Where Wisdom Is Found

Christian Reflection

A SERIES IN FAITH AND ETHICS

BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

GENERAL EDITOR Robert B. Kruschwitz

ART EDITOR Heidi J. Hornik

REVIEW EDITOR Norman Wirzba

PROCLAMATION EDITOR William D. Shiell

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT Haley Stewart

DESIGNER Eric Yarbrough

PUBLISHER The Center for Christian Ethics
Baylor University
One Bear Place #97361
Waco, TX 76798-7361

PHONE (254) 710-3774

TOLL-FREE (USA) (866) 298-2325

WEB SITE www.ChristianEthics.ws

E-MAIL Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu

ISSN 1535-8585

Christian Reflection is the ideal resource for discipleship training in the church. Multiple copies are obtainable for group study at $2.50 per copy. Worship aids and lesson materials that enrich personal or group study are available free on the Web site.

Christian Reflection is published quarterly by The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University. Contributors express their considered opinions in a responsible manner. The views expressed are not official views of The Center for Christian Ethics or of Baylor University.

The Center expresses its thanks to individuals, churches, and organizations, including the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, who provided financial support for this publication.

Contents

continued

Christian Reflection
STUDY GUIDES & LESSON PLANS


The Sign of Jonah

Jesus' mysterious invocation of "the sign of Jonah" became, for Christians facing persecution and death in the early third century, a promise of God's ultimate act of grace and deliverance: resurrection from the dead.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Matthew 12:38-41

Responsive Reading*

The LORD provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish:

I called to the LORD out of my distress and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.

Then he said, "I am driven away from your sight; how shall I look again upon your holy temple?" The waters closed in over him; the deep surrounded him; weeds were wrapped around his head at the roots of the mountains.

I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you raised me up from the Pit, O LORD. As my life was ebbing away, I remembered the LORD; and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. I, with the voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the LORD!

Then the LORD spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land.

Reflection

"In their speaking, art, and writing, in their music, hear God's voice. Why composer, painter, poet, why the note and color choice?" begins Terry York's new hymn (Prophetic Ethics, p. 51). The Jonah marbles, which are a rare artistic creation dating to the third century A.D., and the many appearances of Jonah scenes on early Christian sarcophagi and catacomb paintings, indicate this story was one of the first narratives depicted in Christian art. These artistic expressions reveal important clues about the early church's theological imagination.

"Early Christians interpreted Old Testament prophecies and events as announcing and prefiguring the ministry of Jesus or the church," writes Howitt. "Their interpretation of the book of Jonah was inspired by Jesus' mysterious rebuke of some religious leaders demanding a prophetic sign."

Their demand followed Jesus' healing of a man's withered hand (Matthew 12:9-14), curing crowds of sick people (12:15), and returning speech and sight to a demoniac (12:22-23). By asking for a "sign," the religious leaders were not seeking additional miraculous healings; even Beelzebul can perform miracles and wonders, they charged (12:24)! Instead, they demanded an

14

Christian Reflection
A Series in Faith and Ethics

Feast Article:

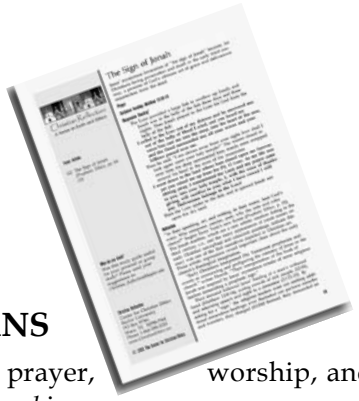
☐ The Sign of Jonah (*Prophetic Ethics*, pp. 54-59)

What do you think?
Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to: *Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu*

Christian Reflection
Center for Christian Ethics
Baylor University
PO Box 97361
Waco, TX 76798-7361
Phone 1-866-298-2525
www.ChristianEthics.ws

Excellent companion pieces to each issue of *Christian Reflection* integrate prayer, Bible study, worship, music, and ethical reflection for personal or group study.

Free ONLINE *www.christianethics.ws.* Click on "Free Study Guides."



www.ChristianEthics.ws

Study Guides & Lesson Plans

These six study guides integrate Bible study, prayer, worship, and reflection on themes in the *Where Wisdom Is Found* issue.

Fear of the Lord

Fear of the Lord is not only the beginning of wisdom. According to Scripture, the proper fear of God is also the end as part of the consummating gift of salvation. What kind of fear leads to wholeness, love, and freedom from self-indulgence, rather than groveling servitude?

The Christian Way of Knowing

The Christian virtue of faith guides the Christian way of knowing and enables the Church to witness faithfully to the gospel in the midst of challenges to knowledge and truth in our postmodern culture.

The Wisdom of James

The Letter of James, reverberating with themes of biblical wisdom from ancient Israel through the traditions of Jesus and Paul, calls us to be a wise community that walks and talks the "wisdom from above."

Wisdom Transformed by Love

In his rich treatment of the virtue of wisdom, Thomas Aquinas insists that not only must wisdom be transformed by love, but also love must be transformed by wisdom. Thus the contemplative life overflows into a life of self-giving love and service.

Sharing Wisdom as an Act of Love

Marilynne Robinson's beautiful novel *Gilead* is a powerful realization of the integral relationship of wisdom to love. It illuminates the qualities of character that one must possess if the wisest of one's words are not to be vacuous or inaccessible to their hearer's understanding.

So Great a Cloud of Witnesses

We in the Church must re-establish a connection with Christians who have gone before us in a way that is meaningful to those who will come after us. Could there be any greater wisdom, or harder challenge, than Jesus' injunction to love one another across generational lines as he loved us?

Introduction

BY ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ

In the rich heritage of Christian wisdom, the human hunger to behold the ultimate cause of reality and to be transformed by its embrace is satisfied in a startling way—on the Cross.

In Christian wisdom, theory and practice intertwine, for wisdom treats "not only about meaning, interpretation, and truth but also, inextricably, about living life before God now and about how lives and communities are shaped in line with who God is and with God's purposes for the future," David Ford has reminded us. "In short, it is about lived meaning directed towards the kingdom of God."

The biblical sages teach, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10), yet fear as a pathway to relationship with God seems to us both unattractive and mysterious. Let us avoid the temptation to think that fear is merely a symptom of immature faith, Russell Reno warns in *Fear of the Lord* (p. 11), for "according to Scripture, fear of God is also the end [of wisdom] as part of the consummating gift of salvation." So, what kind of fear leads to wholeness, love, and freedom from self-indulgence, rather than groveling servitude? Reno suggests "the eternal and unfathomable difference between God and creature explains the everlasting fear that is consistent with a love that draws us ever nearer."

The Letter of James "reverberates with themes from the rich biblical wisdom tradition—from the sages of ancient Israel through the teachings of Jesus and Paul," writes Robert Wall in *The Wisdom of James* (p. 27). James sees Christian wisdom—in both its theoretical and practical dimensions—as embodied within a community that is quick to listen to and obey the "perfect law of liberty," slow to speak in words carefully chosen, and slow to respond with anger.

The early Christians often called the best way of life—whether they characterized it as contemplation of truth or as well-ordered practical

activity—"philosophy," which means the love of wisdom. Thomas Hibbs' *Wisdom Transformed by Love* (p. 38) helps us recover their rich language for the pursuit of wisdom. A "hunger to behold the ultimate cause of reality, even to be transformed into that cause is part of the [ancient] philosophical tradition, as much as it is a part of the Christian heritage," Hibbs notes. "The gospel itself, which identifies Christ as the Word according to whom the universe is created and which invites each of us to 'come and see,' is God's response to this hunger in the human heart."

In *The Christian Way of Knowing* (p. 19), Jonathan Wilson explores the dangerous lures of modernity (which says knowledge is objective and impersonal correspondence with reality that we know with certainty) and of postmodernity (which argues knowledge is only an interpretation of reality or, more radically, a construction of reality). Both modernity and postmodernity view human knowing as our own accomplishment. In contrast, Wilson says, the Christian way of knowing is grounded in the *virtue* of faith in Christ, which the New Testament characterizes as a gift, personal, communal, and cosmic in scope. On this understanding, "Far from being something other than knowledge, faith is the only way by which we can know all things truly—as reconciled to God in and through Jesus Christ."

Emily Rodgers and Haley Stewart examine how the Christian view of wisdom is represented in the stained glass windows in Robbins Chapel within Brooks Residential College of Baylor University. The twelve windows—depicting six intellectual virtues, the cardinal moral virtues, and the theological virtues—"present a narrative of Christian virtue and its ultimate goal, union with God in Christ through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit," they write in *Humble Wisdom* (p. 56). Focusing on iconography in the *Humility* (*Humilitas*) and *Wisdom* (*Sapientia*) windows, they show how the artistic program of this Chapel leads the worshiper to the Trinity windows in the chancel, where Christ crucified is presented as "the Wisdom of God."

Bill O'Brien's new hymn, "Wisdom's Way" (p. 53), with its gentle yet unpredictable melody by Kurt Kaiser, celebrates the Trinitarian nature of divine wisdom—imaged in creation, incarnate in Christ Jesus, and stirring through the Spirit our sense and sight. "Wisdom's way," O'Brien writes, has become "an open secret…wrapped in love, so freely offered by the Way, the Truth, the Life." David Miller incorporates this text in his worship service (p. 46) that traces God's gift of wisdom and love through Israel's wisdom tradition, Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, and Paul's theological reflection on the scandalous weakness of God on the Cross, which is "wiser than human wisdom" and "stronger than human strength."

In *Sharing Wisdom as an Act of Love* (p. 66), David Jeffrey praises Marilynne Robinson's Pulitzer prizewinning novel *Gilead* for depicting the instruction of the young by the wise—an intergenerational act of love that was central to biblical wisdom but is alien to the individualistic ways of our culture. The novel takes the form of the elderly Reverend John Ames's

memoir to his seven year-old son whose arrival at manhood he will never see. Ames is "a winsome narrative voice" who shares his advice with "thoughtful self-criticism" and "without taint of self-righteousness or condescension," Jeffrey notes. "The form of this novel is a memoir, but it reads more like an extended love-letter."

We must learn to share wisdom across generations within the Church today, Jeanie Miley writes in *So Great a Cloud of Witnesses* (p. 74). "My generation has been so busy trying to out-run age and to defy death that we have modeled disrespect of older people, and worship of what's new and 'in'," she confesses. "How can we who have been entrusted with the Church today re-establish a connection with the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us in a way that is meaningful to those who will come after us?"

Helen Cepero, in *Models of Christian Discernment* (p. 88), describes a range of Christian practices for distinguishing "which thoughts, feelings, decisions, and actions in our lives lead to God" and cultivating them. David F. Ford's *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* shows how wisdom grows from spiritual friendships—among Jews, Christians, and Muslims reading Scripture together; or among persons with disabilities and the able-bodied living in L'Arche communities—in which we "listen" to those who suffer. *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls: A Guide to Christian Approaches and Practices*, edited by Gary W. Moon and David G. Benner, brings together representatives of seven Christian faith traditions to explore the intersection of spiritual direction, psychotherapy, and pastoral counseling. Jeanette A. Bakke's *Holy Invitations: Exploring Spiritual Direction* models the practice of one-on-one spiritual direction, while Marva Dawn's *Joy in Divine Wisdom: Practices of Discernment from Other Cultures and Christian Traditions* "suggests that wisdom and discernment develop through an upward spiral of character formation…when we are part of communities that reflect God's character."

We often overlook the biblical wisdom literature, treating it as though it offers only "a bit of sound, if theologically irrelevant, advice," Jonathan Kruschwitz observes in *Neglected Wisdom* (p. 83). "It may seem discordant with the rest of the Old Testament: the story of God and Israel—so prominent in the Torah, the prophets, and much of the writings—is not so obvious in the wisdom texts." He reviews three recent books—Ellen F. Davis's *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, James Limburg's *Encountering Ecclesiastes: A Book for Our Time*, and Daniel J. Harrington's *Jesus Ben Sira of Jerusalem: A Biblical Guide to Living Wisely*—that attempt to set the record straight. "The biblical wisdom texts are not illegitimate siblings of the other Old Testament texts, for the books of wisdom were written within and contribute to Israel's distinctive theological perspective," Kruschwitz concludes. "Wisdom continues to cry out in the street (Proverbs 1:20) and—with the help of these informed perspectives—we would do well to listen.

Fear of the Lord

BY RUSSELL RENO

Fear of the Lord is not only the beginning of wisdom. According to Scripture, fear of God is also the end as part of the consummating gift of salvation. What kind of fear leads to wholeness, love, and freedom from self-indulgence, rather than groveling servitude?

The binding of Isaac in Genesis 22 is one of the most memorable passages in Scripture. God comes to the aging patriarch Abraham and commands him to offer his only son as a sacrifice. In verses of chilling concision, the story is told. Abraham cuts the wood for the burnt offering. He loads his donkey, and begins the journey. From the base of the mountain, the innocent young son unknowingly carries the wood for the fire of his own sacrifice. They reach the appointed place, and the father coolly and efficiently prepares his son to be slain. The sharp-edged knife in hand, Abraham stands ready to draw it across the neck of the child whom he loves. It is a shocking tableau: a father about to kill his beloved son in obedience to God's command.

Of course, readers of Scripture know that Abraham does not end up sacrificing Isaac. An angel of the Lord appears to him and commands him to stop, and immediately a ram appears who serves as a substitute offered in Isaac's place. Nonetheless, biblical readers have long struggled with the episode. The dark possibilities of child sacrifice—and the terrible prospect of a god who would command such things—haunt the scene. And for the modern reader, the explanation that the angel of the Lord gives for the counter-command to spare Isaac only compounds and deepens the ambivalence. "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him," Abraham is told, "for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son" (Genesis 22:12).

Fear! The emotion hardly seems commendable. "Fear," observes Aristotle, "is caused by whatever we feel has great power of destroying us, or of harming us in ways that tend to cause us great pain."[1] If this is so, then in what sense can fear be part of the life of faith, the purpose of which is to draw us close to the great power of God who saves rather than harms us? Are we to think that God favors Abraham because he grovels and trembles in slavish obedience, even to the point of sacrificing his son? Isn't Abraham's disposition of fear as barbaric as the nearly completed ritual of child sacrifice? The Old Testament endorsement of fear, we can easily conclude, is an example of a primitive form of piety, one shaped by ancient Israelite images of a warrior deity who compels obedience with threatening displays of power. Thank goodness, we may continue, it is transcended by the more advanced, more spiritual, and more humane religion of the New Testament. After all, is it not written that "there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18)?

Superficially attractive and unfortunately all too common, this functionally Marcionite view of God in the scriptural witness cannot be the way forward. Scripture itself warns against the idea that fear is an early stage in religious development, one to be transcended by a supposedly more mature, more intimate, more positive vision. The Psalmist proclaims, "The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever" (Psalm 19:9). Moreover, the eschatological prophecies of Isaiah tell us that fear plays a central role in the coming day of divine glory: "Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged" (Isaiah 60:5, KJV). Fear of the Lord is not only the beginning of wisdom. According to Scripture, fear of God is also the end as part of the consummating gift of salvation.

THE LIMITS OF WORLDLY FEAR

Scripture interprets Scripture, and as we turn to the Bible we can find some implicit distinctions that illuminate how the covenant begun with Abraham and fulfilled in Christ both casts out and encourages fear. In the first place, Scripture gives plenty of ink to depicting a worldly fear that diminishes human life. Cain has sown the blood of Abel, and he shrinks from the consequences of his sin. In a world ruled by sin and death, we seem doomed to fear our fellow man. But sometimes it is not a matter of sin. Faced with the infertility of his wife, the Lord appears to Abraham and reassures him, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield" (Genesis 15:1). The ways in which the worldly reality of fertility complicates life also open the Gospel stories. Joseph confronts his pregnant spouse, and he tries to find the most just and humane way to extract himself from the shameful circumstances of her apparent adultery. An angel of the Lord appears to him in a dream, counseling, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:20). Abraham fears the fickle nature of human reproduction, while Joseph fears the way in which

sexual desire can draw us into the destroying power of sin. In both cases, the two men fear being destroyed by the finite powers of the world, the biological "facts of life," that are indifferent toward the flourishing of human beings. This is the essence of worldly fear: a shrinking anxiety about the future based on a realistic calculation of how things usually work out.

We find that Scripture allows that worldly fear plays a legitimate role in worldly affairs. Wisdom urges prudence and discretion (Proverbs 8:12). We should not imprudently fling ourselves into danger, and we need to weigh our actions and decisions according to realistic calculations about likely outcomes. Moreover, if we are in positions of responsibility, prudence counsels a judicious use of fear to motivate others. The Apostle Paul endorses the fear-inducing power of governing authorities. After all, he observes, "rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad" (Romans 13:3). The ruler bears the sword with God's approval, because the common good is well served when the wicked shrink from doing wicked deeds out of fear of punishment. The same use of fear holds for less dramatic uses of public power. Paul tells the church in Thessalonica, "If anyone will not work, neither let him eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10, NASB).[2] Fear of hunger and want motivates, and a wise leader uses that fear to encourage socially cooperative and productive behavior.

Yet, this practical and political endorsement of fear occurs infrequently in Scripture, and it is set against a much larger background of counsel against allowing worldly fear to gain spiritual control. The Bible consistently recognizes that worldly fear can easily come to predominate over our spiritual lives. When it does, fear debilitates, paralyzes, and undermines our faithfulness. For example, the Israelites calculate the might of Pharaoh's chariots in comparison to their defenseless columns, crying out to Moses that it is better to serve in Egypt than to die in the wilderness. Their judgment is justified in the eyes of the world, but Moses reprimands them. They have falsely assumed that worldly powers rule the world. Against this slavery to worldly fear, Moses urges, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today" (Exodus 14:13). The same holds for Abraham's fear of infertility and Joseph's fear of the shame of sin. God rules the world, and we must believe in the power of his outstretched arm. Such a faith frees us from worldly fear. As the Psalmist sings, "Though a host encamp against me, my heart shall not fear" (Psalm 27:3, NASB).

Scripture interprets Scripture, and as we turn to the Bible we can find some implicit distinctions that illuminate how the covenant begun with Abraham and fulfilled in Christ both casts out and encourages fear.

In his reflections on the social destiny of humanity, Saint Augustine treats our usual fears of worldly power in a similar way. He observes, following the Apostle Paul, that the fear-inspiring power of the earthly sword has a proper purpose. Human sinfulness can be restrained by worldly fear, and the wise ruler of the earthly city should acknowledge and try to manage our fears of want, slavery, and death. Yet, however prudent and necessary, social life ordered by worldly fear is as much a spiritual dead-end as an individual life organized around worldly loyalties and loves. The earthly city, Augustine writes, is forever "shaken by these emotions as by diseases and upheavals." A fear of suffering and death can be all too easily conscripted into the plan of demagogues and tyrants. And even if wisely manipulated, the kind of justice that emerges out of trembling anxiety is outward and unstable. For this reason, Augustine concludes that worldly fear has no role to play in the heavenly city of peace. The faithful are united by the power of a common love of God.[3]

THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL FEAR

If worldly fear has no lasting role, then what are the other forms of fear that the Bible endorses? Generally, Scripture commends forms of fear that stem from a realistic assessment of God's righteousness. "Do not be afraid," Moses tells the Israelites at Sinai, "for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin" (Exodus 20:20). The exhortation seems paradoxical: do not fear so that you might fear. But the paradox is apparent, not real. The first fear is worldly. The Israelites want to anxiously retreat from the holiness of God and go back to the less demanding idols of this world. They would rather fear famine and the sword than the judgments of God. But Moses wants the Israelites to reckon with reality. There is no place of refuge. God will put all hearts to the test. If we keep our eyes on this fact, Moses seems to be saying, we will not find ourselves so easily falling into sin. Fear the Lord's power of judgment, Moses is saying, so that you will not fear the world and do its bidding.

Modern theologians often worry that fear of eternal punishment somehow corrupts a true faith, as if the mere thought of divine judgment casts doubt on God's mercy. Others suggest that a faith motivated by fear of punishment simply reflects a cowering, anxious hedonism that organizes commitments according to long-term calculations about pleasure and pain. But these simple-minded views confuse worldly fear with spiritual fear. Consider an analogy from the intellectual life. Fear of ignorance or error can be colored by shame and anxiety, but this emotion does not work at cross-purposes to an animating love of truth. The same holds for fear of divine punishment. Sinners should recoil from the idea of a righteous judge capable of knowing and punishing all transgressions, and this fear is no more inconsistent with a love of God than fear of error contradicts a love of truth.

We need to be awakened to this spiritual fear of God's judgment. The Bible as a whole and the New Testament in particular encourages us to grieve and weep over our sins (see Matthew 26:75). If we tremble before the thought of final judgment (see Mark 13:32-37), we can better avoid transgression. In this way, a fear of divine punishment is pedagogical. It directs us away from sin and toward righteousness. It guides us, says Augustine, "to lead the right kind of life, the life that is according to God's will."[4] This guiding fear, however, must come to an end after the faithful enter their reward, for they have attained righteousness and no longer need the pedagogical fear of punishment.

However, if fear of the Lord is everlasting, then it must be of a different order and possess a different character. What kind of fear has a role to play in the perfection of the elect? What role can fear play in the gift of fellowship with God? How does fear enlarge the heart?

Augustine recognizes that a lasting, heavenly fear of God is something of a paradox. To find a way forward he calls it a "serene fear," because it shares in the "tranquility based on love" that, as Paul teaches, "never ends" (see 1 Corinthians 13:8).[5] Whether or not Augustine is right to think of the everlasting fear as serene, the Bible as a whole supports the apparently odd conjunction of eschatological fulfillment with a shrinking, reverential fear. The culminating scene of the book of Job is a good example. God answers out of the whirlwind, and the thundering declarations of divine majesty are not meant to induce Job to follow the path of righteous. They reveal the transcendent power of God. Job's response: a shrinking, repentant awe in the presence of God.

If we set aside facile pictures of cherubic angels in a heaven filled with dainty nimbus clouds, it is not difficult to see why the promise of fellowship with God instills an existential horror. How can we draw near to God, even to the point of partaking in the divine nature, without dying to our sinful selves? Here the fear is less concerned with punishment and more concerned with purification. In his modest divine comedy, *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis portrays this fear with his usual insight. The spectral souls who are met by the Solid People at the entrance to heaven can only journey toward God if they give up their doubts, vices, and shame. In Lewis' account few have the courage to endure the spiritual fear of purification. The reason is simple: as sinners,

Does fear of eternal punishment reflect a cowering, anxious hedonism that organizes commitments according to long-term calculations about pleasure and pain? This simple-minded view confuses worldly fear with spiritual fear.

they cannot imagine being themselves without the deforming qualities that alienate them from God. In a particularly vivid scene, Lewis portrays a hissing lizard of lust warning a frightened soul. "Without me," asks the lizard, "how could you live?" Sin must be destroyed in order for us to enter the heavenly kingdom. This should be good news, but we are so fully invested in our sinful habits that we see ourselves—our plans, our projects, our personalities—consumed as well. The frightened soul turns to his guardian angel for reassurance. God promises new life, he is told, but there is no promise that the transition from sin to holiness will be painless.[6]

What must be given up can seem so dear to us—and its promised restoration can seem so remote and illusory—that we tremble on the edges of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience, often paradoxically fearing the courage to obey even as we seek divine assistance. Augustine vividly portrays this fear in his *Confessions*. After he had read the Platonists, he reports that his intellectual objections had fallen away. He was disposed to believe in Christ, but he could not, because he feared the narrowness of the way. He wanted to be rid of the binding chains of his sin, but as he tells us, his desire for new life in Christ was accompanied by a paralyzing anxiety that he could not endure a moral change of such magnitude. The closer Augustine gets to his goal, the more he fears attaining it. He sees the gulf between his sin and God's invitation to holiness, and he fears falling into the abyss.

This fear is everlasting. God's invitation to holiness is an offer of fellowship. Grace brings us into the divine life. Yet the gulf between our lives and the life of the Holy Trinity is not just moral; it is ontological. He is creator and we are creatures. The created nature of the human person remains forever distinct from the divine nature of the Holy Trinity. This chasm is bridged by grace, but never eliminated. God becomes incarnate, not created, and salvation is a deification of our humanity, not our absorption into the divine nature.

The eternal and unfathomable difference between God and creature explains the everlasting fear that is consistent with a love that draws us ever nearer. An analogy might help. When we walk across bridges we may enjoy every confidence that the engineers have done a good job and the span will not collapse—and yet, who does not feel hints of terror when looking over the edge and into the depths of the chasm below. This is all the more true of our salvation in Christ. He is our trustworthy mediator, our bridge to eternal life in God, and our confident faith in his saving death is entirely consistent with a fearful sense of the depths into which he went on our behalf, depths from which we turn away in shuddering, instinctive horror. Hans Urs von Balthasar observes, "Fear is not abolished, nor is distance eliminated, when grace is given to nature, but it shows up now in its authentic form in Gethsemane and on the Cross and is transfigured as a

'holy fear of the Lord' lasting into eternity."[7] The nothingness of death endured by Christ can never be fathomed—and we rightly fear to look into its gaping, hungry void. As the old spiritual says of the cross, "it causes me to tremble, tremble."

FEAR AND OBEDIENCE

Both the pedagogical fear of divine judgment and eschatological fear and awe invoked by what God has endured for our sakes operate in Abraham's trial. Abraham does not rely on cheap grace. He does not presume upon the riches of God's kindness and forbearance and patience, as if he could evade God's commandments and then throw himself on the mercy of God. Instead, Abraham has a proper awareness that none shall escape the judgment of God, and he acts accordingly, wishing not to store up wrath for himself (see Romans 2:1-11). Abraham fears the Lord in the way that Moses urges upon the Israelites, and because he fears, he can be trusted to obey. But there is also the further, reverential sense of fear revealed in the trial of Abraham. If we look to Deuteronomy we can see how this is so. There, Moses shifts the relationship between fear and obedience. One does not so much fear in order to obey as obey in order to fear: "diligently observe all the words of this law that are written in this book," we read, "fearing this glorious and awful name, the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 28:58). Abraham's obedience brings him closer to God, and this intimacy with the divine produces a reverential, awe-filled fear.

Thus, we can say that Abraham's fear crowns as well as motivates his obedience. When the angel of the Lord says to Abraham, "now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me," it is as if the Lord is sizing up Abraham. "I remember your contentious personality when we stood overlooking Sodom and Gomorrah," we might imagine God saying, "and I see how your humble fear of my majesty has kept you silent and you did not dispute my commandment." We can imagine God continuing, "And I remember how you pled on behalf of Ishmael, yet now in your reverence for my purposes you have not petitioned on behalf of Isaac." And still further, keeping in mind God's foreknowledge of all that will come to pass, is it not difficult to imagine the Lord saying to Abraham, "I see that fear of God has so overtaken your soul that you no longer think of yourself, and unlike Jephthah who will sacrifice his child (Judges 11:29-40), you do not give yourself over to self-regarding grief and

The eternal and unfathomable difference between God and creature explains the everlasting fear that is consistent with a love that draws us ever nearer.

lamentation." Thus does the Lord admire Abraham, whom he had chosen and tried for his purposes. With satisfaction God says to Abraham, "You are now a man who knows how to walk humbly with his God." Then, quoting from his own wisdom, the Lord concludes his address to Abraham. "It is written," God says," that 'the reward for humility is the fear of God'" (Proverbs 22:3), and thus do I give you what you have earned."

NOTES

1 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book II, chapter 5 (1382a 28-29), in *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), 1389.

2 Scripture quotations marked NASB are from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

3 Augustine, *City of God*, Book XIV, chapter 9.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

6 C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1946), chapter 11.

7 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, translated by Edward Oakes (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1992), 287.

RUSSELL RENO
is Professor of Theological Ethics at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska.

The Christian Way of Knowing

BY JONATHAN R. WILSON

The Christian virtue of faith guides the Christian way of knowing and enables the Church to witness faithfully to the gospel in the midst of challenges to knowledge and truth in our postmodern culture.

What can we know? How do we know it? How do we know that we know it? Can we be certain that we know what we claim to know? When people claim to know something, are they merely giving us their interpretation in order to preserve their power and protect their interests? These are the questions about knowledge that modernity and postmodernity press upon us.

Does the gospel of Jesus Christ provide us with any guidance in this cultural situation? I will argue that the Christian virtue of faith guides the Christian way of knowing and enables the Church to witness faithfully to the gospel in the midst of challenges to knowledge and truth in our culture.

Most of us are not accustomed to thinking of faith *as a virtue*, and this renders us vulnerable to the dangers of modernity and postmodernity.

We are susceptible to the dangers of modernity when we think of faith merely as a mental act of assent to a list of propositions, such as a statement of faith. In this view humans may be reduced to disembodied minds who know "objective truth." But what we Christians know by faith is a person, Jesus Christ. Certainly the propositions are essential to identifying Jesus Christ, but they are not the object of our faith. Moreover, we who know Jesus Christ by faith are not disembodied minds but persons with our own history and personalities through which we come to faith. This does not lead to a vicious subjectivity but to an understanding of the virtue of faith as personal.

We may be susceptible to the dangers of postmodernity when we think of faith as merely a volitional act of trust in Jesus Christ. In this view, humans may be reduced to "the will to power." Faith, in this instance, is the

destruction of my will by God's will. But when we know Jesus Christ by faith, our will is not defeated but transformed. Certainly the bondage of our will to sin is broken, but it is broken so that we may be set free to do the will of God.

As a virtue, faith is the means by which we come to know Jesus Christ and we are transformed in our knowing. Faith transforms our whole way of being: it becomes the habit by which we live and know. By this habituation in faith we grow in knowledge and are better able to be faithful witnesses to the gospel in the midst of modernity and postmodernity.

KNOWLEDGE IN MODERNITY AND POSTMODERNITY

Where modernity is optimistic and confident about the possibilities of human knowing, postmodernity is pessimistic and skeptical. Against modernity's understanding of knowledge as objective and impersonal correspondence with reality, postmodernity argues that knowledge is an interpretation of reality or, more radically, a construction of reality. Against modernity's quest for certainty in knowledge, postmodernity stresses the uncertainty that attends all forms of knowledge. Against modernity's supposedly disinterested search for truth, postmodernity exposes the quest for power and the protection of power inherent in any claim to knowledge.

Since we live in a time of cultural change marked by the breaking down of modernity, we can best identify the problematic nature of knowledge in our culture and the challenges it presents by attending to the postmodernist understanding of knowledge. Two central postmodern views of knowledge prevail: knowledge as interpretation and knowledge as power.

A prolific and influential advocate for the first view is Richard Rorty. In place of the modernist view of knowledge as the correspondence between our mental notions and an external reality, Rorty argues in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) that knowledge is an interpretation by which we are edified. He calls us to maintain an ongoing conversation among competing interpretations. This will not lead us to truth, but to other interpretations, which will lead to still other interpretations…*ad infinitum*. The aim of this conversation is not truth but a more humane society.

Something similar to this view marks our everyday lives whenever we operate with the conviction that "everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion." This conviction typically reflects the underlying judgments either that truth is unobtainable or that it is more important to keep the peace than to challenge a statement. These two judgments reflect precisely Rorty's arguments that (1) truth is trivial and (2) the aim of philosophy is to keep the conversation going in order to form a more humane society. Another way of putting the latter would be to agree with Rorty that democracy is more important than philosophy—that getting along and letting each person have his or her say matters more than arriving at the truth.

Intertwined with this claim that knowledge is interpretation is a second

challenge to the traditional understanding of knowledge. If knowledge is simply one interpretation or construction of reality among other competing interpretations or constructions of reality produced by a person, community, or tradition, then knowledge is not access to reality. Instead, claims to knowledge merely represent access to, or attempts to access, power on behalf of a person, community, or tradition. In this situation knowledge is anything that I can get others to accept as true or that gains power for me, my community or my tradition. This acceptance forms an "interpretive community" that then becomes a base for extending power.

This struggle for power marks many debates about social issues and government policy. Today politics is marked not by a concern with truth but by a concern with what the public perceives to be true. As a result, our social policy debates are shaped by innumerable polls of public opinion that enable us to form bases of power.

Together these postmodern attacks on modernity's understanding of knowledge can cause us great anxiety. Truth, it seems, can be twisted into anything that advances my interpretation of reality and my quest for power. Conflicts are resolved not by our mutual capitulation to "the truth" but only by the dominance or victory of one side or another.[1]

Deepening this distress is the loss of belief in knowledge as a path to certainty. Modernity's quest for knowledge was ultimately an optimistic quest for certainty about the world and humanity's place in the world. But if knowledge is an interpretation of how I propose, or my community proposes, to view reality, and if such claims to knowledge are an exercise of power, then we must also abandon as hopeless the traditional quest for knowledge that is certain. As a result, the postmodern age is marked by deep skepticism about the certainty of human knowledge. The best that we can hope for, it seems, is that those who gain power will create a more humane world.

This distress in our culture is even more intense for Christians than for society in general. For society, debates about the nature of knowledge are contests for political power and for one or another view of our society. But for Christians the meaning of these debates is even deeper. They are debates about people's relationship to God—or, better, about God's relationship to individuals—and about people's eternal destiny.

In this situation we face three temptations that may lead us astray, away from faithful witness to the gospel.

The first temptation lures us into support for modernity. Faced with the relativism of postmodernity, we may we believe that the only way to talk about truth is in the language and categories of modernity. We may conclude that the survival of witness to the truth of the gospel depends on the survival of modernity. But (as I argue below) the categories of modernity are not the only way to argue about truth or to witness to the gospel.

Indeed, modernity has often exercised a corrupting influence on Christian witness to the gospel. For example, modernity views knowledge as a mental act by which we grasp an object or, more broadly, an objective reality. Christian faith, however, is not knowledge of an object or an objective reality in the modernist sense; rather, it is knowing and being known by a subject, a person Jesus Christ.

The second temptation lures us in two ways into wholehearted support for postmodernity. On the one hand, we may support postmodernity because we see it as a way of reintroducing Christianity into Western intellectual life. If everyone's opinion is equally valid, then Christian convictions are as valid as anyone else's. What right, on postmodern grounds, has the academy or any other intellectual endeavor to exclude Christianity? Second, postmodernity's turn from knowledge to personal feeling may seem tailor-made for Christian witness. The unprecedented quest for spiritual experience in our society is illustrated by bestsellers such as Eckhard Tolle's *The Power of Now* and *A New Earth*. We may be tempted to package the gospel as an answer to this quest, but such a quest is an expression of "consumer spirituality" that turns the gospel into something that meets my needs as I perceive them, not a genuine "thirst for God" that participates in the redemption of the gospel.

The third temptation that we face is more subtle: it lures us to accept the ground on which the debate is being engaged. At present the debate is about knowledge—more specifically about *how* we know what we know—not about *what* or *whom* we know.

One hallmark of modernity is the number of attempts to provide a theory that will unify our knowledge and guarantee its certainty. A hallmark of postmodernity is the number of attacks on these quests for epistemological certainty. But as I will argue in my account of the virtue of faith, the solution for Christians to get beyond the objectivism of modernity and the relativism threatened by postmodernity is not to begin with a quest for another—" new and improved"—epistemology. Rather, we must turn once again to the gospel to discover the "Christian way of knowing" taught by faith.

FAITH AS PERSONAL

Four aspects of New Testament faith will guide our account of the relationship between the virtue of faith and the Christian way of knowing: faith is personal, a gift, communal, and cosmic in scope.[2]

Jesus Christ is the ground and goal of faith. If we through faith are to know Jesus Christ as a person, then the virtue of faith must be personal—not in the sense of "private" but in the sense that it involves our whole being. Faith transforms us as persons. It is not merely the transformation of what we know or how we know, nor is it merely an act of the will. Rather, faith is the habituation of the whole person in life with Jesus Christ and by

the power of the Holy Spirit, such that our very way of assenting and consenting is transformed.

This implies that our knowing cannot be reduced to a mental act. We do not know other persons as persons by turning them into concepts or ideas, nor do we know them as persons through a purely mental act of our own. Rather, we know them through their whole way of life as persons, through our whole being as persons.

Against modernity, saying that faith is personal teaches us that our knowing cannot be reduced to a detached, objective stance. Persons are known, as Martin Buber famously reminded us, through I-Thou, not I-It, relationships. This does not lead to a vicious subjectivity but to a relationship of subject to subject. If we are to remain faithful to the gospel, we must not reduce our knowledge of Christ to a subject-object relationship or, in the worst manifestations of modernity, an object-object relationship, where an impersonal mind knows an impersonal concept. Rather, our knowing Christ, which comes as we are habituated in faith, is a subject-subject relationship. This way of knowing depends not on an objective, detached, neutral stance but on the passionate commitment of our whole being.

Against the postmodernist claim that since objective knowledge is not possible therefore knowledge is not possible, the virtue of faith teaches that all true knowing is found through the person of Jesus Christ. As Lesslie Newbigin argues, "The great objective reality is God but he is also the supreme subject who wills to make himself known to us not by a power that would cancel out our subjectivity, but by a grace that calls forth and empowers our subjective faculties, our power to grow in knowledge through believing."[3]

FAITH AS A GIFT

Faith in the person of Jesus Christ comes not through human initiative or achievement but by God's gift. This conception of faith as a gift teaches much about the Christian way of knowing. For those who are new persons in Christ, all knowing is a gift; it is the result of humility, not pride, and therefore should lead to humility, not pride. Humility, not enlightenment, is the first step toward the Christian way of knowing.

This runs directly counter to the modernist view that knowledge is achieved through human effort in our quest to master the world. This account also equips us to respond in three ways to postmodernist skepticism which, from the breakdown of the modernist conception of knowledge, draws the conclusion that claims to knowledge are interpretations and disguised bids for power. First, Christians offer an alternative conception of the path to knowing—knowing as a gift, not an achievement. Second, we reject the claim that knowledge is mere interpretation. The Christian way of knowing and the knowledge that comes by way of that knowing are given by God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Yes, we are called to the task of

interpretation, but that task is supremely the task of interpreting the world according to the gospel of Jesus Christ, not interpreting the gospel to fit the demands of the world. In other words, the gospel, by the power of the Holy Spirit, teaches, reminds, convicts, and guides. Third, we refuse to enter the contest for power. Gifts cannot be forced on anyone, they can only be offered. These are difficult disciplines to practice, but they are necessary expressions of the peaceableness that marks those who know that their lives and all their knowing have been given to them.

Thus the virtue of faith as a gift equips us to resist nostalgia for modernity and to witness faithfully to the gospel in a postmodern age.

FAITH AS COMMUNAL

The gift of faith comes to us from God through a community which is unlike any other, namely, the disciple community. Certainly the Church is a human community, an "earthen vessel." But it is also the body of Christ whose telos—the redemption of creation through the work of Christ—is not created by human beings or achieved by human effort.

Only in the disciple community do we find the gifts of the Spirit which are necessary to the formation of faith. In this community the diverse gifts of the Spirit complement each other and keep our knowledge of the gospel alive, enabling us to discern the work of the gospel today, participate in that work, and be formed by our participation in it.

This claim corrects our tendency to concentrate responsibility for knowing in one area of giftedness or in one office of the community. Certainly the Church needs intellectuals, theologians, and teachers. But it also needs administrators who insure that everyone's voice is heard, the merciful who attach ideas to people, prophets who are sensitive to new direction from the Spirit of God, and so on. Only when this diversity of gifts is honored does the Church embody the Christian way of knowing.[4] This deepens the significance of humility as the first step in Christian knowing and teaches the indispensability of charity toward others and engenders a profound practice of friendship.

Although this call to the virtue of faith as communal reflects a Christian transformation of one aspect of postmodernity—namely, the claim by many postmodernists that our knowing is inescapably communal—it corrects other tendencies of postmodernity that threaten faithfulness to the gospel. First, against the postmodernist tendency to view communities in terms of an interminable power struggle, it reminds us that our communal knowing is a gift to be shared, not a power to be imposed. Second, against the fear that postmodernity leads to a vicious relativism, the practice of faith as communal affirms that knowing is relative to a particular telos, Jesus Christ. Finally, against the fear that postmodernity leads to subjectivity, the practice of faith as communal forces us to rely on the Spirit-gifted community, not on ourselves as individuals.

FAITH AS COSMIC IN SCOPE

Since the disciple community witnesses to and serves the Christ who promises the redemption of creation, the virtue of faith changes our stance toward the entire creation. This assertion has its roots in the Apostle Paul's cosmic Christology, most clearly expressed in his letter to the Colossians: "[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (1:15-17), and "in [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3).

We may think that Paul surely does not mean that we can know such things as geography, psychology, and calculus through Christ, but if we consider faith as a virtue, we can see how he claims precisely that. Of course, Paul does not mean that we can understand any thing without loving attention and diligent study. Rather, only through Christ do we know things in their proper relationship and in reality.

Paul asserts that "through [Christ] God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things" (Colossians 1:20). This is the reality of all things: they need reconciliation to God, and that reconciliation has been accomplished through Jesus Christ. We may "know" all sorts of things, but we do not know them truly until we know this momentous truth: through Christ God has reconciled them to himself. This knowledge comes only as we know ourselves to be reconciled to Christ. When we know the person of Christ through the gift of faith in the community of the Spirit, then and only then can we begin to know all things.

This means that all the ways in which we know—through our emotions, wills, minds, and bodies—must be transformed by the virtue of faith in order to conform to the Christian way of knowing. It also means that everything we know must be shaped by the virtue of faith. No area of human knowledge escapes the claims of faith as a virtue.

Against the secularization of modernity that isolates faith in one particular sphere and denies it the status of knowledge, the virtue of faith as cosmic teaches us that we only know those "other" things if we know them by faith. Where modernity alienates the knower from the known and then struggles vainly to overcome that alienation through epistemology, faith declares that all things have been reconciled in Christ and that through that reconciliation we can know all things in their proper relationship to God.

Against the postmodernist capitulation to alienation and its abandonment of epistemology in favor of the will to power, the virtue of faith as cosmic again witnesses to the reconciliation of all things in and through Christ. Against the postmodemist rejection of metanarratives (accounts of the cosmos), the virtue of faith teaches that the gospel is a metanarrative of reconciliation, not an ill-disguised bid for power.

CONCLUSION

To the question "What can we know?" Christians who are habituated in faith answer, "It's not what you know, it's who you know."[5] And we ask in response, "Do you know Jesus Christ?" To the question "How do we know?" Christians respond, "By the gift of faith in Jesus Christ." And we ask in return, "Do you have that faith?" To the question "How can we be certain of what we know?" faith teaches us to respond, "Certainty is not grounded in human powers but in God's gift and the gifts of the disciple community." And we ask, "Are you a member of that community?"

To the postmodern suspicion that all knowing is an exercise in power, we offer faith as a gift that transforms our will to power and teaches us to live peaceably. For too long the disciple community has accepted the modernist construal of knowledge that denies to faith the status of knowledge. Postmodernity has helped expose the errors of modernity, but only the gospel can provide us with a sure guide for our knowing. Far from being something other than knowledge, faith is the only way by which we can know all things truly—as reconciled to God in and through Jesus Christ.[6]

NOTES

1 This result is not necessarily the intention of postmodernist thinkers, but it seems to be where the situation that they describe leads. Most postmodern thinkers do not recognize where we are headed because they lack a doctrine of sin, and they have no saving response because they lack hope for redemption.

2 Though they do not use the language of virtue, two accounts powerfully argue positions similar to mine: Julian N. Hartt, "The Principle of Faith," in *A Christian Critique of American Culture: An Essay in Practical Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 145-164; and Lesslie Newbigin, *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991).

3 Newbigin, 36.

4 John Howard Yoder gives a practical description of this process in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 15-45.

5 In other contexts Christians would add, "It's not (just) who you know, it's (also) who knows you." J. L. Packer writes in *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 37: "What matters supremely, therefore, is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it—the fact that *He knows me*…. All my knowledge of him depends upon his sustained initiative in knowing me."

6 This article is based on chapter three in my book *Gospel Virtues: Practicing Faith, Hope & Love in Uncertain Times* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 49-71.

JONATHAN R. WILSON
is Pioneer McDonald Professor of Theology at Carey Theological College in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

The Wisdom of James

BY ROBERT W. WALL

The Letter of James, reverberating with themes of biblical wisdom from ancient Israel through the traditions of Jesus and Paul, calls us to be a wise community that walks and talks the "wisdom from above."

The Letter of James describes Christian wisdom—both its theoretical knowledge and practical know-how—as embodied within a community. Since James reverberates with themes from the rich biblical wisdom tradition—from the sages of ancient Israel through the teachings of Jesus and Paul—we should review the working ideas of that tradition before turning to the letter's instruction.

The themes of biblical wisdom emerged from the teaching faculty of ancient Israel who sought to educate the public about the rules to follow for a well-lived life. The Hebrew word for wisdom, *hokma*, reflects this classroom setting: its root meaning suggests using our God-given intelligence to pursue the insight and know-how we need in order to negotiate life in the public square.

The prologue to Proverbs (1:2-7) supplies the working grammar of Scripture's wisdom corpus that includes the Letter of James. The goal is "learning about wisdom and instruction…[for] wise dealing" (1:2-3a). Devotion to the Lord is the essential disposition for this curriculum, while those who doubt God are "fools" who "despise wisdom and instruction" (1:7). The virtues listed here—righteousness, justice, equity, shrewdness, know-how, and prudence (1:3b-4)—catalogue the skill-set of the "wise" who "hear and gain in learning" (1:5). This prologue is for the teacher to guide the education of the "simple" and "young."

Rival groups within Israel debated the nature of wisdom, whether based on human experience or divine revelation, and therefore the subject matter

of wisdom, whether humanistic or theistic. For example, the collections of pithy sayings included within the Book of the Proverbs or the lyrics of wisdom Psalms (e.g., Psalms 1, 37, 49, 73, 112) distill human experience to forge a self-understanding that works well in all of life. Ecclesiastes and Job, on the other hand, seem to subvert the value of this kind of intelligence to make the theological claim that "wise" judgments about life regard only those things that do not last, however important they are, and so must be reordered by a firm devotion to a transcendent God who endures forever.

The sage's curriculum is not opposed to the prophet's admonition to keep Torah. After all, Solomon, the very personification of proverbial wisdom (cf. Proverbs 1:1; 10:1; 25:1), was given divine wisdom for observing Torah (cf. 1 Kings 4:29). In fact, his subsequent spiritual failure shows that the real measure of the wise person is Torah-keeping (cf. James 1:22-25). And Job, whose story was first told by Israel's sages, exemplifies righteous suffering (cf. James 5:7-11). Obedience does not always result in material prosperity. Both Torah-keeping and righteous suffering are principal characteristics of Christian existence according to James and illustrate the letter's indebtedness to Jewish wisdom.

The résumé of Matthew's Jesus, whom James sometimes echoes, includes his work as a teacher of wisdom (cf. Matthew 5-7). While always focused on the practices of building up a community of wise disciples, his prophetic view of human intelligence is conditioned upon "repentance"—an intellectual reorientation that aligns the converted with those beliefs and practices that herald the coming victory "on earth" of God's reign "as it is in heaven." The wisdom of Jesus is articulated, then, against the future horizon of this new creation in which human life is brought into conformity with the Creator's way of ordering the world.

Perhaps because the patterns of Jesus' prophetic wisdom depart so radically from a common-sense approach to life, the Pauline witness says the gospel may seem "foolish" to outsiders, especially when believers identify with the crucified Christ, "who became for us wisdom from God" (1 Corinthians 1:30). According to Pauline preaching, the wise community is shaped by a Christological understanding of the world that "none of the elites of this age" can understand since only by the Spirit is the mind of Christ—the wisdom of God—made known to those who profess him as risen Lord (1 Corinthians 2:6-16).

Almost certainly these two dominant New Testament traditions, Jesus and Paul, inhabit a Jewish (more than Greek) conception of wisdom. The broad range of practical and religious ideas in the Sermon on the Mount, for example, pick up the core themes of wisdom that the prologue to Proverbs puts into play—righteousness, faithfulness, knowledge, and devotion to God. Jesus, however, personifies wisdom and his radical acts of fidelity and love are the supreme characteristics of "wise dealing." According to his

instruction, the real world is the kingdom of God and for this his wisdom is "hidden from the wise and intelligent" of this world (Matthew 11:25). Pauline instruction is also shaped by apocalyptic sensibilities and so contends that divine wisdom is inaccessible to those outside of Christ who suppress natural revelation (cf. Romans 1:19-23) and are without the Spirit's illumination (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:15).

The mention of "James" in the letter's salutation (1:1) is likely not an attribution of authorship but a rhetorical cue that alerts readers that this letter belongs to the faith tradition associated with James, the brother of the Lord. The implied author is the "canonical" James whose enduring legacy is reflected by his status in the New Testament story.

According to the Book of Acts, for example, he is a pastor rather than a missionary; and his congregation in Jerusalem comprises Jewish believers who seek to preserve the church's Jewish heritage when possibly attenuated by the initiation of repentant pagans into the covenant-keeping community (cf. Acts 21:17-26; Galatians 2:11-14). Significantly, the James of Acts contends that the purification of the heart by faith in Christ, while necessary for salvation, is an insufficient condition for membership in a covenant-keeping congregation (Acts 15:13-21): a pagan's genuine repentance is also marked out by those purity practices of a more Jewish kind (cf. 15:20, 29; 21:26). This more robust conception of purity comports well with his public reputation for piety and righteousness—traits of the proverbially wise leader—reported by Christian historian Eusebius three centuries later.

The biblical story of James is climaxed by his Easter conversion (1 Corinthians 15:7; cf. Acts 1:14). This story shapes the reader's view of the book of James: it is the letter of a pastor who was converted on Easter by the risen One and who intends to complete the profession of a congregation's faith with works of purity that witness to his risen brother and Lord. From this Easter angle, the patterns of the edgy wisdom found in James are apprehended by the reader as resurrection practices.

The intended readers of James are introduced as "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion [*diaspora*]"—a metaphor for faithful disciples who form a *diaspora* community and who approach this letter's exhortation as exiles, dislocated and marginalized within an alien world because of their faith (1:1-3; cf. 1 Peter 2:11). In this case, the instruction of James shapes "wise dealings" as the prologue to Proverbs promises, but not to secure the financial future of the poor or political stability of the powerless. Rather these "words of insight" herald the prospect of participation in the coming

Jesus personifies wisdom and his radical acts of fidelity and love are the supreme characteristics of "wise dealing."

victory of God. In this sense, "wise dealing" obtains to those spiritual transactions that prove a people's friendship with God, heirs of God's kingdom.

NATURE AND SOURCE OF WISDOM: JAMES 1:1-21

Two parallel statements (1:2-11; 1:12-21) set out a powerful vision of Christian existence. Central to the letter's conception of discipleship is the routine experience of "trials of any kind" (1:2) and the Christian's "joyful" response to them. Hardship occasions the scrutiny of an intelligent mind that "considers" life's hostile circumstances and "knows" them for what they really are: "the testing of your faith" (1:3).

On the one hand, believers can respond to trials with "nothing but joy" because they know of a coming age, promised by God, when those whose faith endures will be made "mature and complete, lacking in nothing" (1:4b). This joyful confidence is subsequently restated as a beatitude in 1.12, reminiscent of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-11), that God will bless those who "endure temptation" with "the crown of life" (cf. Revelation 2:10) as recompense for their devotion to God.

On the other hand, trials can tempt to spiritual failure those immature believers who are "unstable in every way" (1:8). Because "trials" and "temptation" (1:13) translate the same Greek word, *peirasmos*, readers readily make the connection between their suffering and spiritual testing. Indeed, hardship can produce either "endurance" (1:3)—a steady allegiance to God—or it can "give birth to sin…and to death" (1:14-15). Although demonic impulses (cf. 3:15; 4:5,7) or other external factors (cf. 2:2-7; 5:1-6) may be involved in prompting the believer's inward response to trial, James stresses one's responsibility to make wise choices since one's inward "desires" are "one's own" (1:14) to control.

If God is trusted as a generous and impartial benefactor (1:5), believers will petition God for the know-how they lack in order to deal with their trials in a wise manner—that is, in a manner that will secure an eternal blessing from God. In this regard, prayer is a "considered" and "knowing" response to trials, when asked in the firm belief that the nature of God is generous and the promised future of God's reign is secured by the Lord's resurrection. Rather than doubting God's goodness (1:6-8), then, or being deceived into thinking that God is somehow responsible for one's trials (1:16), the wise thing to do is address God as "the Father of lights with whom there is no variation" (1:17b). Reasoned prayer addresses a generous God who responds to human need in only one way: with "generous acts of giving every perfect gift" (1:17a).

The gift God gives to those who ask is "the word of truth" (1:18). It is a "perfect" (*teleios*) gift not only because it is given by God but because it supplies the wisdom necessary to endure trials, the "full effect" of which is a life that is "mature (*teleios*) and complete" (1:4).[1] The summation of this divine wisdom is marked out by firm exhortation, "You must understand

this, my beloved" (1:19a). But the letter's stock synthesis of proverbial wisdom after so powerful a build-up may seem anticlimactic: "let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger" (1:19b). Only when we come to the letter's main body do we find a fresh and elaborate commentary of this "implanted word that has the power to save your souls" (1:21).

THE WISE COMMUNITY WALKS THE TALK: JAMES 1:22-2:26

The Letter of James consists of three essays—in the sequence announced in the proverbial rubric of 1:19—that expound on the way of wisdom. The first essay (1:22-2:26) interprets and applies the wisdom of "quick listening." To listen quickly means to obey the "perfect law of liberty" promptly (1:22-25). In particular, the "royal law" (2:8) demands merciful treatment of the poor neighbor (1:26-2:7). The community that loves the neighbor in distress deals wisely with them. To show them mercy constitutes prompt obedience to the law of liberty; and this practice is the manner of wisdom, not only because it liberates those in distress but because God returns mercy for mercy at the end of the age (2:12-13; cf. 1:12).

The distress of "orphans and widows" (1:27)—a biblical metaphor for society's most vulnerable members—occasions a spiritual test for the entire community. The care of poor and powerless believers is a hallmark of God's covenant-keeping people (cf. Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 24:17-21; Psalm 146:9; Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 5:28; Acts 2:45; 4:32-35; 6:1-7; 9:36-42); to abandon them not only subverts the community's religious identity but also runs the risk of God's displeasure (2:12-13). Two case studies follow. In the first one, community leaders discriminate against the poor and favor the rich by giving them the best places when seating them "into your assembly" (2:2-4). Such social practices are blatantly foolish in an assembly of the "glorious Lord Jesus Christ" (2:1) who exemplified compliance with God's preferential option for the poor (cf. Luke 14:7-14). The second case is set in a civil law-court rather than a religious assembly. The contrast draws a damning analogy between the foolish actions of the community's leaders and the very rich they privilege who "drag you into court…and blaspheme the excellent name" of Jesus (2:6-7; cf. Luke 18:1-8).

Two responses are appraised differently by God (1:26-27). "Hearers of the word but not doers" are deluding themselves: they think they are religious when in fact what they profess during religious rituals is worthless to God if not acted upon (1:26; cf. 1:22-23; 2:15-16). On the other hand, "God the Father" appraises as "pure and undefiled" the religion characterized by what its members actually do: they care for the poor and powerless without being contaminated "by the world" (1:27). Such a religion is shaped by the wisdom of James. The irony of the exhortation to obey rather than merely to hear turns on the fact that the word translated "listen" also means "obey" (cf. Romans 10:16). "Mirror" is a common trope of illumination among the rabbis and is used here to deepen the irony: a

mirror is useless in the fool's hand who "immediately forgets" what is observed and remains unchanged (1:23-24).

James' commentary on the wisdom of quick listening focuses on the object that is carefully heard: "the perfect (*teleios*) law of liberty" (1:25). While a "perfect law" surely has a divine origin (cf. Psalm 18(19):7, Septuagint), the prior uses of "perfect" in James (1:4, 17) forge a still thicker meaning that helps relate the continuing role of the law to the moral practices of a covenant-keeping community. "Perfect" in James signifies the endgame of Christian existence, formed in faithful reception of God's gifts (1:17-18) and in response to spiritual tests (1:3-4). The implication is that the biblical Torah is a divine auxiliary that continues to disclose a "word of truth" to the community in order to "save your souls." The wise response, then, is to obey quickly what God's "perfect law" demands.

The "law of liberty" resonates with Paul's "law of Christ" in that its demand obligates believers to free each other from their burdens (Galatians 6:2; cf. 5:1). However in James the referent of this phrase more narrowly trades upon Torah's Jubilee legislation: the "law of liberty" concerns "the year of liberty" (Leviticus 25:8-24), which became important especially during the Second Temple period for fashioning a sociological model of God's coming kingdom (cf. Luke 4:16-21; James 2:5). The promise of future blessing introduced in 1:12 is here repeated to link enduring temptation and trials with the wisdom of law-keeping (1:25).

The question posed in James 2:1 is better translated, "Do you have the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?" This recalls the similar phrase used by Paul in which "the faith of Jesus Christ" (cf. Romans 3:22; Galatians 3:22) is a subjective genitive of the crucified Christ's faithfulness to God (cf. Philippians 2:5-8), which secures God's promise of salvation from sin. But the wisdom of James' question is aimed differently—not at Christ's cross (as for Paul), but at his ministry among the poor and powerless. That is, Jesus' self-sacrificial faithfulness to God as Messiah is embodied by doing the "perfect law of liberty" and is glorified "in (his) doing" (1:25). Jesus obeyed the kingdom's rule of law by not failing its "royal" (=kingly) demand to treat his poor neighbors according to God's preferential option for the poor (2:5).

Besides the example of Jesus, two other biblical figures, Abraham and Rahab, are mentioned to underwrite the wisdom of caring for the poor in their distress. Their cases are introduced by the common sense assertion that the mere profession of orthodox faith does not save anyone if not demonstrated by works. That is, if a pious benediction, "go in peace," is given to the hungry and naked without also feeding and clothing them, what practical good results for either (2:14-17)? Or if a believer professes orthodox faith apart from works, how is his destiny any different than the shuddering demons who do the same (2:18-20)?

The combination of patriarch Abraham (2:21-24) and prostitute Rahab

(2:25) form a merism—a figure of speech uniting two images to point to one reality—that underwrites the universally valid claim: "faith without works is dead" (2:26). In Jewish tradition, the story of Isaac's binding (Genesis 22; cf. James 2:21) narrates Abraham's final exam and the grade he receives from God is confirmation of the promises made to him that secures Israel's destiny as God's elect people. In James' handling of the tradition, Abraham exemplifies how a profession of orthodox faith—Abraham is the first monotheist according to Jewish tradition—must be "brought to completion by works" (2:22). Only then is the believer befriended by God with a future secured by divine promise (2:23).

Rahab's biblical story (Joshua 2:1-21) makes this same point by what it does and does not mention. Hardly another biblical figure offers a more impressive profession of faith than does Rahab (cf. Joshua 2:8-11); yet James does not mention it. Only her hospitable and courageous actions toward "the messengers" are noted. The rhetorical effect is to impress upon the reader that the wise believer understands that God befriends people on the basis of their merciful "works and not by faith alone" (2:24).

THE WISE COMMUNITY TALKS THE WALK: JAMES 3:1-18

The wisdom of "slow speaking" is especially suited for readers of the Diaspora (1:1) where daily trials make the experience of dislocation even more destabilizing (3:1-6) and guidance from "wise and understanding" teachers is at a premium (3:13-14). Under these difficult circumstances, the temptation of unedifying speech is made more intense by the inherent difficulty of controlling what is said (3:7-10). The "pure" speech of the community (3:17) guided by "wisdom from above" insures that a "harvest of righteousness" will be sown (3:15-18).

Teachers may be tempted to slander one another to elevate their status within the community (cf. 3:14). The wisdom of slow speaking is directed at teachers by a teacher ("we who teach") with the warning that "not many of you should become teachers" (3:1). This warning is rooted in two beliefs already explored by James. First is the realistic assessment that even believers lack the wisdom necessary to control the inward desires that incline them toward doubt and sin (1:5-6, 7-8, 13-15). That is, "all of us make many mistakes" (3:2). Second is the bracing awareness that God will judge believers on the basis of what they say and do (1:12; 2:12-13).

To slow down what one says is not a matter of better diction; it concerns the careful choice of words used. The difficulty the teacher faces in this regard is illustrated by a triad of familiar examples with increasing threat. Controlling what is said (i.e., the tongue) is like the skillful use of a bit to control the movement of a horse (3:3) or the pilot's handling of a rudder to maneuver a ship through strong winds to safe harbor (3:4-5a). The final example envisages the tongue as a "small fire" (literally, "spark") that destroys a great forest (3:5b-6a).

By this exaggerated example James now can clarify the problem of careless speech, even if by an obscure comparison in 3:6. A "world of iniquity" that "stains" the "whole body" recalls 1:27, which describes the religion of practice as resistant to the "stains" that contaminate a community's standing "before God, the Father." If the "tongue" is a metaphor for speech, then James defines the wisdom of "slow to speak" as the constraint a responsible teacher exercises when speaking "among our members." Put negatively, not to control what is said "stains the whole body" and redirects the community's destiny away from God's reign toward a future "inflamed by *Gehenna*" (my translation; cf. Mark 9:45, 47; 1 Enoch 26-27).[2]

The application of the wisdom of talking the Christian walk is framed by a practical question: "Who is wise and understanding among you?" (3:13). The question alludes to Moses' instruction for Israel to search for "wise and understanding" leaders to broker disputes that might threaten the tribal confederacy (cf. Deuteronomy 1:12-13). The readers of this letter, faced with their own search for congregational leaders/teachers, are guided by a sharply worded contrast between two different kinds of wisdom with very different outcomes.

The wise and understanding teacher bears a skill that is not learned from experience or education; rather its source is a "wisdom from above" (3:17; cf. 1:17-18). Unlike the foolish teacher whose selfish character (cf. 3:14, 16a) is formed by a wisdom that "does not come down from above, but is… devilish" (3:15) and whose résumé chronicles "disorder and wickedness of every kind" (3:16b), the wise and understanding teacher is formed by "the wisdom from above" and mediates "a harvest of righteousness sown in peace" (3:18).

The virtues in 3:17 characterize the peace-making speech of the wise and understanding teacher. James assumes that believers must take responsibility for their destiny with God by making wise choices that resist doubt or their desire for worldly evils.

THE WISE COMMUNITY SLOWS ANGER: JAMES 4:1-5:6

Anger toward others comes from an inward passion for material pleasure (4:1-3). The experience of being without things can provoke the impulse to covet the worldly goods of others (4:4-5). This tests the believer's confidence in a God who promises to resist the arrogant and exalt the pious poor (4:6-12; cf. 2:5). The wise find satisfaction in God while the foolish indulge their self-centered passion for material profit without consideration of God's will for human existence (4:13-17). Ironically, the misery of mistreated workers foreshadows the misery of their greedy employers in the last days, when they will lose not only their wealth but even their lives at the judgment of God (5:1-6; cf. 2:13).

The conflict between friendship with God (cf. 2:23) and "friendship with the world" (4:4; cf. 1:27; 3:6) is embodied in the internal conflict between

two competing "spirits" inherent of every person. Rabbinical tradition identifies these spirits as *yᵉsārîm*—one inclined toward evil, the other toward good. In response to this spiritual reality, then, verse 5 is better translated to pose a pair of rhetorical questions that expect a negative answer: "Or do you think Scripture says foolish things? Does the spirit that God made to dwell within us incline us intensely towards envy?" Such an appraisal is patently false, of course, since Scripture discloses wisdom while "envy" provokes sorrow in one who lacks but desires worldly pleasures (cf. 4:1-3; cf. 3:16)!

Scripture does teach, however, that God will "give grace" and finally "exalt" those of "humble" circumstance while opposing the "proud" (4:6, 10; cf. 1:9-11; 2:5). The two couplets (4:7-8a, 8b-9) bracketed by this *inclusio* of economic reversal employ the idiom of worship to envisage a repentant people's inclination toward God and away from the world and its "devil." The series of imperatives in the second couplet call the community to practice worship that will prepare it for a religious pilgrimage by following a protocol of purification, which marks its separation away from "friendship with the world" toward friendship with God. The eschatological destination of the community's pilgrimage through life is described in 4:11-12 with a summary of the letter's key themes. In this case, the "doer of the law" who will be blessed by God is the one who obeys the command not to covet his neighbor's possessions.

The opening invocative, "Come now" (4:13a; 5:1a), links together two examples of the corruption of wealth that illustrate the wisdom of resisting the impulse toward coveting what others possess, the real source of bitter interpersonal conflicts. The first illustration is of a merchant (4:13-17) whose financial "pilgrimage" (*contra* 4:8b-9) will take him on a journey "to such and such a town" (rather than the kingdom of God) in order to "do business" (rather than God's law; so 4:15) and "make money" (rather than receive God's blessing). The shift of pronoun to "you" (4:14) suggests the merchant, characterized as "arrogant" (4:16), typifies those opposed by God who earlier are called "proud" (4:6). These are the functional atheists who live their lives as though God does not exist. In particular, the proud make foolish choices as though there is no future apocalypse when God will judge all people according to what they have done, whether the "right thing" or "sin" (4:17; cf. 4:11-12; 2:13).

The conflict between friendship with God and "friendship with the world" is embodied in the internal conflict between two competing "spirits" inherent of every person.

The second illustration of a rich farmer (5:1-6) more vividly expresses the destiny of those who choose friendship with the world rather than with God: they will "wail for the miseries that are coming" (5:1). The wealthy choose against God on the basis of two catastrophic mistakes. One involves the durability of material goods: "riches rot…clothes are moth-eaten…gold and silver rust" (5:2-3; cf. Matt 6:19-21). The other mistake involves God's assessment of injustice. The luxurious lifestyle of the rich and famous, purchased at the expense of workers who are mistreated and underpaid, is evidence of malpractice used against them in the heavenly court-case convened by "the Lord of hosts" (5:4). Their condemnation will be executed in "the last days" (5:3) on a "day of slaughter" (5:5).[3]

THE FUTURE OF THE WISE COMMUNITY: JAMES 5:7-20

The letter concludes in the same literary manner by which it begins: with the interplay of parallel statements (5:7-12, 5:13-20). Each is a triad of exhortations that recall important catchwords from the letter's opening. Together they form an *inclusio* that frames the three essays in between. But this conclusion is more than a mere retrospective on James' conception of Christian existence; it supplies the principal motivation for following the letter's wisdom: the coming triumph of the Lord is near (5:7-9). The farmer's experience waiting for "the early and the late rains" (5:7) to water the crops to harvest exemplifies the kind of intelligent patience that awaits God's ultimate victory. This exhortation is made more urgent by the pointed assertion that the Lord's *parousia* is imminent (5:8)—"see, the Judge is standing at the doors" (5:9).

The exhortation not to engage in "grumbling against one another so that you may not be judged" (5:9) recalls the story of Job (5:11) who endured to the end despite his complaining friends. James places him among the prophets who suffered with patient confidence when they "spoke in the name of the Lord" (5:10; cf. Luke 11:47-54). The background for this view of Job is the Septuagint, followed by the *Testament of Job* 51-53, which unlike his portrait in the Hebrew Bible links his famous patience with his merciful treatment of the poor, which in turn is linked to his eventual restoration by a "compassionate and merciful" God. The second concluding statement is an exhortation to pray for healing (5:13-16a). Patience and prayerfulness are the twin dispositions of an apocalyptic worldview, which views Christian existence before the Lord's arrival through the lens of suffering and powerlessness. The opening imperative to pray for those who lack wisdom (1:5-6), which when "implanted" and acted upon is able to "save the soul" (1:21), is here recast as "the prayer of faith will save the sick" (5:15). The elders are summoned because they "implant" the saving word in the community's life and so now lead in a liturgy of healing that "prays over (the sick)" and "anoints them with oil" (5:14). The olive oil administrated "in the name of the Lord" can either be understood as medicinal or, more

likely in a worship practice, as invocative of the powerful presence of the risen Lord who "will raise them up" (5:15; cf. Mark 6:13; 9:38; Acts 3:6, 16)—whether at the end of the age or in physical healing is uncertain (cf. Acts 3:19-21). The logical connection between the healing of sickness and the forgiveness of sins is thematic of the gospel tradition.

The earlier uses of "righteousness" in James suggest the "prayer of the righteous" (5:16) is "powerful and effective" because it coheres with God's pattern of salvation (cf. 2:23-24; 3:18). According to Jewish and Jesus traditions, the prophetic exemplar of effective prayer is Elijah (5:16b-18), whose words on Mount Carmel produced rain because they aligned with God's words for Israel (1 Kings 18; cf. Sirach 48:1-11, Luke 4:25). That is, prayer offered by the righteous for healing or forgiveness is a practice of wisdom because it produces "powerful and effective" results.

The final verses of James (5:19-20) enlists the audience for a mission to "save the sinner's soul from death" (cf. 1:21). These sinners are lapsed believers who have "wandered from the truth" of God's word (cf. 1:18, 21). Without this sacred compass, doubt and inward desire "give birth to sin" and sin to death (1:14-15). The real wisdom of James, then, is clarified by these final words of hope: the repentance and restoration of those believers who have failed their test of faith is mediated by the community made wise for salvation by the instruction of this letter (cf. 2 Timothy 3:15).

NOTES

1 In the Pauline tradition, where human existence outside of Christ struggles against sin, God's generous response is a revealed "word of truth" (2 Corinthians 6:7; cf. Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:5; 2 Timothy 2:15). This Pauline word is the preached gospel which announces to every sinner that "now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

2 *Gehenna* is the Hellenized form of Hinnom, a valley used as a garbage dump near Jerusalem, which became an important metaphor for evil and a possible location for the great eschatological battle when God's good triumphs over the Devil's evil (cf. Isaiah 66:23-24). No doubt this is the subtext of James 3:6.

3 The mention of the murder of a single "righteous one" (James 5:6) may refer to the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53:11; cf. Luke 23:47). But in this letter that emphasizes God's vindication of the pious poor and indictment of the rich, it more likely functions as a metonym for poor laborers who are starving for lack of food, either because of neglect (especially during famine) or juridical injustice (cf. James 2:6-7).

ROBERT W. WALL
is Paul T. Walls Professor of Scripture and Wesleyan Studies at Seattle Pacific University in Seattle, Washington.

Wisdom Transformed by Love

BY THOMAS S. HIBBS

In his rich treatment of the virtue of wisdom, Thomas Aquinas insists that not only must wisdom be transformed by love, but also love must be transformed by wisdom. Thus the contemplative life overflows into a life of self-giving love and service.

The novelist Walker Percy (1916-1990) writes, "Words are polluted. Plots are polluted…. Who is going to protect words like 'love,' guard against their devaluation?"[1] He issues a judgment and a challenge to the modern world, a world characterized by the coarsening of the language of virtue and vice and especially of the language for Christian redemption. As Percy and philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre have observed, one of the problems with our moral and religious vocabulary is that we now possess fragments of what were formerly parts of coherent wholes, ways of life in which the virtues had clearly defined roles. The task of recovery and re-articulation is a complex one. Part of the task certainly involves a return to the authors and texts that represent highpoints in Christian self-understanding.

That self-understanding was concerned with Christianity as a way of life promising virtue, sanctity, and blessedness. In the ancient pagan world with which early Christians were in conversation, there were two principal contenders for the best way of life: the theoretical or contemplative life and the practical or active life. The best way of life, whether one thought it was contemplative or active, was called the life of philosophy, which simply means the love of wisdom. Operating out of the Apostle Paul's dialectical opposition of worldly wisdom and the folly of the Cross, Christian authors nonetheless embraced the philosophical notion that there is a best way of life, the pursuit of wisdom, identified primordially and ultimately with the Word of God, who is "wisdom incarnate."

The obstacles we face in attempting to recover this classical Christian understanding of wisdom are many. As Percy, MacIntyre, and Josef Pieper have observed, in many cases our language for virtue provides us with only simulacra or counterfeits of true virtue. The problem may be less severe with the language of wisdom if only because it is protected from abuse by disuse. While we inevitably use terms such as "courageous," "hopeful," and "generous," we almost never employ "wise." The closest we come to "wisdom" is in our terms "prudent," or "learned," or "smart." These terms themselves, none of which is equivalent to "wisdom," have been debased and in many cases transformed into what the ancients would have called vices rather than virtues. Contrary to our modern understanding of it, wisdom involves more than accumulation of information; it is more than problem-solving ability. It is not just cleverness. T. S. Eliot wonders at the loss of this virtue in the modern world, "Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"[2]

We can begin to recover the lost sense of wisdom by studying one of the richest Christian treatments of this virtue in the writings of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). The pursuit of wisdom, he writes, is "more perfect, more noble, more useful, and more full of joy" than all other human pursuits; by it, we attain a "portion of true beatitude" and approach to the "likeness of God."[3]

As a member of the newly formed Dominican religious order, Thomas actively participated in a religious revival that began in the twelfth century with a renewed aspiration for the apostolic life (*vita apostolica*). The spirit of a return to the gospel and a recovery of the early life of the church came to fruition in the lives of Dominic (1170-1221) and Francis (c. 1181-1226), the latter of whom founded the other leading religious order in the thirteenth century, the Franciscans. The shibboleth of the Dominicans is "to hand on to others things contemplated" (*contemplata aliis tradere*). The Dominican vision of the Christian life is one in which an initial longing for, and love of, God is deepened and informed by assiduous study and prayer. Thomas believed our love for God and desire to serve God are manifested in the pursuit of wisdom, both contemplative and practical.

WISDOM BEGINS AND ENDS IN WONDER

On those rare occasions when we talk about wisdom today, we usually have in mind practical wisdom—the insight that is associated with a well-ordered active or practical life, as when someone offers sage advice in times of uncertainty. In ordinary life, those we admire for wisdom draw upon a wide range of experience, are able to see what is salient or significant in a specific circumstance, and thus can offer counsel about how we ought to proceed. The wise have a sense of perspective and proportion that others lack. As much as they may provide an answer to a vexing question about behavior, they also help us to step back from the immediate matter and see it in relation to larger and more fundamental concerns.

We recognize practical wisdom more readily than contemplative wisdom, the sort of wisdom that is associated with the well-ordered life of contemplation; however, the latter is not foreign to us. As Aristotle puts it, "all human beings desire to know."[4] The desire to know arises from our sense of our own ignorance, from encountering features of our experience whose source or cause is not obvious to us. It is rooted in wonder. Aristotle compares the philosopher to the poet, both of whom are concerned with wonders. For Aristotle, mere knowledge or understanding does not constitute wisdom. Truly wise people would be broadly knowledgeable and capable of seeing the connections among the various parts of learning. They would not restrict their study to a narrow topic, but would be open to the whole range of knowledge and would desire especially to understand the ultimate causes and fundamental principles of the whole. In his *Metaphysics*, where he discusses wisdom in detail, Aristotle argues that there is an ultimate cause of all motion in the universe, the unmoved mover, who moves all things as an object of desire. Aristotle identifies this being as God, whose supreme way of existing and understanding escape our comprehension. God's state of existence "compels our wonder." Even for pagan philosophers, then, wisdom overlaps with theology, with the quest for God as first and ultimate cause.

Thus, the hunger to behold the ultimate cause of reality, even to be transformed into that cause, is part of the philosophical tradition, as much as it is part of the Christian heritage. The gospel itself, which identifies Christ as the Word according to whom the universe is created and which invites each of us to "come and see," is God's response to this hunger in the human heart. For Thomas Aquinas, God himself is not just wise; he is in fact wisdom itself.

If philosophy begins in wonder, it also ends in wonder, in an "avowal of ignorance," as Jacques Maritain nicely puts it. Even ancient pagan philosophers recognized that philosophy can never fully attain and possess wisdom; it is always a loving search for wisdom—what Josef Pieper calls a *philosophia negativa*. But this does not undermine its nobility:

> To wonder is not merely not to know; it means…that one understands oneself in not knowing. And yet it is not the ignorance of resignation. On the contrary, to wonder is to be on the way, in via…. Out of wonder, says Aristotle, comes joy. In this he was followed by the Middle Ages: "All things worthy of wonder are delightful."[5]

Thomas Aquinas explains why theoretical wisdom, the contemplation of God, is so delightful or beautiful to us in the following way.[6] Pleasure or delight arises whenever we encounter what is harmonious to human nature. The effect of pleasure is, metaphorically, the dilation of the human self and expansion of our powers. Our abilities to understand what is good (which

Thomas calls "the apprehensive powers of the soul") are, in their encounter with beauty, enlarged in the sense that we are increasingly aware of being in the presence of what is really good. Our desires for the good (or "affective powers") are so taken up into the object of beauty that they can be said to "hand themselves over" to the object of their delight so as to remain in the object. Here Thomas draws upon one of the most striking features of Christian writing about beauty and contemplation, namely, its ecstatic character. Ecstasy means to stand outside of oneself, to be transfixed by the object of beauty to such an extent that one forgets oneself and loses a sense of time. Wisdom is hardly a self-regarding virtue; much less is it a calculative skill or an activity of the intellect utterly isolated from affection or love. The experience of ecstasy in wisdom is an intimation of immortality.

WISDOM BEGINS IN GOD'S GIFT

To this point we have emphasized how much Thomas borrows from the ancient philosophical traditions about contemplative and practical wisdom. But to complete the picture of his thought, we must look at how Thomas transforms that tradition with this idea from Scripture: that God, who is the creator of all that exists, descends to us in wisdom and love in order to raise us to him in friendship.

For Thomas, then, the created order is a manifestation of God's wisdom: "Through his own wisdom God is the governor of the universe of things to which he is compared as an artist to his artwork. The pattern of divine wisdom, in so far as all things are created through it, has the character of art, exemplar, or idea" (ST, I-II, 93, 1). In creating, God is beholden to no external standard or requirement. This does not mean that what God creates is purely arbitrary, a matter of an unintelligible act of will. Instead, in creating, God acts according to his wisdom. Therefore, creation is one of two ways in which God communicates his wisdom. Revelation is the other.[7]

> The gospel identifies Christ as the Word through whom the universe is created and invites each of us to "come and see." This is God's response to the hunger in the human heart for wisdom.

Scriptural warrant for discerning the likeness of divine wisdom in creation can be gathered from the creation story in Genesis 1, where human persons are said to be made in the image and likeness of God. As is well known, Thomas follows Augustine in identifying the human capacities to remember, understand, and love as providing analogies to the three persons of the Trinity: "There is an image of God in man not because he is able to remember, understand, and love himself but because he can remember, understand, and love God, by whom he was made" (ST, I, 93, 8;

quoting from Augustine, *On the Trinity*, XIV, 12). The image present in our original creation is marred and distorted by sin, reformed through grace, and restored to a likeness to God. These are the stages in salvation history: creation, recreation, and restoration of likeness. Though we have been alienated from the good by sin, grace restores our ability to perceive and take delight in the radiant beauty of goodness. Such a restored perception of goodness, for Thomas, is a precondition of loving and caring for ourselves and others (cf. ST, I-II, 27, 1).

We have a tendency to think that theoretical and practical wisdom are dispositions that we can accomplish for ourselves; by thinking harder and longer, or more broadly and carefully, we can come to know reality and know how to live. But for Thomas, our re-creation as knowers and lovers of goodness begins in God's gift of faith, which is not merely a matter of intellectual assent to claims about God; it involves an experience of the divine. In other words, the beginning of wisdom is an encounter with God. Faith, Thomas says, is an "internal inspiration." We are drawn to the faith through an "interior instinct and attraction of teaching."[8] The object of faith and of the other theological virtues of hope and love is "God himself, who is the ultimate end of things, exceeding the knowledge of our reason" (ST, I-II, 62, 2). Though faith we are drawn to apprehend fundamental truths about God. Through hope, we trust that despite difficulties in this life we shall, through God's grace, attain the ultimate end, which is union with God. Charity "transforms the will into the end," or draws us into willing what God wills for us and the world (ST, I-II, 62, 3).

Following Augustine, Thomas defines charity as the "movement of the soul toward the enjoyment of God for his own sake" (ST, II-II, 23, 2). Charity is a type of friendship: "there is communication between us and God in so far as he communicates his happiness to us" (ST, II-II, 23, 1). It follows that God's wisdom, for Thomas, is indistinguishable from his love. In a manner that would be inconceivable to the pagan philosophers, the contemplation of the highest cause is at once a sharing in, and communing with, the inner life of God.

Thomas goes so far as to call God's gift of charity, or friendship, "the form of the virtues." By this he means that this inspired love gives shape and order to the entirety of human life, not just how we feel and act but also how we think. Indeed, the intellect and the will, understanding and loving, interpenetrate and inform one another in the life of Christian faith. For Thomas faith is a virtue residing in the intellect, since it apprehends principles concerning our end. This end is not only the highest truth, but also the highest good that we seek, the "end of all our desires and actions" (ST, II-II, 4, 2, ad 3). If in one way charity presupposes faith, in another way faith cannot exist without charity, since friendship with God is the form and goal of faith (ST, II-II, 4, 3). Indeed, because charity reorients all of our

desires and actions toward God, Thomas calls it the "mother of the virtues": like a woman giving birth, charity "conceives the acts of the other virtues, by the desire of the last end" (ST, II-II, 23, 8, ad 3).

In what way does charity transform the moral life? We can see how charity molds us by contrasting it to prudence, the virtue in the natural order that orients all the other natural virtues to the goal of human happiness on earth. Prudence, defined as right reason (or thinking correctly) about practical matters, cannot make us moral all by itself; it presupposes that our desires for things and relationships in this life are rightly ordered. If we did not have natural moral virtues like courage, temperance, and justice (a balanced concern for the good of others), then our practical reason would be derailed by fear and cowardice or sensual desire and intemperance. Now here is the important difference about charity: it does not merely presuppose right desire, it is essentially a new desire for God. Like the moral virtues, charity is called a virtue because it is a habitual way of thinking, feeling, and desiring that allows us to seek our true good easily and readily. The source of his virtue, however, is not the repetition of certain kinds of acts (which is how we attain natural moral virtues); instead, its original and abiding source is divine grace, a wholly unmerited gift.

WISDOM LEADS TO FAITHFUL ACTION

Some Christians of Thomas's time held that contemplation is superior to action because it pertains directly to the realization of our ultimate end, namely, enjoyment of God. Thomas objects to this view by referring us to the example of Christ, whom he calls "begotten wisdom." In the Incarnation, God took on humanity in order to manifest divine wisdom through a human life (ST, III, 40, 1, ad 1). So, Thomas argues, "the active life in which, by preaching and teaching, one hands on to others the things contemplated is superior to the life that is devoted exclusively to contemplation because the former presupposes an abundance of contemplation. Christ chose such a life" (ST, III, 40, 1 ad2). The life in which contemplation overflows into action is an imitation of the divine activity, wherein God, both in his original act of creation and even more marvelously in his redemptive descent, communicates his wisdom, goodness, and beauty to creatures.

A life in which contemplation overflows into action imitates God's activity, both his original act of creation and his redemptive descent wherein he communicates his wisdom, goodness, and beauty to creatures.

Again, the role of beauty is paramount. Contemplation itself has its roots in the affections; as Thomas says, "from the love of God we are

inflamed to behold his beauty" (ST, II-II, 180, 1). Beauty encompasses the entirety of the contemplative life. Perceiving beauty sparks desire; moreover, the result of contemplation is both a greater appreciation of divine beauty and an impulse to be a vehicle of that beauty's presence in the world. In Christ, we see the beauty of the divine life and our desire to participate in that life is inflamed (ST, III, 1, 2).

We encounter God and divine beauty, Thomas believes, principally through acts of worship. When God commands in Scripture that we come before him in worship, it is God's way of meeting us where we live in order to raise us to him. Of course, in our present life we cannot literally see God and gaze on divine truth directly. Thus, through revelation about appropriate ways of worshipping God, divine things are "expressed in words" and "proffered to the senses" (ST, I-II, 99, 3, ad 3). The practice of giving back to God fitting praise and gratitude allows the "ray of divine light to shine on us under the form of certain sensible figures" (ST, I-II, 101, 2).

Of course, the accommodation of God to the human condition culminates in the Incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, Christ, who is enfleshed wisdom. Thomas writes, "the external worship of the Old Law is figurative not only of the future truth to be manifested in the fatherland, but also of Christ, who is the way leading to the truth of the fatherland" (ST, I-II, 101, 2). As the twentieth-century theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar puts it, the Incarnation joins "together what in human terms is eternally incompatible: love for one existent is conjoined with love for Being itself."[9]

CONCLUSION

The genius of Thomas Aquinas's approach is his insistence that not only must wisdom be transformed by love, but also love must be transformed by wisdom. Just as the contemplative life has its roots in the affections—in the love of God—so too it overflows into acts of charity in the form of teaching, preaching, and acts of mercy. In this, Thomas is articulating the charism, or particular gift, of the Dominican order in which he served. As Guy Bedouelle puts it, the Dominican purpose is to restore the "bond between the Word received and the Word given, and thus to incarnate it in a significant way of life."[10] That way of life involves the mutual transformation of wisdom and love by one another.

NOTES

1 Walker Percy, "Novel Writing in an Apocalyptic Time," in *Signposts in a Strange Land*, edited with an introduction by Patrick Samway (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991), 161.

2 T. S. Eliot, "*Choruses from The Rock*," *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1952), 96.

3 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, Book I, Chapter 2, translated by Anton C. Pegis (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 61.

4 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book I, Chapter 1.

5 Josef Pieper, *Leisure, The Basis of Culture*, 50th Anniversary Edition (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1998), 136.

6 This paragraph is based on Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, 33, 1 (further citations will be in the text). I use "delightful" and "beautiful" interchangeably here because, for Thomas, beauty is simply whatever pleases us when it is seen.

7 That God's wisdom is manifested in two ways—the created order and revelation—is a theme running through the biblical wisdom tradition (see especially Psalm 19). On the basis of this, Thomas concludes that faith and reason, philosophy and theology, nature and grace cannot ultimately contradict one another because both have their source in God who is truth, goodness, beauty, and wisdom.

8 Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, c614n7, c1515n5.

9 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of God*, volume 1: *Seeing the Form*, translated by Erasmo Leivà-Merikakis (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1982), 193.

10 Guy Bedouelle, O.P., *Saint Dominic: The Grace of the Word* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1987), 245.

THOMAS S. HIBBS
is Distinguished Professor of Ethics & Culture and Dean of the Honors College at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

Worship Service

BY DAVID G. MILLER

Meditation

Brethren, when we read that Christ is made of God unto us wisdom, let us recollect what wisdom is. Wisdom is, I suppose, the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal, and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. But to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892)†

Welcome and Announcements

Prelude

The Summons: based on Psalm 111

Lift up your hearts in thanksgiving to the Lord.
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.
Great are the Lord's works, full of majesty and splendor.
Praise will be his forever and ever.

His words are truth and justice; faithfulness informs his law.
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.
Holy and awe inspiring is his name.
Praise will be his forever and ever.

The fear of this Lord is the beginning of all wisdom.
They who live in it grow in understanding.

Processional Hymn

"Be Thou My Vision"

Be thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;
naught be all else to me, save that thou art—
thou my best thought, by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my Wisdom, and thou my true Word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;
thou my great Father, I thy true son;
thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
thou my Inheritance, now and always;
thou and thou only, first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my Treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, my victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.

Irish hymn, 8th century; translated by Mary Elizabeth Byrne (1880-1931);
versed by Eleanor H. Hull (1860-1935)
Tune: IRISH MELODY

Morning Collect (Unison)

Be our vision, High King of Heaven:
we turn to you for wisdom on our way.
Inform our minds so that we may have the very mind of Christ:
may we understand our place and our purpose in your world.
Help us in the power of your Holy Spirit
to hear your true word to us
and to respond in living worship to you. Amen.

The Witness of the Old Testament: Proverbs 8:1-13, 22-31

In which Wisdom proclaims herself the treasure of God and humankind:

Does not wisdom call,
and does not understanding raise her voice?
On the heights, beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;
beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:
"To you, O people, I call,
and my cry is to all that live.
O simple ones, learn prudence;
acquire intelligence, you who lack it.
Hear, for I will speak noble things,
and from my lips will come what is right;
for my mouth will utter truth;
wickedness is an abomination to my lips.

All the words of my mouth are righteous;
there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.
They are all straight to one who understands
and right to those who find knowledge.
Take my instruction instead of silver,
and knowledge rather than choice gold;
for wisdom is better than jewels,
and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.
I, wisdom, live with prudence,
and I attain knowledge and discretion.
The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.
Pride and arrogance and the way of evil
and perverted speech I hate....

The LORD created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.
Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth—
when he had not yet made earth and fields,
or the world's first bits of soil.
When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then 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.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Confessional Hymn

"God Is Love; His Mercy Brightens"

God is love; his mercy brightens
all the path in which we rove;
bliss he wakes, and woe he lightens:
God is wisdom, God is love.

Chance and change are busy ever;
man decays and ages move;
but his mercy waneth never:
God is wisdom, God is love.

E'en the hour that darkest seemeth
will his changeless goodness prove;
from the mist his brightness streameth:
God is wisdom, God is love.

He with earthly cares entwineth
hope and comfort from above;
everywhere his glory shineth:
God is wisdom, God is love.

John Bowring (1825)
Tune: SUSSEX

Prayer of Confession

We come before a God of wisdom who knows our hearts.
We come before a God of love who has redeemed our lives.
We come before a God of mercy who hears our cries.
Let us confess our sins in humility and hope.

(*Members offer silent prayers.*)

Together, we pray:

God of wisdom and love, we confess that we have turned from your ways to our own wills. We have worked to justify our own ways of thinking; we have thought of new ways of sinning.
Yet you have brought us to this place and in your presence we bow. Your ways are not our ways; your words are not our words. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so you are above us.
Yet you love us, and that love calls us to confess. While we were still sinning, you have loved us. What a fearful, faithful, fundamental pull your love is upon our lives.
We once again ask for your mercy and forgiveness. Help us to mend our lives. Heal our minds, holy, holy God. Amen.

Hear these words of assurance:
"My friends, think what sort of people you are, whom God has called" and know that we are forgiven in God's mercy and grace. Amen.

The Witness of the New Testament: 1 Corinthians 1:18-29

In which God's wisdom overthrows the established intellectual and spiritual order of the world:

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Prayers of the People

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

God of vision, wisdom, love, and mercy, we hear your attributes proclaimed. We sing your praise. We bow beneath your majesty.

You have taught us that it is in respecting and responding to who you are that we find the wise way. Teach us, we pray, how to build upon that firm foundation, not the manipulating wisdom that achieves our own will, but the palace of wisdom that celebrates your work and will in this world.

And because we know who you are and what you are doing in this world, we come to you now bearing the burdens of our family, our friends, the world and its concerns. We give them to you, praying "Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayers."**

(As members offer requests ending with "Lord, in your mercy," the congregation responds, "hear our prayers.")

Lord, listen to your children praying. In your wisdom, act in mercy to redeem these concerns. Give us wisdom to be the answers to the very prayers we make. Give us courage to do your will in this world. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

The Witness of the Gospels (all standing): Matthew 7:24-29

In which Jesus gives a parable concerning wise and foolish building:

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell--and great was its fall!"

Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

The gospel of our Lord
Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Hymn of Response

"Wisdom's Way"

Word of God, by Wisdom spoken,
flung the stars through cosmic space;
sculpted mountains, scooped the oceans,
imaged self in every race.

Love and Wisdom now Incarnate,
entered earth's frame through the womb;
lived with purpose, died for others,
rose victorious from the tomb.

Wisdom's Spirit, faithful Mentor,
guide from darkness into light;
Unpredictable Enabler,
stirring sense, restoring sight.

Wisdom's way, an open secret,
free to all without a price;
wrapped in love, so freely offered
by the Way, the Truth, the Life.

William R. O'Brien (2009)
Tune: WISDOM'S WAY, *Kurt Kaiser* (2009)

(pp.53-55 of this volume)

Worship Offerings

All things come from thee, O Lord,
And of thine own have we given thee.

Doxology

O God of Wisdom, God of Truth
teach us your ways, reveal your word;
help us through all our lives to move
within your will, O Grace-Full Lord. Amen

Tune: OLD 100TH

Benediction

The way of the Lord is wise.
The council of the Lord leads to understanding.
Walk in the fear of the Lord and gain wisdom.
Humble yourself before the Lord and gain insight.
In living this way, you will reveal God's mind to this foolish, frustrated world. You will know yourself and you will be fully known.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

NOTE

† Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "The Fourfold Treasure," preached on September 27, 1871, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in Newington, England (available online at *www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0991.htm*)

DAVID G. MILLER
is Associate Professor and Interim Chairman of English at Mississippi College in Clinton, Mississippi.

Wisdom's Way

BY WILLIAM R. O'BRIEN

Word of God, by Wisdom spoken,
flung the stars through cosmic space;
sculpted mountains, scooped the oceans,
imaged self in every race.

Love and Wisdom now Incarnate,
entered earth's frame through the womb;
lived with purpose, died for others,
rose victorious from the tomb.

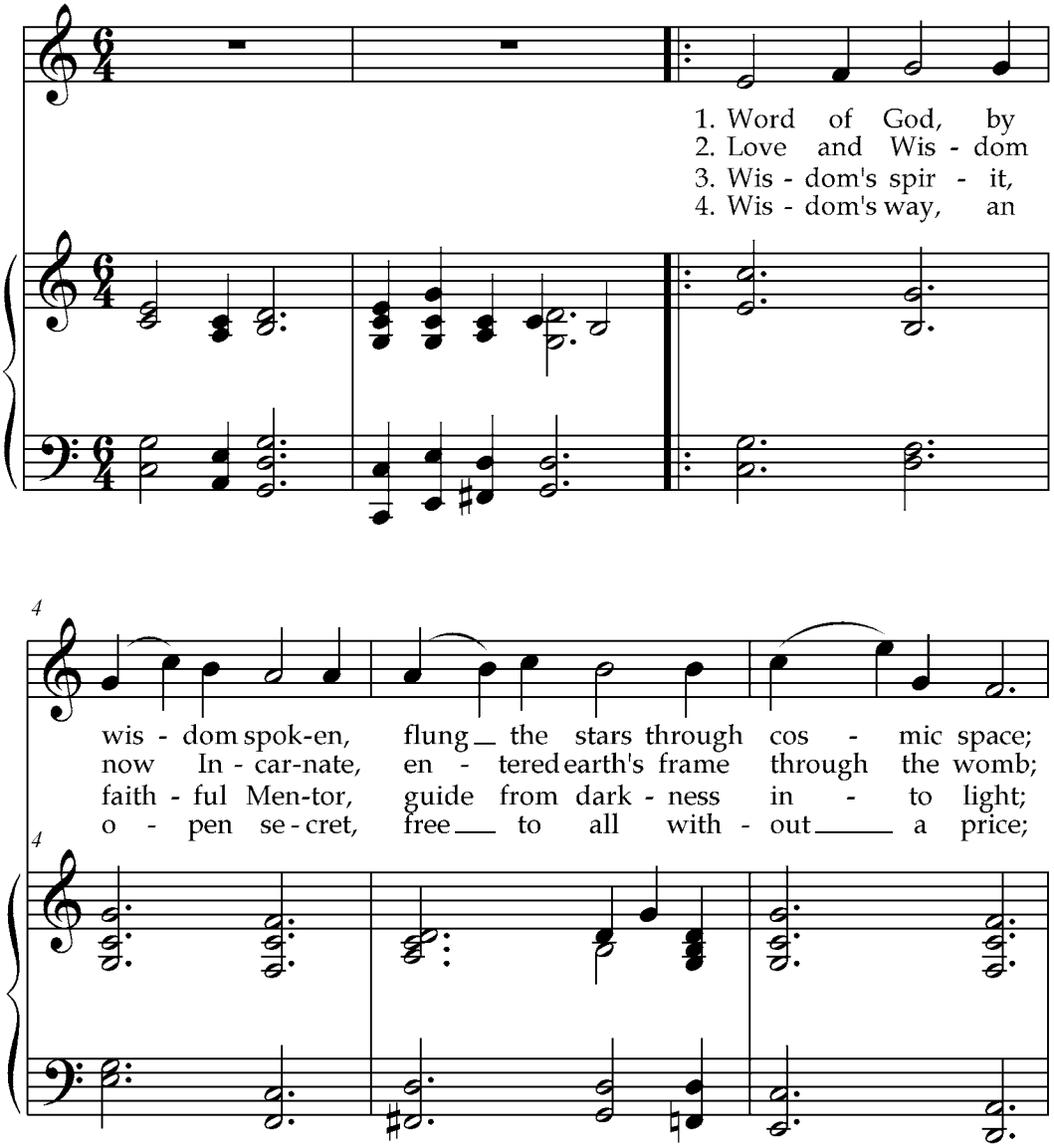
Wisdom's Spirit, faithful Mentor,
guide from darkness into light;
Unpredictable Enabler,
stirring sense, restoring sight.

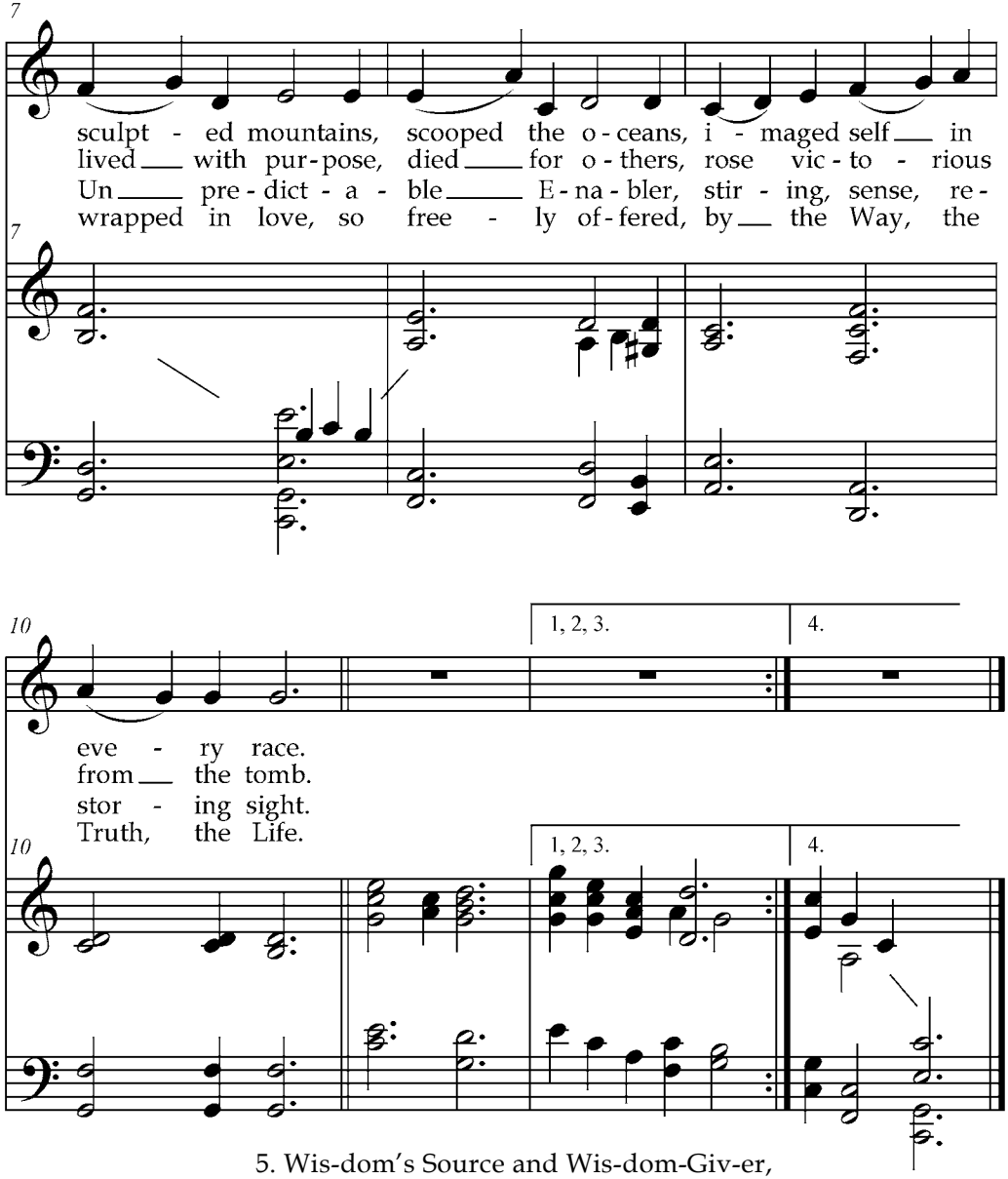
Wisdom's way, an open secret,
free to all without a price;
wrapped in love, so freely offered
by the Way, the Truth, the Life.

Wisdom's Source and Wisdom-Giver,
walk with us along the way;
grant us knowledge and discernment
as we serve you day by day.

Wisdom's Way

WILLIAM R. O'BRIEN KURT KAISER





5. Wis-dom's Source and Wis-dom-Giv-er,
walk with us a-long the way;
grant us know-ledge and di-scern-ment
as we serve you day by day.

WISDOM'S WAY
8.7.8.7.

In the Wisdom and Humility Windows of Robbins Chapel, biblical exemplars and figures from Christian history point beyond themselves to the mystery of Christ, who is the Wisdom of God.

Left window: Wisdom (Sapientia) (2007). *Hand painted leaded glass. 16.25″x 74.25″. Robbins Chapel, Waco, TX. Photo: © Baylor Photography. Used by permission.*

Right window: Humility (Humilitas) (2007). *Hand painted leaded glass. 16.25″x 74.25″. Robbins Chapel, Waco, TX. Photo: © Baylor Photography. Used by permission.*

Humble Wisdom

BY EMILY RODGERS
AND HALEY STEWART

The stained glass windows of Robbins Chapel within Brooks Residential College of Baylor University in Waco, Texas present a narrative of Christian virtue and its ultimate goal, union with God in Christ through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. The Chapel, like the sanctuaries in early Christian and medieval church buildings in Europe, maintains an eastern orientation: the apse and altar are placed in the east to be closest to the Holy Land. Six windows on the south wall (on the right as one faces the chancel) depict the intellectual virtues of humility, art, prudence, understanding, knowledge, and wisdom. Six windows on the north wall depict the cardinal moral virtues of justice, temperance, and courage, followed by the theological virtues of hope, faith, and love. Each window features a biblical exemplar in its main panel and a figure from Christian history in a smaller panel, or predella, below. The culmination of the Christian intellectual and moral life is depicted at the front of the chapel in a stained glass triptych that "recall[s] the works of the Trinity in creating and redeeming the world, taking us through the biblical story in brief capitulation from Genesis to the Revelation to St. John."[1]

Robbins Chapel was completed in 2007 and named in honor of its donors, Bill and Mary Jo Robbins of Houston, Texas. With seating for eighty, it serves as a place of daily morning prayers for the University community and a worship center for undergraduate students who live in Brooks College (see p. 58). The program for the chapel windows was created by a group of Baylor University faculty, students, and staff members in consultation with the donors. Adam Smith, an artist with Willet Hauser Architectural Glass, designed the windows in a style consonant with the chapel's neo-English Gothic architecture, inspired by the medieval colleges of Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Smith used watercolor, pencil, and ink on paper for his original designs, which then were executed in hand painted leaded glass in the company's studio in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.[2]

Each window in the Robbins Chapel is rich in symbolism. Here we will focus on the iconography of the windows that depict humility and wisdom.[3]

Robbins Chapel (2007). *View toward the south wall and chancel. Waco, TX. Photo: © Baylor Photography. Used by permission*

The humility window introduces the worshiper to the intellectual virtues, while the wisdom window points to their culmination in a life shared with God.

In the program of the chapel's artwork, humility (*humilitas*) is the first of the six intellectual virtues. Unlike the other intellectual virtues depicted in these windows, humility was not prized in ancient Greek and Roman culture; its legacy traces entirely from Scripture. The biblical wisdom tradition frequently commends humility (e.g., Psalm 10:17, 25:9, 37:11, and 51:17; Proverbs 11:2, 15:33, and 22:4). Jesus describes himself as "humble of heart" (Matthew 11:29) and prescribes humility for his disciples (Matthew 18:4; cf. Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:7, 18:14). Quoting a hymn that praises Christ's humility, the Apostle Paul commends the same attitude to his readers (Philippians 2:1-11).

The lower portion of the humility window depicts the vision of Mary by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), the abbot who led the Cistercian movement to reform monastic life in the twelfth century (see p. 56). Bernard's vision became a popular theme of art in Florence, Italy, between 1490 and 1530.[4] Like the paintings of that era, here Bernard is pictured at a desk, his hands raised in praise when the vision of Mary interrupts his writing. This image, however, departs from the iconographic tradition in several important ways. Traditionally Mary (sometimes carrying the Christ Child, as in this image) is depicted in full size on the left of the composition accompanied by angels or biblical figures, while Bernard is shown on the right with a balancing number of monks or biblical figures; and the text that Bernard is writing remains unidentified. In the Robbins Chapel window, the

composition is simplified by eliminating the accompanying angelic or human figures. Bernard is emphasized as the central figure, and Mary and the Christ Child appear to float in his vision. Most importantly, Bernard's manuscript is identified as *De Gradibus Humilitatis et Superbiae* (*On the Steps of Humility and Pride*), which was his first published work. The naming of Bernard's treatise is an interpretative key for the window, for in that work he describes humility as an intellectual virtue that results from self-knowledge and ultimately leads to wisdom.

Bernard writes mostly about pride in his treatise, because he confesses in an afterword that he lacks the qualifications to teach others about humility (XXII.57).[5] Yet even in this confession, Bernard is an excellent model of intellectual humility because he realizes his limitations to instruct others in the virtue.

The virtue of humility, Bernard writes, enables us to know the Truth, who is Christ, and thereby to know the truth about ourselves. Only then can we recognize our own unworthiness (I.1-2). Humility is the opposite of pride, which "blots out the light of truth, so that if your mind is full of it you cannot see yourself as you really are" (IV.14). Through a moral commentary on Jesus' proclamation "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), Bernard develops his insight that humility is necessary for gaining wisdom, which is found in right relationship to God. Christ is simultaneously the Way or ultimate exemplar of humility, the Truth that we journey toward, and (when the way is too difficult for us) the Life that nourishes us on our journey toward him. Bernard concludes that Jesus' prayer in Matthew 11:25—"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants"—makes it clear "that truth, which is hidden from the proud, is revealed to the humble" (I.1).

The biblical figure in the main panel of this window is Rachel, whose story is told in Genesis 29-35. As a traditional symbol in art for both humility and the contemplative life, Rachel can serve here as a figural *conjointure* of humility and the quest for wisdom.[6] Because her father Laban deceived Jacob into marrying his older daughter Leah first, Rachel and Jacob were forced to wait fourteen years before they could wed. While Leah and Jacob were blessed with many children, Rachel suffered from barrenness for many years before she was able to conceive her sons, Joseph and Benjamin. In waiting patiently to marry Jacob and enduring suffering while her sister was exalted, Rachel is a model of humility.

Rachel is depicted as a shepherdess, holding a crook in her right hand and cradling a lamb with her other arm; another sheep looks up at her. The shepherdess motif is a reference to Rachel's first appearance in Scripture, when she is introduced to Jacob as she arrives to draw water from the well for her father's sheep (Genesis 29:1-13); it is also a reference to Christ, who

is most often depicted in early Christian art as a shepherd.[7] Portrayed in this manner, Rachel points beyond herself to Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd, who is the ultimate exemplar of humility and the object of wisdom.

The lower panel of the wisdom (*sapientia*) window depicts the Christian politician, poet, and philosopher Boethius (c. 480-524), seated at a writing desk (see p. 56). Prison bars in the background indicate that he is writing *The Consolation of Philosophy*, the book he composed while awaiting execution at the command of the barbarian Emperor Theodoric.

In this 'autobiographical' work, Boethius is visited in prison by Lady Philosophy, who serves as a physician to his soul and a guide for his exploration of the nature of truth, goodness, and beauty. As her name indicates, she is the perfect conjoining of love (*philo*) and wisdom (*sophia*). She reminds Boethius, "All men on earth from one source take their rise; / One Father of the world all things supplies." Since all human beings have the same creator, she asks, "Why boast so loud of forbears and proud race? / *Reflect on your beginnings, and God's place / As source of all*. No man's bereft of worth, / Save if through vices he betrays his birth" (italics added).[8] Truly wise people, then, do not base their worth on earthly status and wealth. Boethius's own experience confirms this: removed from his consulship, imprisoned, and awaiting execution on false charges, he must find joy in something other than worldly success. Through his writing he testifies that it is the love of wisdom, grounded in self-knowledge, which leads him to God and true happiness.

The figure in the window's main panel, King Solomon, is legendary in Scripture as a poet and wise man. This reputation is based, in part, on the traditional attribution to him of certain songs (cf. Psalms 72 and 127; Song of Songs 1:1), collections of proverbs (Proverbs 1:1; 10:1; and 25:1), and books of wisdom, especially Ecclesiastes (Ecclesiastes 1:1) and, in the Apocrypha, the Wisdom of Solomon. Several biblical stories praise Solomon's wisdom. According to the Chronicler, when Solomon became king of the united kingdom of Israel, God commanded him to ask for a gift. "Give me now wisdom and knowledge to go out and come in before this people," Solomon replied, "for who can rule this great people of yours?" (2 Chronicles 1:10). Because he asked unselfishly for wisdom to rule the people, God was pleased to grant him not only wisdom but also wealth and honor (2 Chronicles 1:11-12). According to another well-known story, when the Queen of Sheba traveled to Jerusalem to build a trading partnership, Solomon's great wisdom in responding to her difficult riddles (not to mention his immense wealth) left her "breathless" (2 Chronicles 9:3-4; cf. 1 Kings 10:4-5).

This last story, of course, is the one that Jesus had in mind when he warned some "scribes and Pharisees" who pressed him for an unambiguous miracle: "The Queen of the South shall rise up with this generation at the

judgment and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:42//Luke 11:31). The "something greater than Solomon," of course, is Christ himself and the unfolding mystery of his sacrificial death and resurrection. In this way, the renowned wisdom of Solomon, God's amazing gift to a young king, points beyond itself to Christ, who is the Wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24).

The program of the stained glass windows of Robbins Chapel—the intellectual virtues on the right and the moral and theological virtues on the left—lead the worshiper to the Trinity windows in the chancel. At the center of these windows is the figure of Christ crucified, but with a golden halo of divine glory behind his elongated body. This image evokes the concluding words of the book of Ecclesiastes, attributed to a wiser King Solomon who senses the limits of his wisdom because he has been humbled by hard experience and debilitating age: "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Through that central image of the dying Christ worshipers can glimpse the judgment of which Solomon speaks. In Christ's death on the cross and the divine glory that it reveals, they encounter the great mystery of God that human wisdom cannot fathom: "For here below to discern a cause is easy," Lady Philosophy sings to Boethius, "But hearts are confused by the hidden laws of heaven" (*Consolation of Philosophy,* IV.5.vii.17-18).

NOTES

1 *Robbins Chapel within Brooks Residential College* (Waco, TX: Baylor University, n.d.), 18. The program of the Robbins Chapel windows is described in this booklet and online at the Brooks College Web site (*www.baylor.edu/cll/brookscollege*).

2 Information on the artist is from a personal conversation with Jessica Crowley, Digital Archives and Library Manager at Willet Hauser Architectural Glass. Willet Hauser was formed in 1977 when Willet Studios of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, became a division of Hauser Art Glass Company of Winona, Minnesota. Willet Studios, founded by William Willet in 1898 and now led by his grandson, Crosby Willet, has designed stained glass windows for major ecclesiastical and public buildings in America, including the Cadet's Chapel at the United States Military Academy at West Point, the National Cathedral in Washington, DC, and Saint Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco. For more information, see the company's Web site, *www.willethauser.com*.

3 In the other windows on the south wall, knowledge (*scientia*) is represented by Luke the Evangelist and Copernicus (1473-1543), understanding (*intellectus*) by the Apostle Paul and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), prudence (*prudentia*) by Ruth and Thomas More (1478-1535), and art (*ars*) by Bezalel (Exodus 31:3-4) and Dante Alighieri (1265-1321). In the windows on the north wall, Moses and Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) represent justice (*iustitia*), Elijah and Macrina (before 270-c. 340) represent temperance (*temperantia*), and Joshua and John Bunyan (1628-1688) represent courage (*fortitudo*), while in the theological virtue windows hope (*spes*) is illustrated by Hannah and Dorothy Day

(1897-1980), faith (*fides*) by Abraham and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), and love (*caritas*) by Jesus' mother, Mary, and Augustine (354-430).

4 Stephanie Tadlock, "Fra Bartolommeo and the Vision of Saint Bernard: An Examination of Savonarolan Influence," unpublished M.A. thesis (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, 2005), 45-56, available online at *www.lib.umd.edu/drum/bitstream/1903/2570/1/umi-umd-2457.pdf*. Tadlock compares the earliest known painting on this theme, by The Master of Rinuccini Chapel (in the 1370s), with paintings by Filippino Lippi (c. 1485-1487) and Fra Bartolommeo (c. 1504).

5 Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Steps of Humility and Pride*, in G. R. Evans, trans., *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 112. Further citations by the section of Bernard's treatise will be in the text.

6 Rachel and Leah appear as representatives of the contemplative life and active life respectively in the pilgrim's final dream in Dante's *Purgatorio* 27.94-108. This allegorical interpretation of their story in Genesis, famously employed by Thomas Aquinas to show the complementary nature of action and contemplation (*Summa Theologica* II-II, 179, 2), derives from the writings of Augustine and Gregory the Great (c. 540-604). See Kim Paffenroth, "Allegorizations of the Active and Contemplative Lives in Philo, Origen, Augustine, and Gregory," *The Ecole Initiative* (1999), available online at *ecole.evansville.edu/articles/allegory.html*.

7 Heidi Hornik has noted that "a visual representation of Christ as the Good Shepherd bore rich meaning for the early Christians during times of persecution because it symbolized a leader who would sacrifice his life for his flock; yet, as an already popular image among non-Christians as well, it did not draw attention to the persecuted believers. Later, after the peace brought by Emperor Constantine in A.D. 306, the Good Shepherd became the most popular symbol of Jesus Christ." See Heidi J. Hornik, "The Sign of Jonah," *Prophetic Ethics,* Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics, 6 (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2003), 55-59, here quoting 56.

8 Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, III.6.9, translated by P. G. Walsh (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 50. Further citations will be in the text.

EMILY RODGERS
is a graduate student in Student Affairs Administration at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and Trustee of Brooks Residential College.

HALEY STEWART
is Publication Specialist and Project Coordinator for the Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

Other Voices

The wisdom of what a person says is in direct proportion to his progress in learning the holy scriptures—and I am not speaking of intensive reading or memorization but real understanding and careful investigation of their meaning.

ST. AUGUSTINE (354-430), ***On Christian Teaching*****, 4**

[This is what] wisdom meant to the biblical writers: living in the world in such a way that God, and God's intentions for the world, are acknowledged in all that we do. It sounds like a lofty goal, perhaps too lofty for ordinary people living busy lives. Such a goal of wisdom seems attainable only for great saints; maybe a hermit or a monastic could achieve it. Yet this is not the understanding of the biblical writers…[for] they consider wisdom within the grasp of every person who desires it wholeheartedly. Wisdom does not require any special intellectual gifts. The fruit of wisdom, a well-ordered life and a peaceful mind, results not from a high IQ but from a disposition of the heart that the sages (wisdom teachers) of Israel most often call "fear of the Lord."

ELLEN F. DAVIS, ***Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*** **(2000)**

Underlying the Old Testament's understanding of wisdom is the assumption that God has created and maintained an orderly universe. God's orders are embedded in its fabric and, if observed, are one avenue of revealing God's will…. One of the chief marks of the wise, if not the chief mark, is their awareness that their competency has definite boundaries; it is, so to speak, surrounded and defined by God's autonomous reign.

WALDEMAR JANZEN, ***Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach*** **(1994)**

Jesus himself described his mission, if not his person, in terms of traditional divine wisdom: entrusted with the secrets of God, revealing them to humanity and being rejected by many but accepted by the poor and the unlearned. Thus it is not surprising to see Paul articulating the significance of the person and the mission of Jesus Christ in terms of wisdom….

Paul used the formulation "wisdom of God" to describe Christ and God's plan of salvation in Christ. God in his wisdom so arranged things that he cannot be grasped through human wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:21). A God derived by human wisdom is a source of pride and becomes God only for the elite and the deserving.

E. J. SCHNABEL, "Wisdom," ***The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*** **(1993)**

James calls wisdom the cause of perfection. He knows that faith is tried and tested in affliction. There is no need to ask God for perfect people. What we need are wise people. This is why he encourages those who want to be on top of their afflictions to ask God for wisdom.

OECUMENIUS (10th Century), *Commentary on James*

It is also important to contrast the differences between the wisdom writings of Scripture and those of philosophy and secular disciplines. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle supported wisdom based on sagacious experience combined with personal intelligence. In effect, the individual could think his or her way through life's issues through a combination of brainpower and experience. Conversely, Scripture places experiential knowledge alongside supernatural insight provided through the Holy Spirit. There is no sense of "going it alone" in the scriptural wisdom writings, especially in the letter penned by James. A first-century Greek intellectual might say that good behavior supports the greater good of family and society and alleviates the need for punishment. James, on the other hand, would say that righteous behavior has a kingdom of God focus and cannot be adequately accomplished by individuals in and of themselves, regardless of experience and level of intelligence.

MICHAEL D. McCULLAR, *"James as Wisdom Literature"* (2008)

The voice of ancient guidance delivers us from a culturally determined spirituality. The voice of contemporary guidance rescues us from a do-it-yourself spirituality. And the voice of personalized guidance saves us from a one-size-fits-all spirituality.

HOWARD BAKER, *Soul Keeping: Ancient Paths of Spiritual Direction* (1998)

Truth sees God, and wisdom contemplates God, and of these two comes the third, and that is a marvelous delight in God, which is love. Where truth and wisdom are, truly there is love, truly coming from them both, and all of God's making. For God is endless supreme truth, endless supreme wisdom, endless supreme love, uncreated; and a man's soul is a creature in God which has the same properties created. And always it does what it was created for; it sees God and it contemplates God and it loves God. Therefore God rejoices in the creature and the creature in God, endlessly marveling, in which marveling he sees his God, his Lord, his maker, so exalted, so great and so good, in comparison with him who is made that the creature scarcely seems anything to itself. But the brightness and clearness of truth and wisdom make him see and know that he is made for love, in which love God endlessly protects him.

JULIAN OF NORWICH (ca. 1342-ca. 1416), *Showings*, 44

[We] have separated the will of God from God, and discernment has come to mean a search for God's will which we must find in a game of

hide-and-seek. We often equate discernment with a skill which we must master rather than the gift of God's love which guides us home to Love.

ROSE MARY DOUGHERTY, S.S.N.D., *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment* (1995)

Already, therefore, I had learned from you that nothing should be held true merely because it is eloquently expressed, nor false because its signs sound harsh upon the lips. Again, I learned that a thing is not true because rudely uttered, nor is it false because its utterance is splendid. I learned that wisdom is like wholesome food and folly like unwholesome food: they can be set forth in language ornate or plain, just as both kinds of food can be served on rich dishes or on peasant ware.

AUGUSTINE (354-430), *Confessions*, IV.6

The god of whom no dogmas are believed is a mere shadow. He will not produce that fear of the Lord in which wisdom begins and therefore will not produce that love in which it is consumated…. There is in the minimal religion nothing that can convince, convert, or (in the higher sense) console; nothing therefore which can restore vitality to our civilization. It is not costly enough. It can never be a controller or even a rival to our natural sloth and greed.

C. S. LEWIS, "A Christian Reply to Professor Price," *Phoenix Quarterly* (Autumn 1946)

Wisdom has on the whole not had an easy time in recent centuries in the West. It has often been associated with old people, the premodern, tradition, and conservative caution in a culture of youth, modernisation, innovation, and risky exploration. Yet it may be making a comeback.

DAVID F. FORD, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (2007)

One of the men of old [King Solomon] once begged to be given wisdom so that he might know how to guide your people. He was a king, and his request found pleasure in your eyes; you listened to his voice, even though it was before you died on the cross, even though it was before you displayed that wonderful act of love to your people.

And so, sweet Lord, I ask to be given not gold or silver or jewels, but rather wisdom so that I may know how to guide your people. O font of wisdom, send her forth from the throne of your glory so that she may be with me, toil with me, work with me, speak in me, and bring my thoughts and my words, all my undertakings and decisions, into harmony with your good will, to the honor of your name, for their progress and my salvation.

AELRED OF RIEVAULX (1109-1166), *Pastoral Prayer*, translated by Mark DelCogliano (2008)

Sharing Wisdom as an Act of Love

BY DAVID LYLE JEFFREY

Marilynne Robinson's beautiful novel GILEAD is a powerful realization of the integral relationship of wisdom to love. It illuminates the qualities of character which, unless they are acquired, can render the wisest of words vacuous, or inaccessible to their hearer's understanding.

For many of us, a novel might not seem to be the right place to look for a deeper comprehension of biblical wisdom. Yet in the case of Marilynne Robinson's novel *Gilead* (2004), we would be wrong to think so.[1] Robinson's tale is a powerful realization of the integral relationship of wisdom to love. It thus most helpfully illuminates qualities of character which, unless they are acquired, can render the wisest of words vacuous, or inaccessible to their hearer's understanding:

> See and see but do not perceive, hear and hear but do not understand, as the Lord says. I can't claim to understand that saying, as many times as I've heard it, and even preached on it. It simply states a deeply mysterious fact. You can know a thing to death and be for all purposes completely ignorant of it. (p. 7)

These words of disclaimer, coming near the very beginning of the Reverend John Ames's memoir to his son, signal in their tone and tenor the deepest insight he will endeavor to pass on. In his apology there is little or no presumption of obligation, only a natural hope of communion. Ames, who knows he is dying, wants to bequeath to his seven year-old son whose

arrival at manhood he will never see a kind of intergenerational sense of identity. As it happens, this quite naturally includes advice born of experience, yet each such element is delivered without taint of self-righteousness or condescension. The form of this novel is a memoir, but it reads more like an extended love-letter.

These same biblical words are, of course, addressed to the contemporary readers of Robinson's Pulitzer prizewinning novel, and to a reader who still inhabits some part of the Christian culture to which Ames is a witness, they may seem to imply as much a prophetic judgment about stereotypical preacherly certitude as an admission of limited perspective in this speaker, Reverend Ames. This is in fact a tension that Robinson brilliantly exploits. Such a fruitful acknowledgement of limit is, paradoxically, one of the potential advantages of first person discourse over omniscient third person narration. For the potential to be realized, however, the author must first create compelling character in the speaker.

The sub-genre of wisdom literature which Robinson evokes, even recreates in this novel, is distinctively biblical: "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother" (Proverbs 1:8, KJV) is its watchword, a call to attention and recollection of family identity parallel to a larger invitation to instruction, "*Shema, Ysrael*" (cf. Deuteronomy 5:1; 6:4; 9:1, etc.). Reiterations of this motif are not simply a rhetorical gambit in biblical wisdom books, but a framing device which puts biblical wisdom squarely in the context of Torah, of the obligation of parents to instruct their offspring concerning the relation of God's loving providence to the vagaries of family history. All the *davarim* (words and deeds) of the faithful are to be kept in perpetual memory:

> And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. (Deuteronomy 6:7, KJV)

A disposition to obedience to this commandment has been the way of John Ames's life (we learn this gradually), and his memory of the text, encouraged by his own father (p. 7) has appropriately been preserved in King James idiom. The task he has set himself in his memoir is thus doubly reflexive of the text in which he is steeped: "Your mother told you I'm writing your begats," he writes to his progeny on the page before him; history and wisdom, as in Scripture, are here also in the novel inseparable one from the other.

There is a certain audacity in writing against the grain of the modern/postmodern novel in the way that Robinson does. It connects her, as a story-teller, with venerable predecessors in a near vanished heyday of the novel, when, as Walter Benjamin has memorably observed, the storyteller was one

with "counsel for his readers." Benjamin, one of the greatest of European literary critics before World War II, steeped in Jewish learning, went on to say that "…if today 'having counsel' is beginning to have an old-fashioned ring, this is because the communicability of experience is decreasing. In consequence," he says, "we have no counsel either for ourselves or for others."[2] If Robinson, in a kind of 'sign of contradiction,' has counsel, it is doubtless because she connects so naturally to the sources of communicable wisdom Benjamin's insight draws upon.

The book of Proverbs, perhaps more than any other biblical text, has for Protestant Christians been the model for this particular vein of aphoristic discourse as a means of parent-child instruction. There have been deliberate secular imitations before. One thinks of Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son, Philip Stanhope* (1774), exceptionably candid written epistolary advice to his own son and his godson, born twenty-five years apart, each named Philip Stanhope after himself. (It is evident that Robinson has read from this volume.) Proverbs is itself, of course, far more aphoristic than Chesterfield's *Letters* or indeed than Robinson's novel, which is nonetheless richly aphoristic, with more quotations from Proverbs than any other text, including the Sermon on the Mount and the Epistle of James. Such richness of biblical citation might well have laden the novel with an entirely off-putting preachiness, had not Robinson's narrator and protagonist, despite his vocation, been so compellingly developed in terms of his own keenly reflective, yet surprisingly (especially for a postmodern novel) self-deprecating consciousness. One effect of such a winsome narrative voice is that the personal stories Ames tells *embody* the wisdom he wishes to convey in a fashion resistant to any reduction to aphorism merely: authentic personal transparency is the quintessence of the wisdom to be gathered.

It is because of his thoughtful self-criticism, in fact (not in spite of it), that the narrator thus acquires an authority altogether uncommon in contemporary fiction. This is a feature of the novel which steals in upon one almost imperceptibly in the reading, or, as it may seem, the overhearing of it. The father's authority is never asserted, as such, to his son, nor even to his wayward and deeply unsettled godson. Circumspection is his manner; deferral to the opinion of others, including his own father and grandfather and extending even to theologians with whom in the end he does not agree, or to the sturdier Calvinism of his fellow minister and closest friend, is Ames's habitual discipline. It is not at all that he is without opinions; in fact he holds deeply considered and well-formed opinions. Rather, it is that he respects the views of others and, in the fashion suggested by the opening quotation, reckons it to be impossible for any individual to judge of a matter accountably without the aid of divergent as well as complementary perspectives.

The art of conversation is thus an integral part of the pursuit of wisdom.

Just as one can read a bad book and find something to affirm in "its haplessness or pomposity or gall," Ames says, so with people: "There are pleasures to be found where you would never look for them" (p. 39). The cultivation of deeper friendships, rooted in shared mutual affections, is nevertheless for Ames a still less dispensable anchor to reflection. In his fellow clergyman and neighbor Robert Boughton, shepherd to another flock, he finds "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24, KJV). This, too, has a correlative in the timbre of narrative voice; the words on Robinson's pages appear far less like prose monologue than like a conversation overheard; it might be better to say that they capture a symphony of conversations with persons in all types and categories of relationship, past and present, and with several types of books, past and present in Ames's reading, all of which still remain present to his consciousness as voices in an ongoing colloquy.

A further aspect of this remarkable dialogic effect of the narrative (it is given, after all, as a monologue), is the role of prayer as an undertone in the settled wisdom one "hears" in the father's voice. But an aura of prayer is also a means by which the relationship between father as teacher and any who will have eyes to see and ears to hear is established. "For me, writing has always felt like praying," Ames confesses, "even when I wasn't writing prayers, as I was often enough. You feel that you are with someone," he continues; "I feel I am with you now, whatever that can mean… That is to say, I pray for you. And there's an intimacy in it. That's the truth" (p. 19). Analogously, at least for the reader, Ames further admits that he does not write the way he speaks, but rather tries to write the way he thinks (pp. 28-29). Thoughts can be prayers; his narrative gives the impression of being saturated with both indistinguishably. Prayer in adversity, he says at another point, brings peace, and prayer for others, often uttered through the night for his own and his friend's parishioners, each in their several needs as he understands them, brings him to identify closely with them—bringing unity in the bonds of peace (pp. 70-71). This too, Robinson implies, is a measure of his wisdom.

The art of conversation is an integral part of the pursuit of wisdom…. The cultivation of deeper friendships, rooted in shared mutual affections, is nevertheless for Reverend Ames a still less dispensable anchor to reflection.

Part of what makes Ames's character as well as his voice so appealing, then, is his candor and self-effacement. Unlike Boughton, he has always written out his sermons carefully, word for word; the attic is filled with

them, he says whimsically, putting him "right up there with Augustine and Calvin for quantity. That's amazing," he continues, "I wrote almost all of it in the deepest hope and conviction. Sifting my thoughts and choosing my words. Trying to say what was true. And I'll tell you frankly, that was wonderful" (p. 19). It is this last sentence, in its candid admission of the joy he has taken in his work, which convinces us of the authenticity of what precedes it. We are pleasantly surprised to learn later on that he is still examining his conscience regarding sermons preached long ago—as his own understanding has deepened, thinking "That's what he meant!" (p. 41) and wishing he had put a point differently. This process, too, he interweaves with conversations long past.

It turns out that only one of his sermons has not been preserved. It was written in a time of plague (the 1918 epidemic of Spanish influenza) as he was attempting to comfort the bereaved who would ask him "how the Lord could allow such a thing" (p. 41). Though he still believes this sermon to have offered a persuasive biblical answer to the problem of undeserved suffering ("the only sermon I wouldn't mind answering for in the next world"), when he considered the faces of those to whom he would preach, he burned it before rising to the pulpit. Instead, he preached on the parable of the lost sheep. Here too is an act of wisdom, exemplified in a fashion the author of Job might approve.

Ames's consciousness of the gap between intention and utterance is acute; his sense that truth abides beyond our judgment of it is pervasive in all he writes. Accordingly, the inner debates with self as well as those with external interlocutors—with his father, grandfather, Boughton, (the German philosopher) Ludwig Feuerbach, his elder brother Edward, a seminarian who lost his faith, his wayward godson Jack Ames Boughton—all of these give careful respect to opposing as well as confirming positions, even on occasions when it is evidently painful for Ames to do so. In a most poignant example, he greatly fears a corrosive influence of Jack on his wife and the young natural son for whom his memoir is being written, and he admits as much. Yet he nonetheless respects Jack's skepticism and the candor of it even when he cannot but deplore some of its apparent consequences, in particular Jack's insouciant immorality (pp. 143-154). This attitude reflects a much stronger virtue than tolerance. Rather, it arises from a wellspring of genuine affection that, in its application, is not dissevered from his love for truth, especially for truth about God and his love for the world. "Nothing true can be said about God from a posture of defense," he says in a remarkable passage. "In the matter of belief I have always found that defenses have the same irrelevance about them as the criticisms they are meant to answer…. There is always an inadequacy in argument about ultimate things" (pp. 177-178). Ames goes on to say to his son that it is

possible to "assert the existence of something—Being—having not the slightest notion of what it is," an evident echo of the passage with which we began. The echo reinforces, in effect, the culminating theological wisdom Ames wishes to impart to his son, namely that in matters of faith it is seldom fruitful to look for "proofs" but always fruitful, in effect, to try to live in obedience to Christ (cf. p. 139). Proofs are "never sufficient to the question, and they are always a little impertinent…because they claim to find for God a place within our conceptual grasp" (p. 179).

Here we get a confirming insight into Ames's lifelong conversation with his Calvinist preacher friend Boughton. We see that his quiet fideism resists the reformed rationalism and strong doctrine preferred by the Presbyterian. In the course of his conversation with Boughton the character and direction of his own thinking has been sharpened (cf. Proverbs 27:17). Accordingly, Ames's caution is not a reflex of anti-intellectualism, or careless pietism either, but reflects rather a deeply thoughtful recognition of our human incapacity fully to understand the wisdom of God. Such circumspection is itself, of course, a hallmark of biblical wisdom.

One of the most compelling aspects of Robinson's novel, and, it seems to me, an indispensable part of its wisdom for the contemporary Christian reader, is its acknowledgment of our own typical failure to transmit the wisdom of the generations even to those we most love. This is to cede a point, perhaps, to the Calvinist. The "wisdom" Jack wants to grasp is to know why grace does not reach him (pp. 170-171). The relationship of Ames to his namesake godson and to his seven-year-old son here echoes aspects of the Abraham-Hagar-Ishmael narrative, a passage on which Ames has preached (pp. 128-130). To some extent the failure of his own father and of Ames as godfather to correct Jack, or to find a way in love to understand his evident need for particular attention, is inescapably a failure of wisdom on the part of both "fathers." Ames knows it—or has come reflectively over time to know it in regret. It is evident to the reader that Jack wanted to be confronted, even as a youthful rebel (p. 184), and the final conversation he has with Ames, sitting quietly in Ames's dilapidated old church, provides an irrefragable culmination to this insight.

Ames's caution is not a reflex of anti-intellectualism or careless pietism, but reflects rather a deeply thoughtful recognition of our human incapacity fully to understand the wisdom of God. Such circumspection is a hallmark of biblical wisdom.

It turns out that Jack has also always wanted to be loved in such a way that, as the medieval spiritual writer William of St. Thierry puts it, *amor ipse intellectus est*—love itself embodies understanding.

Marilynne Robinson shows that wisdom comes to us in many ways; it may well be conveyed in a remembered hymn (p. 103), in the memorization of Scripture which then later reveals its truths in the crucible of experience, or even in a clichéd cultural commonplace (p. 60). Thus Reverend Ames is pleased at the progress of his little boy, who, with his mother's help, is memorizing portions of the Scripture, including at this point the Beatitudes (p. 185). But he knows that the lad's present pleasure in "the magnitude of the accomplishment" will pale in comparison to the value of such wisdom later, when the meaning of these remembered words comes inwardly to life in a richer way.

The boy remains as nameless as the implied son in Proverbs, that Robinson's readers might more easily become themselves the actual recipients of the wisdom taught, for the lad is yet far from the age of experience in which he can appropriate it all. Like the Christian reader of *Gilead,* he may well be able to locate or even memorize the wisdom aphorisms of the Proverbs, for example, much more readily than properly understand them: "Who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man, which is in him?" (p. 197; 1 Corinthians 2:11, KJV); "Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (p. 221; Proverbs 13:12, KJV). Perhaps he may come to concede that "hope deferred is still hope" (p. 247); "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth more" (p. 198; Proverbs 11:24, KJV); "Children's children are the crown of old men" (p. 230; Proverbs 17:6, KJV). Yet not all these elements of wisdom will come to be fully comprehended, or confirmed as one might wish in personal experience, even for Ames himself.

What then may we hope for from our efforts to pass on the wisdom of the ages—and ageless wisdom likewise—to a generation whose understanding of it we ourselves shall not live to see? Like Robinson's fading narrator, we cast our bread upon the waters in the hope that "by God's grace, of course" (p. 138), whatever bread returns to us will bear about it some token of our love, and of that which, as to Him, we have committed against that Day which shall come to us all. The parable of the prodigal son, tacit in Robinson's beautiful novel, is nonetheless explicit in her conclusion: the transmission of wisdom is all about a father's love. Before he dies, and his script concludes abruptly with a prayer and "sleep," Ames confers upon the renegade surrogate Jack, hand upon his head, a father's biblical blessing: "The Lord make his face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace" (Numbers 6:25-26, KJV). The moment is sacramental; for Ames and his godson it is in just this way intimately personal. This near final act of the old pastor and father is the fruit of the wisdom which he has received,

and for those who will come to have "eyes to see and ear to hear," it "simply states a deeply mysterious fact" (p. 7). Perhaps that allusive old spiritual song hints at the good of this fact in its soothing refrain: "There is a balm in Gilead / to heal the wounded soul."

NOTES

1 Marilynne Robinson's novel *Gilead* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004) presents itself as a memoir of seventy-six year-old Reverend John Ames written to be preserved for his seven year-old son until he is of an age to read it. Robinson's sequel, *Home* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), is the second of a diptych, focusing on the parallel life and family of Ames' closest friend, Reverend Robert Boughton, Boughton's daughter Glory, and his son Jack (who, as Ames' godson and first namesake, also plays a central role in *Gilead*). In *Home* many of these characters are seen now from a different but complementary point of view. For Robinson's personal views on Calvinism, family, and religion in America, the reader should turn to her book of essays, *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought* (New York, NY: Picador, 1998; 2005).

2 Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in an anthology of his essays, *Illuminations,* edited by Hannah Arendt (New York: NY: Schocken Books, 1969), 86.

DAVID LYLE JEFFREY
is Distinguished Professor of Literature and Humanities in the Honors College of Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

So Great a Cloud of Witnesses

BY JEANIE MILEY

We in the Church today must re-establish a connection with Christians who have gone before us in a way that is meaningful to those who will come after us. Could there be any greater wisdom, or harder challenge, than Jesus' injunction to love one another across generational lines as he loved us?

Under a brilliant blue sky on a perfect summer day, I stood at the front of a ferry that was crossing from the Isle of Mull to the Isle of Iona. As the ferry moved across turquoise waters on my trip of a lifetime, I was almost breathless with anticipation at the opportunity to explore this small island off the western coast of Scotland where in 563 a man named Columba and twelve companions established a community that became one of the most important monasteries in early medieval Europe.

Reading the history of early Christians had brought into sharp focus the difference between the formation of my faith in a culture in which Bibles are easily accessible and that of those martyrs who went to unbelievable lengths to preserve and protect hand-written copies of Scripture. My faith has been formed in ease and air-conditioning while many who have gone before me sacrificed for their faith, suffering tyranny, ridicule, and death for their belief.

Iona draws pilgrims from around the world for short visits and longer retreats. Those who visit Iona speak of "tapping into ancient strength and wisdom" and "feeling the power of the early Christians" there. In the gift shop I bought a silver bracelet etched with designs copied from some of the ancient carvings in the abbey to remind me of those people whose faith has fed my own.

Walking slowly through the ruins of the nunnery and sitting in the stillness of the abbey where countless pilgrims and worshipers have gathered for centuries, I pondered these questions over and over:

What is it that keeps people returning to this site, year after year?

How can we in the Church today retrieve and preserve what was good and true and meaningful from the past, and yet, live in the present?

Is part of the problem of Christian communities today related to a severing from our history and its people? Are we trying to grow without a deep rootedness in the rich soil of the past?

How can we who have been entrusted with the Church today re-establish a connection with the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us in a way that is meaningful to those who will come after us?

The old ruins and rubble, relics of an earlier time and a way of life that is fading, remind me that each generation must decide how to relate to the past. Indeed, those who forget the past are destined to repeat it, and yet there is in all of us a striving forward into what lies ahead. The same scriptures which counsel us to tell our children the stories of God's activity with their forefathers also declares that "God is making things new." The ruins of the nunnery reminded me that we have not yet gotten it right about serving God, but the fact that pilgrims flock to those ruins indicates a yearning to retrieve something precious and rare from the cloud of witnesses who lived out their faith on that island.

Returning to the mainland of Scotland, I thought about how alienated the generations are within most churches, each with its separate programs and services. I thought about how much we need each other and how part of the problem is that we value what is new more than what is old.

In his novel *On Chelsil Beach,* Ian McEwan observes it was in the early 1960's that "to be young was a social encumbrance, a mark of irrelevance, a faintly embarrassing condition for which marriage was the beginning of a cure."† That condition, he notes, would end later in the 60's when to be young, look young, act young, and defy death would become prevailing values of a youth-worshiping culture. Those values and, indeed, the obsessions with the values of youth, would filter and flood all parts of our culture, including the Church. To be old today is to be considered irrelevant.

What have we lost? Can we recover a sense of community that allows the uniqueness of all its individuals while addressing the ills of individualism-run-riot? How can we restore the community of faith that honors all the generations? We need to explore together what a community might be and do, and perhaps the recovery of a sense of our history might be a place to begin.

"At some point, you have to decide what kind of relationship you're going to have with the past," a wise woman told me. "And that means *the* past and *your* past. You can't run away from the past, either the good stuff you want to inflate or the hard stuff you want to forget, and so you might as well decide if you're going to be a friend or an enemy to your history."

To say that we who are in the Church are conflicted about how to relate to the past and move into the future is a mighty understatement. In many cases, we are so afraid of being stymied by the past or we are so ashamed of our past that we have neglected to mine the deep veins of meaning in our history. We tend to discard yesterday's ways and buildings in a rush to see who can be the first with the latest trend.

We thoughtlessly disregard that which has had meaning in the past. Without reflection or consciousness, we urge each other to forget about the past and move on, and yet all of us carry our memories and our mentors consciously or unconsciously. Why not access the wisdom of that great cloud of witnesses by recalling and recounting and *honoring* that which has had meaning for us in the past? We need to remember that we are connected to each other and that we are interconnected across generational, cultural, and religious boundaries; reviving a sense of that connectedness with the past could counter the individualism and its accompanying loneliness, alienation, and separation that have eroded our communities in the last decades.

A young minister told me recently about how the older ministers in a peer group approach *him* to tell *them* how to reach young people. "I don't know why these older guys keep telling me they want to learn from me," this thirty-something minister told me. "I keep trying to find a mentor. I want to learn from somebody who has experience and can tell me what to do! I don't want to repeat what they've done, but I want to learn from them!"

Troubled by this conversation, I did some hard questioning of my own approach to mentoring and leading, teaching and training. I asked myself if I had become defensive about traditional methods or resistant to trying something new. I looked at whether what I want to pass on to the next generation does, in fact, have the possibility of being transformative and life-giving.

Is "the gospel" that I live grounded in truth, fed and nourished by the past, and yet bold enough to live on into the future? Do I give witness by my life to the faith of my fathers and mothers that was passed down in such a way that it can be fluid and flexible in a world that they would hardly recognize, or do I act as if what was old is bad and what is new is good?

Several years ago, a young man visited my Sunday School class on a day when we were discussing various methods of engaging the youth of our

families and the young adults who have rejected the Church. With a biting sarcasm, the man said, "Do you realize how desperate you people are? Why don't you do what has meaning for you and stop trying to placate and seduce the ones who aren't here?"

It was a question that made me examine whether or not I really did feel desperate about the future of the Church. This cynical young man forced us to look at whether what we had in our church offerings of worship and education, outreach and ministry were outdated, outworn, tired, and trivial, or whether what we were offering did, indeed, have enough life to it that it would be inviting and engaging for persons of all ages. Tradition does give stability, but when the tradition has lost its energy and its meaning, it does need to be evaluated. Some traditions continue to be life-giving, decade after decade; others stultify and constrict the life of the Spirit and the community of faith.

Later, in preparation for a dinner to honor the older women in our congregation, I asked them to write down for those of us I called the "youngers" and the "middlers" some wisdom from their life in the community of faith that they would want to pass on to future generations. *Without exception*, every woman I approached resisted. "I don't have anything worth passing down," several said to me. "Who, me?" some would ask. "What could I possibly say that would be considered *wisdom?*"

Was the resistance born of humility or lack of awareness about how profoundly their lives and their faith over a long period of time had impacted our congregation? Were they afraid of appearing brazen or bold? Had they been so busy doing good and living out their faith that they had not taken the time, or not had the time, to own the good gifts they had given to others?

Reviving a sense of connectedness with the past could counter the individualism and its accompanying loneliness, alienation, and separation that have eroded our communities in the last decades.

Or was there in them that terrible sense of shame about being old in a culture that worships youth? Were their reactions a result of coming to accept that whatever they might say would be passed over because, after all, what do the old know about life in this twenty-first century? Have we been so focused on the future and what is shiny and bright out in front of us that we have forgotten, neglected, and disdained the roots and rootedness that ground and stabilize us?

What is it that makes people take that arduous trip to the ancient Christian site of Iona? The sky is a startling blue there, and the water is glorious, but no more so than in the Caribbean.

Returning from exploring those ancient and holy sites to my everyday world, I had three experiences that startled and stunned me into an awakening about how far my culture, religious and secular, has drifted from a healthy and nourishing relationship with the past that has the capacity to feed and nourish the present.

In fact, those experiences were so unnerving that I wanted to declare to the younger generation that we who are older need to make amends to them for neglecting to model and mentor in such a way that the young would know how to relate to the wisdom from the past that is a part of their inheritance. Indeed, my generation has been so busy trying to out-run age and to defy death that we have modeled disrespect of older people, disdain for what is quickly deemed irrelevant and outmoded, and a worship of "what's happening," what's new, and youthful and "in."

Opening my September 22, 2008 edition of *Time* magazine, I was mesmerized by an article entitled "The Truth about Teen Girls" and stunned by pictures of pre-adolescent girls made up and coiffed to look like adults, pictures that prompted images of *mothers* of adolescent girls dressing like adolescents! What is causing pre-teens and teen-agers to want to grow up too fast? Why do they want to look old while their parents will go to extreme measure to look young? What is it in young girls' lives that is forcing them into premature sophistication and premature responsibilities, and whatever happened to letting children be children? No wonder our children are confused! Who are the adults in our culture, anyway? Where are the parents?

I looked at those pictures with sadness for the innocence of childhood that has lost in premature adulthood, as well as for the deep, eternal wisdom of adults that has been left behind in the ash heap of plastic surgery, a reckless abandonment of tradition, a terrible fear of growing older, and a relentless need to be relevant.

Forgive us, I wanted to say to the young, for not allowing you to be children and for refusing to act as adults. Forgive us for being so desperate to stay young that we have tried to be your friend instead of your elders. Forgive us for looking to you to show us how to live when all the time, you needed us to guide you faithfully and steadily into adulthood.

Later, I sat with members of a split church as they grappled with the impact of the brokenness of their congregation. The pain among the remaining members was palpable; I could feel it in every cell of my body.

"You don't get it," a young woman stammered to the group, the governing body that was charged with maintaining the building and the debt of the group that was left. "We who are the future of this church want to move on. We don't want to be tied to *your* music or *your* ways from the past. What met your needs doesn't do it for us and we don't want to keep on looking back."

The next weekend as I was leading a retreat on suffering, using the book of Job as my biblical reference, a young woman stopped me in the middle of the second day with the question, "Where did you get this material? Did you just make it up?"

In spite of being stunned at the edginess in her voice, I saw instantly that I was in the middle of a teachable moment. How I handled the moment and the challenge would both reveal my own nature and help shape hers. Later, however, I let myself feel the abrasiveness and arrogance of the young woman, recalling all the times I, too, wanted to discard the ways, but not the means, of my elders.

Forgive us, I want to say to the young, for not teaching you how to respect those who are older than you. Forgive us for what you have learned from us about ignoring and discounting those who are older will someday come back to harm you. Forgive us for teaching you to be disrespectful and dismissive, for we forgot that when you mistreat someone else, you are injuring your own self. Forgive us for letting you treat us with disdain, for in doing that we have set in motion cycles of behaviors that will only grow stronger in subsequent generations.

In the days after hurricane Ike mauled the Gulf Coast, those of us who live in Houston were disoriented and unnerved. Many were without power for over two weeks, and all of us had debris in our yards and in the streets. Almost all of the signal lights were down, and so every intersection became a four-way stop; at rush hour, the wait to get through those intersections was interminable.

My generation has been so busy trying to out-run age and to defy death that we have modeled disrespect of older people, and worship of what's new and "in."

There were many things in those days that were disconcerting to me, but one of the most upsetting was the sight of countless huge oak trees that had been uprooted and thrown across streets, onto houses, and into yards. Once proud and tall, lining the streets of Houston and "holding hands" across the boulevards as shelter against the relentless Texas sun, those mighty oaks now lay with their roots exposed, dying on

the ground. Driving through the streets of Houston day after day, I found the sight of those felled oaks depressing and disturbing.

Finally, I realized that those trees began to symbolize a reality in this time. All of our major institutions which have given our culture stability, comfort, predictability, and familiarity are in foment and, in fact, in some cases are being uprooted. All of those structures on which we have counted to be there for us as we manage our daily lives are going through massive sea changes; some will survive and some will not. All things will be changed, and we do not know how they will be changed.

The Church stands at a crucial juncture. In this time of transition we can call upon the wisdom of those who have gone before us to stabilize us and ground us in what is nourishing and life-giving.

I had always believed that oaks were sturdy and reliable. I assumed that their root systems went down deep into the earth and that those older ones could and would naturally withstand the storms of this region. Curious about why those old trees fell to the monstrous winds of Ike while younger trees and trees of softer wood survived, I began to question people who know about trees.

"It's about the watering," a tree expert told me. "When you do shallow watering and when there isn't enough water, those roots come up to the top of the soil looking for water, and when that happens they spread their roots out in all directions. Without deep roots, even those mighty oaks won't stand the force of winds like we had."

Without deep roots, the trees become too big for themselves and are easily uprooted.

We who form the Body of Christ on earth, the Church, stand at a crucial juncture in history. The old ways are passing away, and the new ways are not yet clear to us, but in this in-between time—in the "mean" time of transition—we can call upon the wisdom of the ages and the wisdom of those who have gone before us to stabilize us and ground us in what is nourishing and life-giving. We cannot bring life back to what has died, but what we can do is water the roots of our souls with that which will cause those roots to go down deep enough to provide strength against the storms of life.

What can we do to access the wisdom we need to continue to produce healthy fruit? We can recall and recount the various ways that God has been

faithful to us in the past. Children love to hear the stories of how their elders did things in the past. They need to know the ways in which we overcame difficulties; they need to hear stories of faith that connect them with their own heritage, but inspire them into their own futures.

We can engage in conversations across generational lines about what kind of relationship we will have with the past. We can explore and examine which traditions need to die a natural death and which ones have life and energy to them. We must be able to own the victories and the failures of the past, and have the humility to learn the lessons of each without being too attached to either.

We must tell the stories of faith from the Bible and from the religious tradition that is ours. We must ground our children in those stories. We must teach and tell and live the truths that are in them, and we must consciously teach our children how to live in stout faith that can withstand the tough storms of life. We must be careful to put authentic heroes in our children's lives so that they will not have to substitute celebrities or pop "icons" where real heroes belong.

We can confront head-on, but with grace, our culture's worship of individualism and its accompanying "go-it-alone" traps and learn how to live in community with each other in faith, trust, and love. We can challenge the detrimental and destructive ideas of church as a capitalistic venture and a competitive organization and take a look at what it really does mean to be a New Testament church, striving to be conformed to the image of Christ, working to be the presence of Christ on earth, and taking our counsel from the Gospels and Epistles, as well as from the ancient wisdom of the Old Testament, instead of from the narcissistic behaviors of the worlds of consumerism, entertainment, sports, and marketing.

Could there be any greater wisdom or any harder challenge for us than Jesus' injunction to love one another across generational lines as he loved us?

In a recent conversation with my granddaughter, something came up about hurricane Ike. Abby looked straight into my eyes and said, "Mia, the hurricane was a very long time ago. Could we stop talking about it?"

When you are seven years old, six weeks is a long time ago, and when the adults in your world have walked the floor all night while you slept, watching over you while a wild wind blew hour after interminable hour, you do not really get the gravity of the situation .

Abby will eventually learn that we who love her will be her cloud of witnesses to God's protection and provision for her.

And I learned right then how important it is to let go of what no longer serves me and move on into the future.

Both of us, separated by decades of age and experience, need each other, and each other's wisdom.

NOTE

† Ian McEwan, *On Chelsil Beach* (New York: Anchor Books, 2007), 5.

JEANIE MILEY
is a writer and spiritual retreat leader in Houston, Texas.

Neglected Wisdom

BY JONATHAN KRUSCHWITZ

We often overlook the biblical wisdom literature, treating it as though it offers a bit of sound, if theologically irrelevant, advice. The three books reviewed here are important reminders that the wisdom texts were written within and make a valuable contribution to Israel's distinctive theological perspective.

Perhaps wisdom has always been neglected: "Wisdom cries out in the street," the Book of Proverbs maintains, "in the square she raises her voice" as if she were not getting much attention from the people (1:20). Little has changed today. Readers of the Old Testament tend to overlook its wisdom literature, treating it as less important than the historical and prophetic texts. This neglect leads to a deficient understanding of Scripture as a whole, for the wisdom literature comprises an integral contribution to the Old Testament canon.

What explains the current neglect of the wisdom tradition? Its literature may seem discordant with the rest of the Old Testament: the story of God and Israel—so prominent in the Torah, the prophets, and much of the writings—is not so obvious in the wisdom texts. When modern readers note "the absence of references to the great events of 'salvation history': the patriarchs and matriarchs, the exodus and the Promised Land, the kings and prophets, the exile and return to the land,"[1] they may wrongly conclude that this literature disregards the story of the Old Testament and only offers a bit of sound, if theologically irrelevant, advice.

The three books reviewed here—Ellen F. Davis's *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, James Limburg's *Encountering Ecclesiastes: A Book for Our Time*, and Daniel J. Harrington's *Jesus Ben Sira of Jerusalem: A Biblical Guide to Living Wisely*—attempt to set the record straight. Though they

address different biblical texts and themes, the authors demonstrate that the wisdom tradition rests firmly in the same theological context as the rest of the Old Testament. Admitting the tradition's undeniable appropriation of secular views native to other Ancient Near Eastern traditions, they explain how the biblical writers, usually in subtle (but sometimes in unsubtle) ways, fit these foreign concepts into their distinctive Israelite theology. In addition they suggest how this ancient literature should inform the way we live today, helping us to acknowledge God's presence in and sovereignty over our lives.

If the wisdom literature makes no explicit reference to the famous events in the story of God's involvement with Israel, how can we discover its theological disposition? In *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000, 306 pp., $24.95), Ellen Davis pays close attention to creation theology, anthropology (which is often informed by the Torah and the prophets), and, when applicable, the prominence of women, to discern the theological meaning of the biblical books she studies. This interpretative lens, I believe, should prove useful in understanding other biblical wisdom texts as well.

Davis shows how the sages employed key phrases and images that recall other biblical texts in order to integrate life in the world with Israelite theology. From the "deep conviction of the Israelite sages that the sacred and the secular are not separate realms" (p. 5), she draws inspiration for how modern readers can integrate their faith into daily living.

For example, Davis interprets the claim that wisdom is a "tree of life" (Proverbs 3:18) as implying that wise living "reverses our original exile and brings us back into Eden" (p. 43). Such creation story references relate to contemporary ecological concerns, she believes: they should (at the very least) prompt us to question how modern societies treat the earth.

Davis shows how the biblical sages employed extra-biblical traditions. Consider her insightful discussion of this puzzling passage:

> If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat;
> and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink;
> for you will heap coals of fire on their heads,
> and the LORD will reward you.
>
> *Proverbs 25:21-22*

She observes that the biblical writer is likely referencing an Egyptian penitential rite, in which burning coals were placed upon the head of a penitent. Understanding this vivid reference helps us see the point of the

puzzling instruction: "whereas a harsh response only makes enmity more intense, kindness may instill shame and repentance" (p. 133).

Attending closely in this way to the biblical imagery—for poetry "is primarily designed to engage the imagination" (p. 19)—Davis offers a particularly novel reading of the Song of Songs. Since many of the Song's images are suggestive of creation and of Israel's relationship with God, she concludes, "the Song is about repairing the damage done by the first disobedience in Eden, what Christian tradition calls 'the Fall'" (p. 231). She does not disregard the Song's explicit sexual imagery and its value for a right appreciation of human sexuality; rather, she insists, "the sexual and the religious understandings of the Song are mutually informative" (p. 233). After explicating the literal sexual meaning of each text, she explores it through the lens of three layers of redemption—between God and human persons, among people, and between persons and the land. At several points she observes how the Song's images reverse the "asymmetry of power between woman and man" (p. 232). On another occasion she focuses on language redolent of Israel's honeymoon experience with God in the "wilderness," inferring that "the Song assures us that God the gracious Lover may still look at the world, at Israel, at the church, at our souls—and catch 'his' breath at the beauty of the bride" (p. 262).

In this book, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Each of the three commentaries is accessible to read and filled with insight. But the whole book is even more valuable for the interpretive strategy Davis provides for reading biblical wisdom literature generally.

Ellen Davis's interpretive lens—attending to creation theology, anthropology (often informed by the Torah and the prophets), and, when applicable, the prominence of women—proves useful in understanding biblical wisdom texts.

The book of Ecclesiastes is an especially difficult text to interpret, for it does not fit easily within the boundaries of the wisdom tradition. Many readers of the book, as the respected Old Testament scholar Walter Baumgartner once observed, are tempted "to admit how lukewarm [the writer's] faith really is, and how far he falls below the higher peaks of Old Testament piety" (quoted in Limburg, p. 4). But another comment, this one from Elie Wiesel, aptly summarizes the value in our struggling to understand this strange book: "True faith lies beyond questions; true faith comes after it has been challenged" (quoted in Davis, p. 159).

The strongest facet of James Limburg's approach in *Encountering Ecclesiastes: A Book for Our Time* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006, 141 pp., $14.00) is his subtlety in dealing with the book's central theme of vanity (a translation of *hevel*, a Hebrew word that literally means "breath"). This concept recurs so often in Ecclesiastes that Gerhard von Rad once compared it to a "pedal point," the bass note that is sustained beneath the changing harmonies in a piece of music. In contrast to more skeptical interpretations of the text, that desolate pedal note does not dominate Limburg's reading. With the help of tradition (Martin Luther, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Harold Kushner take the stage on multiple occasions), Limburg finds another life-affirming message about enjoying work and time spent with friends, an "ode to joy" that becomes a sort of counterpoint melody in the book (p. 35).

Limburg seeks to unveil God's presence in Ecclesiastes, a book in which God seems conspicuously absent. Observing that God is consistently present in passages about the joy we can find in toil and in time spent together, Limburg declares: "The gulf between God and humans is bridged in these instances that speak of humans receiving and enjoying God's gifts" (p. 34). Or, to paraphrase the Talmud (with Kushner), "In the world to come, each of us will be called to account for all the good things God put on earth which we refused to enjoy" (p. 103). Limburg thus provides a life-affirming reading of Ecclesiastes.

Daniel Harrington's *Jesus Ben Sira of Jerusalem: A Biblical Guide to Living Wisely*, Interfaces (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005, 142 pp., $14.95) is a short study of the scribe in the late third century and early second century B.C. who authored the book of Sirach, which is also called Ecclesiasticus. It is an excellent primer on this wisdom text that is unfamiliar to many readers of the Bible. While the book of Sirach is not in the Jewish or Protestant Christian canon (it is placed in the Apocrypha in Protestant Bibles), Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians accept it as canonical scripture. Harrington demonstrates that the book is a valuable source to anyone seeking a more comprehensive understanding of the genre of biblical wisdom literature.

Harrington begins by briefly summarizing the main points of each section of Sirach and comparing its literary forms with those found in other wisdom books. An overview of Jesus Ben Sira's social context provides insight into, and perhaps more sympathy toward, some passages in his book that bristle the contemporary conscience. Harrington draws out the book of Sirach's prominent theological themes and traces them through other texts of biblical wisdom literature. Finally, he provides direction for

further reflection, by individuals or study groups, on how to practice such wisdom today.

Recognizing the folly of our neglect of the biblical wisdom tradition, Richard J. Clifford cautions, "It is important to remind ourselves that this neglect of the wisdom literature…reflects neither the outlook of the Bible nor that of many centuries of Jewish and Christian interpretation."[2] The three books reviewed here serve as important reminders that the biblical wisdom texts are not illegitimate siblings of the other Old Testament texts, for the books of wisdom were written within and contribute to Israel's distinctive theological perspective. Davis, Limburg, and Harrington suggest helpful ways for us to approach contemporary issues with a wisdom-informed acknowledgement of God's presence in and sovereignty over our lives. Wisdom continues to cry out in the street and—with the help of these informed perspectives—we would do well to listen.

NOTES

1 Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 5.

2 Richard J. Clifford, S. J., "Introduction to Wisdom Literature," in *New Interpreter's Bible Old Testament Survey* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 223.

JONATHAN KRUSCHWITZ
is a M.Div. student at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond in Richmond, Virginia.

Models of Spiritual Discernment

BY HELEN H. CEPERO

How do we know which thoughts, feelings, decisions, and actions in our lives lead to God? What signs mark the journey? Such thorny questions are addressed in the four books reviewed here.

Spiritual discernment, at its heart, is the art of distinguishing what leads to God from what does not. But how do we know which thoughts, feelings, decisions, and actions in our lives lead to God and which lead away from God? How do we know when we are following the pathway toward God? What signs mark the journey? Can we develop the art of spiritual discernment, or is such wisdom a gift of God to be received rather than mastered? These and other thorny questions about spiritual discernment are addressed in the four recent books reviewed here.

In *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 428pp, $31.99), theologian David F. Ford explores scriptural teachings on wisdom with a focus on "listening" to those who suffer. He offers a careful re-reading of biblical texts concerned with living in the Spirit and loving God. Then he takes these insights and looks at them in the light of three contemporary settings: wisdom gained through interfaith dialogue among Christians, Jews, and Muslims; interdisciplinary wisdom sought within the modern university; and interpersonal wisdom found through living with people who have learning disabilities in the L'Arche communities founded by Jean Vanier.

Ford proposes that the cry for wisdom is posed in various "moods." Often Christian wisdom and discernment are expressed in the "indicative" mood ("This is good news…") or "imperative" mood ("Do this…"), but in Scripture they are also modeled through desiring, questioning, and exploring possibilities, which he calls the "optative," "interrogative," and "subjunctive" moods respectively.

For example, Ford helps us "re-read" the cry of Job seeking to love God for God's sake by juxtaposing the scriptural story with the horrific cries of the victims of the *Shoah*, or Holocaust, which are captured in Michael O'Siadhail's heart-rending poetry:

> Pyjama ghosts tramp the shadow of a chimney.
> Shorn and nameless. Desolation's mad machine
> With endless counts and selections. *Try to* see! (p. 95)

Living in the Spirit, according to Ford, requires us not only to carefully re-examine Scripture, but also to share life together in worship and prayer, with a vulnerability that reflects the cross of Jesus Christ. Loving the God of wisdom in this way leads us into an almost mystical union with God, which is characterized less by certainty than by a joyful desire for God and life in the world. Ford longs for a new way of doing theology, which leads to Christian wisdom that embraces the person holistically, body and soul, and is altogether informed by scriptural knowledge and ecclesial practice.

With this wide understanding of Christian wisdom, Ford outlines how a friendship among Jews, Christians, and Muslims would allow us to see multiple meanings in the biblical text. In the university context he examines the possibility of dialogue among academic disciplines that can bring unified wisdom and mutual holistic understanding.

Finally, he commends the friendships in L'Arche communities, where wisdom is characterized by mutual love. Members listen to the cries of each individual—both persons with disabilities and the able-bodied—across faith traditions and people groups. They find joy, celebration, and blessing in life together as they learn to love God for God's sake and love one another for each other's sake. They "re-read" shared scriptures in the context of their spiritual friendship, and this reading makes possible an ecumenical life filled with joy.

The next three books, in their own way, spell out some of these key discernment practices found in *Christian Wisdom*.

In *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls: A Guide to Christian Approaches and Practices* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004, 276 pp., $20.00), editors Gary W. Moon and David G. Benner bring together representatives of seven Christian traditions—Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Reformed, Wesleyan-Holiness, Social Justice, and Pentecostal/Charismatic—to

address the topics of spiritual direction, authentic transformation, indicators of mature spirituality, and the relationships among spiritual direction, psychotherapy, and pastoral counseling. Each writer provides a guide to further readings from his or her tradition. In a second part of the anthology, other writers examine the relationships among the practices of spiritual direction, psychotherapy, and pastoral counseling. The final essay in the book, "Three Voices, One Song," is an extended three-way discussion of a case study by a representative of each of these three soul care-giving disciplines.

In spiritual direction the primary focus should be on God. The director and directee listen together to discern the ways God is moving in their experience.

Moon and Benner commissioned these chapters in response to what they describe as a cry from Christians in all traditions to experience intimacy and friendship with God. The editors' first goal is to help readers "understand and experience more of the journey of authentic transformation," which is "becoming aware that God is everywhere and learning to practice his presence and yield to his transforming grace" (p. 14). Another goal is to begin an interdisciplinary dialogue that will bring clarity and understanding to the process of spiritual formation in each faith tradition.

As they respond to questions posed by the editors, each of the writers in the first section highlights their tradition's distinctive perspectives on spiritual formation and direction. Yet similarities appear that seem to offer common ground. Each one sees the Holy Spirit as the primary spiritual director, teacher, and guide, but each one also longs for human guidance in the journey to better discern the presence and voice of God. Regarding the nature of spiritual maturity, there is a surprising agreement across traditions that the model is Jesus Christ and his way of love—to be spiritually mature is to "put on Christ," to conform oneself to Jesus and bear similar spiritual fruits in one's life.

Clear differences in approach, practice, and ultimate goals emerge in the final discussion of the case study by a spiritual director, pastoral counselor, and psychotherapist. But as each person speaks out of her expertise and responds to the other two, there is a remarkable sense of friendship and collegiality. For instance, psychotherapist Theresa Clement Tisdale tells a colleague she is "struck by what was referred to earlier as harmonies and melodies created by our dialogue. While our voices are distinct, they create a song I found very deep and rich" (p. 236).

Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls encourages us to respond to the cry of the wider Christian faith community for true transformation by

examining our particular traditions—not to erase the important differences among them, but to find commonalities and overarching direction. It promotes dialogue among the three soul care-giving disciplines based on their similar goals of achieving the spiritual well-being that grows from an authentic relationship with God. This book helps us see how soul care is understood and practiced in the larger Christian world and among related disciplines of spiritual direction, pastoral counseling, and psychotherapy.

Jeanette A. Bakke's *Holy Invitations: Exploring Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000, 288 pp., $19.99) illustrates the practice of spiritual direction through a series of dialogues. In the first part she describes the shape and content of spiritual direction and discusses how to select a spiritual director and prepare for direction. Part two is an overview of subjects that are frequently discussed in spiritual direction, while part three speaks to both the benefits and difficulties that arise in the spiritual direction process.

In spiritual direction, Bakke says, the primary focus should be on God. The director and directee listen together not to themselves but for God, in order to discern the ways God is moving in their experience. Rather than talking about themselves, they talk about God. As they become more aware of God in their lives, they can better mirror God's desires for them. This is why Bakke insists that the primary spiritual director is the Holy Spirit.

Bakke distinguishes between constantly turning toward God in the context of faith and listening for God in the context of our life. In the latter case, we may encounter God in ways that surprise and overwhelm us, or discover a deep longing for more of God. Discernment, or wise decision-making, always involves our surrender to God's love. Wise decisions, she concludes, will be congruent with Christ-like attitudes and behaviors, aligned with scriptural teachings and values, grow out of our personal history and relationship with God, and exhibit fruit of the Spirit through transformed relationships with others. As we are open to God's invitation to join his way, we will enjoy peaceful inner stability and authenticity (p. 229).

Marva Dawn's *Joy in Divine Wisdom: Practices of Discernment from Other Cultures and Christian Traditions* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006, 320 pp., $21.95), with its more anecdotal style, employs stories to introduce Christian wisdom practices across cultures. She begins with God's grace, but emphasizes how personal virtues are a means of accepting grace and discerning wisdom.

Dawn suggests that wisdom and discernment develop through an upward spiral of character formation that adds and builds at every turn.

The more we seek these virtues, the easier and more likely it is that we will make choices that reflect Christian values. The more we are able to make godly choices, the more we become people who will discern godly attitudes and habits. The spirals become interwoven when we are part of communities that reflect God's character.

The search for those virtue-forming communities takes the author back into Scripture and to Christian communities of discernment around the world. Dawn is especially critical of North American Christianity for being so culturally infected with individual materialism that uniquely Christian wisdom is rarely inculcated in its church communities.

Integral to this upward spiral of character is the willingness to suffer, a willingness which Dawn understands to be rooted in the character of God. This chosen vulnerability will not be undertaken unless we are willing also to "love God for God's own sake and not for what we can get out of him" (p. 211). The spiral of character and discernment ends in joy and celebration.

Although Dawn tends to speak primarily out of the indicative and imperative mood more familiar to evangelical Christianity, I see several similarities of practice with previous models of discernment: the importance of re-reading Scripture among culturally diverse Christian communities, loving God for God's sake, listening to the cries of suffering and being willing to suffer with others, building character that embodies Christ-like attitudes and choices, and participating in discerning communities that are joyful and can bless others.

None of the four books reviewed here gives a simple model of discernment, but together they give us a clear sense of the identifying characteristics of Christian understanding. Each seeks a model of discernment and Christian wisdom that is ultimately transformative because it is rooted in an awareness of God's certain presence with us.

HELEN H. CEPERO
is Director of Spiritual Formation at North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois.

The Center for Christian Ethics

announces the fourth annual

June 12-13, 2009

Practicing healthcare professionals—physicians, nurses, chaplains, and administrators—will explore pressing moral questions of medicine and healthcare delivery. Distinguished invited ethicists for the conference are Margaret E. Mohrmann, MD (pediatrician, University of Virginia), Timothy Pfanner, MD (gastroenterologist, Temple, TX), S. Kay Toombs (medical ethicist, Waco, TX),and Paul J. Wadell (theologian, St. Norbert College).

Visit the conference Web site

www.ChristianEthics.ws

to download a registration form and view the conference schedule.

The Hillcrest Health System is accredited by the Texas Medical Association (TMA) to provide continuing medical education for physicians.

Hillcrest Health System designates this educational activity for a maximum of 10 AMA PRA Category 1 Credits™. Physicians should only claim credit commensurate with the extent of their participation in the activity.

Editors

ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ
General Editor

Bob Kruschwitz is Director of the Center for Christian Ethics and Professor of Philosophy at Baylor University. He convenes the editorial team to plan the themes for the issues of *Christian Reflection*, then he commissions the lead articles and supervises the formation of each issue. Bob holds the Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Texas at Austin and the B.A. from Georgetown College. You may contact him by phone at 254-710-3774 or e-mail at Robert_Kruschwitz@baylor.edu.

HEIDI J. HORNIK
Art Editor

Heidi Hornik is Professor of Art History at Baylor University. With the M.A. and Ph.D. in Art History from The Pennsylvania State University and the B.A. from Cornell University, her special interest is art of the Italian Renaissance. With Mikeal C. Parsons she coedited *Interpreting Christian Art* and coauthored the three volume *Illuminating Luke*. Her current book, *Michele Tosini and the Ghirlandaio Workshop in Cinquecento Florence*, will be published this year. You may contact her by phone at 254-710-4548 or e-mail at Heidi_Hornik@baylor.edu.

NORMAN WIRZBA
Review Editor

Norman Wirzba is Research Professor of Theology, Ecology, and Rural Life at Duke Divinity School. He is the author of *The Paradise of God* and *Living the Sabbath* and editor of *The Essential Agrarian Reader*. You may contact him by phone at 919-660-3400 or e-mail at nwirzba@div.duke.edu.

WILLIAM D. SHIELL
Proclamation Editor

William D. Shiell is Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee. He has served on leading committees of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. After receiving the B.A. in religion from Samford University, he earned the M.Div. in theology from George W. Truett Theological Seminary and Ph.D. in religion from Baylor University. He is the author of *Reading Acts: The Lector and the Early Christian Audience* (2005) and *Sessions with Matthew* (2008). His weekly sermons are published online in audio format at *www.fbcknox.org*. You may contact him by phone at 865-546-9661 or e-mail at shiell@fbcknox.org.

Contributors

HELEN H. CEPERO
Director of Spiritual Formation at North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois

THOMAS S. HIBBS
Distinguished Professor of Ethics & Culture and Dean of the Honors College at Baylor University in Waco, Texas

DAVID LYLE JEFFREY
Distinguished Professor of Literature and Humanities in the Honors College of Baylor University in Waco, Texas

KURT KAISER
Songwriter and composer, Waco, TX

JONATHAN KRUSCHWITZ
M.Div. student at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond in Richmond, Virginia

ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ
Director, Center for Christian Ethics, and Professor of Philosophy, Baylor University

JEANIE MILEY
Writer and spiritual retreat leader in Houston, Texas

DAVID G. MILLER
Associate Professor and Interim Chairman of English at Mississippi College in Clinton, Mississippi

WILLIAM R. O'BRIEN
Director of BellMitra Associates in Frisco, Texas

RUSSELL RENO
Professor of Theological Ethics at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska

EMILY RODGERS
Graduate student in Student Affairs Administration at Baylor University in Waco, Texas and Trustee of Brooks Residential College

HALEY STEWART
Publication Specialist, Project Coordinator, Center for Christian Ethics, Baylor University

ROBERT W. WALL
Paul T. Walls Professor of Scripture and Wesleyan Studies at Seattle Pacific University in Seattle, Washington

JONATHAN R. WILSON
Pioneer McDonald Professor of Theology at Carey Theological College in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada