do not go out of date.

3.2 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Mention and discuss the source(s) of Wisdom Literature.

3.3 Articulations of the theology of Wisdom literature

Theology here is used to highlight the radical change which wisdom underwent during the post-exilic period. By this time wisdom literature moved from the court to the school. Prov. 1 – 9 is an example of this process. By this time there was no opposition between wisdom and the fear of the Lord. What this means is that wisdom was compared to the fear of the Lord. Derived from this, fear of the Lord meant obedience to the will of God. By this time also as exemplified in the Book of Proverbs wisdom was identified with the Lord. This notion is conspicuous in most of Wisdom literature.

The distinguishing mark of the theology of wisdom is its expression under the authority of God's will, the experience and advice of sages. Once acquired wisdom is capable of exhibiting a life of its own, such that it replaces the sage as a theological resource. Wisdom also assumed Messianic qualities as we find in sapiential passages such as Isaiah 11:2. It is also seen as a gift of God, eternal and co-existent with God as both Creator (Pr. 8: 14-18; 8:35-36) and as King (Pr.4:7; 8:14-16).

In other words, wisdom is associated with royalty and priesthood at the same time. Wisdom is also embodied in justice and virtue as opposed to injustice and vice. Each of the books of Wisdom literature portrays an aspect of theology that impacts on the study of Biblical Studies generally. Those who do not keep the law lack wisdom and run the risk of divine punishment. On the other hand those who keep the law must desire wisdom and ask for it before they can obtain it. Wisdom is like a very shy maiden who must be cajoled and cowed into submission through aggressive and persistent quest. Wisdom is also like a Saviour who rescues the young from the snares of loose women, and from death in its various forms. Those who embrace wisdom obtain divine protection, preservation, promotion and prosperity.

Another theological feature of Proverbs is its personification. In this way wisdom is seen as a preacher, as a guide and as a sister, as a hostess at a banquet, as a firstborn of God, his craftsman, playing before him. She existed before creation, and originates from God. At the same time wisdom is represented as a spouse and consort of those who seeks her, and is capable of attracting those who love her. Yahweh – the Source of Wisdom – always makes Himself available to all those who daily watch at His gates (Pr. 8:35; 4:22). In the final analysis God rewards the good and punishes the evil. Yahweh is recognized as the First Cause, governing the universe with an outstretched hand and scrupulous eyes. His sanctions on bad conduct is near and telling, as well as his recompense of reward to the good and godly.

3.3 **Self-Assessment Exercise**

- Summarize the various theological components of Wisdom Literature

3.4 **Dominant Paradigms of Wisdom Literatures**

The Jewish community of faith saw Wisdom literature as sacred writings which are also described as "the book of Truth". Although there are elements of epic, dramatic and lyrical poetry in these five or more compositions, in which profound spiritual truths are enshrined for

the edification of humanity. This constitutes a decided development in thought from that which obtained in connection with some of the very early fragments of Hebrew poetry, such as occurred in the Pentateuch. There are several areas in which Hebrew poetry can be compared or contrasted with African poetry and only a few of such points will suffice for our purpose at this stage.

First of all, ancient Hebrew poetry has a long standing literary history, whereas the writing of African poetry can be said to be a post-colonial experience dating from only the recent past. Secondly, Hebrew poetry has a re-occurring theological theme, whereas African poetry is mainly anthropomorphic at best and at worst animalistic. Third, Hebrew poetry is couched in specific cultic terms and are specially directed to boost the cult of Yahweh, whereas African poetry are couched mostly in domestic terms and expressed in polytheistic language. Finally, where Hebrew poetry is lyrical and rhythmic, African poetry are satirical and insinuative.

Moreover, Hebrew wisdom literature is characterized by certain literary and paradigmatic features including the parallelisms, strophic arrangement and metical forms as follows:

Parallelisms

Lowth distinguished between three varieties of parallelism as follows:

(a) Synonymous, in which the second line of a poetic verse repeated the thought expressed in the first line (e.g. Ps.83:14; Isa. 1:3).

(b) Antithetic, in which two portions of the verse were involved in contrast (e.g. Prov. 1:29); the same idea was sometimes expressed positively first, then negatively (Ps. 90:60).

(c) Synthetic, in which the sense carried on continuously (e.g. Ps. 1: If, 2:3). This form is hardly parallelism in the strictest sense, as subsequent critics came to recognize.

Starting from this discovery other later writers began to apply the rhythmic or metrical principles of different varieties of Semitic poetry to Hebrew, but this procedure involved considerations of syllabics rather than accentuation. Some scholars, following Anton, Meier and Ley made the accent the determining principle of poetic measurement in Hebrew, and this approach gained increasing approval among English-speaking scholars, although there were some who disapproved of the textual emendations in which most German scholars indulged.

The strophic arrangement of Hebrew poetry was emphasized by Koster who built upon the foundations established by Lowth to distinguish different varieties of strophes. Although a number of commentaries were published in which the poetical material of the Hagiographa was dealt with in various ways, the gains were comparatively modest. Briggs cited three additional varieties of parallelism that scholars had come to recognize as a result of studying Hebrew wisdom literature (Harrison 1989:972-3).

Metrical Division

Regarding metrical division, it should be remarked immediately that there is no tradition of meter in the classical Hebrew compositions, and even the Talmud had nothing to say about this particular topic. While Josephus applied the occidental concepts of Classical poetic meter to the writings of the Hebrew in stating that the songs of Moses (Ex. 15:1ff; Deut. 32:1ff) were written in hexameters, he did this only to show his Gentile readers that a specific poetic form underlay certain portions of the Hebrew Scriptures. However, Classical analogies are unfortunately misleading here, since any discernible meter in

Hebrew poetry can only be determined by relationship to the forms of other ancient poetry in which the essential basis of the structure was a balance of thought, and by implication from the parallel lines themselves.

Two reasons may be adduced for the contention that some of the Hebrew poetic compositions exhibited concepts of meter. In the first place, several of the psalms were apparently meant to be sung to the accompaniment of a variety of musical instruments. Furthermore, the fact that the poetry of the ancient Near East and of Egypt pointed to the presence of meter might also support this idea.

Stophic Arrangement

Within the last century a good deal of discussion has centred upon the question as to whether the lines of Hebrew poetry could be grouped in order to form stanzas or strophes. In general it can be said that the majority of the older critics held to the view that the psalms were arranged in regular strophic organization, the nature of which had been obscured to some extent by later liturgical glosses. More recent studies have shown that while such an arrangement is possible, as indicated by the presence of acrostic poetry in the Old Testament, the grouping of distiches or tristichs into larger formal units cannot be demonstrated.

The fact that strophic arrangement in Hebrew wisdom literature was never allowed to interfere with the sequence of thought would imply that the stanza was never basic to the structure of such compositions. This is in contradistinction to modern poetic usage, in which the stanza comprises a group consisting of a specific number of lines marked by a particular rhyming pattern. Even where there might appear to be some kind of strophic division in Hebrew poetic literature, it seems clear that the stanzas followed the logical divisions associated with the thought forms rather than the rhyming-patterns of modern poetic usage. There would thus seem to be no evidence for the kind of rigid, metrically constructed strophes entertained by earlier Old Testament scholars.

We can conclude this section on strophic arrangements in Hebrew wisdom literature by saying that should a strophe be defined in a more fluid fashion as an informal arrangement of lines characterised by certain external indications, it may be possible to speak of strophes. This implies literally that the close of a stanza may be indicated by the presence of a recurring refrain (cf. Psa. 45:5-11; 43:5; 46:7-11), and as Koster pointed out, by the inclusion of *selah* at

the end of a line. There has been some doubt expressed as to the validity of *sela* has a criterion for strophic delineation, since the meaning of the term itself is obscure. Generally the word stands outside the balanced arrangement of the thought-form, and its association with many psalms headed by a supposed musical title has led some scholars to the conclusion that it called for the raising of the voice in praise.

3.4 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Explain what Wisdom Literature means, when its various paradigms are brought into consideration.

3.5 **Hermeneutical Considerations**

Providing answers to life's most difficult questions – why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer sometimes?- are the main focus of Wisdom Literature. This consciousness is not alien to the traditional African. Just as the African has much to learn from the Old Testament and Christianity, it is also true that some insights from the African traditional religion could facilitate a better interpretation of the scriptures in African context. In other words, there are, in Biblical hermeneutics, some theoretical components which enhance the elucidation of the text in a dynamic way. These can be subsumed under three main headings, namely, world-views, context and textual evidence. When the African context is brought into dialogue with the context of ancient Near East in the task of understanding, interpreting and applying wisdom literature, through the prism of African cultural or postcolonial hermeneutics, that is indeed wisdom *par excellence.* For example, in Wisdom Literature the concept and sources of wisdom literature, including its theological articulation and the dominant paradigms are all illustrated in the oral traditions of African cultures, but this shall be discussed later.

3.6 **Self-Assessment Exercise**

- Can you explain how a good knowledge of African oral traditions and poetry – both written and oral – could facilitate a good understanding of Wisdom Literature?

4.0 **Conclusion**

The Old Testament is a multifaceted and multi-layered book and a greater part of it is what is commonly known as Wisdom Literature. In specific terms Wisdom is associated with creation and with redemption in both Testaments as an illustration of its importance in overall salvation history. As a corollary to this point, wisdom literature or tradition can be found in nearly all cultures. Similar materials are found in the literature of the ancient Near Eastern civilizations and in African oral traditions. Each of the books of Wisdom literature portrays an aspect of theology that impacts on Biblical Studies generally. Hebrew wisdom literature is characterized by certain literary and paradigmatic features including the parallelisms, strophic arrangement and metical forms. When the African context is brought into dialogue with the context of ancient Near East in the task of understanding, interpreting and applying wisdom literature through the prism of African cultural or postcolonial hermeneutics that is indeed wisdom *par excellence.*

5.0 **Summary**

From the fore-going, we have seen that in discussing the components of Wisdom literature insights from our understanding of African cultural or post-colonial hermeneutics goes a long way to facilitating our appreciation of the depths or rigours of Hebrew wisdom literature. As a field of study in which attempts are made to deal with some of life's most difficult questions, it is important to bring the ancient Near Eastern cultures into dialogue with what is known of Wisdom in Africa. This unit having disclosed the nature, components, theology and paradigms of wisdom literature concluded on the note that African concepts of wisdom literature could not be divorced from the wisdom discussed in both the Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern world in general.

The next unit will dwell on the Place of Wisdom in Old Testament Theology

6.0 **Tutor Marked Assignments**

Outline and discuss the major components of Wisdom Literature and show the features of Hebrew poetry that distinguishes it from African oral and written poetic literature. How does an understanding of African cultural hermeneutics facilitate our appreciation of wisdom literature in the ancient Near East particularly Israel?

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MODULE 1: WISDOM AND OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY: ISSUES AND APPROACHES

Unit 2: The Place of Wisdom in Old Testament Theology

Content

1.0 Introduction

Wisdom Literature is the personal, experiential, and poetic representation of Old Testament piety, and it has often attempted to answer the age-old question of the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked. Putting it mildly, wisdom is a timeless, inherent quality of both Divinity and humanity, putting it at its best; yet it is found only in a few who dares to solicit the personal support of Deity in their daily dealings. This unit examines the relationship of Wisdom to the issue of timelessness and eternality of wisdom discussed under the following headings: Wisdom and the paradigm of history, the dialectic of history and creation, wisdom and canonical theology, and hermeneutical considerations.

2.0 Objective

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, the student should be able to:

- Understand the biblical concepts of wisdom in the books of Wisdom Literature enunciated in Unit 1.
- See how Christ is both the Wisdom and the Power of God.
- Draws lessons for today through a hermeneutical consideration.

3.0 **Main Body**

3.1 **Wisdom and the paradigm of History**

It is instructive to note that Biblical faith was communicated through the forms of history, and so one has to take history seriously even in consideration of Wisdom and the morals of society as they evolved over a long period of time. In other words, biblical faith affirms in a very triumphant manner the meaning of history. Wisdom demands the main hermeneutical requirement of proclamation and response. The faith community in demonstration of the wisdom and power of God proclaimed and then confessed the acts of God in creation, redemption, salvation especially through an encounter with the Word.

The locus of wisdom literature is however in creation, not history. Creation may have occurred in time with all the wisdom associated with it, but it is primeval and non-datable time. Therefore, as Wright puts it, in any attempt to "outline a discussion of Biblical faith it is the wisdom literature which offers the chief difficulty because it does not fit into any type of faith exhibited in the historical and prophetic literatures. In it there is no explicit reference to or development of the doctrine of history, election or covenant".

Biblical scholars are excited by wisdom's international origin and character, but to some scholars like Wright it is a mind-boggling phenomenon. For instance, how could someone searching for the distinctive character of Israelite faith find it in religious and moral views that are common to many ancient Near Eastern cultures? Israel's distinctiveness was undoubtedly marked by her predilection for history, and this contrasts with the beliefs and values common to the ancient Near Eastern communities that their gods wielded cosmic powers that could astound even the incredulous. Furthermore, wisdom's epistemological approach to revelation and moral instruction combined the powers of observation of nature and social life with critical reflection on human experience. Yet this approach was not an exclusive Israelite heritage, but one that could also be found in the neighbouring ancient Near Eastern cultures. Apparently, there was no place in wisdom literature for special revelation through either history or law. According to Wright, wisdom articulates a clear view of natural revelation, but it does not set forth a theology of the Word that proclaims and interprets the meaning of history. (Perdue 1994:22)

However, it is to Gerhard von Rad that we turn when we explore the relevance of wisdom to history in Old Testament theology. He underscored the centrality of an ancient Israelite creed often embedded within a larger narrative context. Again, Israel confessed this "little creed" within a liturgical context of festival. The confession contained the following list of redemptive acts of God: the promise to the fathers, the exodus from Egypt, the wandering in the wilderness, and the gift of the Promised Land. In fact some of the psalms are devoted entirely to the historical experience of Israel, while no other mention of this is mentioned in the other Wisdom books.

The interesting this is that each interpretive insight into these historical events results in newer interpretations and reformulation of the creed to emphasize rising hopes and promising occurrences in both the individual and national life. It is easy to mix creation with the

redemptive acts of God in history. Only when one is able to draw a line between the creative ordinances and the validity and authority of the commandments surrounding the created order, can one be able to distil both the sapiential heritage of the Jew and the innate ability to relate to both mundane or to divine things. Wisdom is a divine gift from God to humans and revealed to them the will and nature of God, though considering God to be mysterious and beyond the limits of human comprehension. While the sages in this first stage recognized that there were imponderables, the spirit exuded in their teachings was one of optimism, untouched by a deep sense of the tragic.

3.1 Self-Assessment Question

- Can you give three reasons why wisdom is described as transcendental to history?

3.2 The Dialectic of History and Creation

In his theological writings, Claus Westermann has given a more significant and constructive place to creation and wisdom than have either Wright or von Rad. Westernann`s theological construction consists of two interactive poles; soteorology (salvation) and blessing (creation). His presentation of history follows essentially von Rad in setting forth an ancient historical credo that becomes the basis for the themes or traditions developed in the Exodus-Sinai complex that later join with the covenant of Deuteronomy. Westermann sees the Old Testament as eschatological in its basic movement: The goal of history is the salvation of the world. Within this driving thrust of history, Yahweh saves his chosen people through means of great acts of redemption (Perdue 1994:25).

The second pole, blessing, incorporates the divine power that preserves and enhances life and undergirds the continuing order of creation. Divine blessing includes the gift and continuation of the power of procreation, the provision of sustenance, and support for the structures of life. According to Westermann's view of the Old Testament, creation is beyond history, meaning that it does not exist within a temporal movement. While creation is the presupposition of faith, it is not a historical saving act and thus not the object of confession. Creation was not a part of the ancient credo, for the Old Testament could not conceive of an alternative to God's creation of the world. Furthermore, in Westermann's view, creation is not associated with revelation, it does not testify to God.

However, creation theology does seek to secure the present by linking the order of reality to the wellsprings of primal origins. Creation theology embraces universalism; Israel points to God as the creator of humankind and the world, Westermann argued that Israel inherited its understanding of divine creation from the ancient Near East, and, like its sources, developed two separate traditions: the creation of humanity, the older of the two and the creation of the world.

Subsumed under the pole of blessing (creation), Wisdom is given an important place in Westermann's Old Testament theology. Wisdom's gifts are maturity, longevity, reproduction, and the general enhancement of life; but these come as a result of divine blessing. God's power

of blessing is encapsulated within Wisdom sayings. Like the larger theme of creation, Wisdom is not specifically limited to the chosen people; rather, it is universal in scope. Wisdom and creation share this universalism, for God creates, sustains, and blesses all of life. Wisdom is the power, design, and life-enhancing gift of God that shapes and undergirds reality.

Westermann used this bipartite division of the two traditions of creation (anthropology and cosmology) to speak of the development of Wisdom theology. The early sayings in Proverbs understand humans to be creatures made by God with possibilities and limits that are indigenous to their creatureliness. Humanity is a creature of the earth, gifted with organs of sense to know and perceive. The place of the human creatures is among other creatures, a part of a whole, bound to creation, and blessed by the Creator of the land with nourishment, sustenance, and well-being. This is the older creation. Later wisdom takes up the tradition of the creation of the world with Yahweh through wisdom's establishing, designing, and ordering the cosmos.

3.2 Self-Assessment Question

- Discuss the concept of wisdom and creation? What role do humans occupy in the Divine-nature partnership with particular reference to wisdom?

3.3 Wisdom and Canon Theology

The following features of the canonical approach to Wisdom theology are extant: First, the primary task of interpretation is to understand the shape and function of canonical books. This means that the task is not to uncover the various layers of tradition that comprise a book, but rather to concentrate on the final form of the book that entered into the canon. Second, the canonical approach takes seriously the community of faith that not only shaped the canonical books, but also was shaped by them. Third by means of "inter-textuality" the interpreter used scripture to interpret scripture, for texts in the canon are meant to be read and understood in reference to each other. And fourth, the canonical shape of Wisdom books, particularly in their poetic rendition actualizes their meaning – a meaning that transcends the limitations of historical time and space to address a Word of God to future generations.

Growing out of these literary features of the canon has been the larger issue of the purpose or meaning of an entire book, like for instance the book of Job. Is the book designed to present Job as a paradigm of the suffering of a righteous man? Or is the book written to undermine the traditional theory of retribution? Is the answer to the problem of suffering found in Job's religious experience of encounter with Yahweh in the whirlwind speeches, or does it reside in the content of the book? These questions are complicated by the issue of literary integrity.

Taking the book of Proverbs, its long standing interpretive problems can be outlined in a similar way. It includes its literary composition, the question of form and redaction, historical background, and the theology of wisdom. The major theological questions have to do with the extent that divine order serves as a constitutive element in older wisdom, the issue of retribution, the understanding of wisdom in the wisdom poems (Job 28; Pro. 8 and Sirach 24),

and, perhaps most problematic, the relation of Israel's wisdom literature to the rest of the Old Testament theology. What this approach does provide, is perhaps, a clear description of the canonical function of Proverbs for the piety of an on-going community of faith.

It is in Ecclesiastes that we find, as Brevard Childs have stated, a superscription which identifies the book with the "son of David" (obviously Solomon, reputed as the wisest of the Hebrew monarchs). More than that, the book seeks to undergird the assault on wisdom with its most authoritative voice. Moreover, the book carries with it an epilogue which seeks to legitimate the book as authoritative, divine wisdom and not as private fancy, while indicating in the final analysis that all human wisdom and behaviour will come under divine judgment. The epilogue indicates that the book, then, is to serve as a guide for the community's critical reflection on wisdom. At the same time the epilogue warns that the message of the book, limited to human wisdom and behaviour in the present, is relativized ultimately by the eschatological judgment of God.

Yet in the theology of Wisdom literature, wisdom is indeed the active voice of God, which calls people to true life, established thrones and kingdoms, speaks through the decisions and actions of leaders to rule justly, and witnesses to the Creator. This revelatory voice of God also assumes the providential role of directing human life in the areas of moral behaviour and discourse. "As an essential witness to God's purpose in his creation, wisdom is built into the very structure of reality, and in this role seeks to guide humanity to the way of truth". This wisdom is found, not through reason, but through "the fear of God."

Again, the response of human wisdom to God's address is not limited to ethics, though certainly this is an important dimension to the divine imperatives. Wisdom's response is larger, for it encompasses the totality of human experience. Like the Torah, wisdom requires a faithful response in commitment to God and the divine order, to engage in acts of justice, to care for the poor and needy and to regard life as a good gift from God.

3.3 Self-Assessment Question

- Describe the major theological questions served by the Divine order. What are the constitutive elements in older wisdom particularly in its impact on the issue of retribution?

3.4 Hermeneutical Considerations

Wisdom literature inadvertently personifies the Deity of the Christ, and as part of the experiential, if not the exponential features of the community of faith, it shaped that community and in turn was shaped by that community. In Proverbs, wisdom is an ally of God the Creator (Pr.8:22) and empowers those individuals who possessor her (Pr.4, 8). This idea is carried into the New Testament community of faith as the Apostle Paul equates Christ with both Divine wisdom and power (1 Cor. 1:22-25). For instance, although Job is seen as a historical person, his sufferings have semblance to the sufferings of the Christ on the cross, and raise the question of theodicy. Why do the righteous occasionally suffer and the wicked sometimes prosper? Why is it not the other way round as most of Wisdom literature (e.g. Psalms, Proverbs) infers? The

answer lies in the fact that a Sovereign God knows what is best for his creatures and the safest way to confer His benefits on them is through their love of Wisdom. Most African readers of the Psalms would wonder why the judgment of God is delayed on the wicked, but find in the other parts of Wisdom literature that the delay is sometimes due to God having appointed a day of destruction for those who persist in wickedness. God's sovereign power is circumscribed by His Wisdom and Love altogether!

3.4 Self-Assessment Question

What implication does the sovereignty of God have on wisdom generally?

4.0 Conclusion

It has been said that the locus of wisdom literature is in creation, not history. Creation may have occurred in time with all the wisdom associated with it, but it is primeval and non-datable time. Therefore the sapiential heritage of the Jew and the innate ability to relate to both mundane or to divine things inheres in the creative ordinances and the validity and authority of the commandments surrounding the created order. Wisdom is a divine gift from God to humans and revealed to them the will and nature of God, though considering God to be mysterious and beyond the limits of human comprehension. Wisdom's gift is maturity, longevity, reproduction, and the general enhancement of life; but these come as a result of divine blessing. God's power to bless or curse is encapsulated within His inscrutable wisdom and ineffable love for His creation. Like the larger theme of creation, wisdom is not specifically limited to the chosen people; rather, it is universal in scope. The response of human wisdom to God's address is not limited to ethics, though certainly this is an important dimension to the divine imperatives. Wisdom's response is larger, for it encompasses the totality of human experience. In Proverbs, wisdom is an ally of the God the Creator and empowers her possessors. This idea is carried into the New Testament community of faith as the Apostle Paul equates Christ with both divine Wisdom and Power.

5.0Summary

The above adopted a canonical approach in analysing wisdom and the paradigm of history, in evaluating the dialectic of history and creation, and in assessing the relationship of Wisdom literature to a canonical theology along with a critical identification of the hermeneutical import of the conclusions that scholars may draw from the entire discourse. Wisdom literature amplified the personality and wisdom of God in creation, in history and in redemption. The unit concluded on the crucial note of the typical case of the Christ as a fulfilment of the types of suffering of the righteous that is still a source of bewilderment to analysts of the Divine oracles today, particular on the issue of theodicy.

In the next unit, we shall examine the various approaches to Wisdom Literature within the broader context of Biblical theology, as a further step towards resolving the knotty issue of theodicy.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

Critically examine the issue of the universality of in the ancient Near East and Israel, particularly in its relevance to New Testament times.

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MODULE 1: WISDOM AND OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY: ISSUES AND APPROACHES

Unit 3: Approaches to Wisdom Theology

Contents

1.0 Introduction

Wisdom Literature is the poetic, personal experiences of Sages. It occupies a central place in Old Testament studies, particularly in its attempt to explain some of life's oddities and most difficult questions. Wisdom literature amplified the personality and wisdom of God in creation, in history and in redemption. Our duty in this unit is to examine the distinctive features of Wisdom Literature, particularly its various approaches. They include the genre of Wisdom Literature with particular reference to the Psalms, Proverbs and Qoheleth (i.e. Ecclesiastes), anthropology, cosmology, theodicy and hermeneutical considerations.

2.0 Objectives

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Recognize the genre of Wisdom Literature within the context of the Old Testament canon.
- Understand the various approaches extant in Wisdom Literature.

- Discuss the hermeneutical considerations of the OT concept of theodicy and its New Testament applications and relevance to the African context.

3.0 Main Body

3.1 The Genre of Wisdom Literature

Wisdom literature is generally poetic, lyrical and philosophical. Biblical Wisdom Literature has little or no concern with history, except as it concerns the role of God in everyday life. In fact, the wisdom books of the Old Testament have rightly been called poetical books, in the sense that they are not narratives. The term poetic is not exclusive to Wisdom Literature, since most of the prophetical books are also written in poetical style. There are also several poems scattered in the historical books. It has however been established that the Masoretes composed a special musical notations for Psalms, Job and Proverbs. This helps to put these books apart from the other poetical works.

There are distinctive features of Hebrew poetry that enables us recognize its genre wherever we encounter it. Firstly, Hebrew poetry has no rhyme, but is replete with alliteration in which the last word in a line corresponds to or echoes the last line in the next line. A good example is Samson's riddle:

Out of the eater came forth meat
Out of the strong came forth sweetness (Judg. 14:14).

Secondly, Hebrew poetry is also characterized by parallelism. A parallelism is a similarity between two parts of the same statement or sentence, the first section raising a certain expectation and the second completing it. Take the example of Psalm 51: 1

Have mercy on me, O God in your goodness,
In the greatness of your compassion blot out my transgression.

Thirdly, Biblical scholars identify three classical types of parallelism, namely synonymous parallelism, antithetic and synthetic parallelism. Let us briefly expatiate on this as follows:
a) In synonymous parallelism, the second section merely repeats the idea of the first with a slight variation. A good example is in the psalm we have quoted above (Psa. 51:1).
b) Antithetic parallelism presents a contrast between the two sections. They express the same thing, but by negating or contrasting it, e.g. A wise son makes his father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother (Pro. 10:1).
c) There is synthetic parallelism which represents all other parallelisms found in Hebrew poetry and which cannot be classified under the first two groups. Here parallelism is understood in the sense of expectation which is created in the first part and completed in the second e.g. Yet God knows the way that I take, and when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold (Job 23:10).

Beside these three types, some scholars include a fourth type called the "stair-case" parallelism. In this type of parallelism, the first two lines builds up to a third, e.g.:

for behold your enemies, O Lord, for behold, your enemies shall perish;
all evil doers shall be scattered.

Fourthly, it is instructive to note, however, that parallelism is not unique to Hebrew poetry, but is essentially expounded in it. Yet, parallelism is common to all ancient Semitic or Near Eastern literatures in general. The examples we have just given of Hebrew wisdom writings has a correspondence in the literature of ancient Ugarit (modern RasShamra inSyria). This correspondence is found in the famous Ugaritic epic, Baal and Anat where a messenger speaks to Baal, thus:

> Behold your enemies, O Baal; Behold, your enemies you will smite, Behold, you will vanquish your foes.

The point is that a student must be completely sensitive to the parallelismso characteristic of Hebrew and ancient Near Eastern poetry as to identify its many varieties and emphasis, and understand the frequency with which it serves as an aid to comprehension when the meaning of a line is obscure. In particular, Hebrew poetry serves as a mnemonic devise for sticking the text in mind and remembering it with ease both as a lyrical or musical note, and as a memorable remark. In addition, some Hebrew verses are arranged in an acrostic style in which every new verse begins with a successive letter of the alphabet (e.g. Psa. 34:1-2; 111, 112 and 119). A major limitation of the acrostic pattern is the tendency to restrict or limit the poet's or singer's power of expression.

In Proverbs Biblical scholars make a distinction between a saying and a proverb (*mashal*) as they appear in the Old Testament. A saying has no particular rhythm or parallelism. A proverb on other hand, is an art-form and the result of a literary artifice. The difference between them is that a saying such as is found in 1 Sam. 10:12"...And who is their father...Is Saul also among the prophets..." can also be called a proverb, but for the fact that it lacks the literary expression popularly found in a typical proverb. A typical proverb is generally marked by a play on words or contrast or some sort of literary device. This is explicitly stated in the following examples:

> Let not him who is girding on his armour boast as the one who is ungirding his armour (1 Kgs 20:11).
> As is the share of him who goes down into the battle, even so is his portion who remains with the baggage – they shall share alike (1 Sam. 30:24).

3.1 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Identify and discuss the four main types of genre in Hebrew wisdom literature in the Old Testament.

3.2 **Anthropology**

Many scholars have contended that Wisdom literature is largely a human enterprise with its focus on human nature and function. They have argued that at least this is true of early wisdom, if not also for the entire corpus of canonical Wisdom literature. Thus they submit that wisdom is either largely concerned with the individual person or with humanity, but not with God and the general themes of Israelite faith. For instance, Walter Zimmerli, early in his study of the literature of the Sages, contended that wisdom was in essence the quest to master life. Wisdom is radically anthropocentric. Walter Zimmerli later brought the dimension of the notion of creation *continua* into wisdom, which he sees as a human enterprise under the theological rubric of creation, with the role of humanity being paramount in its ultimate expression.(Perdue 1994:35).

The best way to understand wisdom is to see it as the "art of steering" life to a desired or expected destination. The objective of the wise person is 'to master life' by means of coming to a knowledge of the world (expressed in the literary form of the proverb that apprehends the data of reality) and in applying that knowledge to any and all circumstances in life (captured by the form of the admission). Wisdom therefore entails the bulk of humanity who are actively seeking out their place in God's world, and are ordering reality, and exhibiting a mastery of life. Although all of Biblical literature is replete with an affirmation of the value of life, it is in Wisdom literature that this affirmation shines out more clearly because it places its primary concern on the well-being of the human personality. Indeed, biblical humanism is characterized by confidence in the human ability to encounter life and address its challenges.

However, wisdom's earliest expression set forth a "belief in human's innate ability to get along in the world in which he finds himself, a confidence in reliance upon purely human abilities and instruments." Later stages of wisdom's development has been characterized by scepticism leading to a radical questioning of the theological and social principles espoused by wisdom, and culminated in the kind of radical pessimism we find in Ecclesiates (Qoheleth), denying any legitimate affirmation of divine retribution in human history. The scepticism resulted in an even greater passion for the essentially human in some wisdom circles.

Although some Biblical scholars have dwelt so much on the anthropocentric features of wisdom, some insisting that wisdom entails a this-worldly life full of joy, well-being and wholeness, there is a divine dimension to wisdom which elevates it to the sublime heights of purity and absence of biases. This divine wisdom legitimates social knowledge but considers its divine component as the authoritative ground for ethics and values which informs the human capacity to know and to act properly in line with the true and the good.

3.3 **Self-Assessment Exercise**

- What are the anthropocentric features of Wisdom literature? How does the quest to master life ultimately cause humans to be on the "steering wheel" of life?

3.4 **Cosmology**

A third approach to understanding wisdom focuses on the cosmos and world order. It sees cosmos as the product of an intelligent design or the wise craftsmanship of an invisible hand. This approach argues that in the wisdom traditions of the ancient Near East, creation was thought to be pre-arranged into a cosmic order and with its components of reality integrated into harmonious whole. There is an interesting resonance between Old Testament theology of wisdom and the African concepts of custodianship of creation. Both affirm that humans are stewards of creation. Land for example is one component of natural reality which has been inherited from the ancestors and which they in turn obtained from the Deity or Creator as a gift, along with the power to enjoy its usufruct. This resonates with the general belief of Ogba and Ekpeye people that creation is a continuous process of change, decay and renewal, hinged on the upright character of the inhabitants of any particular territory! There is a "moral fibre" inherent in the created order which the Creator has built into the very infrastructure of creation and which makes for accountability, harmony, and responsibility. It is self-evident that the Biblical concept of creation *continua*as propounded by T. E. Fretheimmeans that God originated creation and ensures its rejuvenation through what the Egyptians call *"ma'at*"(Ahiamadu 2011:39-87).

"Ma'at" which is synonymous with the Hebrew "*sedeqah*" or English "*righteousness*" is the act which ensures creation *continua*. It is therefore the practice of righteousness by humans in the socio-political sphere which enhances a sense of accountability, harmony and responsibility and facilitates a proper integration of social and cosmic orders. Through human acts that are in tune with the rest of creation the adverse consequences of chaos is promptly averted. An Old Testament scholar who expressed this notion earlier is B.C. Ollenburger who stated that there is a relationship between *"ma'at"* and the cosmic order, and that this link can be broadened to include not only origination and sustenance but also ultimate preservation. There is an *epigenesis*in wisdom theology that expounds the continued emergence of new forms of reality using various approaches to wisdom. Thus the approach of wisdom theology through cosmology is both Egyptian, ancient Near Eastern, and indeed an Israelite heritage that has passed into most other cultures through the biblical text.

3.4Self Assessment Question

- "Creation is an act of the Divine, but its sustenance and development is a human performance." Evaluate the theological implications of this statement.

3.5 **Theodicy**

A third approach is represented by those who point to theodicy as the major theme in wisdom. Perhaps the leading advocate for this approach has been James Crenshaw, who has examined wisdom's questioning of divine justice in many different publications. Recognizing that creation is at the heart of wisdom thought, Crenshaw noted that any discussion of the

distinctiveness of the sapiential formulation of this tradition had to take seriously the element of chaos, which posed enormous challenges in creation *ex nihilo* in the thoughts of the Sages.

Indeed, Crenshaw argued that the experience of chaos and its on-going threat in all areas of life (cosmic as well as social) led to the development of creation theology in the wisdom tradition. The appearance and purpose of creation theology was to articulate a defensible doctrine of theodicy. In presenting their understanding of creation, the question of the relationship of God to chaos in its natural, social, and moral forms prompted the sages to defend divine justice.

The threat of chaos drives humans to the quest for wisdom and the attendant consequence of attempting to resolve the contradictions of theodicy. Nevertheless, there are three fundamental areas in which this threat appears, namely, human perversion, human ignorance, and human consciousness of divine presence. With respect to human perversion the text Ecclesiastes 7:29 comes to mind: humankind alone could be held responsible for the corruption of the social order of the created world. The same is true of human ignorance. Qoheleth observes that the lack of human knowledge and the ability to perceive and ascertain divine activity means that the traditional correlation of event and time leading to a successful conclusion cannot be known (Eccl. 3:11; 7:13-14).

Finally, the consciousness of the divine presence brings humanity into the tension between the mystery of God expressed in the notion of transcendence and the immanence of God in creation. To overcome this problem, the sages introduced the idea of Wisdom as a woman who mediated between the extreme polarities of transcendence and immanence.

3.4Self-Assessment Exercise

"The existence of chaos in the created order compels the need for humans to uphold the principles of '*ma'at' 'sedeqah'* or 'righteousness' as a way of avoiding chaos and confusion in human affairs? Explain these principles and their application of human generally.

3.5 Hermeneutical Considerations

The approaches to Wisdom theology so far discussed are deeply rooted in Biblical theology and have been instrumental to a growing volume of sapiential writings on both creation and redemption. The anthropological features of creation commends a consideration of the almightiness of God as Creator, and his role as Redeemer and the primary restorer of order and decency in all of creation and nature. The acts of God are seen in human activities as they border in what we sometimes call "miracles", but more than that we see the wisdom of God and his purpose for instilling humans with a high sense of order which necessitates their desire for justice, righteousness and order in all of human affairs. When this standard drops and humans engage in corrupt practices, order and decency is quickly replaced by chaos and confusion. This cycle is observed in the Song of Deborah in the case of ancient Israel (Judg.5).

3.5 Self-Assessment Exercise

- What are the implications for a multi-cultural approach to wisdom literature are such as has been presented heretofore?

4.0 **Conclusion**

There are distinctive features of Hebrew poetry that enables us recognize its genre wherever we encounter it. Biblical scholars identify three classical types of parallelism, namely synonymous parallelism, antithetic and synthetic parallelism. These features of Hebrew poetry serves as a mnemonic devise, and makes for easy remembrance and quick recall of both the lyrical and musical notes. Although some Biblical scholars have dwelt so much on the anthropocentric features of wisdom, some insisting that wisdom entails a this-worldly life full of joy, well-being and wholeness, there is a divine dimension to wisdom with implications for attaining the sublime heights of purity and absence of biases. The threat of chaos drives humans to the quest for wisdom and the attendant consequence of attempting to resolve the contradictions of theodicy. There is a "moral fibre" inherent in the created order which the Creator has built into the very infrastructure of creation and which makes for accountability, harmony and responsibility. In presenting their understanding of creation, the Sages pondered over the relationship of *sedeqah, ma'at* or righteousness to the re-ordering of chaos in its natural, social, and moral forms. By their understanding of God and creation *continua*, the Sages were also prompted to defend the concept of divine justice or theodicy as a by-product of Divine wisdom.

5.0 **Summary**

In understanding the various approaches to Wisdom literature, we have looked into issues bordering on genre, anthropology, cosmology and theodicy. Genre has been discussed in a nutshell with emphasis on parallelism, and the various ways sayings and proverbs interface. We have also shown that humans motivate the quest for wisdom as a panacea to the confusion and chaos that often harass the human estate. Although the whole creation is surrounded by chaos, the cosmology of Egypt, the ancient Near East, and even modern day Africa shows that human actions contribute immensely to stabilizing and sustaining the level of order and decency experienced in the created order. Our focus on the Psalms, Proverbs and Qoheleth is to highlight the importance of the use of language and rhetorics to direct or "steer the ship" of wisdom along life's path of righteousness, order and justice.

In the next unit, we shall examine Imagination, Rhetoric and Social Location in Wisdom Literature.

6.0 **Tutor Marked Assignments**

Critically assess the relevance of any three approaches to Wisdom Literature to the study of Old Testament sapiential heritage from an African cultural perspective.

7.0 **Reference / Future Reading**

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MODULE 1: WISDOM AND OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY: ISSUES AND APPROACHES

Unit 4: Rhetoric and Social Location in Wisdom Literature.

Contents

1.0 Introduction

Sapiential imagination is an indispensable part of Wisdom Literature as it shows more of the personal, experiential and reflective style than any other Old Testament books. Apparently, books such as Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes) and Proverbs could be said to be clearly rooted in the international wisdom movement as parts of vigorous participation in the dialogue over meaning and purpose in human affairs. Interestingly, most of the books of Wisdom so far encountered in the study bear both a pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic imprint. Qoheleth's vocabulary strongly implies a post-exilic date for the work, and as Dearman (1997:219) have suggested, might turn out to be one of the youngest works in the OT. On the other hand the book of Psalms and Proverbs represents the literary genius of writers from different dispensations, put together by redactors who evidently were orthodox or maximalist editors.

3.1 Rhetoric **in Wisdom Literature**

Metaphors, stated or imagined were central to the nature and content of sapiential imagination. Similarly, rhetoric became so embedded in moral discourse with metaphors playing such a key role for conveying and provoking meaning. The teachings of the Sages combined elegance of form with moral content to shape a world of imagination for human dwelling. Subsequently, to understand the sages is to appreciate the aesthetic dimensions of their teachings. To cast aside and then ignore the rhetoric in the effort to discover the content often leaves the interpreter with little more than a list of moral and pious platitudes. An

important key to understanding the writings of the sages is to allow the elegance and content of their teachings to provoke the readers' imagination, to allow, at least in the moment of interpretation, entrance into their sapiential world of beauty and order.

Our understanding of this will come from instances drawn from the book of Proverbs. The literary character of sapiential teaching includes several forms: sayings, instructions, narratives, dialogues and poems. These forms are present throughout the litany of wisdom traditions and are used to shape its distinctive discourse.

In a wisdom context, *masal* is the general term for any sapiential form (1 Sam. 10:12; 24:14; Pr. 1:6; 26:7,9), while the plural , *mesalim*, refers to a collection of wisdom sayings and other forms (Pr.1:1; 10:1; 25:1). The most common form was the 'saying', or proverb (*masal),* although to the word also covers a wide variety of other literary forms, including didactic psalms (Ps 49:5; 78:2), poems (Isa.14:4-11) and parables (Eze.17:2). The etymology of the word suggests two understandings: "rule" and "comparison". In the first instance, the term points to wisdom's desire to master life. Through the embodiment of wisdom teaching, the Sage has the ability to rule or control the vicissitudes of life and to be successful.

Language in itself has power. Through the use of language and by wise teachings a proper behaviour is produced through the guidance of the Sage, based on their orientation of mastery of situations and achieving success by all means. The second understanding suggests that endemic to wisdom thinking is the view that an underlying connection exists between the things created and the human entity to which they are subjected. In the personal experience so the Sage, these subjection of nature to and control over nature by humans is one of the realities of Wisdom. The Sages saw and envisaged a reality that enabled humans to make sense of the world and that reality is in the poetic, personal experiences of sages embodied in specific types of rhetoric.

In ancient Israel these specific types of "sayings" in wisdom literature include proverbs, comparative sayings, better sayings, happy sayings (or beatitudes), numerical sayings, questions, and riddles. These are usually artistic sayings in that many of the features of Hebrew poetry are present.

The proverb, the most common form of saying, is normally a sentence of two parallel lines (synonymous, antithetical and synthetic) in the indicative mood that registers a conclusion drawn from experience (Pr.20:1,3; 8,8):

> The sluggard does not plough in the autumn;
> He will seek at harvest and have nothing (Prov. 20:4).

At times proverbs use metaphors, when the statement is made that one thing is (but also is not) another. Thus in Proverbs 14:27, 'the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life'.
In synonymous proverbs, the second line, while restating the thought of the first, usually adds something new. The addition is usually not dramatic, but adds a different twist or nuance. Thus Proverbs 21:12 comments:

> The righteous observe the house of the wicked;
> the wicked are cast down to ruin.

In the second line, "the wicked" is repeated, though what the righteous observe in the first line is extended to include, not just "the wicked" but also the fate that awaits them: they "are cast down to ruin" (see also Pro. 22:7, 8, 14).

Antithetical proverbs contrast two things. Thus Pr.14:3 contrasts the subject of the two lines:

> The talk of a fool is a rod for his back,
> but the lips of the wise will preserve them.

Also see Proverbs 14:5,6,8,9; 21:31. Synthetic proverbs are sayings where the thought of the first line is developed in a continuing movement in the second. For example, Pro.15:3 states:

> The eyes of the Lord are in every place,
> keeping watch on the evil and the good

Also see Pro. 21:6,7,21-22, 25.

Comparative or like sayings share the same features of proverbs, but they seek to find points held in common between two different objects to give insight into one or the other. In this way, they are quite similar to metaphors (e.g. Pr. 10:26; 11:22; 19:12; 20:2; 25:3, 13-14; 26:7-11). Thus:

> Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes,
> so is the sluggard to those who send him. (Pro.10:26).

A particular type of comparative sayings uses the principle of "if this, then how much more or less this". For example:

> *Sheol* and *Abaddon* lie open before the Lord,
> how much more people's heart. (Pro. 15:11).

The better sayings compare one thing to another, though with the judgment that something is to be preferred or is of more value than that with which the comparison is made. It should be noted, however, that the two things compared are always qualified by modifiers or circumstances. Thus Proverbs 15:16 reads:

> Better is a little with the fear of the Lord,
> than great treasure and trouble with it.

See Proverbs 15:17; 16:18; 19:1, 22; 21:9,19.

Happy sayings typically begin with the Hebrew word *asre*(happy), and pronounce people "happy" who, because of wise and righteous behaviour, have entered into a state of well-being and joy. For example, Proverbs 14:21 states:

> He who despises his neighbour is a sinner,
> but happy is he who is kind to the poor.

Also see Proverbs 8:32, 34; 16:20; and 29:18.

The pattern of numerical sayings consists of a title line and a list of things that have in common the feature or features of the title line. The list contains two, three, four, or even seven things that share one or more features in common. Thus Proverbs 30:21-23 reads:

> Under three things the earth trembles; under four it cannot bear up
> a slave when he becomes a king, and a fool when he is filled with food; an unloved woman when she gets a husband, and a maid when she succeeds her mistress.

3.1**Self-Assessment Question**

- What are the leading literary characteristics of Wisdom in the poetic books – Psalms, Proverbs etc?

3.2**Social Location in Wisdom Literature**

One social location for the wisdom tradition was the Israelite and Jewish family. The ethos and social structure of the Israelite family has been the object of research, although a comprehensive overview has yet to be written. Throughout much of its history, the Israelite family was largely patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal. This means that the dominant authority in the family was the father that identity and inheritance passed from the father to the sons (with the firstborn son succeeding his father as the head of the family), and that normally the wife left her own household to join that of her husband. The *bet ab*(house of the father) was the nuclear family that consisted of a husband (father), wife or wives (mother(s), unmarried children, married sons and their families, and widowed daughters. Older and/or poor family members might also be included, along with slaves and "foreigners" (sojourners who had alien status). Several families related by blood and living in close proximity to each other comprised the extended family, or clan *(mispahat).* Several clans comprised the tribe *(s'ebet* or*matteh),* while the tribes of Israel ("sons of Israel") were the largest socio-political unit (*s'ibte-y'Israel* or *bene-yisrael).* The social unit of the tribe began to fragment after the establishment of the Israelite monarchy.

The second social location for wisdom was the royal court. With the formation of the Israelite state, the institution most responsible for nurturing the wisdom tradition was the monarchy. This is suggested by a variety of sources, including the Solomonic narrative in 1 Kings 3-11 and the headings given to several collections of wisdom teachings in Proverbs. Solomon is presented as the wise king whose divine endowment with "an understanding mind" (1 Kings 3:1-15) enabled him to rule justly and well (1 Kings 3:16-28) the Davidic empire. His administrative reorganisation of the Israelite state (1 Kings 4:1-28), involvement in the creating of sapiential forms (1 Kings 4:29-34 =MT 5:9-14) building the Temple and palace (1 Kings 5-9), and great prosperity are attributed to his wisdom (1 Kings 10:1-13). This connection of Solomon with the wisdom tradition is also represented by three subscriptions in the book of Proverbs (Pr. 1:1; 10:1; 25:1) as well as the attribution to him of the books of *Qoheleth* and Songs of Solomon (Canticles) and the Wisdom of Solomon. Historically speaking, there is no basis for assuming any direct association of Solomon with these books and the superscriptions that attributed these three collections to Solomon may be no more than an indication of royal patronage of the traditions of the House of David, rather than any direct Solomonic authorship.

A third social location for the development and transmission of wisdom was the school. The wisdom tradition, more than likely, was developed to a large extent within schools designed to educate administrators, scribes, lawyers, and teachers. The evidence for the existence of

schools and specific information about their structure and programs unfortunately is rather sparse. Several sources of information include canonical and deuteron-canonical texts that explicitly and implicitly point to schools, archaeological and epigraphic data, and comparative analogies from the ancient Near East. There is a text often cited in support of the notion of the existence of institutions of learning in ancient Israel of the second century. In this text Jesus ben Sira in 200 B.C.E. issues an invitation to potential students who would take up a course of study with him:

Come to me those who are unlearned,
and lodge in my school.

Based on comparative evidence, schools in Israel may have been associated with sanctuaries in ancient Israel. Certainly, in the ancient Near East, libraries and schools were at times associated with temples. Moreover, during the post-exilic period, the place of the Temple in Jewish society continued to grow in significance, and the association of scribes with the religious teachings of the Torah seems to have grown even closer that before the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. Indeed, Ezra, the Jewish sage-scribe who also served in the Persian government as minister for Jewish affairs, was a student of the Torah who came to Jerusalem and led a major religious reform. Whether Ben Sira's school had an affiliation with the Temple is unclear, though his positive views of and teachings about Temple worship, Torah, and the high priesthood suggest a close relationship between education and the priestly system.

3.2Self-Assessment Questions

In what sense can Wisdom Literature be described as the educational programme of the ancient Israelite Royalty?

3.3Hermeneutical Considerations

When one considers the versatility with which sages recited the Writings, particularly during the Temple services it leaves one with no doubt that the Torah championed the cultivation of human memory. The features of Hebrew poetry favoured parallelisms, the use of metaphors, alliteration, riddles, sayings, and proverbs which left an indelible mark on the memory of both pupils and students. The well-trained scribe mentioned by our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 13:52 reminds one of the professional who is competent in the use of the Torah, Writings and Prophets that reproducing their statements posed little or no problem.

3.3Self-Assessment Question

Discuss Hebrew poetry and its unique features and how it helps us enrich our study of Wisdom Literature.

4.0Conclusion

Sapiential imagination is an indispensable part of Wisdom Literature as it shows more of the personal, experiential and reflective style than any other Old Testament books. Simply put, observation and experience are tools of the human intellect which remained an integral part of the wisdom movement both in ancient Egypt, ancient Israel and the ancient Near East. It is also the primary reason for the close affinity and accommodating relationship between the wisdom movement and ancient Israelite culture. The specific types of "sayings" in wisdom literature include proverbs, comparative sayings, better sayings, happy sayings (or beatitudes), numerical sayings, questions, and riddles. These are usually artistic sayings in that many of the features of Hebrew poetry are present. The social location for the wisdom tradition included the Israelite and Jewish family, the royal court, and the school all of which served as the nucleus for the creation and transmission of culture and for education in the various professions necessary for social life at the national level.

5.0 Summary

This unit examined the salient features of Hebrew wisdom literature, particularly as imagination, observation and experience are brought into sharp focus. We also highlighted the role of rhetoric and of social location in intensifying the rigours of wisdom among pupils who are trained to become professionals manning the different spheres of ancient Israelite national life.

The next unit will study the impact of social location on moral discipline.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

Define rhetoric, and identify and summarize the three major social locations of Wisdom Literature.

7.0References / Future Reading

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MODULE 1: WISDOM AND OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY: ISSUES AND APPROACHES

Unit 5: Social Location and Moral Discipline

Contents

8.0 Introduction

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for Wisdom is *hokma h*and in the New Testament, it is always the Greek *Sapere.* Wisdom is simply defined as a right application of knowledge, and the ability to make disciplined and right choices. Several Old Testament personalities, both male and female – were s at one point or another described as being wise –David, Solomon, the woman of Tekoa, Abigail and more. Wisdom is an important part of the Hebrew biblical canon. Nearly a third of it has been devoted to an understanding of, interaction with and reflections on Wisdom.

In this unit we shall discuss the social contexts in which Israelite morality is shaped. We have made an extensive allusion to these in the concluding parts of the preceding section. What remains is for us to emphasize how this social institution – temple, family and school – helps in shaping the moral discourse of the Kingdom. We shall also assess the role of women in the wisdom traditions of ancient Israel, and then attempt a critical examination of the place of wisdom in the sustenance of an Israelite empire during the era of the united monarchy when Saul, David and Solomon reigned (i.e. circ.s 1040 – 922 BCE).

2.0 Objectives

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Understand the right application of knowledge in the Old Testament.
- Discover the different features of Wisdom in the lives of Solomon, Abigail, and others.
- Appreciate the privileged positions occupied by home schools in the sapiential evolution of the ancient Israelite "empire".
- Know the heart and essence of Wisdom literature in moral discourse.

3.0 Main Body

3.1 The Social Setting of Moral Discourse

As part of an on-going discussion about the social context in which Israelite sapiential traditions were shaped and nurtured, it is instructive to note the following points:

A major social location for shaping ancient Israelite wisdom traditions was the Jewish family. The *bet ab*(house of the father) was the nuclear family that consisted of a husband (father), wife or wives (mother(s), unmarried children, married sons and their families, and widowed daughters. Older and/or poor family members might also be included, along with slaves and "foreigners" (sojourners who had alien status). Several families related by blood and living in close proximity to each other comprised the extended family, or clan *(mispahat).*This means that the dominant authority in the family was the father: that identity and inheritance passed from the father to the sons (with the firstborn son succeeding his father as the head of the family), and that normally the wife left her own household to join that of her husband. Throughout much of its history, the Israelite family was largely patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal. The ethos and social structure of the Israelite family has been the object of research, and a comprehensive overview has been written in Biblical scholarship.

The second social location for wisdom was the royal court. With the formation of the Israelite state, the institution most responsible for nurturing the wisdom tradition was the monarchy. This is suggested by a variety of sources, including the Solomonic narrative in 1 Kings 3-11 and the headings given to several collections of wisdom teachings in Proverbs. Solomon is presented as the wise king whose divine endowment with "an understanding mind" (1 Kings 3:1-15) enabled him to rule justly and well (1 Kings 3:16-28) the Davidic empire. His administrative reorganisation of the Israelite state (1 Kings 4:1-28), involvement in the creating of sapiential forms (1 Kings 4:29-34 =MT 5:9-14) building the Temple and palace (1 Kings 5-9), and great prosperity are attributed to his wisdom (1 Kings 10:1-13). This connection of Solomon with the wisdom tradition is also represented by three subscriptions in the book of Proverbs (Pr. 1:1; 10:1; 25:1) as well as the attribution to him of the books of *Qoheleth* and Songs of Solomon (Canticles) and the Wisdom of Solomon. Historically

speaking, there is no basis for assuming any direct association of Solomon with these books, and the superscriptions that attributed these three collections to Solomon may be no more than an indication of royal patronage of the traditions of the House of David, rather than any direct Solomonic authorship.

A third social location for the development and transmission of wisdom was the public school. The wisdom tradition, more than likely, was developed to a large extent within schools designed to educate administrators, scribes, lawyers, and teachers. The evidence for the existence of schools and specific information about their structure and programs unfortunately is rather sparse. Several sources of information include canonical and deuteron-canonical texts that explicitly and implicitly point to schools, archaeological and epigraphic data, and comparative analogies from the ancient Near East. There is a text often cited in support of the notion of the existence of institutions of learning in ancient Israel of the second century. In this text Jesus ben Sira in 200 B.C.E. issues an invitation to potential students who would take up a course of study with him:

"Come to me those who are unlearned, and lodge in my school".

Based on comparative evidence, public schools in ancient Israel may have been associated with sanctuaries or Temples during the hey-days of the monarchy. Certainly, in the ancient Near East, libraries and schools were at times associated with temples. Moreover, during the post-exilic period, the place of the Temple in Jewish society continued to grow in significance, and the association of scribes with the religious teachings of the Torah seems to have grown even closer than before the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. Indeed, Ezra, the Jewish sage-scribe who also served in the Persian government as minister for Jewish affairs, was a student of the Torah who came to Jerusalem and led a major religious reform. Whether Ben Sira's school had an affiliation with the Temple is unclear, though his positive views of and teachings about Temple worship, Torah, and the high priesthood suggest a close relationship between education and the priestly system.

3.1 Self-Assessment Question

- The term "Wisdom" is a multidimensional word. Using any Biblical character (s) of your choice, critically evaluate this statement.

3.2 Covenant Loyalty in familial instructions

In wisdom literature the religious concept of "wisdom" is worked out through social regulations and priestly instructions including the Decalogue, the covenant code, the deuteronomistic code and the priestly code. The cultural and religious influence of women in a male-dominated society such as in ancient Israel is too difficult to discern. However, in this subsection, we consider the role of women as central to the evolution of Israelite sapiental traditions. Let us spend the next few paragraphs illustrating this example. A close look at the

cultural impact of patriarchy on women generally reveals the social role they fulfilled in ancient Israel. Women played significant and essential roles in the record of ancient Israel and were some of the best known actors in the Biblical wisdom story whether we look at it economically as illustrated in the example of Abigail (1 Sam. 25), or militarily as in the case of Deborah (Judg.4), or even politically as in the case of the woman of Tekoa (2 Sam. 14). Culturally, the wisdom tradition narrates the story of the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1-11). The whole narrative revealed that as the new generation were about to enter into the Promised Land, women were not to be deprived of their rightful inheritance within the community. Of course, women who insisted on sharing in the inheritance rights to land in particular had to stay married within their father's ancestral clan.

Another example of women's role in the family can be seen in 2 Kings 8:1-6, where it is suggested that women acted wisely and so could be trusted with inheritance. In the above text, Elisha told a woman – a widow with a son who was still a minor – to leave the country because of an impending seven-year famine. She left her family and when she returned at the end of the period, she appealed to the king who ordered that her land be restored along with all the produce which accrued from it during the years when she was absent. The Deuteronomist editor was careful to observe that she came with her now grown son to make this special appeal. In essence she acted with great understanding and wisdom; otherwise the heritage would be lost forever. In a male dominated society the presence of a grown up male child was a great asset to a widow or widower.

Besides, women also instructed children in their homes in line with the Torah's Covenant requirements for discipline and decorum in the people's approach to Yahweh. Women were never excluded or exempted from participating fully in eating the sacrificial mean along with other members of the family (Deut. 12:12; 14:26). Their commitment to the instructional development of their children was as important as their involvement in the domestic duty and participation in the covenant meal. In Jeremiah (7:17-18; 44:15-19) women were accused of perverting wisdom by misusing the sacrificial meal in not, first of all, offering it to Yahweh instead of to the so called "queen of heaven". This behaviour originated with the women but brought very serious indictment of the impure religious and cultural behaviour of both men and women for their role in divination, necromancy, sorcery, spiritism and witchcraft (Dt. 18:10-11; 2 Kgs 21:6; Lev. 19:26, 31).

The critical role women played in an evolving sapiential tradition of the ancient nation included accompanying their male counterparts in religious ceremonies. By this they also implicitly acknowledged Yahweh's ownership of all things, including the land. Therefore they brought their own part of the offerings to the priests who in return provided them with tools for spiritual instructions necessary for the cultivation of Wisdom at the family level. Consequently, Yahweh – the Source, Sustainer and Severer of life – held both men and women responsible for fulfilling the choices necessary for making the whole nation of Israel wise. Indeed, only to the extent that men and women complied with the divine requirements of wisdom and prudence in the matters of daily living both in the home, in the Temple and in

the royal courts would Yahweh exalt his people to the high points where they are considered the wisest species of human beings on planet earth (Deut. 4:6).

As we consider the issue of social location and moral discourse, we cannot overemphasize the point that men built their houses, but wisdom demanded that women made these houses into homes (Pr.14:1-2).Only in homes where there was harmony and love could there be the kind of an enabling environment within which to pass on familial instructions to the younger generation. Even in modern times Jewish children under the age of five-to-six years were generally to be instructed in their homes by their parents, until they get to the age of seven-to-ten when they are now transferred to the "sycamore tree shade schools" where local rabbis engaged the children in catechismal schools. The objective of each catechetical instruction is to sensitize the memory of the young teenagers to the Torah's special commands and rules, as embodied especially in the Decalogue and expressed in regular attendance at the three annual festivals of the ancient Israelites – Passover, Weeks and Tabernacles.

3.2 Self-Assessment Question

- Wisdom is not an exclusive prerogative of Sages. Critically evaluate this statement in the light of wisdom traditions of the home-school in ancient Israel.

3.3 The Israelite "Empire": in Defence of Wisdom

For a fleeting period of time in the millennia of human experience and civilization in the ancient Near East, the narrow strip of land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea was united under a centralized government and controlled by indigenous rulers. With its core settlements in the hill country of Ephraim and Judah, the kingdom of ancient Israel spread out northward into Galilee, westward to the coast, and eastward along the Transjordan plateau. These territories constituted the domain of the Davidic Monarchy, which was super-imposed over the tribal organization that had held sway over the portion of the Levant during the several hundred years preceding David's accession to kingship around 1000 B.C.E.

The fragility of such a unified governing system in the pre-modern Levant is apparent from the minute place it occupied in the register of political configurations that rose and fell in the Fertile Crescent. The tenuousness of such a system is also abundantly clear from the major, virtually the only, source for our knowledge of its existence – the Hebrew Bible. While the historical books of the Bible record the difficulty with which the Davidic dynasty was established and sustained in its rule over the twelve tribes and describes the agony that marked its breakdown into the tiny southern Kingdom of Judah after only one other monarch, David's son Solomon, had occupied the Davidic throne, it is in Wisdom Literature that we understand the internal, personal and experiential woes of the actors.

The ancient era of King Solomon (960-922 BCE**)** was depicted as the "glorious" days of the United Monarchy because of the important choices the king had to make and the important

projects he had to implement in order to bring Yahweh worship to the centrality of ancient Israel's national life. Thus a cursory look at 1 Kings 3 – 11 demonstrates the reason why most of Wisdom Literature – some Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Songs of Solomon – were patently ascribed to King Solomon – considered the wisest of all the kings of Israel and Judah. The wisdom theme predominates in these passages, and highlights the international dealings and diplomacy of Solomon which constituted the central and consistent issues of the Solomonic narrative. In other words, there is an intrinsic connection between wisdom and international diplomacy.

Even the long central segment, chapters 5-9, which describes the construction and dedication of the Jerusalem temple-palace complex, does not have an internal, Israelite purview as its sole focus. The international propaganda significance of the buildings is clear. Indeed, the supranational scope of the Jerusalem project is communicated and prefigured in the opening episode of the Solomonic narratives, 1 Kings 3:4-14. In this text God appears to Solomon in a dream and grants him wisdom, which he immediately demonstrates in the tale of the two harlots and which he then uses in his decision to build the temple.

As has already been mentioned previously, wisdom in the biblical world had clear international connections. Its material, derived from the cultural systems of common sense and everyday life experiences of sages. It was comprehensible to Egyptians, Syrians, and Israelites alike. It thus could rise above the particular and constitute a universally understood mode of discourse, at least within the boundaries of a larger shared cultural world such as the ancient Near East. Solomon achieved his reputation as a master of wisdom by virtue of his skill in maintaining authority over an international court as well as Israelite leaders without the use of force. Sages all over the world left their contemplations and came to tap into the Wisdom of Solomon (1 Kings 10), though they had increasing reasons to resist Solomon's influence. Yet Solomon sustained their submission to the Davidic throne and to divine wisdom with minimum effort, so far as can be discerned from the biblical information while using the military resources available to him.

Remarkably enough, the narrative in 1 Kings 3 forms the basis for authenticating Solomon's identification with Wisdom Literature in parts and as a whole. It is that text that described Solomon's dream at Gibeon in which God praised Solomon for not asking for "riches or the life of your enemies". Instead, Solomon at the outset of his reign recognized that, given the immensity of his realm, he could only be successful through the exercise of great diplomatic and wise skills. So he asks God for a "wise and discerning heart" to be able to govern so great a people. Ironically, God's response not only praises Solomon for requesting neither wealth nor military might; it also grants him the former and not the latter, along with the discerning mind that Solomon had specifically asked for. Solomon's individuality, what he sought for himself, thus lay in his wisdom and not in his wealth, according to the biblical narrative

Indeed, in language reminiscent of the evaluation of Moses at the end of Deuteronomy, where Moses' mighty deeds and his unique relationship to God are heralded thus: "and there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses" (Deut. 34:10), Solomon is said to have possessed "a wise and discerning mind" such that no one like him had existed before him nor would anyone like him arise after him. Re-evaluating Solomon means reasserting this unique dimension of Solomonic individuality and recognizing as does the biblical author that the life, honour and riches which characterized his reign were not of his choosing, for what he chose most passionately was Wisdom, hence in Wisdom Literature king Solomon remains a patron saint to all of its writings.

Moreover, by means of Wisdom the Davidic dynasty survived all the troubles, turmoil and trials of the period of both United Monarchy and the period when only Judah and Benjamin remained on the side of David, while the rest of the ten tribes went their own way to form a separate kingdom. And this status quo remained until the days of the Babylonian captivity, more than 120 years after the Northern Kingdom was removed by the Assyrians into captivity.

3.3 Self-Assessment Questions

- Show how the Wisdom of Solomon narrated by the Deuteronomist in the book of 1 Kings 3-11 got worked out in the poetic, personal and experiential Wisdom Literature. Give helpful examples.

3.4 Hermeneutical Considerations

The nature of sapiential heritage in Africa, namely the so-called African oral literature or orature has been receiving scholarly attention recently. Not only is much of native African literature generally oral and unwritten, but have also suffered from inertia as a result of disuse, abuse or even downright denigration. At present they are considered the ethos of an animistic religion and culture. It is my submission that there is embedded in African communities such sapiential endowments which if harnessed could yield the ethos of, and provide a moral discourse for environmental and ecological integrity in Nigeria. Our discussion so far critically assessed the rich sapiential and ethical traditions of ancient Israel during the glorious days of the united monarchy, and the enabling environment provided by a sound sapiential and moral ethos for the massive social, political, economic and cultural development of the new nation. By way of inter-contextual and inter-textual dialogue and hermeneutic, African heritage of wisdom and morality could go a long way in facilitating our understanding and application of Semitic social and ethical norms as transmitted through the Scriptures. Modern day Africa have lots to learn from ancient Israelite heritages.

3.4Self Assessment Question

- What indices best fits an understanding and application of Wisdom within the African sapiential environment

4.0 Conclusion

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for Wisdom is *hokma h*and in the New Testament, it is always the Greek *Sapere.* Wisdom is simply defined as a right application of knowledge, and the ability to make disciplined and right choices. Women played significant and essential roles in the record of ancient Israel and were some of the best known actors in the Biblical wisdom story whether we look at it economically as illustrated in the example of Abigail (1 Sam. 25), or militarily as in the case of Deborah (Judg.4), or even politically as in the case of the woman of Tekoa (2 Sam. 14).While the historical books of the Bible record the difficulty with which the Davidic dynasty was established and sustained, it is in Wisdom Literature that we understand the internal, personal and experiential woes of the actors. The wisdom theme predominates in the Solomon narratives and highlights the international dealings and diplomacy which constituted the central and consistent issues of the ancient era of king Solomon. In other words, there is an intrinsic connection between international diplomacy and wisdom. By way of hermeneutics, the development of African heritage of wisdom and morality could go a long way in enhancing a healthy development of sound social and ethical norms that will sustain the growth of trade, industry and true religion at both local and international levels. Modern day Africa have lots to learn from ancient Israelite heritages.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, we surveyed the theological concept of wisdom and its practical meaning in the social contexts of family, royal court and Temple. Instructively, parents were also trainers of their children in the moral discourse of ancient Israel and when they left the home school children were sent to local rabbis to learn the recitals and catechism. We discovered that the longevity which attended the Davidic dynasty in particular and ancient Israelite "empire" when compared to some of their neighbouring states, were essentially the result of careful and diligent application of knowledge in the conduct of both national and international affairs.

Next unit, which is the beginning of a new Module (Module 2: The Theology of Wisdom Literature) will discuss the gift of wisdom as an endowment from God.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Outline the main features of the social locations and moral discourse of sages in their contemplation of the wisdom traditions of ancient Israelites. How can the African sapiential heritage be aligned with ancient Israelite's for social development?

7.0 References / Future Readings

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MODULE 2: THE THEOLOGY OF WISDOM LITERATURE

Unit 1: Theology and Moral Discourse in Proverbs

Unit 2: Theodicy and the Sovereignty of God in Job.

Unit 3: Cosmology and Anthropology in the Testament of Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes).

Unit 4: Theology of Praise and Prayers in the book of Psalm.

Unit 5: Relationship and Redemption in the Songs of Solomon.

Unit 1: Theology and Moral Discourse in Proverbs

Contents

1.0 Introduction

This unit is the beginning of Module 2 in our study of Wisdom Literature. The theme of the module is Theology and Moral Discourse in Proverbs. This module is a follow-up of Module 1 which concentrated on the Issues and Approaches to Wisdom in Old Testament Theology. Module 2 shows how the various issues and approaches are worked out in the canonical books of the Old Testament, including Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Psalms and Songs of Solomon. We use a multidiscipline approach in critically evaluating each of the books in the light of theology and moral discourse. Wisdom is linked to Yahweh, the God who had chosen and redeemed Israel. Underlying this understanding of wisdom is the assumption that God created

andmaintains an orderly universe. God's orders are embedded in its fabric and, if observed, are one way of revealing God's will.

2.0 Objective

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand why wisdom is linked to Yahweh, the God of Israel.
- Identify the use of figurative language in Proverbs and in Wisdom generally.
- Appreciate the worth and nature of wisdom.
- Appreciate the role of sages in moulding the cultural lives of the Hebrew.
- Understand the scientific and practical approach of Proverbs to life.

3.0 Main Body

3.1 Creation and Moral Discourse

The book of Proverbs makes no pretension at the fact that it too is a theistic, monotheistic treatise in its view of creation. God by wisdom made the heavens and the earth, and by His understanding upholds the universe by this same creative power. The link between creation and wisdom is such a close one that the book states clearly that the same power that originates and sustains life in the world is available to those who incorporate within their lives the teachings of the sage. In line with this Proverbs hints at the "tree of life" (Pr. 3:18; 11:30; 13:12) and recalls the joyful bliss of the Garden of Eden.

Its primary emphasis is the fact that the one who finds wisdom will be greatly blessed and if possible attains the original purpose of God in creation, which is to bring humanity into fellowship with Divinity. Wisdom is the foundation upon which God's creation stands. Divine wisdom continues to bring stability to the on-going cosmic order. In the embrace of Wisdom (i.e. in the knowledge and actualization of sapiential teaching), the student embodies the same cosmic power of life and knowledge that God used in creating and governing the universe.

A second emphasis of Wisdom is "service and sacrifice" (Pr.3:9-12). It is only as humanity yields a self-giving service to God and to fellowmen, that we fulfil the ultimate divine purpose of becoming divine channels for impacting nature and creation in positive ways. Moreover, learning from Wisdom and applying understanding are both basic to the good life envisaged by sages and philosophers. In Proverbs as in real life "practice makes perfect" and better still as the English say "examples are better than precepts".

An African proverb says that "ignorance breeds tears while learning wipes it". The purpose of the sages is to give the young pupils practical application of wisdom to life's challenges so as to enhance right living and increase longevity.

For instance, in Prov. 3:19-20 the writer uses a verb for creation "divide" (*baqa*)"by means of his knowledge the primeval deep (*tehomot)* was divided. This verb has its origins in the mythological image of the divine warrior *Marduk* "splitting open" the chaos monster, *Tiamat*.

Indeed, *Marduk*, having slain her in combat, splits her in half (ANET, 67) and uses her carcass in creating the universe. Prior to the battle, the power of magical incantation and the curse, forms of ancient wisdom especially in Mesopotamia, was used in the mastery of the dragon (ANET 64).*Tehom*or *tehomot* (a plural of majesty) as the chaos monster is reflected in several poetic texts in the Hebrew Bible, including the well-known depiction of the creator's defeat of the dragon in Psalm 74 (especially vv.12-15; cf. Gen.49:25; Deut.33:13; Ps. 77:17; and Hab.3:8-10).

Yahweh's dividing of the sea following the liberation of the Israelites from the Egyptian sojourn (Ex.14:16; Neh.9:11; Ps.78:13) alludes to this mythological battle. Prince Yam, the Canaanite god of the sea and the personification of chaos, was identified with the sea that is crossed in Isaiah 51:9-11. Yet there is only a faint echo of this battle between the creator and the chaos monster in Proverbs 3:19-20. Finally, one act of the governance of creation is mentioned in Proverbs 3:19-20: "The skies continue to drip their dew." God is the one who, by means of divine wisdom, provides the cosmos with life-sustaining moisture (cf. Job 28:25-26; 36:27-28;38:28, 37; Ps. 78:23). In the Yahwist narrative, the first act of creation is a "mist," arising from the earth to moisten the dry land (Gen.2:6).

The writer contrasts the constructive ways of wisdom with the destructive path of violence (1:11-18), and immorality (2:16-18). The adulteress with her seductive words tries to lure a young man to her house and ultimately to death (chap. 5,7). The simple are described as wayward, while fools are described as hating knowledge and loving complacency, and mockers as ignoring all God's advice and spurning His rebuke (1:22-30; cf. 21: 24; 9:7-9; 22:10; 29:8; 13:1; 15:12). It is almost axiomatic that folly, mockery, and waywardness lead inevitably to wickedness and onwards to doom and destruction.

Sexual immorality is an antithesis of wisdom (Pr.5,7, 9). One wonders at the great emphasis laid on sexual immorality, violence and indolence in the book of Proverbs. The explanation is that being a book of wisdom, the book uses illustrations of certain vices to point out what wisdom definitely is not. Some biblical scholars however do not see sexual immorality as the antithesis of wisdom. Instead, it is intemperance in eating and drinking that is the antithesis of wisdom; sexual immorality according to this view is the product of intemperance. He whose eating and drinking habits are under self-control may never be caught in the sin of adultery or sexual immorality. A prince who is kind to the needy will always be sure of a large following, unlike the cruel and oppressive king who will end up deserted. Righteousness – a by-product of wisdom and the fear of the Lord (Pr. 14:34) – is what exalts a nation. Thus wisdom is generally extolled as a virtue throughout the book of Proverbs and wickedness is denounced as a vice that is repugnant to good taste.

3.1 Self-**Assessment Question**

- Wisdom is the guide to every creative effort, both human and divine. Discuss.

3.2 Holiness and Wisdom

We began our list of sages with some male and female examples like David, Abigail, the widow of Tekoa, and Solomon to name a few. The story of David and Abigail (1 Sam. 25) is a well-known one. In that story, the wisdom of Abigail consisted simply in her ability to evaluate a situation and choose the course of action that is life sustaining rather than destructive. In the opinion of Waldemar Janzen, Abigail's action in saving her family from imminent danger springs from an innate good sense which is available to humans anywhere. However, good sense is not necessarily borne out of an outstanding intellectual giftedness, but is the product of a good use of ordinary intelligence and the profitable application of communal and personal experience.

Therefore, the short proverbs of Proverbs 1 – 9 are styled as addresses from the older generation to the younger, from the wise teacher to "my son." This stands in some sharp contrast to the priestly instructions. They, too, apply at times to Israelites in general, as for example, when they distinguish between clean and unclean foods. More frequently, however, they instruct a certain group or individual: high priest, priests and Levites, lepers, women who have given birth, those who offer certain sacrifices. The wider appeal of wisdom to all hearers is related to the general openness of the status of the wise man or woman, as compared with the strictly defined hereditary lines of priests and Levites. Of course, certain well-defined ranks among those wise who stood in the king's service must also be assumed, although the particulars are no longer clear to us.

A more striking difference can be seen between the priestly focus on the act and the wisdom focus on character. Abigail is characterized as "a woman of good understanding" (Pr. 25:3), whereas her husband Nabal is shown up for his name as someone with an in-bred folly. Wisdom and foolishness are seen as dimensions of character more than labels of individual actions. Hans Heinrich Schmid has pointed out a contrast, in this respect, between Israelite and general ancient Near Eastern wisdom. In the latter, individual acts, wise or foolish, contribute to the balance and imbalance of the universe. In Israel, the universe is in God's keeping, whereas individual wise or foolish actions gain their significance as they shape human character.

In keeping with this the teachers of Proverbs 1 – 9 make a fervent appeal for "conversion" to wisdom and rejection of folly, for making a life choice when confronted by these two ways. Indeed, the concept of righteousness in Africa has to do with making the right choices between these two opposing moral ends! Apparently, an individual's misjudgement on the part of a person considered wise would not immediately undo that status of a right-choosing (righteous) one. On the other hand, a person's holiness / cleanness always pertain to each given moment. It could be undone by a contaminating act and restored by appropriate measures. Israel had persons reputed as wise men and women, but none known as holy men and women in the ritual

sense of for instance Hinduism. In spite of these differences, the priestly and the wisdom paradigm share one important feature according to Waldemar Janzen:Both appeal to every Israelite, inviting him or her to the quest for holiness and for wisdom, respectively.

3.2 Self-Assessment Question

- Wisdom produces flexible and good character, but the ritual laws administered by the priests and Levites shapes only rigid and religious character devoid of human passion. Discuss.

3.3 Popular, or Folk, Wisdom

The village setting was the birthplace of Israel's popular ethos (or folk wisdom) and the primary channel for its transmission. Its literary stylization and fixation in collections like those of Proverbs (10:1ff)must be attributed to a further phase – probably to more formally trained scribes at the royal court and in the Temple. In this process, the scribes added insights from their own courtly tradition with its strong international flavour. If Erhard Gerstenberger and Hans Walter Wolff are right in their assessment, this popular ethos was also the soil from which sprang many of Israel's laws, cultic instructions, and prophetic impulses. The village circle was certainly the school of the common person.

What comparison exists between the horse-whip, donkey halter, and a rod for the back of fools? See the near opposite instruction contained in two close verses (26:4-5). Moreover, verses 12 – 13 speak variously of the hope of the fool only if the fool realizes that he indeed is a fool. Note also that the lazy attitude of folding hands is highlighted (vs.15-16). Quarrels are traced to a cause which is gossip. Similarly, malice is concealed by deception (vs. 22, 24-26). Pits once dug need to get covered over with a lid to avoid slips (vs. 27-28). These are examples of popular or folk wisdom found both in the Deuteronomistic, Priestly, Prophetic and the Wisdom corpus. In the first of the concluding chapters of the book of Proverbs, the message comes out clearly that learning of God's wisdom is a lifelong task and never ending task.

For instance, in the African sapiential heritage and oratureit is impossible for humans to know the ascent to and descent from heaven, to scoop water with a basket and even more difficult to wrap water in a linen. There are so many things impossible to know and impossible to do which only by a continual quest can humans attain to the pathway of self-fulfilment (Pr.25:2). Thus the book of Proverbs have taught wisdom, knowledge, understanding, prudence, and self-control, but it does not lay claim to having exhausted all possible knowledge or wisdom on earth to begin with. There is always room for fresh discoveries of knowledge and wisdom. Be that as it may, wisdom, knowledge, understanding, prudence, self-control, righteousness and their contrary vices have certain definable distinctive to which nothing could be added and from which nothing could be removed. Wisdom recognizes the differences between the two ways – righteousness and wickedness – and that is what makes wisdom the principal acquisition.

As far as Proverbs is concerned this is the root of all knowledge. To be wise is to "fear the Lord", and be attentive to parental or folk wisdom. The numerical proverbs also point in the direction of folk wisdom which necessitates caution in individual actions at all times (Pro. 30:10-14; 15-16; 17-19; 20-23; 24-28). As part of folk wisdom, the description of the attributes of the wife of noble character is a fitting epilogue to the whole book, and demonstrates the role of women in familial instructions.

3.3Self Assessment Question

- In which ways does folk wisdom influence socialization and child-rearing processes among the ancient Israelites and in modern day ethnic groups in Nigeria?

3.4 Its Theological and Historical Roots

The preceding ethos drew much from common ancient Near Eastern lore, but the imprint of Yahwist faith is also unmistakeable. It was the widespread assumption of earlier critical scholarship that an older, international and non-theological wisdom (represented in Prov. 10:1ff) was succeeded by a later, theological phase (evidenced in Proverbs 1-9). Against this, Gerhard von Rad has argued convincingly that the older wisdom of Proverbs, far from being a separate non theological stream distinct from Israel's historical faith, rested securely in a context where the main lines of historical faith could still be taken for granted. Hence the wisdom teachers could devote themselves to the uncharted areas of daily life that lay between the highways of historical faith.

More than that, von Rad has drawn attention to three kinds of explicit theological statements in the older sections of Proverbs: (1) Proverbs with the central theme that God tests the heart (e.g. Pr. 16:2; 17:3; 21:2; 24:12) (2) Proverbs dealing with God's approval or disapproval of specific behaviour or attributes (e.g. Prov. 11:1, 20; 15:8,9,26; 16:5,7; 17:15; 20:10, 23; 21:3; 22:12), some corresponding closely to laws of Yahweh. (3) Most telling theologically is a group of proverbs speaking of limitations of human possibilities through God's autonomous reign (e.g. Pro. 16:1,2,9; 19:14, 21; 20:24; 21:2, 30f; cf. Also 16:33; 21:1; 25:2; 29:26). This must not be misunderstood as fatalism, the wise move confidently, as we have noted, but within the limits of God's sovereignty.

Generally, these proverbs represent a great and distilled wisdom. Its precepts are timeless principles that cut across lands and cultures and its maxim are true for all times.

Hans Heinrich Schmid also affirms the theological nature of wisdom in the book of Proverbs, making the further point that ancient Near Eastern wisdom generally was also theological, rather than pragmatiic only. Furthermore, he counters the frequent claim that wisdom is non-historical. It is certainly not mythical, in the ancient Near Eastern sense, nor a collection of ever-valid truths in a Greek philosophical sense. In fact, wisdom is intensely concerned with the right time and context. Schmid summarizes the relationships of proverbs to history as a three-step process: (1) Very concrete (historical) experiences are observed and sifted. (2) These

are handed down from father to son, teacher to student, in poetic and generalised formulations (proverbs) that in themselves seem timeless and universal. (3) They are, however, meant to be received in a particular historical situation and applied judiciously to it, to see whether they can become new historical reality at this new time and in this new place. Schmid observes that the temptation is to "freeze" wisdom on the second level and allow individual formulations to become context- less absolutes.

3.4Self Assessment Questions

- Describe the historical and theological features of Proverbs. Is there a way to discern a human skill through the look of his / her face?

3.5 Hermeneutical Considerations

Proverbs are short, pithy and witty sayings intended to convey truth to the ordinary mind in a quick, illustrative and often familiar tone. They instil the mind with discipline, prudence, discernment and wisdom. When its teachings are adopted and its precepts imbibed, then good and efficient character is the result. Wisdom is conditioned by obedience to and acceptance of divine instructions. This condition is fulfilled when the ears are turned to wisdom and the heart is applied to understanding. By means of such obedience to God's word there flows divine guidance, direction and salvation. The promises of God to those who persevere in the path of discipline and good character are that Wisdom's spirit is poured out upon them. Sometimes, the path may be lined up with all forms of seduction and enticements, but once wisdom has been imparted to and imbibed by humans, particularly in their inward parts, it becomes easy to escape from folly's allurements.

Wisdom once acquired has to be guarded and the sustenance of wise conduct would always be the result of avoidance of the evil ways and a consistent warm embrace of wisdom's ways of self-discipline, perseverance and obedience to divine instruction. When we pay attention to divine instruction we cultivate the inner powers of discernment and discretion. Similarly, when we listen with rapt attention to godly instruction we gain knowledge and understanding. This is particularly true of the moral virtues of chastity and purity. Regardless of how sugar-coated the words of an adulterous woman will appear, it can never allure the wise and godly child who has learned from his own parents to "keep", "store", "guard" and "bind" himself to the words of God taught and given as "commandments" , "instructions" etc. Wisdom is spoken of as high in quality (Pr.8:1-9), precious (vs. 10-14), authoritative (vs 15-21), eternal (vs. 22-26), creative (vs.27-31), and demanding (vs. 29-36 cf. Mt. 13:44-46).

It is important to bring various Nigerian sapiential heritages into dialogue with one another but more importantly with the Biblical text in general and Wisdom Literature in particular in the on-going quest for national integration, social development, educational renaissance, and economic emancipation. The preservation of creation and conservation of natural resources is the primary goal of sapiential heritage in Africa. There is enough intellectual and philosophical resources embodied in African *orature* to the restoration of national integrity in all spheres of life.

3.5 Self-Assessment Question

- How would you relate the concept of divine wisdom in the Old Testament to the practical life of both young and old in contemporary African communities? Are there practical examples of wisdom in the New Testament?

4.0 Conclusion

The link between creation and wisdom is such a close one that the book states clearly that the same power that originates and sustains life in the world is available to those who incorporate within their lives the teachings of the sage. However, good creative sense is not necessarily borne out of an outstanding intellectual giftedness, but is the product of a good use of ordinary intelligence and the profitable application of communal and personal experience. These are sometimes referred to as popular or folk wisdom and are found in the Torah as well as in the Writings. However, it is in the latter that the message comes out clearly that learning of God's wisdom is a never ending and lifelong task. It is impossible to know the ascent to and descent from heavenor as some African would say, even more difficult to "wrap water in linen". Therefore a continual quest for wisdom is a divine assignment for all humans, and the only pathway to self-discovery and fulfilment is a continual quest for it (Pr.25:2). Generally, Proverbs represent a great and distilled wisdom from both a divine and human perspective. Its precepts are timeless principles that cut across lands and cultures and its maxim are true for all times. When we pay attention to divine instruction we cultivate the inner powers of discernment and discretion, and that is wisdom. Similarly, when we listen with rapt attention to godly instruction we gain knowledge and understanding, and that also is wisdom.

5.0 Summary

So far, we critically assessed the role of wisdom in creation and moral discernment and have also illustrated the inexorable link between creation and holiness in the sense of ritual purity. Moreover, wisdom is practically associated with ordinary everyday life, even though it has a historical significance in the things which it accomplishes and theological importance in directing the wise to God's commandments and precepts. We can bring African sapiential heritage into dialogue with wisdom as found in both ancient Israel and ancient Near East, and so address the identity crisis that sometimes rock African personalities.

Next unit will discuss theodicy and the sovereignty of God in the book of Job. This will bring into focus the age-long question as to why the righteous do suffer sometimes and the wicked do prosper sometimes. It will also highlight the right response to the problems of adversity.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- **Discuss the importance of teaching and learning in the book of Proverbs.**

7.0 References / Future Reading

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MODULE 2: THE THEOLOGY OF WISDOM LITERATURE

Unit 2: Theodicy and the Sovereignty of God in the book of Job.

Contents

1.0 Introduction

The events of the book of Job were very clearly associated with the Semitic land of Uz, perhaps in the Teman district of Edom. Although Theologians are not very agreed as to the date the events occurred or even of their writing, it is conjectured as some of the miscellaneous events which took place during the patriarchal period 2100-1400 B.C.E. One of the most revealing events of the book is the fact that Satan, though a fallen creature, occasionally finds its way into heaven to partake of meetings with God. In this unit we shall examine the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked as elements of the sovereignty of God, which no mortal can apprehend let alone question. Therefore, being able to handle adversity wisely is a necessary virtue to be learned. Moreover, the completeness which comes to humans only when they are totally dependent on God is also evaluated in the light of divine justice and righteousness.

2.0 Objective

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Discuss the role of human freedom in the presence of sin and evil.
- Understand the Old Testament perspective to human suffering.

- Understand how God views the prosperity of the wicked *vis-a-vis* the suffering of the righteous.
- Describe the possible consequences of adversity when properly handled.
- Discuss the private and corporate nature of the Sovereignty of God.

3.0 Main Body

3.1 Definition of Theodicy

The word "theodicy" is derived from two Greek words, *theos* "God" and *dike* "justice". It is a term used to justify God's ways and dealings with humans. Theodicy aims at resolving the problems of evil for a theological system and demonstrates that God is all-powerful, all-loving and just, despite the overwhelming presence of evil. There are six ways in which Evangelical Christianity have attempted to understand the problems of the suffering of the righteous and the seeming prosperity of the wicked. Why do the righteous suffer in a world ruled by a Righteous God? Why do the wicked prosper in a world in which a Holy God detests wickedness?

First, there obviously is a logical inconsistency of a theological nature in the problem of theodicy that opens it up to attacks by atheists who insist that an Omnipotent God, who is all loving but who allows evil to exist in a world He created is a contradiction. Thus it behoves Theodicy to prove that there is logical consistency in the paradox of the good sometimes getting what the wicked deserve, and vice versa. Although the critic may never be of the same theological persuasion as the Theodicist, the latter need not base his argument on the acceptability of it by the critic, but on the convictions of a Righteous God who often turns things around in favour of the righteous, and who promptly and duly rewards the wicked.

Second, theodicy is capable of addressing the problem of evil in its various shades and colours: evil can be moral, physical, and can impact on an individual's relation to God in view of specific pressures to do wrong that the individual may be experiencing. The answer to the problem of evil provided by Theodicy should be such as provides explanations in a logical, consistent and coherent manner. God is good and omnipotent. It means that he can use "evil" to achieve his ultimate goals of being good to all those who call on him in uprightness.

Third, there may not be a universally acceptable explanation for the reasons things go awry the way they do sometimes, but the theological explanation so offered should nevertheless incorporate a particular concept of divine benevolence, and divine power in spite of the existence of evil.

A fourth position states that the problem of evil is in its various forms a problem of logicalconsistency. Theodicy is an interesting phenomenon to reflect on intellectually, but only if our theologies do incorporate a notion of God's omnipotence according to which he does anything in logically consistent ways. There will always be a reasonable explanation for

every act of God. Most, if not all, theodicies are structured for theological positions that interpret God's omnipotence as the ability to do the logically consistent.

A fifth position adopts a particular axiom with regard to moral agency and moral blameworthiness, namely that a person is not morally responsible for that which he cannot do or which he does under constraint or compulsion.

A sixth and final position is the guiding principles. They attempt to resolve the apparent contradiction by arguing that God, in spite of his omnipotence, cannot remove evil. Since he cannot remove evil, he is not morally responsible for its presence in the world. Such an argument rests on the concepts of God's omnipotence according to which God can do only the logically consistent. Theodicy is interested in the things which God can accomplish – a value of the first order of creation – which he could not do if he were to take evil away. The argument is that God could not have granted humans free will without turning a blind eye to evil, as a means of sifting the "wheat" from the "tares" in view of human depravity.

3.1 Self-Assessment Question

- Identify and explain some of the terms used to define theodicy in Wisdom Literature.

3.2 Definition of Sovereignty of God

The biblical idea of God's sovereignty includes all that is involved in the divine kingship and this means at least three things: 1) Ownership. The Hebrew word for lord is *(adon)* and the two Greek words *kyrios* and *despotes*, all imply this. In addition, the Bible asserts it constantly. All things are God's: the earth, the heavens, the silver, the gold, and above all humanity themselves. 2) Authority. God has an absolute right to impose his will on all his creatures. But his commands are never arbitrary. They express his character as righteous and holy love. They accord fully with his relationship to us as redeemer and Father. Yet his authority is categorical, and when confronted with it, people have no right to temporize, negotiate or let alone disobey. 3) Control. God is master of his universe. At times he is displeased with it and at times angry. But it never baffles or frustrates or threatens him.

The concept of the sovereignty of God illustrates the biblical teaching that God is king, supreme judge and ruler, and the law giver of the universe. God's sovereignty is expressed in the comprehensive plan or decree for world history; he "has established his throne in heaven and his kingdom rules overall." His sovereignty is exercised and displayed in history in the work of creation, providence and redemption. The gracious work of redemption also manifests God's sovereignty. He promises, covenants and works redemptive history. In the ninth chapter of Job the "sufferer" unexpectedly placed God in a sovereign and irreproachable position, and announces the positive attributes of God including divine wisdom and immeasurable power.

Theologians generally consider "sovereignty" one of God's communicable attributes; "sovereignty" expresses an inherent characteristic of God and a distinction is sometimes made between sovereign will and sovereign power. God's sovereign will and power is not

arbitrary, despotic, or deterministic; his sovereignty is characterized by his justice and holiness as well as by his other attributes of wisdom and righteousness. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are paradoxical and beyond human comprehension, but not contradictory. In the opinion of Klooster (2004) divine sovereignty and human sovereignty are certainly contradictory, but divine sovereignty and human responsibility are not and could not be. God uses human means in history to accomplish his purposes, yet such means do not generally involve coercion. God commands us to live according to his sovereign law (Gen. 2:16-17; Ex.20). Yet God effectuates his will even through sinful, disobedient human actions (Gen.45:5,7-8; 50:19-20).

The New Testament event of the crucifixion of Christ is certainly the most heinous crime in history, but we are told that it occurred within the boundaries of the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, for the crucifixion was simply what God's power and will had predetermined would happen in the general interest of the redemption of all humankind (Ac.2:23; 4:27-28).

The doctrine of the sovereignty of God is emphasized especially in the Augustinian-Calvinistic tradition and is denied or compromised in the Pelagian, Arminian, and liberal traditions, which claim varying degrees of human autonomy. The confession of the sovereignty of God has become the hallmark of authentic Calvinism. It is not however its central principle; sovereignty is not the basic principle from which Calvin's whole theology was deduced. That is a caricature of Calvin and Calvinism. Actually the term "sovereignty" is found only a few times in the *Institutes*; the same is true of the Reformed confessions. Yet the doctrine is indeed part of authentic Reformed thought. The key in Calvin's theology was to speak where the Scriptures speak and to be silent where they are silent. That is why he wrote of God's sovereignty and defended predestination and other controversial doctrines.

Classic Calvinism does not minimize the role of human responsibility in history. Only in extreme forms of supralapsarian thought and hyper-Calvinism is sovereignty emphasized in ways that compromise human responsibility and curtail the universal proclamation of the gospel. The confession of the sovereignty of God should occasion the praise and glory of God and encourage a life lived in obedient love within the kingdom of the King. As in the case of all God's attributes, so God's sovereignty should be reflected in the Christian life. The Christian who is being renewed in the image of God and progressing in sanctification should again exercise dominion over creation as God's vicegerent n promoting the kingdom of God in human history to the glory of the Sovereign Lord.

3.2 Self-Assessment Question

- Write a short note on the concept of the sovereignty of God and what it means to creation and to nature generally.

3.3 In Defence of Divine Justice

The book of Job brings to the fore the titanic spiritual struggle between the forces of Good (God) and the agents of evil (Satan) to determine the place of humanity in the achievement of divine (godly) purposes on earth. Job had a desire to serve God's purposes and he did so with a blameless and upright heart; he feared God and shunned evil. God also blessed him in a special way and above all others in his generation. The Apostle Paul was later to intimate the Church with the fact that these men of antiquity were guided by a "law written in their hearts", we find in the case of Job that he not only knew what sacrifices and services to God was, but he also practiced same. According to the Psalmist, God presides over the heavenly council which includes angels (Ps. 82:1; 99:1 etc). The coming of the devil into this Council is not only disgusting but also revealing. It reveals God as both long-suffering and forbearing over all his works.

Meanwhile the appearance of Satan (literally *the Adversary*)in the heavenly court was primarily to discredit God's righteous standards, and at the same time put up the humans as hypocrites whenever they display a desire to serve the divine purposes as Job did. God does exonerate his own, but he does so as a testimony to the angels that he is a perfect and omniscient God. Satan is under God's power too, and does nothing to the saints or to nature generally without God's approval or at least foreknowledge. As Job bemoans his calamity, one thing stands out clearly, namely, the fact that humans are myopic in their understanding and assessment of events, but also are prone to very faulty judgment and theology.

In his initial response, Job friends attempt to counter Job's destabilizing curses by sapiential instruction and pious praise of Yahweh as creator and sustainer of a just world order. The dominant metaphor for God is that of divine ruler or judge whose edicts establish and carry out a retributive system of justice in which the wicked are punished and the righteous rewarded. Even the righteous may at times receive divine rebuke, argues Eliphaz for instance, but they should endure patiently, repent of their sins, and expect a merciful God to deliver them from evil. What is interesting is that Eliphaz in particular, grounds his teaching, not simply in sapiential modes of authority (often based on experience, analogy from nature, and the appeal to tradition), but also in prophetic revelation (Job 4:12-17) and on a doxology (5:8-16). The "fear of God" for this defender of the faith disallows sapiential debate and critical reflection. A creative metaphor has been reshaped into inflexible dogma formulated in the language of retributive justice. In other words the dogma of retributive justice uses the world of nature to bolster the notion that the wicked are eventually punished (Job 4:10-11).

There is a doxology in the Eliphaz speeches including the one in Job 5:9-16, which lyrically is praise, sung either by the falsely accused, who await a declaration of innocence by the judge, or by the guilty, and who confess their guilt and declare the judgment just. God is thus seen as the divine judge whose rule is one of judgment, retribution and rewards. That doxology is grounded on three themes: creation, nature and society. 1) Creation. The making of great things and "wonders" allude to God's defeat of chaos, divine creation, and providential rule

over nature (Job 7:5, 14; 9:9-10; 42:3; cf. Pss. 96:3; 98:1). For Eliphaz, retributive justice is grounded in the moral character of God.

2) Nature. The second theme speaks of God's providential rule of the natural order: the sending of rain to renew life. In Genesis 2:4b-6 (cf. Deut. 11:14, 17; 28:12; 1 Kings 8:35-36; Job 36:27; Ps. 147:8; Isa. 41:18-19; 43:19; 44:3-4; 55:10; Jer. 14:22; Mat. 5:45), the first act of creation is Yahweh's sending a mist to moisten a dry desert, turning it into arable soil conducive for fertility. In this doxology, rain is a divine "gift" that renews the earth and makes the fields fertile. 3) Society. The third theme speaks of God's providential guidance of history, in particular the punishment meted out to the arrogant self-righteous (Pro. 26:27; 28:10; Ps.7:15; 9:16; 35:8; 57:6). This doxology opposes the self-sufficiency of politicians who ignore providence in human affairs. Their hubris leads ultimately to alienation from God (cf. Gen. 2-11; Eze. 28).In opposition to these rulers filled with self-importance, God exalts the needy and poor and acts to establish justice. Job, in the opinion of Eliphaz, should abandon the hubris and sing this ready-made doxology as a confession of guilt in order to receive divine mercy.

3.3 Self-Assessment Question

- Mention the three themes of a doxology that must inform the penitent and wise.

3.4 The Sovereignty of God and human Dependence

Although all of Job's friends speak to assuage his grief and bolster God's justice, their speeches can all be summed up in this sentence: *God never punishes the just unnecessarily neither does he gloss over the errors of the wicked unduly. He is the final authority when it comes to justice, retribution and rewards.*

Bildad's speech serves as a concluding and comprehensive summary of the world view of the three opponents of Job articulated throughout their preceding discourses. God is a tyrannical, unchallenged, and powerful king ruling over an empire that he has conquered in primeval times. Although hidden in mystery, God is able to see all that happens within his cosmic kingdom. While this awesome God is concealed in mystery, his all-seeing light penetrates even to the darkest region of his empire, enabling him to know all that happens. Only a fool would dare to challenge divine rule or assume that God's knowledge of affairs is limited. The organizing metaphor for the speech is conflict, for God won and then holds on to his kingship by the real and threatened use of frightening power. Indeed, the opening line is the theme for the entire speech: "dominion and fear is his". Divine rule is based, not on justice, but on sovereignty of God which can be very intimidating.

Furthermore, there is a younger voice, Elihu's, in the company of Job's circle of friends who is never mentioned by name except as he boldly took exception to Job's complacency and to his friends' obduracy. Neither does Elihu shudder at the sovereignty of God; instead he boldly embraces the Divine *Ruach* as the reason for humanity's life and power of reason. Indeed,one of the more interesting developments in the speeches of Elihu is his view of inspiration, which

gives authority to teaching based on human insight; his view of inspiration stands in opposition to the traditional sapiential teaching that wisdom is especially associated with old age and experience. In other words, the structures of both traditional and radical wisdom crumbles as a result of the inability of Job and his friends to provide convincing answers and to present persuasive arguments in view of Job's complacency and his friends' obduracy. As far as Elihu is concerned the wrangling of scholars leads nowhere. Therefore, we must depend on God and on human folk or popular wisdom as the source of true understanding.

Literally, the young Elihu rejects Job's attack on divine justice by arguing that God, the divine artisan who shapes both rich and poor, lowly and mighty in the womb, is no respecter of persons, for they are all the works of his hands. God brings quick and unexpected destruction upon sinful human beings, regardless of their social status. Even so, Elihu especially dwells on divine retribution against the mighty aristocracy (34:17-30). Elihu is no daydreamer who depicts the poor as innately noble, pious and long-suffering people who always exemplify a humble and quiet spirit. In his third speech, he notes that even the victims are not heard, if they question divine justice, as has Job, or ask where God is in the midst of their trials. Such faithless questioning leads God not to respond, asserts Elihu, although here he stands not only against Job but also against the tradition of laments in the Psalter.

The awesome power of God is illustrated in the speeches from the whirlwind (Job 38:1 – 42:6). Similarly, the utter helplessness of humanity is illustrated also in the responses of Job to the speeches from the whirlwind. It is remarkable to Job who earlier in the discourse had seen him in an upright frame, now confronted with Divine majesty and holiness, throws away all pious opinion of him, and adopts God's stance. His time with his three (or four) friends had been spent with him comparing himself with them alone, but now that God enters the equation, Job is shrouded in self-abnegation and utterly helpless, and dependent on God.

3.4 Self-Assessment Question

- Differentiate and discuss the Sovereignty of God and human dependence, and show how the speeches all fit together in the concept of inspiration.

3.5 Hermeneutical Considerations

Clearly Job would neither approve the counsel of his friends, nor accept the fact that his earthly calamity was the outcome of a perverted life. For one thing his friends counsel sounded pious and humane, yet they lacked the compassion and empathy expected from them by someone they had known all along as a very good friend. In every service there has to be an accompanying sacrifice to make it acceptable both to Deity and humanity. Services rendered must pass the fiery test of antagonism for it to be sustainable. Special features of the discourse include a) humans are no more than slaves, hired men and women who are happier only when they engage themselves ultimately in the achievement of the purposes of God for their lives; b) human activities – no matter how formidable – are no more than a cloud that vanishes after dropping down the dews and serving as shades; and c) human lives mean no more than the dust. Be that as it may, there is always a fresh start for those who are firmly in

the hands of God. God will never consign a blameless person, including Job into oblivion or eternal death. There is hope of the resurrection deeply imbedded in the patriarchal consciousness of sages as depicted by Job's apt statement: *I know that my Redeemer lives, and though after the flesh worms devour my body, yet with my eyes will I look upon God.*.(Job 19:25).

3.6 Self-Assessment Question

- Critically evaluate the role of Job's friends in the on-going debate that Divine sovereignty necessitates human dependence.

4.0 Conclusion

Theodicy aims at resolving the problems of evil for a theological system and demonstrates that God is all-powerful, all-loving and just, despite the overwhelming presence of evil. Even when things do not go as planned, the confession of the sovereignty of God should occasion the praise and glory of God and encourage a life lived in obedient love within the kingdom of the King. As in the case of all God's attributes, so God's sovereignty should be acknowledged by all, at all times and under all circumstances as reflected in the Christian life. God remains the divine judge whose rule is one of judgment, retribution and rewards. Although hidden in mystery, God is able to see all that happens within his cosmic kingdom. While this awesome God is concealed in mystery, his all-seeing light penetrates even to the darkest region of his empire, enabling him to know all that happens. Only a fool would dare to challenge divine rule or assume that God's knowledge of affairs is limited. God will never consign a blameless person, including Job into oblivion or eternal death. The hope of a resurrection deeply embedded in the consciousness of the upright and blameless person is a sure indication of strength for daily triumphant living.

5.0 Summary

Thus far we have outlined the several ways in which humans are confronted by the realities of evil in the world, but there is comfort in knowing that a Sovereign God reigns over all and that he judges in justice, retribution and rewards. This has been done under the following sub-headings: definition of Theodicy, definition of Sovereignty, in Defence of Divine Justice, and The Sovereignty of God *vis-a-vis* human dependence. We concluded the sub-section with hermeneutical considerations.

In the next Unit we will examine the Cosmology and Anthropology of the Testament of Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes). This will enable us to critically assess the Divine – human dialogue, and the nature – nurture interface.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Write short notes on the following with Wisdom Literature as your tool: (a) theodicy, (b) sovereignty of God, (c) Satan, justice and righteousness, (d) the Divine scrutiny, and (e) the certainty of resurrection and life beyond the grave.

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MODULE 2: THE THEOLOGY OF WISDOM LITERATURE

Unit 3: Cosmology and Anthropology in the Testament of Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes).

Contents

1.0 Introduction

Cosmology refers to the ways a people perceive the world around them, which in turn shapes the way they respond to the demands of the environment around them. In Wisdom Literature cosmology reflects in the unending activities observable in every facet of natural life on sky, land and sea. Qoheleth considers all human activities as utterly meaningless because it all ends in futility with no real satisfaction, as will be found in the "fear God and keep his commandments" theme. Perhaps, the same emptiness could be seen in plants and animals as they blossom and flourish "as leaves on the tree" and then soon "wither and perish".

On the other hand, anthropology refers to the *modus vivendi* of *homosapiens*

In Qoheleth, it is rightly observed that even the human mind does not escape the vanity show. Life generally is meaningless and the day of death is better than the day of birth. There is a similarity of lifestyles and life experiences across human communities and the same events take place in all of them. Wisdom and learning makes for healthy outlook on life, but it does not strengthen human resolves any more than wealth and wellbeing increase longevity. The best approach to life is therefore the unrelenting effort to "fear God and keep his commandments" which is the whole duty of humans. Besides God who alone is constant,

immutable and immovable, every other object of creation is liable to transient life. Life at its best is very brief and its glories a fading beauty.

2.0 Objective

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss Cosmology and Anthropology from the perspective of Wisdom Literature.
- Describe the good life and the most congenial ethical order.
- Know what is meant by testament in *Qoheleth* and its moral order
- Appreciate the benefits of knowledge as it relates to both cosmology and anthropology

3.0 Main Body

3.1 The Quest for the Good in the Cosmology of *Qoheleth*.

Life under the sun is full of challenges. Consequently, wisdom is an important attribute of those who aspire to the good life. It means that the wise would work at their jobs and relate with their peers in a purposeful and goal-oriented manner. Work has no inherent value unless it gives us enjoyment and the fulfilment we need. There is a cosmology of traditional wisdom in *Qoheleth*, but it does not provide suitable answers to the questions raised about the good life in human existence. The sage who authored this book could not move from perceptions of the world and extension of what is perceived with creation to shape vital images into compelling articulations of faith and the temporal life. Tradition no longer provided a reservoir for cosmological images of faith, due to both the failure of collective memory and the inability of sapiential teachings, especially those concerning retribution, to withstand the practical engagement of Qoheleth's experience and observation. Further *Qoheleth* could not envision a world of sacred dwelling in which justice and well-being prevailed.

The crisis for *Qoheleth* was both an ethical and a theological one, since he came to assert, because of his own critical reflection on and experience of present existence that the observable connection between the moral life and cosmology had broken down. Order for this sage assumes the dimensions of rigidity and tyranny, because of the rule and character of a hidden God. The ethical life was no longer one of living in conformity with cosmic order and seeking to establish a sphere of beneficence in which well-being would result. The cosmological rendering of a world of goodness in which moral action led to desirable consequences could no longer sustain itself in an enigmatic and frightening reality unresponsive to human behaviour. When the prevailing cosmology lost its power to convict, the moral system dependent on that world view was replaced by one no longer upheld by divine sanctions and a pervasive justice present in the world, society and human nature. Thus a very different way of looking at human existence in the world needed to emerge. What was called for was a new world view shaped by Qoheleth's own imagination. To find the resources for this human-oriented reality, Qoheleth turns to the anthropological tradition. This

tradition is reconceived in this sage's imagination, and central to this preconception is his metaphor of *hebel*, "breath", which literally means meaninglessness in this book.

3.1 Self-Assessment Question

- Describe the basis for meaninglessness of life in *Qoheleth* (Ecclesiastes). What dimension of wisdom is the author's focus?

3.2Cosmology and the Ethical Order

Ooheleth reflects a cosmology or world view that is essentially theocentric and monotheistic. In the first major section of the book (Ecc. 1:12-5:19) King Solomon speaks about human view of life on earth, and with an allusion to the endlessness of human labour, he lists his own accomplishments and the building of great and magnificent structures. He also included the accumulation of wealth, physical pleasures, royal rule, legal decisions, the typical human activities that have their opposites, the success story of coming to the throne, and cultic activities. In every case the king of Israel concludes that each human activity is based on a particular view of the world and that such activities contribute to maintaining a social and economic, even political order but with results that are at best transient and at worst ephemeral. Every action is grounded in the desire to master and perpetuate life, but this desire cannot be fulfilled. Actions guided by wisdom cannot guarantee success, and success without joy lacks value.

Life is a riddle for which *Qoheleth* attempts to find the key. It is remarkable to note that even Solomon who reigned as Israel's wise monarch could not fully grasp life's meaning, neither could he experience satisfaction in his labours, and could not expect to his remembrances to outlive him. The meaning of life is not to be found in the acquisition of knowledge, money, sensual pleasures, oppression, religious profession, or folly. No human accomplishments guarantees a future remembrance of the dead by the living, Solomon for instance could not be remembered beyond his immediate succeeding generation before it faded into the oblivion of human forgetfulness, a fate to which every mortal are eventually consigned. The desire for the life-giving spirit, residing at the basis of all human life and activity remains unfulfilled in most occasions, and what humans are left with at the end of their days on the earth is no more than "*hebel*" "breath" "a chasing after the wind" or meaninglessness.

The structure of human life is such that humans are perpetually engaged in the struggle to make sense of life "under the sun". However, even this attempt is also futile because God has made it that humans will find nothing even if they engage in the greatest quest for meaning.

The only way to maintain the social order is to realize the centrality of God as the source and end of all values as the one who indeed is both Creator and Sustainers of the earth and its world system. Therefore a life lived under God will seek to use and enjoy the manifold aspects of human existence to the greater glory of God. In this cosmology lies the orderliness needed for life to be lived and enjoyed by all who belong to the family of God.

The only meaning that exists is to rest every human case with God and to "fear God" and to keep his commandments. In addition humans are to depend on God for daily needs and requirements, and so enjoy each day's provisions as being especially from him. *Qoheleth* constitutes an exhortation to live a God-fearing and perhaps a God-honouring life, realizing that one day an account would have to be given to Him. *Qoheleth* apparently relied upon traditional religious beliefs in making the affirmation that God made humans to be mentally upright, but that the intervention of devices of human fashioning had led to the declension of humankind from prevenient grace. The book's basic presupposition is that life in all its manifold aspects is entirely devoid of meaning without God.

Apparently, there is a wisdom that is earthly and is summed up in the words of *Qoheleth*, but the heart and essence of true wisdom is to know God from whom all blessings flow. The author claims to have tested every facet of life based on a cosmology of Epicureanism, but it all worked out in the knowledge that all of life is futility. Even eating and drinking serves to give one temporary satisfaction except that whatever gain one has made is obscured by the knowledge that "time changes all things", including those coming after one. In view of the fact that the world system lacks any reliable or dependable justice system, it is clear that the attempt to do the right thing is often countered by the presence of wrong that goes on in the heart of humans. Evil doing never gets its full expression without the controlling influence of the opposite yearning to do the right.

3.2 Self-Assessment Question

- Summarise the main features of life under the sun as exposited by *hebel* or "breath." Analyse the relationship between world views and ethical order.

3.3 Anthropology and the Ethical Order

Lots of paradoxes exist in the realm of anthropology and threaten the very fabric of societal order if not handled with the wisdom and understanding prescribed in *Qoheleth*. Some enjoy longevity, but end up worse than a still-born child. In other words, longevity must be qualified with certain attainments before it can be meaningful: children, grand and great-grand children and a settled home are the distinctive of a responsible longevity worthy of proper veneration. Humans who are wise, but poor get no recognition among their peers; neither do those who are fools, even though enjoying abundant wealth. They all end up like the beast doomed to death, destruction and their memory consigned to oblivion. It is like the sordid case of princes who walk the streets on foot, while beggars ride on horses. Such contradictions of life baffle the author of *Qoheleth* as it would baffle students of Wisdom today. Yet such are the paradoxes of life that humanity without divinity ends up not better than the animals around their houses – all go to the same place, not above, but beneath.

These paradoxes seem resolved in the understanding that "a bird in hand is worth two in the bush", or as the African proverb would put it, "we do not pour away the remaining drinking water in the water pot, just because the clouds are gathering and rain is being expected." Our ethical order must be built on reality not on speculation. In *Qoheleth* it is made clear that each

human received his / her proper gift from God, even though at death humans do not take anything away with them from the earth. Human ethical order is built on relationships that are faith based, not destiny based. The wealthy person who became rich through ill-gotten gain and who eventually did not live to enjoy this wealth, is worse in reputation than a still-born child...

Even the king's word is esteemed as of high importance because the king is full of traditional wisdom but even the best intentions of the king is only negated by human activities which often are paradoxical and contradictory. *Qoheleth* examines individual actions, including that of the king and sage within the larger structure of time. The *anthropos* is a product of aesthetic appeal and moral standards which must be maintained through "fear of God and the keeping of his commandments". Moreover, the *anthropos*must work at achieving her goals within the time allotted them on earth as there is no labour no inventions on the other side of eternity. Already they are denied the comprehensive knowledge of the cosmic and historical components of time and the course of divine events – in the past, present and future – and are trapped in a present that is obtuse, mysterious, and ambiguous, completely unaware of what may or may not happen.

It means that human control over events and their outcome passes from human hands either to God or to mere chance. One may only rejoice in the "day of adversity" and learn from the "day of adversity" that God is the one who structures time and determines the course of significant events. Thus all human actions are accompanied by risk.

Consequently, human inability to discern divine activity undercuts both the theologies of salvation history and cultic ritual, which represented and re-actualized in sacred drama deeds of divine redemption. Moreover, the failure to perceive a coherent pattern for historical time, so evident in prophetic and historical texts in Israel, results in the fragmentation of experience and the loss of collective and individual identity. The human quest for identity and self-understanding within a common tradition requires the integration of temporal phases (past, present and future) as a unity. Collective memory enables both the community and the individual to recall and rearrange significant events from the past in order to be able to explain the present. Human memory allows for individuals to tap into the reservoirs of tradition so as to find root metaphors to convey meaning.

Similarly, the anticipation of history allows both the individual and the community to give informed direction to their actions. Memory and anticipation are creative acts of the imagination that organize and interpret experience. The individual and the community come to self-understanding through the narratives they construct. The incorporation of individual life within the larger tradition provides a meaning structure in which self-understanding reaches a culmination and produces coherence in life. Thus in the views of Jesus Ben Sira, individual life becomes part of the community's past experience, present existence, and anticipated future. The basis for *Qoheleth* is the inevitable loss of collective and individual memory (Ecc.1:8-11; 5:20). With the loss of memory, experience does not achieve unity

through time. Rather, experience fragments into disconnected pieces of isolated perceptions. All that remains is the immediacy of the present moment.

3.3 Self-Assessment Question

- Review the nature of humans in *Qoheleth*, and show how individual or collective memory can enhance identity and self-understanding.

3.4 The Testament of *Qoheleth* and the Moral Order

When we examine Qoheleth's poem on anthropology, we see a disclosure of the royal testament, balancing the anthropology and cosmology of the two strophes of the introductory poem. The two themes of the poem are joy (*smh*) in two different strophes. First, Ecc.11:9-10 there is the occurrence of *carpe diem* which while exploiting the creation of light and darkness, admonishes the audience of students to rejoice in the sweetness of youth, for "childhood and youth are *hebel.*" The young are therefore warned against consummating their joy in unlicenced frivolity. His counsel remains clear: Enjoy life while the physical capacities for celebration are at its height.

As one approach the concluding sections of *Qoheleth*, one is astounded by the intelligent use of metaphors in describing the declining days of the aged sage. Leo Perdue describes it as "an allegory of old age and increasing decrepitude, or the metaphorical description of physical decline and death in terms of a large estate or city". The allegorical interpretation is often strained, leaving much to the imagination, the interpretation of the decline of a large estate or city follows a more literal and obvious translation. This decline becomes a metaphor for the decline and death of human beings. Leo Perdue proposes a variation on the second interpretation by suggesting that this description represents the end of the world of human dwelling and nature, occasioned by the death of the human creature. Death returns history and the cosmos (civilization and nature) to chaos in a depiction that is quite similar to that found in Jeremiah 4:23-26.

A look at the second strophe (Ecc. 12:1-7) begins with a continuation of the *carpe diem*, but quickly changes in mood and substance. "Remember your creator (or is it your "tomb"?) in the days of your youth," the sage instructs, adding the sombre note: "before the evil days come, and the years draw near in which you say, 'I have no pleasure in them'" The opening line contains a crux interpretatum (*bore eka*cp. *Bara*'), most normally translated as "your creator." However, this translation is questionable due to the plural now ("creators"). In the oldest surviving interpretation of this text, preserved in the tractate Abot 3:1 in the Mishnah and attributed to Rabbi Akabia ben Mahalalel, one reads:

Reflect upon three things and thou wilt not come within the power of transgression: know whence thou art come, whither thou art going, and before whom thou wilt in future render account and reckoning. "When thou art come"- from a fetid drop; "and whither thou art going" – to a place of dust, worms and maggots; "and before whom thou wilt in future render account and reckoning" – before the Supreme King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed is He."

The author of *Qoheleth* has carefully chosen a term that, through similarity in sound and spelling, would stimulate the imagination to think of all three. This is the understanding of the Mishnaic and Talmudic interpretations and is not uncommon procedure in Hebrew rhetoric. If so, the resultant meaning for the poem would be as that God is the giver of and nourishes all life. Nevertheless, he does not shunt his offspring out of all troubles, but gently rescues them from all their foes. *Qoheleth* (11:5) takes creation for granted, as he depicts the process of conception in the embryo as the commencement of the life of all humans. Thus human mortality lies in their origin at conception.

Still on the process of divine origin of all things, Qoheleth urges the congregation to "remember your creator" – a reminder that brings to the fore the divine and natural response to suffering. The congregation is to recall the mighty deeds and salvific acts of God, including the slaying of the chaos monster and the creation of the world, in order to establish the basis for hope in present redemption and to remind God to act to redeem his people (cf. Ps. 74, 77). For God to remember his people mean to deliver them (Ps.74:3). For Qoheleth, God is indeed the powerful tyrant, whose power directs the world and determines the fates of human beings, neither is he the redeemer who enters into life to save the human creature. Thus, while the students are instructed to remember God, they should not expect that God will remember them otherwise.

In Wisdom Literature the question is often asked "What are humans that God is often mindful of them" (cf. Ps 8). On the terrestrial plane, the question asked by Qoheleth is, why would humans engage in a titanic struggle to master life and be in control of their own destiny when the life they live eventually ends in futility? The students are therefore instructed to remember God in the prime times of their youth, when bad habits have not yet gotten hold of them. Life progresses to the point when the physical senses are dulled, and humans make speeches even when they are not talking, and they hear sounds even when they are not listening. During this paradoxical stage of life, the parts of the physical body begin to deteriorate in structure and function. All the wisdom and all the learning gradually wear out in significance and all that matters is "reverential attitude towards God the maker of all, and a keeping of his laws".

3.4 Self-Assessment Question

- How would you describe the use of metaphors in depicting the days of old age? What other ways can metaphors be interpreted in Wisdom Literature?

3.5Hermeneutical Consideration

The study in this unit has shown that *Qoheleth* is a multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary book from the fourth and third century BCE, perhaps composed from the various collegial collections from the previous Priestly and Monarchic era in ancient Israel. Fear of the unknown should never be allowed to displace the healthy fear of God. In order to overcome the fear of the unknown, humans should think of God in thankful terms and have pleasure in being alive. There are countless opportunities of doing the right waiting at the door-steps of all those who are reverential in their attitude towards God. In the same way, there are oddities hanging

around in every human environment waiting to be ignited by inhuman conduct and bad behaviours.

It is important that rulers should liaise with wise men in the making and shaping of policies, because excluding them could prove fatal. Wisdom, not wine should come first in the reckoning of princes in order for just and righteous policies to emerge from their seats of power. Life is so full of uncertainties even for those already occupying positions of influence and power. Consider the dilemma confronting the human being who comes face to face with wonderful opportunities of service and great rewards, but which leaves in their trail sorrow and travail. The assurance given in *Qoheleth* in the face of dilemma is that nothing escapes the knowledge and sovereignty of God. Reality is found only in God from whom all natural phenomenon emanate and to whom all life returns. No one can stand before the judgment seat of God boldly who has not learned to take God's commandments serious in these present times.

3.5 Self-Assessment Question

- You have heard the conclusion of the whole matter in *Qoheleth.* Now tell us the conclusion of the whole matter according to the lessons you have learned so far.

4.0 Conclusion

Whenever we speak of a stable social, moral and ethical order, we should not forget to align our speech with an understanding that is informed by our world view and human craving for innovations. A stable moral and ethical life has to be lived in conformity with the cosmic order with a view to an established sphere of beneficent influence leading to the well-being of both humans and other creatures. It is not like the sordid example of princes who walk the streets on foot, while beggars ride on horses. Such are the contradictions of life that baffle the author of *Qoheleth* as it would baffle students of Wisdom today. Moreover, the paradoxes of life that humanity without divinity ends up with are not better than that of the animals around their houses – all go to the same place, not above, but beneath. Lots of paradoxes exist in the realm of anthropology and threaten the very fabric of societal order if not handled with the wisdom and understanding prescribed in *Qoheleth*. Some enjoy longevity, but end up worse than a still born child. The allegorical interpretation is often strained, leaving much to the imagination, the interpretation of the decline of a large estate or city follows a more literal and obvious translation. This decline becomes a metaphor for the decline and death of human beings. Leo Perdue proposes a variation on the second interpretation by suggesting that this description represents the end of the world of human dwelling and nature, occasioned by the death of the human creature. It is important that humans make the "fear of God" and the "keeping of his commandments" a priority so that they are able to stand boldly before him on the day of accounting and reckoning.

5.0 Summary

So far this unit adopted a postcolonial critical approach in assessing the various interpretations to which *Qoheleth* is susceptible, including the following sub-headings: The Quest for the Good in the Cosmology of *Qoheleth*; Cosmology and the Ethical Order; Anthropology and the Ethical Order; The Testament of *Qoheleth* and the Moral Order; as well as Hermeneutical Considerations.

Next unit will examine the Theology and Salvation History in the book of Psalm.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Narrate in brief the nature and development of testament in Qoheleth, based on her cosmology and anthropology. Illustrate your answers with useful references.

7.0References / Future Reading

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MODULE 2: THE THEOLOGY OF WISDOM LITERATURE

Unit 4: Theology of Praise and Prayers in the book of Psalms.

Content

1.0 Hebraic traditions of Praise and Prayer

The names "Psalms" and "Psalter" come from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) where they originally referred to stringed instruments (such as harp, lyre and lute), then to songs sung with their accompaniment. The traditional Hebrew title is "*tehillim*" meaning "praise", even though many of the psalms are *tehillot* meaning "prayers". In fact, one of the first collections included in the book was titled "the prayers of David son of Jesse" (Ps.72:20). As John H. Stek has pointed out, "The Psalter is a collection of collections and represents the final stage in a process that spanned centuries." It was put into its final form presumably by the post-exilic temple personnel, who completed it probably in the third century B.C.E. As such it served as the Book of Common Prayer, as well as the song book and of religious instruction for the second Temple (Zerubbabel's and Herod's) temple and for use in the synagogues. By the time of the first century C.E. it was generally known as "the book of Psalms (Luk.10:42; Acts 1:20). At that time also Psalms was used as a title for the entire section of the Hebrew OT canon known as the "Writings" (see Luk. 24:44). So our survey of the theology of praise and prayers in the Psalms as a leading book in Wisdom Literature will be discussed under the following sub-headings: Hebraic traditions of Praise; Parallelisms as didactic forms of Praise; The theology of the Psalms reflected in metrical divisions; Strophic arrangement and lyrical impact of the Psalms; and Hermeneutical Considerations.

2.0 Objective

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the significance of Praise in Wisdom Literature
- Describe the Hebraic traditions of Praise
- Realize why Parallelism and metrical Divisions is crucial to Wisdom Literature
- Be informed of the strophic arrangements, and
- Discuss the relevance of the Psalms in the worship of God by the contemporary church.

3.0 Main Body

3.1 Hebraic Traditions of Praise and Prayer

It is interesting to note that the book of Psalms features primarily the praises and prayers of a faith community composed primarily of Hebrew adherents of Yahweh. Yet the heart and essence of the Psalmody is moral. Occasionally, the Psalter drew attention to the beauties of nature in praise of the Creator, and an on-going concern with the world around them in their prayers, but all these were primarily within the sphere of moral activity. Since the ancient Hebrews of Old Testament times enjoyed no assurance of a future life, the question of retribution for wickedness was entertained in terms of the contemporary or immediate future situation, and undergirded by the traditional Hebrew belief in the Divine moral governance of the world.

As far as the Psalter is concerned God's people in general and Israel in particular would be dominant on all the face of the earth wherever they are found (Ps. 2:8; 18:43; 45:5). Similarly, the God whom they served rules the universe (Ps. 47:8) and deserves the praise of all the earth (Ps.2:11; 22:27; 68:32 etc). Moreover, such offer of praises has both a temporal and an eschatological implication (Ps.9:8; 67:4). Eschatology in the Psalms is more of a pious hope that disease, evil, and misfortune would be banished from the earth (Ps.27:13) instead of the more drawn out eschatology of the New Testament that the earth would be made anew in a creative sense. In the views of R.K. Harrison there is not as much eschatological hope in the Psalter as there is of praise of God and prayers to him on issues that border on terrestrial circumstances and situations.

Perhaps the Messianic hope is embedded in every expression of praise and prayers in the Psalter, but it is of the sort that precluded any thought of an existence other than what obtained in the physical world. The ancient Hebrews believed that the death of the body meant the individual was virtually isolated from God in *Sheol*. This depicts the Psalmists as being predominantly concerned with the more immediate problems of life, with a possible exception of Psalm 49:15 and 73:24. Nevertheless, some Psalms expected to encounter the divine presence even in the shadowy realms of *Sheol* (Ps. 138:9). If we look for a theology of a future life we cannot find it in the Psalms. However, there was certainly a distinct feeling that all

individual spiritual values were by no means obliterated in the decease of the body. Indeed, the very fact that certain authors (of the Psalms) entertained the concept of some kind of vague existence in *Sheol* at least suggested the possibility of a future re-awakening, and that alone was a constant source of praises and prayers.

As Harrison puts it, those who seek to do God have will and so exercise their highest mental faculties in exercise of their duties, find that they gain an inner peace that approximates the Psalmist's model for spiritual and material beneficence. Therefore, in the opinion of Biblical scholars the book of Psalms is the pilgrim's map to a fulfilling spiritual life. The book is a single entity of praise, prayers, and spiritual instructions – a total of 150 psalms in our modern Bible versions. A further division into five books each ending with a doxology marks out the Psalms as a book of books. The opening Psalm serves as an introduction to the rest of the Psalms while the 150th Psalm serves as the final doxology.

1.1 Self-Assessment Question

- How would you describe the use of prayer and praise in the Psalms?

1.2 The Liturgical Approach to the Psalter

It was the passion of Herman Gunkel to give the Psalms a literary face, aside of its renowned spiritual value as Israel's hymn of praise, litany of prayers, and a code of instructions. Herman Gunkel whose work on the Psalms began in the early decades of the 20th century, considered the structure of the Psalms as important to an understanding of the worship situations from which they emerged. He was also interested in the thoughts and moods which different psalms were found to have in common. A third feature of Gunkel's study was the recurrent features of style, form and imagery which served these various ends. He found the following main types: Hymns of praise, personal thanksgiving, communal laments and personal laments. In addition there were smaller categories such as marching liturgies, blessings and cursing, wisdom psalms, royal psalms and a variety of other mixed types.

While Gunkel regarded most of the canonical psalms as literary descendants of Israel's original psalmody, S. Mowinckel saw them as products of a living cultus. He reconstructed the rites and festivals of Israel from the clues which he detected, independently of any confirmation from the Pentateuch. His early psalm studies, in the 1920s, made much of a postulated festival of Yahweh's accession as King, supposedly celebrated at the New Year somewhat after the fashion of the Babylonian *akitu* festival, leaving its traces in about 40 of the psalms and in the development of OT eschatology. This lead was quickly followed sometimes to access, by other scholars, notably the so-called Myth and Ritual School of British and Scandinavian scholars in the 1930s, who drew heavily upon comparative religion to construct in detail a cultic drama of divine combat and nuptials and the fixing of destinies, which accounted for many of the cries of anguish or triumph in the Psalter and most of its allusions to seas and springs, enemies and monsters, defeat and victory, and the attributes and activities of the king.

Not all scholars, however, who acknowledge a debt to Mowinckel have agreed in detail with him or (still less) with those who carried his methods to extremes. Mowinckel himself makes less of the Accession motif in his later writings than in his early studies, and other scholars who emphasize the influence of the new year festival on the Psalter would see its main aspect as covenant-renewal (e.g. A Weiser) or the reaffirming of God's choice of Zion and the house of David (e.g. H.J. Kraus) . But the legacy of Gunkel and Mowinckel remains, in the preoccupation of most commentators with the task of assigning each psalm to its proper class, and in the viewing of almost all the material as ecclesiastical.

This is distinct from the view, with which there can be no quarrel, that the psalms were collected and used for worship, and in many cases written expressly for such use. Instead, it assumes that even those psalms which profess to have sprung from episodes in the life of David (i.e the bulk of Psa. 51-60), or which are attested as his writings by the NT (eg. Psa. 16, 69, 109-110), arose on the contrary out of the cult-drama or were anonymously composed as set pieces for worship situations that might arise for the individual, the Davidic king or the congregation. Thus Psalm 51 despite the introductory statement which is part of the Hebrew text, is allegedly not David's prayer after his sin with Bathsheba, and Psa. 110, despite our Lord's account of it, is not allowed to be the work of (as he himself put in Mk. 12:36) 'David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit.' Within this dominant school of thought, however, there are varieties of opinion as to the right classification of individual psalms, and there is more confidence in saying who did not write the psalms than in deciding who did.

Consequently, J. D. Douglas suggested that the attempt to place the psalms within their setting should be governed by the evidence in each separate case. This will include the internal characteristics to which Gunkel and his successors haven drawn attention, but it will be controlled by the statements, where there are such, in the titles and other scriptures. It will also bear in mind the fact that a psalmist could speak (as Peter pointed out in Acts 2:30ff.) as 'a prophet' aware of God's promises and foreseeing what was far beyond his own horizon.

In all of this, the content of praise includes singing God's goodness, extolling his works on a personal, communal, national and inter-communal levels. Individual praises occur in acknowledgement of his mercies, while national praises are sung in remembrance of great acts of grace. In all, the great acts of God exhibited in the course of the gruesome national experience known, first as the cruel Egyptian bondage and later as the exile, are aptly depicted.

3.2 Self-Assessment Questions

Why do scholars regard the Psalms as the defining literary masterpiece of praise and prayer?

3.3 Metrical division in the Psalter

Regarding metrical division, it should be noted that classical Hebrew poetry has little or no room for metrical division. Not even in the Talmud did meter occupy any significance place. What Josephus did was to apply the occidental concept of classical poets to the writing of Hebrew poetry in his literary analysis of the songs of Moses in Exodus 15:1ff and Deut. 32:1ff.

In his opinion this classical Hebrew poetic lines were written in hexameters and shows that a specific poetic form underlay certain portions of the Hebrew Scriptures. In the opinion of R.K. Harrison there is hardly any justification for this attempt to fit a Semitic literature into an occidental mould. Literature like culture should be allowed to be understood and used within the confines of its own context, particularly when the concept of comparative literature is not in view. Any discernible meter in Hebrew poetry can only be determined by relationship to the forms of other ancient poetry in which the essential basis of the structure was the balance of thought and by implication from the parallel lines themselves.

Furthermore, the fact that the poetry of the ancient Near East and of Egypt pointed to the presence of meter might also support this idea. On the basis of a comparative study of the Syriac language, Bickell repudiated the idea that Classical Greek and Latin concepts of poetry could be related to an oriental language, and sought to transpose the poems of the Old Testament into metrical forms similar to those employed by Ephraem and other Syriac poets. Several grounds may be adduced for the contention that some of the Hebrew poetic compositions exhibited concepts of meter. In the first place, several of the psalms were apparently meant to be sung to the accompaniment of a variety of musical instruments.

Perhaps one essential element of Hebrew poetry, if metrical divisions can be accorded a place in it, is its nature of fluidity. Consequently, while in Babylonian poetry the commonest line comprised two parallel *stichos* containing two stresses each, it frequently happened that in one or other of the *stichos* a third stress was inserted 2:3 or 3:2). On such a basis the comparative simplicity of the Hebrew diction might suggest a 2:2 line as the primary form, and although this structure occurs quite frequently in Hebrew poems, 3:2 "pentameter" is far more common. By far the most widely used scheme in Hebrew poetry, however, is the 3:3, occurring in the poetic sections of Job, in many prophetic oracles, in Proverbs, and in the bulk of the Psalms. While Babylonian poetry often has a predominantly 2:2 meter, individual compositions are generally interspersed with lines that can only be read in terms of a seven-fold *ictus*, making for a 2:2:3 compilations. A six-stress line often seems to require a scanning in terms of 2:2:2.

3.3 Self-Assessment Question

- Of what use was the meter (or metrical forms) in the psalms for the ancient Hebrew faith communities?

3.4 The Strophic arrangement of the Psalter

A strophe can be defined as an informal arrangement of lines characterised by certain external indications. Within the last century a good deal of discussion has centred upon the question as to whether the lines of Hebrew poetry could be grouped in order to form stanzas or strophes. In general it can be said that majority of the older critics held to the view that the psalms were arranged in regular strophic organization, the nature of which had been obscured to some extent by later liturgical glosses. More recent studies have shown that while such an arrangement is possible, as indicated by the presence of acrostic poetry in the Old Testament, the grouping of distichs and tristichs into larger formal units cannot be demonstrated. The fact that strophic

arrangement in Hebrew poetry was never allowed to interfere with the real sequence of thought would imply that the stanza was never basic to the structure of such compositions.

This is in contradistinction to modern poetic songs, in which the stanzas comprises a group consisting of a specific number of lines marked by a particular rhyming pattern. Even where there might appear to be some kind of strophic divisions associated with the thought-forms rather than the rhyming patterns of modern poetic usage. There would thus seem to be no evidence for the kind of rigid metrically constructed strophes entertained by earlier Old Testament scholars.

The Septuagint (LXX) appears to have had some sort of liturgical usage in view when the term was rendered by *diapsalma,* with the implication being that stringed instruments were used to accompany the rendering of the psalm concerned. The Hebrew verb could thus mean either the "lifting up" of voices or the crescendo of musical instruments. That the latter seems very probable is indicated by the fact that *selah* normally occurred at the end of a division of thought, where the voice would presumably pause in any event. In the absence of the foregoing, the only other reasonable indication of some form of strophic arrangement may be seen in the symmetrical organization of the thought-forms.

The discovery of Ugaritic materials was preceded by the frequent assumption by Biblical scholars that the regular strophic order that they had postulated had been disturbed by glosses or dislocations of the text. This furnished a warrant for wholesome rearrangement of lines, textual emendations, and the like, sometimes being undertaken with reference to the Septuagint (LXX) and later versions, but on other occasions being indulged in on a basis of purely subjective speculations. Aside from any other considerations that might preclude such activity, it should now be fairly apparent to all scholars as a result of the discoveries as *Ras Shamra* that the text of the Hebrew Psalter is by no means as faulty or corrupt as was supposed by a great many nineteenth-century critics. Furthermore, the wide degree of freedom that the literary compositions of Ugarit enjoyed with respect to form and fluidity of meter indicates that considerations of meter *per se* are not by any means adequate as criteria for textual criticism, and that in fact wholesale reorganization of the text of the kind indulged in by Duhm and others is specifically contradicted by the epic texts from *Ras Shamra*.

3.4Self Assessment Question

- What is a strophe and how does it facilitate the use of the psalms in prayers and private meditations?

3.5 Hermeneutical Considerations

It is interesting to note that some of the Psalms "have a more didactic character that others (e.g. Psalm 1, 112, 127), while a further type, which may have been related to community usage independently of Temple worship (Ps. 11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 131) is in harmony with some of the great poetical expressions of faith and trust found elsewhere in the Old Testament narratives

(Gen. 49:2ff; Exo.15:1ff; Dt. 32:1ff; 1 Sam.2:1ff; Jere. 11:18ff; 12:1ff; Hab.3:1ff). This observation was first mooted by R.K. Harrison.

Some have concluded that the first Psalm is an introductory note to the rest of the psalms. It demonstrates the benediction of those who live good lives separated from sin and from worldliness. How could it be said that someone who exclusively was devoted exclusively to the study of the Torah would be comparable to a tree planted by the sides of the waters? It is because of the creative result of such a commitment which includes privileged insight into the practical realities of life as well as the power of application of same to the issues of each day. If the first Psalm is an introductory note to the rest of the psalms, then the second Psalm is an introductory note to the body of Messianic psalms. Some theologians insist that all of the Psalms have Christ as theme, and that the words of the Psalms foreshadowed the depths, heights and breadths of the thoughts of the incarnate Messiah so envisaged.

On the other hand, there are those who stress the need to limit the Messianic connotation to those Psalms referred to in the New Testament as explicitly Messianic such as Psalms 2,22 and 110 to mention a few. In this latter view therefore the second Psalm is clearly Messianic while other general Psalms could not be said to envision a Messiah – whether in his first or second advent. Yet the Psalmist did not mince words as to the extent of mutual love and care that existed between God and Christ on the one hand and between God and his people on the other. Consequently, those who fail to pledge their loyalty to the King of kings would face the wrath and the disgust of the Father of all spirits and Lord of all flesh.

Interestingly, Jehovah tackles his adversaries in the same way they tackle those who keep his commandments on earth. This tackling is hinted in the third Psalm which incidentally is the first of the psalms with an imprecatory perspective to it. Humans are quick to multiply their hatred of the good, and do intensify the troubles of the just, but they are unable to hinder them just because of Jehovah's special interest and love for the just and upright. He gives sleep to his beloved ones, so that they know that God is in perfect control of all situations and circumstances that might confront his people. He cannot and does not ignore the appeals of his own people as they are set apart for the purpose of being in constant communion with their Maker. There would be abundant joy and gladness in the heart of the upright as a result of God's sovereign intervention in their situation and his divine "padding" of their plans and purposes. In the morning God would oversee their trials and triumphs, and at night speak to them as a King of kings and God of gods as they arise in the morning with hearts that are turned towards the very temple and city of his presence. Thus shall Jehovah bless the upright and cause the godly to walk in his ways.

However, whenever they err as they very often do then instead of hearing his words of comfort (Isa. 40:1), they would be rebuked by Jehovah in hot displeasure. A situation arises when the Almighty would use his prophets to send timely warnings to his errant people so as to avert an outpouring of his anger against them. The dead do not praise God, and Jehovah gains nothing when the wicked are flushed out and they drag the just along with them into graves of silence. Consequently, those who maintain a life of uprightness are shown divine favour and given the

power to escape all forms of trials or tribulation. Jehovah is the greatest teacher and he teaches the just and upright in the ways they should go, so that though weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

The message of the Psalms generally appeal to the pious, the religious and faithful of all times and clime. The church in Nigeria make use of the psalms so much that it nearly always obscures the clear teachings of Jesus Christ on forgiveness. Adherents of the Christian faith inadvertently employ the use of the psalms in their prayers and most at times end up venting their spleen of vengeance and hate upon their perceived adversaries, rather than simply asking that the God of all mercies should pour out his mercies upon them and show them kindness as those who act before they realize what they are doing.

3.6 Self-Assessment Question

- Summarize the main thrust of piety in the Psalms and show how they have been applied in our contemporary society.

4.0Conclusion

This unit has surveyed the Psalter with a view to highlighting its special interest in the personal piety and experiences of adherents of the God of the Hebrews, and by extension the God of the universe. The traditional Hebrew title is "*tehillim*" meaning "praise", even though many of the psalms are *tehillot* meaning "prayers". In fact, one of the first collections included in the book was titled "the prayers of David son of Jesse" (Ps.72:20).The Psalms have both a literal face and spiritual worth. It serves as Israel's hymn of praise, litany of prayers, and a code of instructions. Herman Gunkel whose work on the Psalms began in the early decades of the 20th century, considered the structure of the Psalms as important to an understanding of the worship situations from which they emerged. The Psalms are both metrical and strophic to put it simply.

Any discernible meter in Hebrew poetry can only be determined by relationship to the forms of other ancient poetry in which the essential basis of the structure was the balance of thought and by implication from the parallel lines themselves. Similarly, the strophic arrangement in Hebrew poetry was never allowed to interfere with the real sequence of thought. In other words, the stanza was never basic to the structure of such compositions. Generally, some of the Psalms "have a more didactic character that others (e.g. Psalm 1, 112, 127), while a further type, which may have been related to community usage independently of Temple worship (Ps. 11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 131) is in harmony with some of the great poetical expressions of faith and trust found elsewhere in the Old Testament narratives.

5.0Summary

So far, this unit discussed the theology and praise of the Psalter with a particular emphasis on their liturgical and ecclesiastical worth in the life and worship of the ancient Israelite faith communities. This has been done using the following sub-headings: Hebraic traditions of Praise and Prayer; the Liturgical Approach to the Psalter; Metrical Divisions in the Psalter; the Strophic arrangement of the Psalter, and Hermeneutical Considerations.

The next unit will discuss the Theology of Relationship and Redemption in the Songs of Solomon.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

Identify and analyse the distinctive features of the Psalms in the worship life of Old Testament believing or faith community.

References / Future Reading

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MODULE 2: THE THEOLOGY OF WISDOM LITERATURE

Unit 5: Relationship and Redemption in Canticles (Songs of Solomon).

Contents

1.0 Introduction

In the Canticles (Songs of Solomon) we are presented with Wisdom Literature as it relates to the love life. It features a scenario in which the intertwining of religion and cultural life has been beautifully illustrated. To the Jews Canticles is a source of pure and exquisite delight that must be read and meditated upon during any of the three major national festivals – Passover, feast of Weeks and Tabernacles. However, pure aesthetics would forbid any literal acquaintance or even interpretation of Canticles because it speaks of base and vile desires and ambitions. Yet it is a book so mysterious and incomprehensible to the unspiritual mind, even though the book is an expression of pure marital or erotic love as ordained by God in creation. That pure love is vindicated in Canticles as against the asceticism and lust of the literal interpreters – which are the two profanations of holy matrimony. There are over 15 geographical references, about twenty-one varieties of plants and fifteen species of animals mentioned in the book, with the name of King Solomon mentioned in seven occasions. Biblical scholars describe the author of Canticles (Songs of Solomon) as well versed in country lore: This points to the fact that true love is holistic, involving humans, animals, plants, flora and fauna.

2.0 Objectives

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the liturgical significance of Canticles as Wisdom Literature
- Describe the allegorical and symbolic interpretation of Canticles
- Show how the erotic language of Canticles impacts on a literal interpretation of relationships and redemption.
- Explain the significance of the flora and fauna of Bible lands as depicted in Canticles for a holistic view of relationships and redemption.

3.0 Main Body

3.1Allegoricaland Erotic View of Canticles

In the opinion of rabbinical scholars the Song of Solomon (or Canticles) is fondly referred to is one of the best gifts ever given to Israel from God: "The whole world is not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; all the Writings are holy, and the Song of Songs is the holy of holies." That is the way Rabbi Akbar affirms the canonicity of the Songs. There had been considerable literal opposition to the canonicity of the Canticles which undoubtedly stemmed from its overtly erotic nature and language. Historically, this objection was outweighed by the traditional Solomonic authorship and by the rabbinic and Christian allegorical interpretations which lifted the poems above a sensual level.

The traditional attribution to Solomon is based on the references to him (Songs 1:5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11) especially the title verse (Songs 1:1). Solomon's skill at song writing was alluded to in 1 Kings 4:32. However, the final redaction of the book might have taken place centuries after the historical Solomon, perhaps earlier than the Greek period – (circa 300 B.C.E.) in view of the intercourse between Canaan and Ionia from the Solomonic period onwards. The linguistic evidences notwithstanding as well as the use of Aramaisms, the Northern origin of the book seems clearly evident, especially when the geographical allusions are taken into careful consideration – Sharon (2:1), Lebanon (3:9; 4:8, 11, 15 etc), Amana, Senir, Hermon (4:8), Tirzah (6:4), Damascus (7:4), Carmel (7:5). Nevertheless, there is no provincialism in the book. The author simply displays a perfect knowledge of Palestine and Syria – from Engedi by the Dead Sea (1:14) to the mountains of Lebanon.

Like other Wisdom Literature the book is personal, experiential and poetic. The power of poetry lies in the intensity of love and devotion expressed and especially in the rich imagery which permeates the descriptions of the lovers and their love. To look at these descriptions with the mind-set of African love songs should not detract from their essentially Semitic origin and application. Some of the similes might look derogatory to the African love singer (e.g. teeth like ewes, neck like the tower of David 4:2ff), but again that does not diminish the depth of the passion expressed from the loved one to his beloved. According to A. Bentzen,

Orientals fix their eyes on one single striking point, though they use several parallelisms to express it: the single striking point in these love songs is the beauty and finesse of the human frame – be it the female or the male. Be that as it may, the wide allusion to pastoral qualities in the imageries of the book has caught the attention of form critics. The poems abound in references to animals and especially plants and some scholars find this as depicting a source for the Songs located in the Canannite fertility cults.

The allegorical method of interpretation of Canticles have therefore been found a useful tool in the hands of rabbis and Church fathers who struggled with the idea of accepting Hebrew love songs into the canon of Scripture. This allegorical interpretation has highlighted the love of God towards his people as manifested in Hebrew history. In Christian circles, contemporary interpreters have equated the beloved to the Church, and the lover to God or Christ. Origen is the great allegorical interpreter of Canticles, followed by Jerome, Athanasius, Augustine and others. One of the greatest setbacks of the allegorical school is the problem of subjectivism – each one interprets according to the individual preferences. In the opinion of R.K. Harrison "the most acceptable would be the view that the book entertains a double *entendre,* in which the theme of human love is interpenetrated with a mystical concept of a far deeper order.

3.1 Self-Assessment Question

- Summarize the importance of an allegorical interpretation of Canticles in Wisdom Literature.

3.2Literal and Dramatic View of Canticles

Biblical Scholars see in Canticles (the Songs of Solomon) a substantial amount of ancient materials that might have originated principally from Israel, in a Northern Kingdom perspective. As we have seen it has often challenged both secular and ecclesiastical interpreters. The overtly secular and the natural, frank treatment of it, the unique allusions to exotic things in nature, the frequent interweaving of nature and dramatic imagery, sharply distinguish the Canticles from nearly all extant pre-Christian Hebrew literature. Furthermore, as V. Nyoyoko has observed, "the book hangs together rather loosely, deriving a semblance of unity mainly from the unusual theme and from the roughly similar style of the separate poems and fragments." No other force, such a single author's viewpoint or an easily recognizable unified structure, can be found to lend credence to the whole, or to guide readers to the meaning and purpose of the book.

Speaking of dramatic imagery, Delitzsch suggested two major characters of Canticles, namely Solomon and the Shulammite shepherdess in the drama. Falling in love with her, the king took her from her homeland to marry her in Zion, and as a result was lifted from the levels of physical attraction to pure love. This theory was criticized rightly or wrongly on the ground of the dignity of the king. It would be out of character for a king of Solomon's standing and calibre to condescend to the love of a shepherdess (Songs 1:7). Neither would it have been realistic for the closing scene of the love drama to take place in the home village of the bride.

Furthermore, in Songs 6:8ff, the bridegroom appeared to set the bride in favourable contrast to the royal harem, which ill accords with the traditions associated with Solomon.

The book combines a mastery of flora and fauna of Bible lands with sentiments of a cultural and commercial intercourse between the lover and his beloved. A number of lyrics contained in the book reflect both a Hamitic and Semitic source, though scholars are critical of any possible connection with the former. In rabbinic circles, Canticles is read exclusively in allegorical terms as has been mentioned earlier, though a literal interpretation is widely accepted among contemporary Biblical scholars and exegetes.

It is remarkable to note the extensive use of metaphors in Canticles: "tents of Kedar", "tent curtains of Solomon", "and tents of the shepherds" – all of which describe a woman with a beautiful and pleasant physique as a masterpiece of creation. On the other hand, the "chariots of Pharaoh", "strings of jewels", "and earrings of gold", describe the exquisite delight of noble men who occupy the royal estate. Other individual clauses include "sachets of myrrh", "a cluster of henna blossoms", "vineyards of Engeddi", "rose of Sharon", "lily of the valleys", and others like "lilies among thorns" which collectively refer to a heart that is purified with love and filled with thoughts that are true, just, lovely, honest, pure, noble, kind, virtuous and praise-worthy. On a more literal and dramatic note, they would refer to the heart of Jesus Christ the redeemer of his church, his bride. The heart of the lover became so captivated by the beauty of the beloved that it forgets all physical limitations of space and time in the expression of the heart of love. Even the tone of the voice becomes infected with the "love virus" because the heart is filling and swelling with love. Love is compared to a garden where all kinds of good fruits could be found.

The wonder and amazement in Canticles is in the fact that the beloved thirsts for love while the lover throttles the globe for adventure. Even when the beloved stuck to appointments given by the lover, circumstances perhaps beyond her control led to an adjustment which resulted in a strong feeling of frustration, distress and despair in the bowels of both. In the attempt to catch up with the lover so as to regain lost ground the beloved stumbles into night marauders who apparently show no regard for anyone – prince, princess, ranks or file. The radiance and ruddiness of love increases from both their heads to their toes only when they show the right attitude in the midst of pleasant as well as distasteful circumstances until their love dreams are achieved, and they find themselves in each other's warm embrace.

Only then does the important body parts become the mutual possession of each other – hair, eyes, cheeks, lips, arms, body, legs, mouth. At the peak of its expression, love causes the lovers to become oblivious of the huddles which they have scaled, while they are busily engaged with a mutual romance that amplifies the wonderful features of their individual bodies. They exchange these distinctive features and blend them into one conjugal union, such that sooner or later they become one body, one soul, one spirit in both a mystical and literal sense.

Painful though it seems, but separation either due to profession, occupation, ill-disposition, or even death becomes inevitable at some point in the relationship. Therefore, love must be experienced and expressed at the right time. Moreover, as long as life lasts, distance cannot

obliterate the feeling of love. Though separated by thousands of kilometres, a lover's heart is kept warm in the hope of a possible reunion with the one loved. As the Church song goes it is a day when true lovers "meet to part no more" (Songs 1-6).

3.2Self-Assessment Question

- Explain the following metaphors of love emotions in Canticles**: "**"tents of Kedar", "tent curtains of Solomon", "tents of the shepherds" the "chariots of Pharaoh", "strings of jewels", "earrings of gold", "sachets of myrrh", "a cluster of henna blossoms", "vineyards of Engeddi", "rose of Sharon", "lily of the valleys", and others like "lilies among thorns".

3.3 Liturgical and Didactic-moral View of Love

The liturgical interpretation of Canticles was first published in 1922 by T.J. Meek. His findings show that Canticles had been derived from sources external to Hebrew customs and manners. His view was countered by N.H. Snaith who claimed to have detected the presence of two alternating cycles in the book relating to specific aspects of Hebrew history. Later biblical scholars like Harrison would prefer sources of Canticles closer to the Phoenician, rather than Egyptian or Babylonian ritual practices. In its present form, Canticles might not have any connection to any pagan liturgy of a generally immoral character as it is difficult for such to be incorporated into the canon of the Hebrew Scripture without a radical revision of its theological presuppositions, and there are no indications that such a redaction took place at any time.

The didactic-moral as well as the liturgical value of Canticles is captured in all of its eight chapters, but especially in the second chapter. It presents the purity and wonder of true love. Exponents of this position have generally regarded the work as historical and as far as some Christian interpreters are concerned it is alleged that the love portrayed therein directs the reader to the greater love of Christ. Basically, however, the composition teaches the beauty and holiness of the marriage-love relationship that God has ordained for humanity, and it is on such basis that Rowley would support the inclusion of Canticles in the Hebrew canon. Let us take a cursory look at the way the liturgical and didactic-moral experience is worked out in the book:

Love is a vision shared by the opposite sex in a union that is comparable to the blossoming of a rose or lily (Songs 2:1-2). In the same vein, it is also compared to uniqueness of a tree among the trees of the forest. Apparently, every love relationship is unique (2:3) both in aromas it sends out and in the fruit it bear. Love also is a didactic emotion both in its power of covering the nakedness of the beloved and as consolation to the isolated. It is both a banner unfurled to draw the attention of all to the intimacy shared by the lovers, as well as a table which provides enriching delicacies for the enjoyments of the lovers.

From the dining hall to the bedroom of delights, the parts of the body come into amorous intercourse. At this juncture, no interference could be condoned, and so intercourse had to be in absolute privacy (2:3-7).

Apparently, and in very deep amorous language, the intimacy of the lovers – particularly the sex experience is described as a "leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills – standing behind our walls.." The completion of the action opens the way into another realm of love, first, a rising from the love bed (2:8-10; 7:11-13), and second a refreshing showers from the dews outside the court-yard. Among the figurative expressions of both physical and biological communication brought into play in the act of love-making include "the winter is past, the rains are over; flowers appear, singing, cooing of doves... arise" are heard all around the palace (2:11-13; 6:11; 7:12).

Primitive love such as is depicted in Canticles is full of natural and exquisite delight, but its limitless affection exposes it to rivalry and competition from other equally suitable lovers. Night time is lover's time. One lover alone does not keep the warmth of love, especially at night (Ecc. 4:9-12). Yet when one lover like Solomon can boast of several wives and concubines, definitely he could not be at off their beds at the same time. Neither was it possible for every one of those women to share in his love for more than a couple of times in the year.

When love is confronted by such a huge competitiveness, then only a restive lover can be sure of sharing in the romance of the lover even in the quietness of the night. Perhaps, the watchmen were positioned to patrol the city to ensure that everyone stayed in the places of their individual love experiences (3:1-5; Neh.3:29; 11:19; 13:22). There could be several other reasons why the duty of the watchmen is required within both the kingdom and palace, but they could do nothing without the support of Yahweh – who appointed the king in the first place.

It is evident in Canticles that love is an exalted emotion, with a fragrance that is totally alluring, and with companions that are both valiant and noble. Love rides on a chariot that is upholstered and beautifully adorned, and its crown is both maternal and glorious (3:6-11). Love is attractive and charismatic: it often draws out a huge company of admirers, helpers and providers such that in the place of love, nothing practically is lacking!

3.3 Self-Assessment Question

- **Mention and discuss at least four of the various interpretations of Canticles.**

3.4 Hermeneutical Considerations

In Canticles it is generally believed that a collection of individual love poems within the Hebrew faith communities have been brought together for both didactic and liturgical reasons. The eroticism apparent in them, according to this view, is to be taken literally for what it is. No attempt can succeed in finding structural coherence in the whole or can uncover an underlying moral. Perhaps some of the lyrics may have been sung at weddings, but the hypothesis advanced at the end of the 19th century, which regards all the lyrics in the book as part of one cycle of poems similar to those sung at modern Syrian folk weddings, is no longer believed plausible. Thus all four interpretations including the allegorical and erotic, the literal and dramatic, and the liturgical and didactic-moral view of Canticles still have their active proponents.

According to Apostle Paul writing to the Corinthians, love is both explorative and protective (cp. 1 Cor. 13:4-8; Songs 2:14-15). Everything about love is beautiful and sweet. Moreover, love like a sweet fragrance sends out sweet aromas that attract "foxes" figurative of persecutions. Love never fails – yes never falters even in the face of troubles. It is instructive to note that love is an affair for the night, not broad daylight, that is, speaking of the amorous component of true love (2:16-17; cp. 2 Pet. 2:13-15 etc.). Those who carouse or make love during the day time are inexorably described as "blots and blemishes" in a canonical text ascribed to no less an apostle than Peter.

In the opinion of E.J. Young, with regards to the teaching of the book:

> The Songs of Solomon (or Canticles) does celebrate the dignity and purity of human love. This is a fact which has not always been sufficiently stressed. The Song, therefore, is didactic and moral in its purpose. It comes to us in this world of sin, where lust and passion are on every hand, where fierce temptations assail us and try to turn us aside from the God-given standard of marriage. And it reminds us, in particularly beautiful fashion, how pure and noble true love is. This, however, does not exhaust the purpose of the book. Not only does it speak of the purity of human love, but by its very inclusion in the Canon, it reminds us all of a love that is purer than our own.

3.4Self-Assessment Questions

- Canticles does celebrate the dignity and purity of human love. What would you compare the "foxes that spoil the new vine" to in the new dispensation of interpretation today?

4.0 Conclusion

To the Jews Canticles is a source of pure and exquisite delight that must be read and meditated upon during any of the three major national festivals – Passover, feast of Weeks and Tabernacles. Like other Wisdom Literature the book is personal, experiential and poetic. The power of poetry lies in the intensity of love and devotion expressed and especially in the rich imagery which permeates the descriptions of the lovers and their love. The overtly secular and the natural, frank treatment of it, the unique allusions to exotic things in nature, the frequent interweaving of nature and dramatic imagery, sharply distinguish the Canticles from nearly all extant pre-Christian Hebrew literature. Basically, however, the composition teaches the beauty and holiness of the marriage-love relationship that God has ordained for humanity, and it is on such basis that Rowley would support the inclusion of Canticles in the Hebrew canon. We also took a cursory look at the way the liturgical and didactic-moral experience is worked out in the book. We also noted that all four interpretations including the allegorical and erotic, the literal and dramatic, and the liturgical and didactic-moral view of Canticles still have their active proponents. There are several parallels in African oral literature to the tenets of Canticles.

5.0 Summary

The essential nature of relationship in Canticles with implication for the redemptive love of the lover for the beloved was surveyed in this unit under the following sub-headings: the Allegorical and Erotic View of Canticles; the Literal and Dramatic View of Canticles; the Liturgical and Didactic-moral View of Canticles, and Hermeneutical Considerations.

The next unit will survey the concept of Wisdom and Old Testament Theology.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Discuss in detail the parallelism between erotic and agape love in Canticles
- How can you defend or oppose the explicit language of love used in Canticles?

7.0 References / Future Reading

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MODULE 3: FORM, RHETORIC AND CONTENT OF WISDOM LITERATURE

Unit 1: Wisdom in The language of narratives and poems

Unit 2: The Metaphors of the Sages in Systematic Form

Unit 3: Sapiential Imagination in Theological Terms

Unit 4: The Rhetoric of Sapiential Language

Unit 1: Wisdom in The language of narratives and poems

Contents

1.0 Introduction

In the book of Proverbs (9:1) we read in the opening verses of the ninth chapter: "Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars." Wisdom is compared here to a host who plays an extensive role in making her guests comfortable, including in the process the slaughtering of fatted calves and making of a sumptuous feast for everyone who cared to turn in to partake of its sumptuous menu. The notion of Christ being the wisdom and power of God mooted by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:24) is reinforced in Wisdom Literature (Pro.4,8,9; Songs 2:4). His invitations to all those who would dine at the royal banquet springs from Wisdom's kind disposition and her concern for those who would dare to build upon her tested pillars and sure foundation. Narrative theologians in contemporary theology have reminded us of the importance of how stories actualize meaning. The same may be said of poetry. Although the stories told in Wisdom Literature are principally poetic and therefore of a sapiential imagination, they are nevertheless meaningful and didactic. Indeed, when the content of the narratives and poems is taken out of these forms and shaped into a systematic presentation, a

different rendering of faith and its meaning occurs; thus depicting the centrality of Wisdom in Old Testament theology.

2.0 Objectives

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Narrate the life experiences of sages in Wisdom literature
- Appreciate the depths of spiritual understanding exhibited by sages.
- Understand the role of fasting in the journey to Wisdom.
- Describe how the fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom for life and godliness.

3.0 Main Body

3.1 The Formal Language Of Narratives

Narratives differ from poetic language in that they usually are formal, literal and logical. Stories told in narrative style would of necessity have a theme that reflects the story teller's perspective to the events narrated, as well as his or her beliefs, values and mores. Even when the story teller keeps a neutral stance, it is difficult to separate him from his presuppositions in telling the story in a particular way at a particular time in a particular place and for a particular audience. In some narrative text the author's purpose stands out very clearly, whereas in others it does not. This implies an apprehension of the divine intention of the narrator prior to an interpretation which ultimately flows from one's study of Wisdom Literature. The objective of a narrative text is achieved the moment observations made based on such texts are interpreted with careful consideration of context-related factors, and is reinforced when the application of the learned purposes of the text are applied to a given audience "according to their felt need."

Once an exegete, interpreter, preacher, or translator / narrator is able to uncover this purposes clearly during observation or in a state of reading and study then the interpretation of the text and its application will of necessity fall into line with the intent and purposes of the human instrument who did the narration. By implication it means that it falls into line with the inspiration that fulfilled the Divine intent and purposes. The interpretation of any literary text begins with observations made of its literary context and this information is processed through contextual re-interpretation and meaningful application.

Israel's wisdom is a very complex phenomenon and it also underwent considerable changes. However, all that it says about life characterizes the basic experiences of the sages and wise men / wise women who put them together first as narratives and then later into songs of praise, laments, imprecations and prayers as we have them today in Wisdom Literature. Obviously inter-connected with various communities of the ancient Near East, Israel owed much of her narratives to her neighbours in the way and direction of the development of her literature generally, and Wisdom in particular. The unique thing about Israel is that it borrowed from others and transformed what was borrowed into a personal, experiential and even lyrical tales

that impacted on life and world-view of many. In other words, Israel digested and expressed the matter of her wisdom anew in her own style to emphasize human interests and moral activities. Indeed, Israel's understanding of Yahweh shaped its proclamation of wisdom.

3.1 Self-Assessment Question

- We cannot divorce the author's presuppositions from any and every narrative text. Discuss this statement with useful examples.

3.2 The Rhetoric of Poetic Literature

An understanding of the way Hebrew poetry works is also an added advantage in the interpretation of Biblical texts generally. Apparently, parallelisms are not necessarily a feature of poetry alone but are also found even in narratives. In Ogba language, emphasis in poetry, as in narratives is often on reduplications, as in English it is by rhymes. In Hebrew parallelisms are the building blocks of poems, songs and stories. They help in simplifying the understanding of the message of a passage as the second part often reinforces or adds clarity to the first part. Consider for instance, Psalm 24:1 and Isaiah 55:6 where we read respectively as follows:

The earth is the Lords and the fullness thereof,
the world and all who live in it.(Ps.24:1)
Seek the Lord while he may be found,
call on him while he is near.(Isa.55:6)

The second line in both passages is paralleled by the first. Identifying parallel expression can help us to unravel obscure verses in other parts of the Bible. Spaces do not permit us to bring into focus all the possible ways of doing interpretive hermeneutics.

Our bibliography below carries a list of authors whose work has benefitted this study, and the reader is advised to consult those references for a personal research. Furthermore, the books under consideration in Wisdom Literature are essentially the poetic compositions of ancient Israelite in particular and ancient Near East in general. Fortunately, these compositions are couched in the personal and collective experiences of inspired persons. Such persons as Agur, Asaph, David, the men of Hezekiah, Jeduthun, Job, Korah, Moses, Solomon and his sons among others who wrote down poetic, experiential and personal notes have helped to keep the records of Israel straight and to preserve their native wisdom. A cursory glance at the contributions made by each of the books considered so far in this section will suffice for a proper appreciation of their rhetorical and sapiential value.

In Job we the see the potency of moral and spiritual strength even when confronted by extreme physical, social and psychological devastation. However, in the Psalms we see the efficacy of oracular engagement with the Deity and the security of the Deity over all those who care to consult with Him from time to time resulting in outbursts of jubilation and songs, but sometimes also in dirges, imprecations, lamentations and remonstrance. In Proverbs we presented with the wisdom of the ancient civilizations of the ancient Near East, especially of

Israel and Egypt and these are couched in rhetoric language of those who had experienced and proved the gracious impact of the Divine-human solidarity. Such is the assurance of security and significance given to those who aspire towards and strive for an experience in the writing of beautiful poems. In Ecclesiastes a warm appreciation of nature and creation issues forth from the pens of one of the greatest men in history.

On the other hand, Solomon warns about the inherent weakness and corruption of the human estate in the terrestrial plane by forces inimical to the true interests of Israel and Yahweh. These forces negate every attempt to derive humanistic love and service from relationships.
This concept is further pursued in the Songs of Solomon – a book in which the need for a more transformed relationship of love both with God and with others is kept open. If the experiences of Old Testament saints are anything to go by, and if scholars consider them exemplary, unique and worthy of emulation, it is these poetic, personal and experiential books that have assiduously preserved them. There is one other way of doing hermeneutical analysis of any text which we cannot ignore at this stage because of its simplicity and adaptability.

3.2 Self-Assessment Question

- What would you describe as the essential rhetoric component of any three of the books studied so far in Wisdom Literature (viz. Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Psalms or the Canticles)?

3.3 Pre-text, Text and Context as Key

By *pre-text* we mean the socio-cultural background in which the authors of the Wisdom books grew up and which shaped their perspectives to the text we now have as Wisdom Literature, and by *context* we mean the world in which ancient Israelite wisdom traditions were shaped and nurtured. Andrew Dearman prefers to look at the context in which wisdom becomes functional, than those in which it originated. Nevertheless, the questions of wisdom in Israel and wisdom's origins are interrelated. No doubt one source of wisdom in Israel was the family, since it was the primary societal institution for nurture and education. Closely related to the family were the clan and the village. Tekoa, for example, is the home of a wise woman who is able to elicit an emotional response from the king to a fictitious story and then use his response as a means to persuade him to a course of action (2 Sam. 14:1-22). In the words of this same widow, David "has wisdom like the wisdom of an angel of God"(14:20) which alludes to other key sources or contexts of wisdom, namely the monarch and the royal court.

It is with David's son Solomon, however, that the Old Testament particularly associates wisdom. Solomon seeks wisdom from Yahweh for the government of the people and then employs it in juridical and administrative ways (1 Kgs. 3:3-28). According to this request, Solomon asks Yahweh for a "listening heart to judge your people and to discern between good and evil." In addition to these accounts, Solomon is described as the recipient, of divinely inspired wisdom, a wisdom that surpassed two widely recognized repositories of wisdom,

namely, the "sons of the East" and Egypt. Moreover, Solomon collects proverbs and songs which are part of his larger interest in the material world, and he is able to answer the questions of the African queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-10).

Generally, biblical scholars consider the rise of the state of Israel as one of the major source of the development of the expected sociological and theological environment within which her wisdom traditions flourished. Yahweh would play the same role of author and guardian of the world order that the Egyptian and Mesopotamian deities played for their respective states. In Israel the administrative apparatus of the state had reached a point by Solomon's reign that schools and scribal guilds had an institutional setting. In turn, this institutional setting would foster the growth of a variety of wisdom movements and sapiential skills, although one should not assume that the didactic emphasis in proverbial wisdom has its "life setting" in schools. Moreover, we should not assume that reference to Solomon's collecting Proverbs, even though there is no reason for scepticism concerning his part in the process.

The biblical traditions concerning royal and court wisdom suggest a parallel with Egypt, where the collection and study of wisdom was institutionalized. This setting would be important for the preservation of written materials and their study. Even so, we should hesitate to put too much weight on schools in Israel in the early pre-exilic period. Above all we should be sceptical of an earlier theory that described this period in Israel as he "Solomonic enlightenment."

Thus we have the customs and manners of Bible lands to fall back on when it comes to contextualizing the wisdom of the sages, including the ancient wisdom of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Israel. We cannot place the "life situations" of ancient times in dialogue with those of contemporary times. Times have changed, but wisdom is never limited to time and space. In that sense wisdom is transcendental. We shall discuss this presently. The initial times of the written word are a matter for Biblical historians and archaeologists to determine. Our interest is mainly to present the text and contexts clearly, correctly and courageously so that it's meaning and relevance is understood by contemporary audiences. Our interest therefore is in underscoring the inter-textual, inter-cultural and even inter-religious dialogue within the various parts of the biblical text, but even more particularly between the world of the biblical text and today's world. This process entails a very careful analysis of both the semantics and morphology to decipher the literal and the interpretive meaning attached to each text by its original authors, including the editorial changes which redactors could observe in each of the text – Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Psalms and Songs of Solomon to mention a few.

3.3 Self-Assessment Question

- Discuss the multi-faceted nature of the context or sources of wisdom in ancient Israelite traditions and show its relevance to multi-disciplinary analysis.

3.4 Hermeneutical Considerations in Wisdom Literature

Every culture produces its own store of wisdom. Wisdom may be expressed in the form of oral pronouncements or stories, or it may blossom into major philosophical works that carefully explore the questions that have troubled humanity since the Stone Age. The Biblical text for its part is replete with the wisdom theme. It is woven into nearly every narrative and literally springs from the tongues of characters in scenes as varied as historical annals and private discussions. Here are a few examples: (1) Eve's dialogue with the serpent in Gen. 3:1-6 is a typical wisdom piece, examining a truism and testing its validity. (2) Jacob employs "native wisdom" by placing peeled rods in front of his flocks to ensure that they produce the proper types of offspring (Gen.30:37-43). (3) Joseph's answer to Potiphar's wife references "right behaviour" in terms of obedience to his master and to God (Gen. 39:8-9). (4) Jethro provides good advice on administration of the people in telling Moses to appoint Judges instead of hearing all the cases alone (Exo. 18:19-26). (5) The wise and the fool are graphically displayed in the story of Nabal (whose name in Hebrew means 'fool') and Abigail, the wise wife, in their dealings with David (1 Sam.25:2-38). (6) In attempting to protect her honour, Tamar urges her brother Amnon not to rape her and act "as one of the scoundrels in Israel" (2 Sam.13:12-13). (7) Solomon earns his reputation as a "wise king" by discerning the truth in the case brought to him by two prostitutes (1 Kings 3:16-28).

The wisdom theme is especially common in the slayings of sages and prophets and in books which so far we have discussed as part of Wisdom Literature. (1) The prophets quote well known proverbs to make a point in their message. Ezekiel 18:2-4 and Jeremiah 31:29-30 both quote the proverb, "the parents have eaten the soured grapes and the teeth of the children is set on edge." (2) The knowledge of God and right behaviour are often paired. Samuel chides Saul for failing to be obedient, "Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam.15:22-23). Hosea points to the people's distress when he says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos.4:6). (3) The path to wisdom is found throughout the books of Psalms and Proverbs in statements like "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 111:10; Pr.1:7; 9:10). There are also "wisdom psalms" like Ps.1, which points to the proper way and the dangers of association with the foolish: "Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners thread..."

3.4 Self-Assessment Question

- Discuss how wisdom literature is a product of the society that produces it.

4.0 Conclusion

Narrative theologians in contemporary theology have reminded us of the importance of how stories actualize meaning. The objective of a narrative text is achieved the moment observations made based on such texts are interpreted with careful consideration of context-related factors, and is reinforced when the application of the learned purposes of the text are applied to a given audience "according to their felt need." Furthermore, the books under consideration in Wisdom Literature are essentially the poetic compositions of ancient Israelite in particular and ancient Near East in general. Fortunately, these compositions are couched in the personal and collective experiences of inspired persons. The wisdom theme is especially common in the slayings of sages and prophets and in books which so far we have discussed as part of Wisdom Literature.

5.0 Summary

So far, this unit examined the Wisdom in the language of narratives and poems, discussed under the following sub-headings: Formal Language Of Narratives; The Rhetoric Of Poetic Literature; Pre-text, Text and Context as Key; and Hermeneutical Considerations in Wisdom Literature.

The next section will discuss another component of Wisdom Literature namely, The Metaphors of the Sages in Systematic Form.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Give a brief textual analysis of your observation and interpretation of native Wisdom.

7.0 References / Future Readings

Ahiamadu, A. E. *Redefining Stewardship of Land and Oil Mineral Resources in Nigeria – A theological and ethical response to Land Occupancy and Oil Minerals Management and Use in a developing economy*. Saarsbrucken: Lambert Academic Press, 2011.

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MODULE 3: FORM, RHETORIC AND CONTENT OF WISDOM LITERATURE

Unit 2: The Metaphors of the Sages in Systematic Form

Content

1.0 Introduction

Wisdom Literature in ancient Israel and the ancient Near East is not rendered by discursive prose but in experiential, personal and poetic language, often with an attempt to systematize its formulations. The literary embodiments of creation theology include poems, narratives, instructions, and sayings. In addition, the rhetoric of each piece of literature participates with the content and form in shaping a minute aesthesis, a world of beauty and substance, that gives coherence and meaning to life. When speaking of creation, the sages usually filled these texts with the content and images of organizing metaphors and metaphor clusters. These metaphors and metaphor clusters may be inferred from the linguistic construal of sapiential literature, for they are not always directly stated. At least this is often true in naming God. The attention is placed on the activity of creation, rather than on the naming of the creator in other than rather generic terms (e.g. God, "the God," "maker," Yahweh) or by indirect reference (pronouns, the Silent still Voice). Nevertheless, the identification of the metaphorical referents of the language of God, the world, and humanity is an important task for seeing how the sages actualize theological meaning. The metaphors for construing the acts of creation and providence in the wisdom tradition include fertility, artistry, word and battle. These infer, then, that God as creator and sustainers is king, judge, artist, warrior, parent, lover, husband, and sage. Metaphors for human beings include children of God, lovers of wisdom, objects of art, kings, and slaves, while the world humans inhabit is most often depicted as a fertile field of garden, kingdom, city, household, or building.

2.0 Objective

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the meaning of fructifying power of the Deity.
- Discover the artistic value of human and animal physiology.
- Recognize metaphors as an essential component of language
- Recognize the reason the battle for human minds goes on.
- Understand metaphors used of God and nature in Africa.

3.0 Main Body

3.1 Fertility Metaphor in Cosmological Tradition

In the ancient Near East, an important cluster of metaphors used to speak of world origins and maintenance is fertility. Through sexual prowess and fecundity of deities, reality was created and sustained. Through intercourse, gods were conceived and born (theogonies) and the alternating seasonal rhythm of fertility and sterility was maintained. Even fertility goddesses like Ishtar and Isis were considered deities of wisdom who dispensed life and fecundity to devoted followers. Gods were represented metaphorically, then, as consorts, lovers, and spouses.

Popular religion in Israel gave Yahweh a fertility goddess, most often Asherah, to be his consort. The prophets adapted this metaphor to speak of Israel as a consort or bride of Yahweh, her lover and husband (see Isa. 54: 5-8; Jer.3:1-4:4; Ezek. 18; Hos.2). As husband and lover of Israel, Yahweh provided life-giving rain and enriched the fertility of soil and crops, which make existence possible. In the face of barrenness of people and flocks, Yahweh as Lord of the Womb ensured that reproduction would give life to present and future generations. Through the love of wisdom and its incorporation in life, humans participated in the creative, generative power of Deity.

The sages appropriated the fertility metaphor to speak of Woman Wisdom as the lover and consort of God (cf. Wisdom of Solomon 6-9). Wisdom is rendered as, if not actually married, a lover, an heir-apparent, and a fertility goddess who seeks to attract young students to her embrace (Pr.7; 9:1-6). In contrast to Folly, who is portrayed as a seductive harlot leading to death (Pro.7:6-27; 9:13-18). Wisdom is depicted in the roles of the Queen of Heaven and divine consort of Yahweh who brings life, fertility, and blessing to those who love her and follow her instruction. In the portrayal of divine activities, Yahweh is seen in the roles of the lover and consort of Woman Wisdom, as well as her father and mother. She in turn becomes the instrument of creation and mediator between God and humanity (Pro.8:2-31). Through God's love of Wisdom, life in the cosmos originated and continues. Through their love of Wisdom, the wise participated in the generative power of Deity and helped to sustain and continue life.

[Living among a Jewish community in the Hellenistic world of Alexandria, Egypt, a wisdom teacher composes an exhortatory speech designed to encourage faithful and wavering Jews to maintain their loyalty to their ancestral faith, to persuade apostate Jews to return to their religious traditions, and to convince pagans of both the integrity and superiority of Jewish religion. Through his speech of artful persuasion informed by Hellenistic literary and philosophical conventions, the teacher shapes a world of imagination that through the activation of memory lays claim to the theological traditions of the past in the effort to address at least one community of the Jewish Diaspora. He skilfully combines Jewish traditions of salvation history and creation with familiar Hellenistic form and thought to construct a new theological synthesis.

Drawing from earlier formulations of personified Wisdom (Job 28; Pro.1:20-33; 8; 9 etc), the teacher gives divine-like characteristics to Woman Wisdom, who dwells beside the divine throne and reflects the glory and attributes of God's nature and embodies the divine activities of creation and redemption in history. She is the artificer through whom God worked in creating the structure of the cosmos (cf. Pro.3:19-20; 8:22-31), the divine spirit that dwells within and orders creation (cf. Sirach 24), the vital force that renews all things (cf. Ps. 104), and the indwelling spirit that enters into righteous human souls in each generation and blesses them with the bounty of her gifts (cf. Pr.3:13-18). Indeed, those who pray to God for her, earnestly seeking to possess her, may expect her to come and take up her dwelling within them (cf.1 Kgs 3). The teacher also draws on the traditions of redemptive history in reciting first a litany of those saved by Wisdom, and then re-telling God's deliverance of the Israelites from the cruel Egyptian bondage].

3.1 Self-Assessment Question

- Discuss the concept of Woman Wisdom as both a fertility and redemptive metaphor.

3.2Artistry Metaphor in Cosmological Terms

A second important metaphor cluster that construes the origins of the creation of the world in the ancient Near East (and particularly in Biblical wisdom literature) is artistry. For example the activities of the Creator God are described in terms of an architect or builder who constructs the cosmos into a well-formed house, elegant palace, or a city for human habitation. The story tellers and poets of Israel borrowed this metaphor to describe the world as a house secured on firm foundations (Ps.18:8; 82:5), with a roof (the firmament or sky; see Gen. 1:6-8; Job 37:18) supported by cosmic pillars (normally the mountains; see Job 9:6; Isa. 40:12; 48:13).

One way the sages understood wisdom was in terms of the design and skill of the artisan God, who created and continues to maintain the well-ordered world. As stated in Proverbs 3:19-20; and Psalm 104:24):

> The Lord by means of Wisdom established the earth; the heavens were secured through understanding. By means of his knowledge the primeval deep was divided, and the skies continue to drip their dew.

While God is rarely called "wise," it is clear that wisdom is a divine attribute. As an attribute of God, Wisdom sometimes assumes this role of builder or artificer of all things (Prov. 9:1-6; Wis.7:22; 8:6). In the first strophe of an elegant poem (Pro.9:1-6), Woman Wisdom constructs her spacious house (or temple) supported by seven pillars, pointing to its beauty, strength, magnificence and perfection. She then invites students to enter into her house and dwell – that is, to take up the study of the wisdom tradition and to live.

[Even so, the Woman Wisdom is not content simply to recite the past, but, by an act of the imagination, he reshapes it in part with a new literary form, a *logos protreptikos* (speech of exhortation), which follows Hellenistic literary conventions (for example the syncrisis), and with new understandings. His thesis in the second part of the book, for example, articulates the theme that those things in creation that blessed the Israelites became the means by which God punished the Egyptians. A variation of this idea is the Stoic concept that the elements of nature were reconfigured in order to act in new and different ways. This both preserved the integrity of the laws guiding the physical world and allowed for God's redemption of the Israelites and punishment of the Egyptians. Instead of rejecting Hellenistic thought and literary expression, the Woman Wisdom makes use of both to communicate her restatement of Jewish faith and lessen the allure of Greek culture.

The imaginative world of instruction and narrative also moves toward a new vision of reality that is yet to exist fully. The exhortatory speech of Woman Wisdom contains no eschatological character, for she promises that God's act of redemption in the past will continue in the future. God's love for creation and all his creatures causes him to offer even to pagans and apostates the opportunity to pursue righteousness and to come to knowledge of their Creator. Kings of the earth, along with all mortals everywhere, may shape within themselves a righteous character that allows them to receive Woman Wisdom and through her obtain the gift of immortality.

The Jews who aspire to righteousness, but who sometimes perish because of their loyalty to their faith and the witness of their character, have the hope of immortality. Indeed they will be the ones who in judgment will stand and condemn the wicked. Only the righteous have the gift of immortality made possible through Woman Wisdom. There will be a reckoning in which the wicked will be punished, while the righteous will reign over the new world]. Such are the notions of creation and redemption embodied in both Hebrew and ancient Near Eastern literary art.

3.2 Self-Assessment Question

- Every book of Wisdom so far encountered in the Old Testament has something to say about God's creative and redemptive artistry. Discuss.

3.3 Metaphorical Variations through Language

The third major metaphor cluster in Israel and the ancient Near East that portrays the origins and maintenance of the cosmos is word *(logos*). The Creator speaks creation into existence and sustains it by the power of language. Metaphorical variations of creation through language include the spoken word, spirit or breath, wisdom, edict, and thought. God in this metaphor cluster is portrayed as acting like a king who issues a royal decree, or a sage whose wisdom imagines and then brings into being creatures and the world, or a poet whose elegant language shapes an aesthesis of coherence, beauty, and justice. The power of the divine breath animates existence, while its withdrawal leads to sterility and death. The sages speak of creation by word (Sir. 39:17), point to the ordinances that govern the heavenly bodies and meteorological phenomena (Job 28:26; 38:33), and tell of God's royal edict that establishes the boundaries for a threatening Sea to keep his flocks from overwhelming creation (Job 38:8-11; Pro.8:29; cf. Jer.5:22). The origins and maintenance of the cosmos, then, depend on the power of the divine language.

Wisdom is not only the imagination, skill, and talent of the artist and poet to create beauty, but it is also analytical and constructive reason that both observes and posits coherence and order, whether in reference to elements of nature or in the persuasive arguments of moral discourse. For the sages, divine wisdom creates and orders the world, originates and sustains all life, and, embodied in sapiential language, teaches those who take up the path to sage- hood (see Job 28; Pro.8:22-31; Sirach 24). The sapiential tradition contained, then, this same creative, divine wisdom that brings and nurtures life and well-being. As the voice of God, Wisdom is present in every work of creation, goes in search of those who desire life, reveals the divine will, and points the way to blessing (Pro.1:20-33; 8:1-36; Wis. 1:7; 9:17-18).

The sages therefore regarded language as a vehicle for both creative and destructive utterances. Each teaching contained the potency to bring about well-being, success, and vital existence; while each foolish word, thoughtlessly spoken, could result in failure, misery, even death (Pro. 10:1, 20-21; 12:6; 18:21). Language could create and sustain a beneficent order of life, or subvert this same order and lead to destruction. Through wise and prudent language, the sages engaged in the creative activities of shaping and sustaining the cosmos, human community, and individual life.

In Israel and other cultures of the ancient Near East, the creative and destructive power of language was at times associated with breath, considered to be the life force of creaturely existence and thus the vital, life-giving power that permeates all of the cosmos. In the Hebrew Bible, God's breath or spirit gives life and sustenance to all creatures (Psa. 104; see also Gen. 2:7; Isa. 42:5). Elihu, for instance, uses this tradition in speaking of the sovereignty of God and the utter dependence of creation upon God's vital breath (Job 34:14-15). Ben Sira speaks of Wisdom's coming forth from the mouth of God and then permeating creation like a mist (Sirach 24). The author of the Wisdom of Solomon equates wisdom with this life-giving and sustaining spirit of God, which is present in all of creation (Wisdom 1:6-7).

The power of divine edict is also associated with the creative and destructive potency of language. Justice is the divine force that permeates all of reality and keeps it from returning to chaos. Reality is construed as a kingdom regulated by divine laws that, combined together, comprise cosmic justice. Through obedience to laws and wisdom teachings, humans participate in the ordering of this reality. At least during the monarchy, kingship was legitimated by this tradition, for the king is responsible for laws that reflect the justice that permeates the cosmos (cf. Pro.16:12). Other institutions, including those of scribes and teachers, had a similar responsibility, even though less influential.

In other words, the metaphor of divine word was very significant in the wisdom tradition. The frequent emphasis on proper speech points to the importance of this image. Eventually, the sapiential tradition and its cluster of word metaphor were identified with the written Torah (Psa. 19; 119; Sirach 24). Torah and wisdom teaching became the embodiment of the divine life-giving and sustaining power of creation.

3.3 Self-Assessment Question

- How would you defend or oppose the claim that language is the primary vehicle for constructing or destroying reality?

3.4 The Battle for Right is not by Might

A fourth metaphor for the origins and maintenance of world creation is battle. Creation issues from the contest between the divine warrior and primeval chaos, often personified as a dragon or serpent residing in the cosmic waters. Through the defeat of chaos, the Creator ascends the throne as a cosmic ruler who then creates the world and issues decrees that determine human destiny, sustains creation, and order human society. Yet, this rule is not uncontested, but continues to be opposed by the forces of chaos that seek to destroy the cosmic government of the Creator and to bring to an end the order of life. In this cluster of metaphors involving struggle, the Creator is both the divine warrior who battles chaos for supremacy over the cosmos and the victorious king who assumes rule over the divine assembly and the entire cosmos.

[Israelite and Jewish sages not only alluded to metaphors that construed their imaginative envisioning of the creation and maintenance of the cosmos, but also spoke of human origins, sustenance, and nature. Humanity and human individuals are created and sustained by God's acts of fertility and nurturing, creative artistry, and inbreathing of the divine spirit. To portray human nature and destiny, the sages spoke of humanity both in terms of the actions and roles associated with children, king, and slave, and objects of beauty and art. At timeshumanity was named or specifically described by these images. At other times, their activities and roles are indirectly imagined in these terms.

The Woman Wisdom's speech of exhortation, through its rhetorical structure, enacts a world that allows for the active presence of God and participation of those who become wise. The first major section speaks of Wisdom's indwelling in creation and entrance into the souls of the

righteous. Wisdom is the artificer of creation who renews all life, while she also dwells within the righteous in reconciling them to God and leading them to immortality. The wicked deny divine creation, attributing their existence to mere chance. Through their evil, death entered into the world, and in their efforts to deny divine purpose to life they persecute and seek to destroy the righteous. Solomon, the narrator through whose voice the Woman Wisdom speaks, becomes the example of the righteous person whose prayer for Wisdom leads to her possession. At the end of the first major section Wisdom takes on the role of the redeemer who saves the righteous from destruction], through the battles in which chaos and confusion are defeated and order and decency is established.

Apparently, the battle was fought to bring order and decency out of chaos and confusion. It is similar to what Yahweh did in bringing the gods of Egypt under subjection in order to rescue his people and bring them into a land of their own in which they could be governed and administered by Yahweh's righteous laws. Such ability of Yahweh to engage the opposing forces of evil in battle and to defeat them and rule over them exemplified in the redemption of Israel from the cruel Egyptian slavery has become paradigmatic in Wisdom literature for the divine action in the world and the purpose towards which God directs cosmos and history. In both poetic and narrative language, the focus of Yahweh's battle weapons is on the deliverance of the righteous and the defeat of the wicked. Thus the very means of the deliverance of the righteous becomes the same means for the punishment of the wicked. Therefore, God will always exalt and glorify himself in the blessings of divine preservation, promotion, prosperity, protection and provisions which he furnishes his people at all times against the wish and designs of their adversaries.

3.4 Self-Assessment Question

- "God engages the forces of evil in battle such that the very means of blessing his people becomes the very means of punishing his enemies." Critically evaluate this statement.

3.5 Hermeneutical Considerations in the Old Testament and in Africa

In Wisdom Literature as in the rest of the Old Testament, metaphors of creation, redemption, relationship and mastery play an important role in the structure and systematic content of the sage's theology. In Solomon's prayer, God is addressed as the one who created all things through his word and formed humankind to have dominion over the creatures (Gen.1:26-28: Psa. 8:1-6). In Wisdom however God created the world out of "formless matter" and humans out of "dust" meaning that creation is a process of shaping and forming matter into the forms of things that are desired. However, it is especially Woman Wisdom who serves as both the instrument of divine activity in creation and the artificer , the same way God is the artificer (see Pro.8:22-31) of what is formed. Divine Wisdom is now more than a literary device of personification of a divine attribute. She has become an existing being, mediating between heaven and earth.

The Woman Wisdom permeates creation, holds it together, and provides it with a structure and an order, while as the divine spirit she renews all life. Cosmic wisdom enters into and dwells in

pure and honest souls in each generation, making them friends of God and becoming the object of human passion. Thus Old Testament wisdom literature is imbued with this divine afflatus that points the way upwards to a Deity that is all wise, all powerful and ever present.

Similarly, the African concepts of God speaks of a Creator and Artificer who is Supreme, All powerful and Ever-active in the affairs of human communities – be it among the Yoruba *Olodumare,* the Igbo *Chineke,* the Hausa-Fulani *Allah,* or the Egyptian *Ra* they all convey the same message – the concept of a Supreme God who is over all and who is in all (Eph. 4:6). Why would John Mbiti (1969) describe the African as incurably religious or Bolaji-Idowu (1996) underscore the pantheistic mind-set of the African in deifying nearly all objects of worship whether they be trees, fields, rivers etc if not for the understanding that God and religion is the primary pre-occupation of the African, and indeed humanity? The point however is that the ancient Israelite concepts of God now conveyed to Africa through the imperial missionary project of the 18^{th}-20^{th} centuries has a much more loftier, sublime and purer concepts of God devoid of caprice and immorality often associated with deity in Africa.

3.5 Self-Assessment Question

- Give a brief analysis of the concepts of God in both African and ancient Israelite world views.

4.0 Conclusion

This unit provoked our mind in reading the Old Testament differently, particularly when we approach a study in Wisdom Literature. The extensive use of metaphors, though not a characteristic exclusive to Wisdom literature, is the easiest way of understanding the sayings of sages as most of them spoke of human features such as fertility, artistry or artisanship, language and battle in their personal understanding and expressions in relation to Deity. Not only is God presented as husband and owner of his people Israel, but also he makes them fruitful like the way the heavens pour down rain and dew to make the earth fruitful. Besides, he designs and moulds them and the rest of his creatures in ways and manners that are individual, unique and peculiar. Like a master artisan Yahweh needs no other counsellor in displaying his architectural ingenuity throughout creation and nature. Neither does he create without the use of words and language similar to what he has given to humans – the gift of speech or utterance! Thus, in bringing humans and nature to the place of life and light words serves as a means of activating Yahweh's true and good intentions. His power to create and to destroy is in his words. Consequently, he fights his battles not with weapons of war, but with words of authority and power and in the process disperses the forces of chaos and confusion in both the celestial and terrestrial realm, while at the same time preserving, promoting, prospering, protecting his people while at the same time providing for them the blessings they need for life and godliness.

5.0 Summary

This unit surveyed the concept of metaphors in the Old Testament, and particularly in Wisdom Literature under the following sub-topics: Fertility Metaphor in Cosmological Tradition;

Artistry Metaphor in Cosmological Terms; Metaphorical Variations through Language; The Battle for Right is not by Might; and Hermeneutical Considerations in the Old Testament and in Africa.

The next unit will consider the second to the last theme in the third module, namely: Sapiential Imagination in Theological Terms.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Do a critical appraisal of the uses and relevance of Metaphors in Wisdom Literature, particularly as it used in creation, redemption, and relationships.

7.0 References / Future Readings

Ahiamadu, A. E. *Redefining Stewardship of Land and Oil Mineral Resources in Nigeria – A theological and ethical response to Land Occupancy and Oil Minerals Management and Use in a developing economy*. Saarsbrucken: Lambert Academic Press, 2011.

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MODULE 3: FORM, RHETORIC AND CONTENT OF WISDOM LITERATUTE

Unit 3: Sapiential Imagination in Theological Terms

Contents

1.0 Introduction

Broadly speaking, imagination is the capacity of the human mind to form images, organize them into a coherent whole, and provide them meaning. Imagination may be broken down into two types: common and creative. Common imagination, in contrast to sense perception, projects to exist in the mind and then seeks to interpret or explain something that is not subject to the immediate experience of the senses. On the other hand, creative imagination involves what is commonly designated as the construction of a world view. There are several levels of creative imagination and the student is advised to read the references at the end of this unit. Meanwhile, suffice it to say that one level of creative imagination is at work in placing the various objects of reality into a meaning system that makes sense of human experience and provides a context for making one's way in the world. In an earlier sub-section (Module 1 Unit 3) we discussed sapiential imagination as an indispensable part of Wisdom Literature, and stated that it shows more of the personal, experiential and reflective style of writing than in any other components of the Old Testament. Perhaps, a methodological point to note is that sapiential imagination is of such a nature and plays such a key role in the shaping of the world of the sages, particularly in their understanding and shaping of reality.

2.0 Objective

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Appreciate the importance of the human imagination as a gift from God in the recovery plan of God for humanity in the Old Testament.
- See the danger of perverted imagination in the covenant and sapiential community.
- Describe the benefits of common and creative imagination in faith communities.
- Understand the indispensable role played by the sages in shaping the realities of the believing communities.
- Evaluate the paucity of the use of creative imagination in socio-religious life of Africa

3.0 Main Body

3.1 The Nature of Sapiential Imagination

The Sages in ancient Israel made their way in the world, at least in part, by using common imagination to form, classify, organize, combine, and synthesize the images. Such wisdom imageries indirectly derived from their sense experience are to articulate an artful presentation of language in both their character and conversation. These images were placed into a variety of literary forms created by the sages: sayings, instructions, poems, dialogues, and narratives. While the literary forms possessed general characteristics, the sages shaped these by rhetorical structures and images, designed to create a literary aesthesis that brought together forms, structure, and contents into an elegant, compelling, and insightful teaching. The teachings of the sages evoked the imagination, provided insight into faith and morality, stimulated critical reflection, and became the basis for rational decision making and moral action.

By the exercise of common imagination, the sages observed such things as the drunken behaviour of the fool, the soothing effect of the calming word, and the admirable industry of the ant, classified them into common categories, and then used them as the substance of wisdom teaching. Sayings and instructions of various kinds were especially used to incorporate into moral discourse what was learned from reflecting on the images of sense perception. Comparisons, even between objects and experiences that did not seem to be related, were made between objects and experiences that did not seem to be related, were made that contributed to a body of knowledge that made sense of the world.

Simply stated, this is imagination that moves to fill in observable features of fragmentary data, classifies and presents them in ways that reflect an artful combination of form and content.

Beyond the common imagination, and at the preliminary level of creative imagination is the construction of a world view. At a secondary level, however, creative imagination moves from mere conventional portrayals of images to unconventional ones by associating with objects and segments of reality new features or by putting them into unusual configurations and combinations. A third level of creative imagination allows the mind to transcend the present world to shape realities that reside beyond the immediacy of experience and perception. This type of creative imagination may involve envisioning new possibilities that do not yet exist,

save in the mind's eye. A future is envisioned that may be grounded in the past and the present or even represents a radical break from either of these two temporal spheres. This type of creative imagination may move totally outside the boundaries of space and time to speak of transcendence.

A fresh or transformed image may shatter existing meaning structures and lead to the creation of a new world view. Creative imagination may subvert orthodox conventions in order to usher into existence a new life-defining and life-orienting reality. This is the type of imagination that Ricoeur describes in his important book on metaphor. As we have seen earlier, metaphor has the ability to re-define reality and transform those who live within its world. While all levels of creative imagination may have the unique power of disclosure i.e., they enable an object under consideration to signify or mean something as a result of interpretation, creative imagination at its highest level possesses transforming power by disclosing new possibilities of meaning for existence and self and their attainment in a world that is not-yet-actual.

3.1 Self-Assessment Question

- How would you define imagination and the concept of reality shaped by Sages?

3.2 The Role of Sapiential Imagination

The sages used their creative imagination in the shaping of a world view that provided the context of wise living and being. In the opinion of Leo Perdue, the role of the sapiential imagination could be accessed through six components: tradition and memory, critical engagement and reformulation of understanding, envisioning the world, imagining God's central to and yet outside of that world; imagining human existence within that world, and acknowledging the limits and restrictions of mystery.

First, the sages drew on the cultural traditions passed on to them from their predecessors in the formulation of their own articulation of Wisdom. Every time sapiential imagination was put to work in the formation of sayings, narratives, and poems, the sages did not create a novel world, because they lived in a world constructed at least in part from inherited tradition. They did of course, re-shape these traditions through their creative freedom, but inherited images still pressed themselves into their imagination. For example, the metaphor of the tree of life derives from the mythic traditions of the ancient Near East and perhaps was mediated through the Yahwist narrative in Genesis 1-2, but perhaps not exactly so. In other words, in the shaping of the sapiential imagination, tradition and memory plays very crucial roles, and this imagination builds on the linguisticality and historicality of human existence.

Secondly, sapiential imagination engages critically with and reformulates understanding in ways that activate the human memory. The one who hears and sees is enabled to redefine the world of story-telling and poetic speech. Those who receive these narrative worlds enter into a structure in which they play a role either as active participants or as observant spectators. As soon as they enter into this structural world of linguistic and historical reality, their own reality construed through language is experienced or re-experienced. However, while these memories

of the new reality are fresh and vital, the human participant then tests their validity according to existing cultural and personal norms. In re-telling these narratives and representing these poems, the sages often reshaped them in new ways to convey their meaning in changing culture. Even though the authenticity of the culture now re-told may be denied or completely abandoned, they sometimes rear up their ugly heads because of having shaped culture and community for many past generations.

Thirdly, Sages also used their imagination to re-describe reality by seeing an altered world similar to or even radically different from the one presented through traditions. Ben Sira, for example, uses creative imagination to produce a theological synthesis that combines creation, wisdom, history and Torah into a fresh world view; all of creation and history has been divinely guided toward their culmination in the priestly-scribal community in Jerusalem. In the Wisdom of Solomon, creative imagination is used to shape reality within the form of a homily of persuasion that is in measure still in future. The task of faithful Jews who follow the teachings of the wise is to help to practically enliven that new reality.

Fourthly, the Sages envisioned God as being in the center of their historical and linguistic world of space, time, and action. At the same time, God stands outside this world and brings it into judgment. The wise believed that regardless of how compelling and meaningful their constructed world may be, God is still a transcendent, often mysterious deity whose freedom cannot be constrained by the boundaries of a sapiential world view. God for the sages is not directly experienced through the senses, but is known through the revelation of creation, the traditions of the past, and, at least through religious experience in the case of Job.

Fifth, human nature and destiny also informs the sapiential imagination in a whole lot of ways. With imagination the sages constructed a world in which to live (historicality), and their tools for this world construction were metaphors that were embodied in both poetry and narrative (linguisticality). Important metaphors were used to construe the human nature and actions. Humans for instance were the children of God, works of art, lovers of wisdom etc. These metaphors were sometimes clearly used but at other times were inferred from the descriptions of human nature and behaviour.

Sixthly, the Sages envisioned the divine component of human existence couched in mystery and expressed in the contingencies in life that were not under human control or that could not be anticipated. Moreover, there were mysteries in the reality experienced by the sages and in the world they imagined that compelled them to appreciate the immensity of God and the paucity of human intelligence and cognitive power. Nevertheless, the sages were not by such mysteries and contingencies dissuaded from their passion for both experiential and transcendental knowledge. In Proverbs 16:9 it is stated thus: “A human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps.” Neither did they abandon their responsibility to develop ways for triumphant living in the world.

3.2 Self-Assessment Question

- In which ways did the sapiential imagination express itself in Leo Perdue’s views?

3.3 Imagination **in Wisdom Literature**

It is instructive to note that all books within the Wisdom corpus presuppose the importance of human observation and experience in the wisdom movement which as we have seen encompassed not only ancient Israel but also the ancient Near East in general. Even in the book of Job, where the empirical element in human experience comes under critique, it is still presupposed as integral to the search for wisdom. Observation and experience in turn indicate two key elements of imagination fused into the wisdom movement's approach to culture. One is the emphasis on the observant individual who seeks to understand discrete data, a particular experience or a set of events. The other concerns the collected observations of previous generations (e.g. the two-way to live doctrine) which grant insights and warrants for discerning sages.

Thus imagination fuelled the sages' apprehension of divine truth, but also of the realities which from day to day confronted the individual humans and which needed to be answered based on empirically workable (if creative) procedures. A look at the book of Proverbs demonstrates the importance of parental instruction for the child or student, while in Job the wisdom inherited from God and from our forebears comes into exposure. Ecclesiastes completes the picture with its offer of individual imagination and reflections in the light of certain expectations of what should be or will be profitable for an individual. In each of these examples, there is a tension between the variety of experience and the more stable norms of tradition**,** a tension which becomes acute in Job and Ecclesiastes. Its accent on observation and experience has made the wisdom movement the most open to all literary traditions potentially in the Old Testament traditions. Apparently, the root of wisdom movement could be located in imaginative insights from its various cultural settings. Yet there were two veritable, if theological sources of creative imagination which shaped their approach to host cultures. One is the affirmation of a theology of creation broadly understood. Human community including her sapiential heritage is a manifestation of a creator, so that insight into the workings of any human community or natural environment provides instruction for the life of the wise. Secondly, 'the fear of Yahweh / God' also anchors the imaginative elements in the wisdom movement, and of course with a particular theology in mind.

Yahweh is the creator whose works deserve a response of awe and piety on the part of the wise. The value of wisdom lies in its ability to guide a sage's imagination and shaping the mental code and to respond appropriately. Even if Yahweh's activity as creator or moral agent seems hidden to the sage, there is every indication that Yahweh's presence in the world and in the human community is embedded in human capacity not only for mnemonic but also in creative or imaginative learning. Although Yahweh is mentioned in the Psalms, Proverbs, and Job, there is no clear mention of the divine name in Ecclesiastes and Songs of Solomon except as the 'fear of God'; and the crevices which this creates is completely absorbed by the human mental capacity both to remember, think and imagine!

Simply put, observation and experience are tools of the human intellect which remained an integral part of the wisdom movement both in ancient Egypt, ancient Israel and the ancient

Near East. It is also the primary reason for the close affinity and accommodating relationship between the wisdom movement and ancient Israelite culture.

3.3Self-Assessment Question

- The role of imagination in the theology of Wisdom Literature consists in its ability to shape both the experience and observation of sages in the literary exercise of ancient wisdom movements. Is this a correct assessment? Discuss.

3.4 Hermeneutical Considerations in the Old Testament and Africa

Although the influence of the wisdom movement on the Old Testament is greater than contents of the five books of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Psalms and Songs of Solomon, these all furnish the basis for an examination of the distinctive emphases of the movement's approach to culture. The books of Wisdom Literature reflect in varying degrees the international character of the wisdom movement and its empirical approach to human existence. Furthermore, in varying degrees they demonstrate profound wrestling with the place of wisdom in the development of Yahwistic theology and Israelite culture.

Each of the five books presupposes the importance of human observance and experience in the wisdom movement. Even in the book of Job, where the empirical element in human experience come under critique, it is still presupposed as integral to the search for wisdom. Observation and experience, in turn, indicate two key elements in the wisdom movement's approach to culture. One is the emphasis on the observant individual who seeks to understand discrete data, a particular experience, or a set of events. The other concerns the collected observations previous generations which grant insight and warrants for discerning sages. Such observations included the general assumption that God is good, caring and just; and that he could be trusted to support and bless those who live wisely and justly.

Conversely, there is little emphasis laid on the indigenous or native wisdom heritage – as depicted in African proverbs, wise-sayings, and folk-lore – in dealing with environmental and ecological problems of clean air, green environment, freedom of movement and sustainable development in the depressed region of the Niger Delta. There is embedded in the culture of various African communities such sapiential endowments which if harnessed could yield the ethos for environmental and ecological integrity in Africa. A lack of recognition of the sapiential (or wisdom) heritage of African communities, even in its present oral form, does exclude multinational and expatriate ventures from sharing in our common humanity as well as from accepting and cherishing the uniqueness of the African sapiential heritage.

3.4 Self-Assessment Question

- How does the Old Testament concept of sapiential imagination compare to or contrast with the African oral sapiential heritage?

4.0 Conclusion

This unit has shown that imagination is the capacity of the human mind to form images, organize them into a coherent whole, and provide them meaning. It depicts both the common and the creative aspects of imagination. We have also outlined the six components of sapiential imagination, namely tradition and memory, critical engagement and reformulation of understanding, envisioning the world, imagining God's central to and yet outside of that world; imagining human existence within that world, and acknowledging the limits and restrictions of mystery. Lastly, imagination fuelled the sages' apprehension of divine truth, but also of the realities which from day to day confronted the individual humans and which needed to be answered based on empirically workable (if creative) procedures. In our hermeneutical considerations we learnt that Old Testament sapiential traditions have international sources and that African sapiential heritage has an essential role to play in sanitizing the socio-cultural policies of both the state and the expatriate companies.

5.0 Summary

So far, this unit surveyed the Old Testament concept of sapiential imagination as a vital literary force in Wisdom Literature, and this was done under the following heads: The nature of Sapiential Imagination; The Role of Sapiential Imagination; Imagination in Wisdom Literature; Hermeneutical Consideration in the Old Testament and Africa.

The next unit, which concludes our studies in this Manual, will examine the **Rhetoric** of Sapiential Language.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment

- Give a brief but critical analysis of the nature, role and components of Sapiential imagination and demonstrate its relevance in enhancing public policy in Africa.

7.0 References / Future Reading

Ahiamadu, A. E. "Sapiential Approach to Environmental and Ecological Integrity in Nigeria" in Kiabara: Journal of Humanities Vol 16 / 1 (2010), pp. 78 – 90.

Ahiamadu, A.E. *Biblical Hermeneutics – Methods and Tools of Interpreting and Applying the Bible in African – A postcolonial maximalist analysis*. Enugu: SIVC, 2012.

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MODULE 3: FORM, RHETORIC AND CONTENT OF WISDOM LITERATURE

Unit 4: The Rhetoric of Sapiential Language

Contents

1.0 Introduction

Metaphors played a central role in the rhetorical composition of sapiential language. Through artistic expression, the sages shaped an esthesis of beauty and order to express their views of God, humanity, and the world. Through reasoned arguments, the sages attempted to persuade their hearers to follow their teachings. In addition, they also depended on the power of language to create a world view that stimulated the imagination of those they addressed. The poems about Woman Wisdom, the sayings about the responsibility of the wealthy to care for the poor, the speeches of Job and the voice from the whirlwind, and the royal testament of Qoheleth to name a few, are well crafted texts designed to create a world of imagination that expressed different sapiential understanding of God, humanity and the world. Only a cursory glance at some of the major features of this rhetorical casting of sapiential language will demonstrate to the student how important rhetoric was for the sages in construing their teachings and in the construction of reality.

2.0. Objective

By the end of this concluding unit, you should be able to:

- Appreciate the place of Wisdom Literature in general Old Testament studies
- Understand how the genre of Wisdom shaped the literary tradition of the sages
- Know the criteria for differentiating between Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly
- Acquire an interpretative lens for identifying Wisdom in both the Old Testament and African literary traditions.

3.0 Main Body

3.1 The Origins of Rhetorical Criticism

The origins of rhetorical criticism are usually traced to James Muilenberg, though he himself acknowledged important predecessors, including especially Herman Gunkel, Robert Lowth, and J.G. Herder. The major tasks of rhetorical criticism are to define the limits to a literary unit (prose or poetry), uncover the component parts and structural patterns at work in its shape, and point out the literary techniques used in ordering artistic composition. The focus is the literary work itself, and not the mind of the author, or the understanding of the original audience. The artistry of the text renders its meaning. This means that the artistic composition and the meaning of the text are inseparable.

The literary techniques that enable a unit to cohere and engage the imagination include anaphora (the repetition of an initial word or words of several clauses, lines, or strophes); refrains (repeated words or phrases (*mots crochets*) that blend the entire unit or major subunit; inclusions (the repetition of the opening word or words at the close of the unit, thus marking the unit's literary boundaries), and parallelism of members (strophes or lines within a poem that parallel in some fashion, though there is also a "seconding sequence" in the second part that extends, differs from, or in some fashion changes the idea in the first part). Among the different kinds are especially synonymous, antithetical, and synthetic parallelism (discussed in the section on Psalms and Proverbs)

Other features of artistic composition include onomatopoeia (words imitating sounds), alliteration (the correspondence of sounds at the beginning of words), assonance (the correspondence of the sounds of accented vowels), and a variety of different structures for lines, paragraphs (narrative), and strophes (subunits of a poem that express normally one central idea) including chiasms (literally an "X" formed by a pattern of lines : e.g. a, b, c, cl, bl, al) and acrostics (particularly alphabetic ones).

These literary features of Hebrew poetry and narrative are used by the sages in the esthetic shaping of their teaching. Form, metaphor, and rhetoric combine with content to transmit the values and beliefs of the sages in ways that will provoke the imagination and open the mind to learn about and reflect on God, the world and human existence.

3.1 Self-Assessment Question

- Outline the literary techniques that characterize sapiential rhetoric. How do they fit?

3.2 Rhetoric in the Bible

There are not many movements in Biblical Study whose beginning can be exactly dated, but such is the case with the movement known as 'rhetorical criticism'. The expression was coined by James Muilenberg in his presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature, in December 1968, which was called 'Form Criticism and Beyond'. Muilenberg took it as a given that form criticism was the dominant mode of study then adopted by American scholars. He argued that form criticism was perfectly valid and satisfactory, but that it might be time to move on from its competence in studying individual pericopes and return to the project of trying to understand texts in their entirety (there are some resemblances here to early canon criticism). What was needed, Muilenberg suggested, was a close attention to the articulation of biblical texts, so that one might see how the argument of chapters and books have persuasive ('rhetorical') force with their readers.

Classical texts have always been studied in this way. Indeed, in ancient times rhetoric was a major branch of study which subsumed much that we might now call literary criticism. The aim of all writers was (and is) to persuade the reader, to talk the reader over to their side of an argument – more obviously in discursive prose than in verse, but there too, if we allow 'persuade' to have quite a broad meaning.

In Biblical Studies questions of rhetoric, Muilenberg argued with good reason, had tended to be neglected, especially since the essentially fragmenting methods of form criticism had deflected attention from the finished work which a redactor had produced from the fragments. In a sense, rhetorical criticism is just redaction criticism by another name. But if so it is a distinctive way of looking at the possibilities of redaction criticism, which concentrates on the way the reader, is pulled along through the text rather than on the text in its own right. Rhetorical criticism is interested in how writers or redactors do things to readers. Often this happens through 'structures'; but where structuralists are concerned with archetypal structures of myth or narrative, rhetorical criticism is interested in the structure and shapes of arguments. A recent work on Biblical criticism defines rhetorical criticism as seeking to make clear "the overall argumentative and persuasive strategy that is designed to move the audience or reader to agree with the speaker or writer."

One of the best illustrations of how rhetorical criticism can work in Muilenberg's own commentary on Isaiah 40-66 (often referred to in scholarly circles as 'Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah') in the *Interpreters' Bible*, written before he had formulated a theoretical statement of his position. The commentary is obviously form-critical, in that it begins by dividing the book of Isaiah into pericopes, and is concerned with the possible oral existence of these pericopes in the prophet's (or prophets') own preaching. But Muilenberg sees the pericopes as also arranged in a deliberate way, so as to persuade the prophet's audience to accept certain

conclusions – primarily, the belief that Israel is about to return in triumph to the Promised Land from the barrenness of exile.

Many scholars since Muilenberg have undertaken rhetorical criticism, and there is an excellent survey in Phyllis Trible's*Rhetorical Criticism.* Some, including John Barton of Oxford University and AmadiAhiamadu of University of Port Harcourt, have practiced rhetorical criticism without realizing it. Rhetorical criticism provides Biblical scholarship with a very sophisticated way of evading some of the challenges of historical criticism: first, because it enables the question of authorial intention to be elided – when it suits them, rhetorical critics will argue that the rhetorical arrangement of the text is what the author meant, and when it doesn't, that this is just how the text now is, and we have no right to try to get behind it; and second, because they can nearly always "demonstrate" a rhetorical structure in any given text and so invalidate historical-critical arguments based on its apparent (or evident) formlessness.

Thus when rhetorical criticism comes in at the door, critical probing into the text's unity (keeping the example of 'Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah' in mind) or disunity tends to go out of the window, the demonstration of its unity being taken as an absolute imperative. (These are some of the reasons why it is not adequate to see rhetorical criticism as merely a branch of redaction criticism.) The job of the exegete, for most rhetorical critics, is not to ask whether the text hangs together rhetorically, but to show that it does. This can make rhetorical criticism an ally of conservative interpretation.

3.2 Self-Assessment Question

- When it comes to textual unity the use of the form critical tool of Rhetorical criticism often throws historical criticism out of the window. Discuss this statement.

3.3 Poetics in Wisdom Literature

Rhetorical critics are interested in one particular kind of literary technique or convention: the persuasive structuring of arguments. But there are many other types of convention in literature. The reader who is "competent" in Western literature can recognize, for example, the conventions for writing novels – characterization, plot-structure, "closure" – or dramatic conventions, rather loose in England, but in French literature traditionally very rigid, involving the "unities" of place and time. The structuralist idea that we can recognize an "ill-formed" play or novel is generally convincing.

In the last twenty years or so a number of "secular" literary critics have come to claim an expertise in the conventions of Biblical literature in general and Wisdom literature in particular, and have worked towards producing a "poetics" of the Bible. Such a concern is closer to a traditional literary-critical interest in the author. It sees itself as standing in the mainstream of modern literary studies, and tends to express a rather low view of specialist Biblical critics: occasionally one can detect an idea well described by Michael Payne:

> There's an attitude that runs from Moulton to perhaps Helen Gardner, that if a literary critic has a weekend free, he or she can perhaps straighten out problems in Biblical studies that fusty scholars have not been able to work through.

What is a "poetics"? Jonathan Culler describes it as "a study of the conditions of meaning and thus a study of meaning." A poetics is an attempt to specify how literature "works", how it enables us to perceive the meanings we do perceive in it. Like rhetorical criticism, a poetics of the Biblical text – or of any text – is interested in how the text is articulated, in how it comes to convey the meanings it does. Meir Steinberg writes, "contrary to what some recent attempts at 'literary' analysis seem to assume, form has no value or meaning apart from communicative (historical, ideological, aesthetic) functions. Steinberg's work is a major attempt to produce a Biblical poetics that serves Wisdom Literature as a form critical tool. It is important to heed his warning that he is interested in how the Biblical text conveys ideas and not in a 'literary' study in the sense of a merely formal analysis.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that he concentrates on Biblical authors and their intentions. He is firmly in the camp of those who, like structuralists, are concerned with the discourse of the Biblical text rather than with its genesis, or in what John Barton terms "the text itself". On this note, Sternberg is impatient with some literary theory, and Robert Alter, who must also be placed in this section despite marked differences from Sternberg, generally seem to think that theory obscures more than it illuminates. Both of them are what may be called "practical" literary critics who are interested in explicating actual literary works, not theorizing about literature. However, both think that this task requires sensitivity to recurring patterns in the Biblical text generally, but especially in Wisdom.

Earlier in this Module we had intimated that the conversations of Wisdom Literature are not necessarily to be treated as promises or even prophecies from the point of view of poetics. The righteous and the wicked do not always get their dues on earth as proclaimed in Proverbs or Job. Sometimes rewards lie beyond the grave.

3.3 Self-Assessment Question

- In Old Testament literature and especially in Wisdom it is crucial to engage the actual literary content of the text in a dialogue than to theorize on its literature as an institution. This may be true of literature generally but is it true of Wisdom literature?

3.4 African Rhetoric and Philosophy

In the last two decades the seminal works of such scholars as PlacideTempels, Geoffery Parrinder, John Taylor, John Mbiti, Bolaji Idowu, Dominique Zahan, and Alexis Kagame and countless others have been subjected to rigorous criticism by a new breed of Western trained scholars of African descent, who want to be known as professional protagonists of African philosophy and wisdom. A dimension of this critical reappraisal is the scepticism as to the existence of African traditional sapiential thought of anything worthy to be called Wisdom.

The latter-day scholars who have been trained in the Platonic and Aristotelian tradition (and the Cartesian tradition where doubt is a cardinal virtue) tend to approach the study of African culture and rhetoric from the only perspective they know – the Eurocentric perspective which they claim to be universal. Applying the tools of Western philosophy, some of these African scholars subject African thought and thinkers to the kind of test which only they can pass.

This is why many of them dismiss the works of John Mbiti, Alexis Kagame, Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold Senghor and so on, as anything but Wisdom (Ehusani 1991;95-6). What is more, for some of these scholars, the rich preserve of proverbs, myths, legends, aetiologies and folk-tales which constitute the African "orature" are only an expression of a people's "collective thought" but not their "collective memory" which comes short of a philosophy or sapiential heritage. In the words of Peter Bodunrin:

> Since we hold that philosophy is properly studied – through the examination of the thought of individuals, another argument we have used against ethno-philosophy is that the collective thought of people upon which they concentrate is not philosophy.

The lack of any written texts, the anonymity of African thought, and the near absence of formal logic and theories of knowledge are among the reasons for the sceptical approach to African sapiential tradition and philosophy. Paulin Hountondji for example sees philosophy as a function of science, and does not accept that Africa had 'philosophy' prior to modern science. He takes a critical look at the work of Placide Tempels and Alexis Kagame (both on Bantu philosophy); of John Mbiti (on African religion and philosophy); of Marcel Grisule (on Dogan religious ideas); and Leopold Senghor ('Negritude') among others. He denies that Kagame and Tempels' work in philosophy, and says that they are nothing but projections of the author's own philosophical beliefs.

3.4 Self-Assessment Question

- What interest do African philosophers show to the preservation of the native intelligence and wisdom, folk-tales, aetiologies, legends and narratives of Africa?

3.5 Hermeneutical Considerations on the language of Africa's sapiential heritage

An interesting number of scholars are beginning to realise today how the use of foreign languages in African sapiential traditions is itself an obstacle to a truly unfettered research into the African thought and sapiential heritage (Ahiamadu 2010:79-90). To choose a language is to choose a particular thought pattern. The choice of the language already predetermines the most important questions. Thus Mbiti believes that language is the key to any serious research into, and understanding of, traditional religion and sapiential thought. It is sad to note that most of those involved in the study of African philosophy are using the peculiar categories of English, French or German languages to analyse Akan, Yoruba or Ebira thought. Ngugi Wa Thiong'O defines language as the particular system of verbal signposts, which, over time, comes to reflect a people's historical consciousness. It also becomes the memory bank of their collective struggle over nature and over the social product. Therefore, until sapiential traditions and

philosophy is written and taught in an African language, African philosophy may turn out in the future to be nothing but Western philosophy in African guise. A serious study of any one of the nearly eight hundred languages spoken all over Africa will offer a glimpse into the inexhaustible wealth of knowledge contained in these 'verbal signposts'. The lack of written records about the history, philosophy, sapiential heritage, religion, and cosmology and value system of Africa by Africans has hidden the rich sapiential resources from which her history, theology and philosophy could be written.

3.5 Self-Assessment Question

In which ways may the rich sapiential heritage of Africa be accessed and possessed?

4.0 Conclusion

This unit has shown the role which metaphors played in the rhetorical composition of sapiential language. We were informed that the origins of rhetorical criticism are usually traced to James Muilenberg, though he himself acknowledged important predecessors, including especially Herman Gunkel, Robert Lowth, and J.G. Herder. In Biblical Studies questions of rhetoric, Muilenberg argued with good reason, had tended to be neglected, especially since the essentially fragmenting methods of form criticism had deflected attention from the finished work which a redactor had produced from the fragments. Rhetorical critics are interested in one particular kind of literary technique or convention: the persuasive structuring of arguments. But there are many other types of convention in literature. A dimension of this critical reappraisal is the scepticism as to the existence of African traditional sapiential thought of anything worthy to be called philosophy. To choose a language is to choose a particular thought pattern. The choice of the language already predetermines the most important questions.

5.0Summary

So far, this unit surveyed the critical concepts of Wisdom Literature under the following sub-headings: The Origins of Rhetorical Criticism; Rhetoric in the Bible; Poetics in Wisdom

Literature; African Rhetoric and Philosophy; and Hermeneutical Considerations. It also concludes our studies in this Manual in its various topics, and sub-topics.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment

- Give a brief survey of the rhetorical features of the texts of Wisdom Literature, making relevant applications to the African sapiential heritage.

7.0 References / Future Reading

Barton, J. *Reading the Old Testament – Method in Biblical Study.*Louisville; Westminster / John Knox, 1996.

Dearman, J.A. *Religion and Culture in Ancient Israel.* Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992.

Ehusani, G. O. *An Afro-Christian Vision "Ozovehe" Toward a More Humanized World*. Lanham: University Press, 1992.

Perdue, Leo G. *Wisdom and Creation – The Theology of Wisdom Literature.*Nashville; Abingdon Press, 1994.