

# The Delight of Wisdom<sup>1</sup>

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It was a typical cloudy English day, a sprinkle of rain, like a mist which pushes your eyes down as you bike to the library, but for some reasons I saw him, a combination of two images of antiquated Cambridge: an old rusty bicycle and an even older don dressed in his academic robes, squeaking their way somewhere at breakneck speed. I stopped my own bicycle, there on Grange Road, struck by the odd spectacle and pondered: 'I wonder where he's going in such a hurry?' That night over dinner a junior fellow from Christ's College filled me in on the secret of the dons, informing me that the old professor was on his way to the Senate House for a vote. What happened that day in the Senate House had profound implications for Western culture in general and little did I know as I sat beside the road how much reflection still lay ahead for me to grasp the significance of that day. The resources for understanding this significance would be found close at hand in my Hebrew Bible, in the portrait of Lady Wisdom in Proverbs, one of the most vivid of all depictions of wisdom in the Bible.

## I. Wisdom and Old Testament theology

There is little question that Lady Wisdom has often been misunderstood and mishandled in the writing of theologies of the OT, that is, summaries of the thought found in the Hebrew Bible,<sup>2</sup> a discipline that has engrossed OT and Hebrew Bible scholars since Philip Gäbler initiated (or at least delineated more carefully) this discipline in the late 18th century.<sup>3</sup> As one reads through the wisdom literature, whether that is the practical

<sup>1</sup> This article is a revised version of my Inaugural Lecture in the Chair of Old Testament at McMaster Divinity College, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada (14 November 2003).

<sup>2</sup> On the relationship between Wisdom and OT Theology see J.F. Priest, 'Where is Wisdom to Be Placed?' in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* ed. J. Crenshaw, (New York: KTAV, 1976), 281–88; W. Zimmerli, 'The Place and Limit of Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament Theology', in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* ed. J. Crenshaw, (New York: KTAV, 1976), 314–26; B.K. Waltke, 'The Book of Proverbs and Old Testament Theology', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136 (1979): 302–317; R. Murphy, 'Religious Dimensions of Israelite Wisdom', in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* ed. P.D. Miller Jr., P.D. Hanson, and S.D. McBride, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 452–56; R.E. Murphy, 'Can the Book of Proverbs Be a Player in "Biblical Theology"?', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 31 (2001), 4–9.

<sup>3</sup> See an English translation of Gäbler's lecture in B.C. Ollenburger, E.A. Martens, and G.F. Hasel, *The Flowering of Old Testament Theology: A Reader in Twentieth-century Old Testament Theology, 1930–1990* Sources for Biblical and Theological Study, (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1991). For its significance see G.F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic issues in the current debate* (4th ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991) as well as J. Sandys-Wunsch and L. Eldridge, 'J.P. Gabler and the Distinction between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology: Translation, Commentary, and Discussion of his Originality', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 33 (1980): 133–58; M. Sæbø, 'Johann Philipp Gabler at the End of the Eighteenth Century: History and Theology', in *On the way to canon: Creative tradition history in the Old Testament* ed. M. Sæbø; *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplements*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 310–26; L.T. Stuckenbruck, 'Johann Philipp Gabler and the Delineation of Biblical Theology', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52 (1999): 139–55.

guidance of Proverbs or philosophical reflection of Ecclesiastes, Job and Song of Songs, there is a tone distinct from much of the other literature in the OT. Here one finds little of the emphasis on covenant which predominates the narrative and prophetic literature of ancient Israel. There are scarce whispers of the great redemptive events beginning with the choosing of Abraham and continuing through the exodus, conquest, monarchy, exile and restoration. In contrast wisdom literature places creation theology at its centre.<sup>4</sup>

And so for many the relationship between the two, wisdom and redemptive-covenant, remains uncertain. Lady Wisdom is clearly misunderstood and is seen by some even as an enemy of redemptive-covenant, and such confusion is reflected in or possibly caused by the bifurcation of our own worldview into the sacred and secular.

Lady Wisdom's cry, however, rises above the covenant negotiations of Abraham and God, above the crashing waves at the Red Sea, the thunderous raucous at Mount Sinai, the trumpet blasts at Jericho, the tambourines of David's praise, the passionate woes of the prophets, the masons of Zerubbabel's temple, above the powerful roar of the grand narrative, the biblical story. And we find her voice in the foundational chapters of the book of Proverbs.

## II. Lady Wisdom

In Proverbs 1–9 two main images are employed to encourage people to embrace wisdom.<sup>5</sup> The one image is drawn from the parent-child relationship, as we hear the cry: 'Listen my child to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.' At certain points however, the voice of the parent encourages the child to pursue wisdom:

Get wisdom, and whatever else you get, get insight. Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honour you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a fair garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown (Prov. 4:7b–9).<sup>6</sup>

Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister', and call insight your intimate friend (Prov. 7:4). Such calls from the parent to the child reveal a second major image complex in

<sup>4</sup> See R.E. Murphy, 'Wisdom and Creation', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1985): 3–11.

<sup>5</sup> See R.C. Van Leeuwen, 'Liminality and Worldview in Proverbs 1–9', *Semeia* 50 (1990): 111–44 for a superb review of approaches to the 'root metaphor' in Proverbs 1–9, including N.C. Habel, 'The Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9', *Interpretation* 26 (1972): 131–57 and C.V. Camp, 'Woman Wisdom as Root Metaphor: A Theological Consideration', in *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in Honor of Roland E. Murphy* ed. K.G. Hoglund and R.E. Murphy; *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplements*, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 45–76. The question is whether it is necessary to isolate a root metaphor and instead recognise diversity in the imagery. Such an endeavour appears similar to the search for root lexical meaning for ancient words (as criticised by J. Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1968]).

<sup>6</sup> Translations in this paper are from the New Revised Standard Version.

Proverbs 1–9, that of Lady Wisdom.<sup>7</sup> We first hear Lady Wisdom's voice in Proverbs 1:20–32.<sup>8</sup> There she calls aloud in the street, raises her voice in the public squares, at the head of the noisy streets and in the gateways of the city, reminding us that to listen to her will mean safety, no fear of harm (1:33).<sup>9</sup> She appears again in the closing chapters of the prologue to the book of Proverbs, in chapter eight<sup>10</sup> where again she cries out 'On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads ... beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals' (8:2). In this, the longest speech of Lady Wisdom, she extols her own virtues as better than silver, gold and jewels for 'all that you may desire cannot compare with her' (8:11). She then declares her role in culture, providing guidance for kings, rulers and nobles, and reveals her existence before creation and her role in creation as God's 'master worker' (8:30).<sup>11</sup> There she declares: 'I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race' (8:30).

This intimate self-exposure of her role past and present, sets up the final chapter before we encounter verse upon verse of short pithy proverbial wisdom that we often associate with the book of Proverbs.

As in both previous encounters with Lady Wisdom we are greeted initially with her cry call. Proverbs 9 is constructed in chiasmic form, that is, the second half of the chapter is a mirror of the first, an inversion in which similar elements are presented but in reverse order.<sup>12</sup> One sees immediately how the first (9:1–6) and last (9:13–18) stanzas of this

- <sup>7</sup> For the effect of engendering wisdom as a woman see J.S. Webster, 'Sophia: Engendering Wisdom in Proverbs, Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 78 (1998): 63–79; C.V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Bible and literature series; Sheffield, England: Almond, 1985); Camp, 'Root Metaphor', 45–76. On this image also see Habel, 'Symbolism', 131–57. Some see here an allusion to a bride (e.g. Webster), while others (e.g. Habel) argue that the imagery is rather one who guards the traveller and exalts and crowns her devotees.
- <sup>8</sup> Interestingly 'wisdom' here and in Prov. 9:1 is in the plural (although not in Prov. 8). The plural has been explained as a plural of intensity or abstract; cf. R.E. Murphy, *Proverbs* (Word Biblical Commentary; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 8.
- <sup>9</sup> See R.E. Murphy, 'Wisdom's Song: Proverbs 1:20–33', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987): 456–60.
- <sup>10</sup> For claims for ancient origins of this metaphor contrast R.N. Whybray, 'Proverbs 8:22–31 and Its Supposed Prototypes', *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965): 504–514 and M.J. Dahood, 'Proverbs 8:22–31: Translation and Commentary', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30 (1968): 512–21. For this passage also see J.-N. Aletti, 'Proverbes 8:22–31. Étude de structure', *Biblica* 57 (1976): 25–37; M. Gilbert, 'Le discours de la Sagesse en Proverbes 8', in *Sagesse de l'Ancien Testament* ed. M. Gilbert, (Gembloux: Duculot, 1981), 202–218; G.A. Yee, 'An Analysis of Proverbs 8:22–31 according to Style and Structure', *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 94 (1982): 58–66; D.H. Williams, 'Proverbs 8:22–31', *Interpretation* 48 (1994): 275–79.
- <sup>11</sup> Such language led many Christians to see here a reference to the second or third persons of the Trinity. See various views and problems in Williams, 'Proverbs 8:22–31', 277–78.
- <sup>12</sup> I am well aware of the danger of finding chiasmic structures behind every bush, M.J. Boda, 'Chiasmus in Ubiquity: Symmetrical Mirages in Nehemiah 9', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 71 (1996): 55–70. However, there is no question that one finds here this rhetorical technique. See also R.W. Byargeon, 'The Structure and Significance of Proverbs 9:7–12', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 (1997): 367–75. The effect of such chiasmic structuring is explained by Byargeon as first to call into question previous claims of misplaced text and, secondly, (citing Watson) to 'link the components of a strophe', and, thirdly (especially 9:10), 'to be a hinge between the two proximal parts of Proverbs 9 (1–6, 13–18)', p. 371. The LXX (followed by Syriac) text of Proverbs 9 is extremely expansionistic; cf. R.J. Clifford, *Proverbs: A commentary* (Old Testament Library; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 102.

chapter are focused on two female figures who share much in common, Lady Wisdom and Woman Folly.<sup>13</sup> They both possess a house and call 'from the highest point in the town' to invite the 'simple' to dine, spreading a meal with both drink and food.<sup>14</sup> Such points of contact which draw these two figures together simultaneously serve as points of contrast. While we are only told in passing that Woman Folly has a house, we are told that Wisdom has built her own house, hewing her seven pillars,<sup>15</sup> an allusion most likely to a grand house, a mansion whose construction has been superintended by Wisdom herself.<sup>16</sup> Wisdom is portrayed as the quintessential banquet director: slaughtering animals, mixing wine, setting tables, organising a workforce of servant-girls who blanket the city to invite guests to enjoy a rich meal of both meat and wine.<sup>17</sup> What a contrast to Folly who merely 'sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the high places of the town' offering a simple meal of bread and water whose origins are in question. The greatest contrast, however, comes in the final verse of each section. While Lady Wisdom honestly offers her guests life, Woman Folly deceitfully leads her simpletons into the pit of death. Although, on the surface, there are many similarities between these two women, a closer look reveals the stark contrast.<sup>18</sup>

What lies between these two depictions of Wisdom and Folly is a section that for many years Hebrew scholars considered a later addition to Proverbs 9.<sup>19</sup> However, verses 7–12 are essential to the message of this chapter for they highlight further the contrast between wisdom and folly,<sup>20</sup> now exemplified in the lives of those who accept the invitations of the two women.<sup>21</sup> The one who accepts wisdom's invitation is called 'the wise' ... the one who accepts folly's invitation is called 'the scoffer'. The first one is obvious, to dine with wisdom means to attain the title of wise. The second, the scoffer, is often depicted as the worst of the many characters of folly in the Hebrew wisdom

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly Woman Folly is closely associated with the 'strange woman' who appears regularly in Proverbs 1–9, see Williams, 'Proverbs 8:22–31', 278–79; Byargeon, 'Proverbs 9:7–12', 373; Webster, 'Sophia', 65–69. Webster also notes a similar relationship between Lady Wisdom and the 'good wife' (cf. 31:10–31). Further on the 'strange woman' see G.A. Yee, 'I Have Perfumed my Bed with Myrrh': The Foreign Woman (iššā zārā) in Proverbs 1–9', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 43 (1989).

<sup>14</sup> While there may be double entendre at play (both food and sexuality) in the invitation of Woman Folly.

<sup>15</sup> On the seven pillars see P.W. Skehan, 'The Seven Columns of Wisdom's House in Proverbs 1–9', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 9 (1947): 190–98; J.C. Greenfield, 'The Seven Pillars of Wisdom (Proverbs 9:1) – A Mistranslation?' *Jewish Quarterly Review* 76 (1985): 13–20; B. Lang, 'Die Sieben Säulen der Weisheit (Sprüche IX 1) im Licht Israelitischer Architektur', *Vetus Testamentum* 33 (1983): 488–91 and the superb review of various theories by R.N. Whybray, *Proverbs* (New Century Bible; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 142–43.

<sup>16</sup> See Clifford, *Proverbs*, 105–106.

<sup>17</sup> See J.E. McKinlay, 'To Eat or Not To Eat: Where is wisdom in this choice?' *Semeia* 86 (1999): 77–79, for comparison and contrast of the meals of Wisdom and Folly. The attempts of Clifford and Lichtenstein to link these meals to Ugaritic texts merely catalogue the semantic range of meal language, rather than establish literary or religious dependence; cf. M. Lichtenstein, 'The Banquet Motif in Keret and in Proverbs 9', *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 1 (1968): 19–31; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 103–104.

<sup>18</sup> These thoughts are echoed in Byargeon, 'Proverbs 9:7–12', 373–374.

<sup>19</sup> See a review of this in R.E. Murphy and E. Huwiler, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (New International Biblical Commentary; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 43; Whybray, *Proverbs*, 141–42; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 102, 106–107.

<sup>20</sup> See Byargeon, 'Proverbs 9:7–12', 367–75. The appearance of the first person singular suffix ('by me') in 9:11 suggests that the centre section is spoken by Lady Wisdom herself.

<sup>21</sup> This link is also noted by Byargeon, 'Proverbs 9:7–12', 373–74.

literature, for while the others portray foolish behaviour, the scoffer goes on the offensive and mocks the very system of wisdom itself. Verses 7–9 identify the posture of the two ways: while the scoffer resists any instruction, hating and abusing those who would dare to correct, the wise gladly accept it, loving those who would add to their learning. While the posture of the wise is one of humble pursuit, that of the scoffer is arrogant rejection of wisdom.

Verses 11–12 highlight the rewards of the two ways. Wisdom offers long and abundant life to those who pursue her way. The reverse is implicit: those who reject her and so embrace Folly, set themselves up for misery and as verse 18 says, 'death'.

In the first and last sections of this chapter we observe contrasting feminine figures and in the second and second from last sections we observe their contrasting ways. What lies at the centre of this passage, however, is a statement that provides an orientation essential to the acquisition of wisdom and simultaneously heals the rift between wisdom and covenant.<sup>22</sup> For there we find: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight' (9:10). Similar phrases are found in each of the core wisdom books (see especially Prov. 1:7; Eccles. 12:13; Job 28:28; cf. Prov. 1:29; 2:5; 15:33; cf. 10:27; 14:26, 27; 15:16; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 31:30; Job 1:1, 8; 2:3; Eccles. 3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12, 13).

If this 'fear of the Lord' is the beginning of wisdom, what is this 'fear'? The answer to this lies in the use of the 'fear of the Lord' elsewhere in the OT. Although one can find the 'fear of the Lord' in several places in the OT, a particular body of literature is fixated with this concept. This 'fear' is mentioned 25 times in the book of Deuteronomy and the literature it spawned.<sup>23</sup> An exemplary passage is Deuteronomy 10:12, 20:

So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul ... You shall fear the Lord your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast.

This 'fear' is initially the human reaction to God's awesome presence and glory and refers to the awe and reverence afforded the Holy One of Israel. However, in covenant literature this becomes equated with submissive and faithful worship of the Lord. It becomes a term for the faith posture of the ancient Israelites towards the Lord who saved them. It is the human response in the divine-human covenant relationship. To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind is the same as to fear the Lord (see Deut. 6:1–5). Thus the 'fear of the Lord' is a relational term signifying the Israelites' response to God's grace displayed in salvation (especially the Exodus). As Walter Brueggemann has aptly written, it means:

<sup>22</sup> For the key role of this phrase in Proverbs 9, see Byargeon, 'Proverbs 9:7–12', 375, who notes 'the emphasis on the "fear of Yahweh" is at the centre of the chiasm in 9:7–12 and also in the centre of Proverbs 9, for the decision between Wisdom and Folly ultimately rests on whether one fears Yahweh'. On the definition of the 'fear of the Lord', see Waltke, 'Proverbs', 302–317; cf. W. Brueggemann, 'Praise to God is the end of wisdom: What is the beginning?' *Journal for Preachers* 12 (1989): 30–40.

<sup>23</sup> See the extensive list in M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972): Deut. 4:10; 5:26; 6:2, 13, 24; 8:6; 10:12, 20; 13:5 [4]; 14:23; 17:19; 28:58; 31:12, 13; Josh. 4:24; 24:14; Judg 6:10; 1 Sam. 12:14, 24; 1 Kgs 8:40, 43/2 Chr. 6:31, 33; 2 Kgs 17:7, 25; 28; 37–39, 41; Jer. 32:39. The object always is YHWH.

to take God with *utmost seriousness* as the premise and perspective from which life is to be discerned and lived. That 'utmost seriousness' requires attentiveness to some things rather than others, to spend one's energies in response to this God who has initiated our life.<sup>24</sup>

If this phrase 'fear of the Lord' is a covenant term, a relational term and thus a faith term, we can now see the intimate relationship between covenant literature in the OT and wisdom literature. Rather than wisdom literature standing in contrast to covenant literature, wisdom is actually based on covenant and serves to enhance covenant. Wisdom assumes the covenant base and moves forward not only to respond to covenant, but also to bring the principles of covenant to bear on all of life. Rather than being in opposition to covenant and to the salvation-story work of God, it represents the ultimate goal of salvation and covenant: the transformation of all of life by God's redeemed people. Wisdom literature, with its heavy emphasis on creation theology, rather than being an embarrassing appendage to OT theology is the highest expression of God's purposes: to redeem creation and culture to himself through his transformed and transforming people.

### III. Wisdom in a Post-foundational World

The old don who blindly passed me a few minutes before 2pm on 16 May 1992<sup>25</sup> on Grange Road was speeding to a vote in the Senate House on whether to approve an honorary doctorate for the great Algerian-born French scholar Jacques Derrida. Derrida, the man who had turned the academic community upside down and had become inseparably linked to what has come to be known as 'Deconstructionism', a contributing movement to post-structural, post-foundational, and/or postmodern epistemologies. Derrida, along with many others challenged the reigning paradigm of academia and his influence has been immense. What many dons at Cambridge found disconcerting about Derrida was that his views were considered diametrically opposed to the very essence of the scientific project pursued at Cambridge, begging the question: how can one honour a man who undermines the foundations of modern investigation?

And so my friend, the junior fellow at Christ's filled me in on the vote. The 540 dons voted physically: with those in favour on one side of the ancient auditorium and those opposed on the other. Facing each other, the bodies were counted and the vote was decisive: 336–204, in Derrida's favour. The Frenchman would receive the British honour, even if begrudgingly bestowed, but the vote revealed something far greater, that is, the beginning of an admission that the rules of engagement in the university and cultural setting needed revisiting and revision.

There were those who protested this vote like Quine and Marcus who accused Derrida of work that 'does not meet accepted standards of clarity and rigor' and which

<sup>24</sup> Brueggemann, 'Beginning', 30, italics original.

<sup>25</sup> I did not record this date myself at the time, but was happy to find the date it in K.J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) and the time in *The Times*, 'A Storm in the Cloisters' (9 May 1992, p. 12).

is composed of 'tricks and gimmicks similar to those of the Dadaists',<sup>26</sup> but in general there was an acceptance that no matter what one thinks of Derrida he represents an important milestone in the journey of western culture and thought. In his own reflections on the Cambridge vote, Derrida would later see himself as part of a:

re-examination of the fundamental norms and premises of a number of dominant discourses, the principles underlying many of their evaluations, the structures of academic institutions, and the research that goes on within them.<sup>27</sup>

He continues: 'What this kind of questioning does is modify the rules of the dominant discourse, it tries to politicise and democratise the university scene.' Among other things Derrida (and others of like mind) reminded many of the role that presuppositions play in the pursuit of knowledge.<sup>28</sup> Such an admission has the potential to open up a new way of dialogue within the sphere of the university which is a microcosm of the broader cultural universe.

The impact of this shift is evident in the essay of John Polanyi in the Canadian *Globe and Mail* a few years ago entitled: 'Quest for a truly social science'. In this article the Canadian Nobel prize winning chemist reminded the scientific community of the 'moral force of science' that can more actively support both democracy and human rights around the globe, a thought he admits 'would have seemed preposterous when I began my life as a scientist'.<sup>29</sup> It also is displayed in Vaclav Havel's speech at Independence Hall in Philadelphia (4 July 1994) which bemoaned science's 'unconditional faith in objective reality' which has led to a 'state of schizophrenia' in which humanity as observers becomes entirely 'alienated' from themselves as beings.<sup>30</sup> The way ahead according to Havel is a greater 'awareness that we are not here alone nor for ourselves alone, but that we are an integral part of higher, mysterious entities against whom it is not advisable to blaspheme'.

In an ironic way, I find in these trends within the larger scientific and philosophic communities of our world the whispers of Lady Wisdom, a call to affirm rather than to ignore our deepest personal and religious sensibilities in the pursuit of knowledge. So Lady Wisdom called to me on Grange Road as I sought to understand my place within that grand university which was only representative of a much larger cultural enterprise

<sup>26</sup> Published 9 May 1992 as a letter to the editor ('Derrida Degree a Question of Honour') in *The Times* (p. 13) and signed by Hans Albert, David Armstrong, Ruth Barcan Marcus, Keith Campbell, Richard Glauser, Rudolf Haller, Massimo Mugnai, Kevin Mulligan, Lorenzo Pena, Willard van Orman Quine, Wolfgang Rod, Edmund Runggaldier, Karl Schuhmann, Daniel Schulthess, Peter Simons, Barry Smith, Rene Thom, Dallas Willard, Jan Wolenski.

<sup>27</sup> 'Honoris Causa: "This is also extremely funny"', tr. by Marian Hobson and Christopher Johnson, in *Points ... Interviews 1974-1994* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 399-421.

<sup>28</sup> For a basic orientation to the impact of post structural thought on Christian hermeneutics see S.E. Fowl and L.G. Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); J.R. Middleton and B.J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used To Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995); S.J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Vanhoozer, *Meaning*; S.J. Grenz and J.R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> John Polanyi, 'Quest for a truly social science', *Globe and Mail* (Saturday, April 29, 2000), A15.

<sup>30</sup> V. Havel, 'The Need for Transcendence in the Postmodern World', *The Futurist* (July-August 1995): 47; V. Havel, 'The New Measure of Man', *New York Times* (July 8, 1994): A27; see also V. Havel, 'The End of the Modern Era', *New York Times* (1 March 1992): E15.

within our world. Such a call leads me to ask with Tertullian, 'what does Jerusalem have to do with Athens?'<sup>31</sup> In contrast to Tertullian, Lady Wisdom appears to think 'everything', for she consistently reminds us of her public character. She takes her place at a location of prominence and influence within the culture, crying out 'in the street, in the squares ... at the busiest corner ... at the entrance of the city gates' (1:20-21), shouting 'on the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads ... beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals' (8:2-3), calling 'from the highest places in the town'. This reminds us that wisdom is something not only needed, but also found in the crossroads and high places of our culture. At the same time, however, Lady Wisdom reminds us of her theological character. She is a creation of God himself (8:22-29) and claims that her foundation is the fear of the Lord (1:28-29; 9:10). For us to embrace the vision and mission of wisdom is to embrace covenantal relationship with God.

These two aspects of Lady Wisdom's character (public context, covenantal relationship) are often seen at odds for those within the biblical tradition, a tension expressed by Jesus in John 17 when he prayed that his followers would be 'in the world' and yet not 'of the world'. Some resolve this tension by retreating into a fundamentalism that eschews dialogue, others by embracing a bifurcation that divides secular (public) from sacred (private) spheres. Lady Wisdom brooks no resolution as she passionately embraces creation and culture based on the fear of the Lord. She reveals her involvement in the design of creation and culture and announces her joy in the inhabited world and delight in the human race, while never compromising on the fear of the Lord.

Wisdom reminds us that our pursuit of knowledge and understanding not only can, but should be set within the context of our religious commitments, our theological convictions. We pursue knowledge and understanding as those who bear the image of God who created wisdom and understanding. This is a necessity for those participating in contexts sharing a common confession, but also for those from the biblical tradition who seek to participate in the larger cultural conversation. This also means that our pursuit of knowledge within our cultural institutions must remain open to dialogue. In a post-foundational world we have the opportunity to embrace a level of dialogue that admits we all have convictions that are worthy of exploration. Such exploration is only possible as we all participate in the conversation, rather than create boundaries which insulate us from one another. Wisdom warns us not to flee from the public to the private, but rather to accept the invitation to engage in public discourse and academic pursuit, not only bringing wisdom to bear upon such discourse and pursuit; but also embracing wisdom wherever she may be found.

<sup>31</sup> *De praescriptione haereticorum* 7.9.