

❖ 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.

O E C U M E N I U S (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.

M I C H A E L D . M c C U L L A R, *"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.

H O W A R D B A K E R, *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.

J U L I A N O F N O R W I C H (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 consummated.... 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)