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THE MOTIVATION TO DO GOOD DEEDS AS REVEALED IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

GEOFFREY HUNTTING

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Referee: Dr. Matitiahu Tsevat

DIGEST

Introduction - The verses of the Book of Proverbs present the reader with a number of contrasting styles and messages relating to the ways human beings should conduct their lives on Earth. It is the purpose of this thesis to examine the motivation to do good deeds as revealed in the book and to see whether the contradictory themes relating to that motivation can be reconciled.

Chapter I - The book of Proverbs imparts at least two types of advice: one related solely to living everyday life and the other relating to God's moral and ethical laws. In the verses relating to first type of advice, often referred to as old wisdom because of their similarity to Egyptian Instruction, the consequences of either following or not following the advice flows directly from the act itself and seems to represent some natural order on Earth. In those other verses which are oriented to God, however, it is God himself who administers either reward or punishment. The chapter discusses whether and how both systems of authority can be reconciled.

Chapter II - In describing both proper and improper behavior, most of the verses use one set of character or behavior traits or another: most commonly, wise and foolish in old wisdom and righteous and wicked in God-oriented. The chapter examines whether and how both can be viewed as a unit.

Chapter III - A majority of verses, including some God-

oriented ones, link proper behavior with a system of reward and punishment while most of the God-oriented verses speak only of pleasing or displeasing God. Can both motivations be reconciled?

Chapter IV - The chapter examines how the early Reformed Protestant sects applied the verses of Proverbs to life and whether they were able to reconcile the contradictory themes present in the book. Weber's work relating to the Protestant work ethic reflects the confusion between the glorification of God through everyday work and the receipt of material reward as a sign of God's favor.

Conclusion - Present in the book of Proverbs are two distinct approaches to living a successful life: one God-oriented and one Earth-oriented. While both remain separate and identifiable, there is evidence in the verses that the contemporaries of the book did not view the two systems as contradictory. Rather, the varied messages were viewed as cumulative and equally valid. The difficulty in practically applying these principles, however, is evidenced in the development of the Protestant work ethic. The means of doing deeds became confused with the goal of glorifying God, and the material reward for the doing those deeds became the measure of God's approval.

He who strives to do good and kind deeds attains life, success and honor.

Proverbs 21.21

Dedicated to David Kittner and Emanuel S. Kardon, men for whom the doing of good deeds is a part of life itself.

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INTRODUCTION

The verses which comprise the book of Proverbs represent a variety of literary genres, including sayings, instruction, and acrostic poems, all commonly found among the writings grouped under the broad heading of wisdom literature.[1] That variety of genres is one reason why most Biblical scholars have concluded that the work contains contributions from more than one author, writing over a number of years and perhaps centuries, and representing several different Near Eastern cultures. In fact, it is probable that much of the book already existed in the form of old sayings passed orally from generation to generation among the peoples of the area long before any court scribe or wisdom instructor ever thought of writing them down.

It is no wonder therefore that the verses in Proverbs cover a wide range of subjects and express varied and sometimes seemingly contradictory attitudes toward life on Earth and the relationship between humankind and God. The diversity in the subject matter of the book is obvious even from the most cursory reading. Where many verses dwell in some detail on the necessity for humans to follow the dictates of God's teachings for both their physical and spiritual well

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[1] Roland E. Murphy, Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, Esther, vol. XIII of The Forms of the Old Testament Literature, ed. Rolf Knierim and Gene M. Tucker. 24 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), pp. 50-51.

being, others, perhaps a majority, dispense only the most practical advice relating to the everyday aspects of life and are devoid of what William McKane calls "God language or ...other items of vocabulary expressive of a moralism which derives from Yahweistic piety."[2] Thus in Proverbs 3.5-10, God's authority forms the core of a successful life on Earth:

> Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely upon your own insight. (3.5)
>
> In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will straighten your paths. (3.6)

In one place, Proverbs 3.9-10, the Book not only uses the general God language that characterizes this classification of verse but also offers a specific material reward in exchange for compliance with God's wishes. As commentators have observed, these verses are further distinguishable because they apparently make a cultic demand:[3]

> Honor the Lord with your wealth, and with the first fruits of all your produce; (3.9)
>
> So your granaries will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine. (3:10)

In contrast to the verses above, however, much of the book concerns itself not so much with a relationship with God, but rather with advice that is limited to life in this world.

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[2] William McKane, Proverbs, A New Approach (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1970), p. 11.

[3] Ibid., p. 293.

A common theme relates to the virtue of hard work, or conversely the perils of sloth, thus:

> I passed by the field of a lazy man, and by the vineyard of one lacking sense. (24.30)
>
> And behold, thistles had sprung up all over it, chickweed covered its surface and its stone enclosing wall had been allowed to fall down. (24.31)
>
> I looked, I reflected, I observed, I took instruction. (24.32)
>
> A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of hands to lie down. (24.33)
>
> And poverty comes to you like a vagrant, and want like a beggar. (24.34)

Most of the verses mandate certain behavior which will ensure the reader's success or, conversely, enjoin those acts which will condemn him to failure. Some verses while not prescribing a particular behavior, leave no doubt as to what the proper course of action is, or is not, and the consequences of either obedience or disobedience. In verses 24.30-34, above, the punishment for sloth is clearly poverty and want, but where that punishment originates is not mentioned. It is likely, however, that poverty is seen as the natural result of sloth, and, therefore, the verse clearly recognizes the existence of a natural order which functions independently on Earth without any direct intervention by God.

The consequences of success or failure vary from verse to

verse, but invariably the actor is affected either physically or materially in this world as a result of his conduct. This is also true even of many verses dealing with a purely religious theme, as evidenced by verses 3.9-10, above. In that case, the one who follows the proper rite of dedicating the first fruits to God, will reap the benefits of a full storehouse of produce. That verse implies that the benefit is bestowed directly by God and goes beyond merely pleasing God. Similarly, in other verses, God also demonstrates his disfavor directly. This general proposition that God acts directly and not through an intermediate Earthly order is stated clearly in verses 24.11-12:

> If you refrain from rescuing those who are sent to death and those who are about to be slain; (24.11)
>
> For if you say, "we knew nothing of this," won't the one who weighs hearts take note, and the one who keeps watch over your soul not know, and render to each man according to his deeds? (24.12)

The book is more specific in verses 22.22-23:

> Do not rob a poor man just because he is poor, and do not crush a needy man in court; (22.22)
>
> For God will plead their case, and rob the life of those who rob them. (22.23)

Whether the punishment or reward is given directly through God or as a result of a natural order of things, all the above rewards or punishments are closely related to the

original act. Thus, while the natural order punishes sloth with poverty and want, God repays the one who properly dedicates his first fruits to God, with an abundant harvest. With regard to unethical or immoral behavior, however, the picture is less clear. In the examples above, God intervenes directly to punish the oppressors of the poor, but the severity of the punishment seems to exceed the nature of the crime. Thus, the one who cheats the poor man in court will not merely lose his ill-begotten gains, but perhaps his life as well.

It may be that the natural order cannot be relied upon to ensure ethical or moral behavior. If, as is discussed below, the authors and editors of Proverbs discerned a certain natural order merely by observing life around them, they may also have observed gaps in that order which required direct intervention by God. This is especially true in the area of ethics and morals. After all, where they could see that hard work invariably brought direct material rewards, they must also have noticed that such was not necessarily the case of the upright who are poor. Further, one can only speculate as to what the wisdom instructors who were themselves from the upper echelons of society might have thought of the prospects of a natural order taking care of the poor and the oppressed. It may be that they would have preferred an intervention by God over an uprising by the oppressed themselves. Whatever the reason, God seems to take personal charge for these kinds

of offenses, rather than leaving them to a natural course of events on Earth.

In some cases, it is not clear what the punishment is exactly for a particular type of conduct, or who administers that punishment. Thus in chapter 5, verses 3-5, the consequences for a man who becomes involved with a foreign woman are described in vague terms that may include both an Earthly and divine form of punishment:

> For the lips of a strange woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; (5.3)
>
> But in the end she is as bitter as wormwood, as sharp as a two-edged sword. (5.4)
>
> Her feet go down to death
> her steps grasp at Sheol. (5.5)

On one hand the punishment for one who becomes involved in such a forbidden relationship carries with it the direct punishment of living with a disagreeable person. But the references to She'ol and death seem to indicate that the act involves divine sanction as well. Scholars disagree concerning the significance of this. There are those for whom the foreign or strange woman is associated with the pagan cults and, because of the references to She'ol, may refer to the Babylonian goddess Kilili who brings destruction to her lovers.[4] Death would then come from the woman herself, and

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[4] Ibid., pp. 287, 314.

could perhaps still fall under the realm of natural order. Similarly, this death, as related by the verse, may represent instead a social death experienced by those who are ostracized by society as a result of illicit relationships. However, the frequency with which death as a punishment is associated in the book with a more direct involvement by God, leaves open the possibility that as with the oppressors of the poor, God tends to this type of offender directly.

Nevertheless, it is clear that according to some of the verses, punishment or reward comes to the actor in this world as a direct response to his conduct, and in those cases, an order seems to be at work, answering virtue with material success and sin with material ruin. In other verses, however, the consequences of a particular act are less clear, and seem to leave the possibility open for punishment not from some natural order of justice functioning on Earth, but rather through direct intervention of God. The question becomes whether these seemingly contradictory messages as to the source and nature of reward and punishment for human conduct on Earth as expressed in the book of Proverbs can be reconciled. Is there one system of authority headed by God and governing every human act on Earth, or are there at least two authorities: one functioning on Earth governing what we might call every day conduct, and a second, operated directly by God and relating only to ethical and moral matters? Is it possible to reconcile the existence of these two systems of

authority which appear contradictory to the modern reader of the book?

Not surprisingly, many scholars have found it impossible to reconcile the diverse messages contained in Proverbs and have instead chosen to treat each identifiable part as a separate work. This has been done in numerous ways by several different authors. Perhaps the most obvious division, especially for modern scholars, is to divide the passages of the book between secular and religious, or more appropriately, between those verses that relate to the relationship between humans and God, and those which merely prescribe a model of conduct for life on Earth without any reference to God at all. Many have concluded that what was originally an essentially secular or utilitarian work was amended later to include God and God-related references by which the redactors of the book hoped to bring the final work into line with the Israelite religion.

There is general agreement among scholars that the first nine chapters of the book serve as an introduction to the series of collections which comprise chapters 10 - 31, and many have attempted to identify the source and dates of authorship for this and other portions of the Book according to the varying styles in which each was written.[5] Most notably, as William McKane and R. N. Whybray have indicated, the similarity between chapters 1-9, and works from Egyptian

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[5] Ibid., p. 49.

Instruction have led many to conclude that those chapters were, at least in part, borrowed from that culture. But while conceding differences between the first nine chapters and the rest of the book, the contrast between religious and secular language is no more characteristic of the first nine chapters than the other twenty-two, and while there seems to be more frequent references to God in the first nine chapters, there is little if any evidence that these chapters in the form that we know them today are any more in line with the Israelite religion described elsewhere in the Bible than those that follow.

McKane agrees that chapters 1-9 constitute a largely separate work which is comprised of pieces which can generally be described as "Instruction."[6] However, he rejects the notion that this group of verses is any more homogeneous than the others or that their authorship was necessarily from a later date:

> I am not concerned to show that the "Collection" was completed at an earlier date than these arguments indicate, but only that in so far as 1-9 reproduces the form of the Instruction it need not be late for that reason. My account of this section will reveal an unevenness of the contents of those parts which are strictly Instruction. Most inculcate earthy and hard wisdom and have nothing in them that would stamp them as distinctively Israelite, certainly not as Yahweistic... (3.1-12, 21-26, 31-35). There are one or two passages which are concerned particularly with anti-social behavior (3.27-30; 4.14f.; also 6.12-19 which is not Instruction) and

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[6] Ibid., p. 7.

so the three classes of material which appear in the sentence literature(i.e. chs. 10-31) are also present in 1-9.

McKane divides what he calls the sentence literature of the book, i.e. those pieces generally found in chapters 10-31, into three classifications. The first classification of verse, "Class A," forms the framework of what McKane calls "old wisdom" and is concerned with the education of the individual for a successful life. These verses lack the God-oriented or pietistic language which McKane asserts is distinctively Israelite. In "Class B," however, the center of concern is the community, and the sentences are of a negative character and describe the harmful effects of various manifestations of anti-social behavior. Finally, "Class C" sentences are identified by the God-oriented language identified above, which, according to McKane, represent a later reinterpretation of the "Class A" material.[7]

McKane refers specifically to the "antithesis of tzadik vs. rasha" as "...evidence of (this) Yahweistic reinterpretation of old wisdom and as evidence that the wisdom sentence had become an instrument for inculcating Yahweisitc dogma." He concludes then that the class C sentences give expression to a doctrine of theodicy.[8] To McKane, the

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[7] Ibid., pp. 10-11.

[8] Ibid., p. 15-16.

addition of the tsadik-rasha antithesis to the verses in Proverbs which he would characterize as "class A," or "old wisdom," represented an attempt to portray an ideal, through which the authors sought to present a just God presiding over a just order which rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. This, he believes, was in contrast to the old wisdom sentences which had parallels in Egyptian Instruction and which prescribed a mode of human conduct only in the context of a natural order governing life on Earth without divine interference. That order, which is encompassed in the word ma'at, is a concept which evolved over centuries in Egypt and which, therefore, defies exact definition.[9]

To the Egyptians, all existence was governed by a divine order extending beyond the world of man and into the realm of the gods who themselves were subject to it. Ma'at, which in some sentences approximates justice or right, but in others is personified as a goddess, is the basis for all society, and operates objectively by rewarding the wise and good and punishing the foolish and evil:

> I have spent 110 years in life, which the king has given me, and with rewards beyond those of them that have gone before, because I did right (maat) for kings.(Ptahhotep)[10]
>
> ...evil indeed wins wealth, but the

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[9] R. N. Whybray, Wisdom in Proverbs (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1965), pp. 55-56.

[10] Ibid., p. 56.

> strength of truth (ma'at) is that it endures...(Ptahhotep 5)[11]

To McKane, the presence of the God-oriented verses in Proverbs contradicts the old wisdom reminiscent of Egyptian Instruction which reflect this silent omnipresent order. U. Skladny, however, rejected McKane's views relating to a doctrine of theodicy in Proverbs. Instead, Skladny spoke of a character-consequence nexus and, according to him, while "deed and consequence are intrinsically related, chapters 10-15 treat not so much the actions of righteous and wicked as their settled attitudes and consequences which can almost be regarded as part and parcel to these attitudes."[12] Skladny observed that there were some sentences in which God intervened to bring about the consequences of a particular act, but persisted in maintaining that there was no stated dogma in the book of recompense and retribution. In contrast to McKane, Skladny believed that the tsadik-rasha antithesis, in fact, reflected a belief in an imminent order and that this material, far from contradicting Egyptian wisdom and its doctrine of ma'at, was conceptually related to it. [13]

H. Gese, took issue with this later view. McKane describes Gese's views as follows:

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[11] Ibid., p. 55.

[12] McKane, Proverbs, p. 20.

[13] Ibid.

> The distinctive element in Gese's account is that he presupposes a secondary Yahweistic reinterpretation to have operated on certain of the verses in which there is an explicit mention of Yahweh's action, and that with this reinterpretation the sentences are no longer compatible with the Egyptian Maat. According to Gese, these sentences (10.22: 16.1,9,33; 20.24; 21.1, 30,31; 25.2) emphasize the freedom of Yahweh from any metaphysical order and are evidence of a tension between Yahweism and old wisdom which ultimately precipitates the crisis of wisdom in Job and Ecclesiates."[14]

Other scholars have been critical of this view as being too narrow.[15] McKane, however, finds in the introduction of the tsadik-rasha antithesis, a flight by later writers from the more realistic preoccupation of the early wisdom with the empirical truth of life on earth into what he described as a "pietistic Yahweism."

McKane's view is not inconsistent with those of earlier scholars who distinguished between an earlier, fundamentally secular form of wisdom imported from Egypt, and later additions which were of a more religious nature. O. S. Rankin quotes Gunkel in regard to this supposition:

> With the exception of the teachings of Meri-kare and of Amen-emope the wisdom of Egypt was prevailingly secular. Gunkel is of the opinion that "Hebrew proverb-literature ...was in its beginning altogether secular, and it was not the reward of the righteous man but the recompense of wisdom, that is, of worldly wisdom, which was preached.

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[14] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

[15] H. Gemser, Spruche Salomos, Handbuch zum Alten Testament, 1937, p. 8, cited by William McKane, Proverbs, A New Approach (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1970) p. 15.

> The religious motive was introduced later, and the belief in the worth of wisdom was united with the belief in God as Judge. Thus at length the idea of divine reward and retribution became fundamental to the teaching of wisdom, and hence the dual aspect of this wisdom, in its ernest piety, and its secular utilitarianism."[16]

Rankin questions this theory that the presence of a religious sanction for wrong doing represents a later addition to the Book. He observes that even among Egyptian wisdom literature, there is the Wisdom of Men-em-ope, which "... is remarkable for its religious tone." While conceding the secular nature of much of the book of Proverbs which "...was no doubt due to contact with the oriental wisdom writings...the religious element in Prov. 10-22 does not appear to have been woven in, or tacked on later, as an afterthought."[17] Rankin does concede, however, the possibility that the two branches of wisdom may have been produced by two separate schools which functioned in Israelite society at the same time. Rankin fails, however, to recognize the possibility that the contradictions of religion and wisdom may have been present even before the literature was imported from Egypt, and his argument does little to dispel the observation that the large groups of verses in the work as we know it today remain conceptually irreconcilable.

Despite the disagreements among scholars as to their

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[16] O. S. Rankin, Israel's Wisdom Literature (London: Morrison and Gibbs Ltd., 1936), pp. 68-69.

[17] Ibid.

significance, all agree that there are at least two contrasting types of wisdom sentences that comprise the book of Proverbs. One type, more typically found in verses 10-29, deal only with principals for man to follow in living successfully on Earth. These portions, characterized by Gerhard von Rad also as the old wisdom, while not making a theological statement, convey to us that an order exists on Earth, and that by acquiring wisdom, mankind can to some degree learn to function successfully by the rules governing that order. In contrast to this, the second type does make a theological statement, probably best expressed in Proverbs 9.10:

> The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, and knowledge of holy matters is understanding. (9.10)

Although this second category of sentence adds the God language which characterizes it, it does not necessarily contradict the concept of order described in the old wisdom. Rather, concepts relating to God are brought into that order, as the most important aspect of wisdom. As important, the very concept of a wisdom that is available to, and which must be acquired by individuals on Earth is present in both types of wisdom sentence. So although both types are distinguishable by the presence or lack of any reference to God, they both recognize the existence of something called wisdom which because it is not given directly to human beings

at birth, must be obtained by them from the wisdom teacher. Further, while one type of sentence may have been developed later than the other, or perhaps contemporarily by a different school, they may not represent contradictory perceptions of reality. Then, as now, humankind is confronted with the reality of life on Earth, and that reality is characterized by a readily discernible order. In the same way, God and religion were a part of life, as well. The presence of both themes in Proverb probably would not have seemed inconsistent to the collectors of the wisdom sentences comprising it.

Von Rad does, however, describe a change in Israel's perception of reality: a humanization process, i. e. the beginning of a rational search for knowledge, which gave rise to the development of attitudes expressed in the old wisdom.[18] He speculates that such a movement must have been preceded by a disintegration of an understanding of reality "which we can describe in a felicitous expression of M. Buber's, as "pan-sacralism.""[19] He describes the earlier perception of reality as follows:

> ...there are also narratives which stand wholly on the earlier side of this great intellectual upheaval. We are afforded interesting insights by the comprehensive narrative which depicts one stage of Saul's military involvement with the Philistines(ISam. 13f.). If one follows the fairly

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[18] Gerhard von Rad, Wisdom in Israel (New York: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 58.

[19] Ibid.

> complicated course of events, it becomes immediately clear that the narrator brings every decisive event, military advantages and setbacks as well as all human conflicts, into association with the world of the sacral and the ritual: the vow of abstention which Saul imposes on the warriors, with the total cursing of any transgressor, the obtaining of a sign through Jonathan, the "divine panic" which strikes the Philistine camp, the overhasty eating of ritually unclean meat on the part of exhausted soldiers, the "redemption" of Jonathan from the death penalty by a substitute, and much more besides. One can see that the military activity takes place in a thoroughly sacral realm of ideas. Without question we are dealing with a very old fashioned faith which believed that every event was encompassed by rites and sacral ordinances, and for this reason we can call it pan-sacral faith....

Von Rad, however, sees evidence of a radical departure from this way of thinking, in other parts of the Bible:

> ...in the understanding of reality, in the whole sphere of comprehension, some decisive change has taken place, particularly with Solomon...What a worldly sphere it is in which men play their parts here!...Events are determined by the political will of a great king, but equally also by his weaknesses, by ambition, political intrigues and love affairs. They seem to unfold in accordance with a closely forged chain of causality, with a law which lies within the circumstances and within men themselves.[20]

With the departure from pan-sacralism, the fundamental perception of reality and the world around had been altered. First, a new emphasis was placed on the value of worldly things, and secondly, once the events of the world were

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[20] Ibid., pp. 58-59.

observed, there came some recognition that the world was governed by some kind of order. Although, as von Rad observed, there is no express formulation of a "determinism," "(n)evertheless, the experience of inherent determinism and of intrinsic value is everywhere present in the sentences of old wisdom. Wherever it teaches the recognition of orders - and this it does in abundance - it has already objectified an inner experience of the reality of the world."[21]

What emerges from this new approach to the reality represented by the wisdom teachers is not accompanied by a parallel decline in religious outlook, however. Instead, what we find is a reconciliation between the two. The wisdom literature blends a type of determinism with a continued belief in the power of God. However, that power was seen in the context of a new approach to reality. While this new approach gave rise to an investigation into the most mundane aspects of life, it never tried to separate from life, man's experience with and his perception of God. When man's perception of life around him yielded the existence of an order, it was only assumed that God was the creator and head of that order. For those scholars who would assume that from the lack of reference to God that authors of those sentences were secularists, von Rad cautions that modern notions of religious-secular tension were foreign to the those living when Proverbs was written:

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[21] Ibid.

> ...it can be categorically stated that for Israel there was only one world of experience and that this was apperceived by means of a perceptive apparatus in which rational perceptions and religious perceptions were not differentiated. Nor was this any different in the case of the prophets. The reality surrounding Israel was much more comprehensive than we would imagine, either in political or socio-ethical or any other kind of terms. The neighboring nations, the great empires, the political and strategic events were certainly seen clearly by the prophets, even more clearly than by the majority of their contemporaries, but this was still not the full reality in which Israel found herself. Just as real for them was the burden of guilt, the involvement in evil and in disobedience and the consequences of this; and as real as anything could be was Yahweh's word which thrust deep into Israel's life as both a destructive and a constructive force. All this lay on one and the same level of man's potential experience. One can, therefore only warn against trying to see the specific factor in wisdom simply as the manifestation of a rationality which was independent of faith.[22]

Perhaps it is true that the editors of Proverbs did not divide life into religious and secular or utilitarian spheres, but while this explains why they may have attempted to bring the imported old wisdom into line with Israel's religion, it does not tell us how successful they actually were. The question remains as to whether the book presents the reader with one consistent system which prescribes a singular motivation to do good deeds and avoid doing bad ones, or whether the book contains one or more hopelessly irreconcilable approaches. If the editors of what we know today as the book of Proverbs were attempting to fuse the

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[22] Ibid., pp. 61-62.

dominion of God and a natural order on Earth into one system of reward and punishment for human conduct, what form does that system take? And if a fusion has taken place linking the most mundane human acts on Earth with God's authority, what is the significance of that fusion? Is the motivation to act wisely with regard to everyday life as great as the motivation to ensure that one's conduct is in compliance with God's moral or ethical guidelines? And is the motivation to do good deeds primarily for the purpose of obtaining the material reward promised by some verses or merely to please God, as reflected in others? If there are two separate messages regarding such motivation, can they be reconciled, and if not, is one dominant?

These questions will be examined in the context of three patterns of contradiction apparent in the book of Proverbs. Those contradictions relate to the nature of the authority or authorities dispensing reward and punishment for human conduct; the identity of the tsadik and rasha, that is, whether they are comparable to the chacham and kesil, and the authority to which each is subject; and, finally, the nature of the reward or punishment which the authority metes out to those actors.

The first of these patterns relates to the presence in the book of two separate sources of authority. While those verses that can be characterized as God-oriented present us with an order headed and administered by God directly, others

which deal primarily with everyday conduct and which have been described by some as old wisdom, prescribe advice only in the context of some natural order under which each human act elicits a response either in reward or punishment. How do the two orders relate to each other?

A second contradiction relates to the descriptions of the actors who are subject to the different authorities described. While the God-oriented verses employ characters which are described in terms of wicked or righteous, the old wisdom verses speak in terms of the wise and the simple or the slothful and the diligent. Must one necessarily be both wise and righteous to please God, or is it necessary to achieve the status of both using completely separate criteria?

A third contradiction is evident in the different ways in which reward or punishment is administered. In virtually all of the old wisdom verses, as well as a number of God-oriented ones, every act carries with it some material reward or punishment. In contrast to these, however, most of the God-oriented verses speak in terms of conduct which is either pleasing or displeasing to God. In view of this, is the motivation to act properly for the purpose of pleasing God, to gain the material reward promised in the vast majority of verses, or both. Are these two motivations reconcilable?

The fourth and final chapter is for purpose of examining how one religious community for whom the book of Proverbs represented a central role, especially in homily, dealt with

the contradictions relating to the motivation to good deeds, discussed in the first three chapters. The early Reformed Protestant sects, most notably the Calvinists in continental Europe and their counterparts in England and America, the Puritans, incorporated much of the hardheaded wisdom of Proverbs regarding the virtues of hard work and moderation in life style into their religious doctrine. This phenomenon has been examined by a number of sociologists. Most notable among them was Max Weber who attached great importance to the formation of the Protestant work ethic and its possible role in the rise of a profit-based modern capitalism in the economies of Western Europe and America in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries. From the works of Weber and others, as well as the writings of the Calvinists and Puritans, themselves, it may be possible to draw some conclusions as to whether and how the contradictory concepts in Proverbs can be reconciled.

I

God and the Order of Wisdom on Earth: Reconciling Two Systems of Authority in Proverbs

In the book of Proverbs, most of the verses, or in some places, groups of verses, give advice relating to how human beings should conduct themselves in life. Depending upon whether the particular type of behavior is recommended or enjoined, the advice is coupled with an appropriate reward or punishment. As stated above, some verses are based expressly on God's authority and almost always deal with ethical or moral matters. Still others make mention of neither God nor any matter relating to God but relate rather to living a successful and prosperous life on Earth. These latter verses imply the existence of some natural authority which governs human life without any direct intervention by God. Can the reader through examination of the book of Proverbs discern a relationship between the two types of authority, and are they reconcilable? What is the relationship between God and this Earth-centered authority; does God ultimately and effecttively preside over it?

Classifying all of the verses of Proverbs along the lines set forth above are difficult if not impossible. While in many verses it is clear that the advice given is either expressly God-oriented or solely practical, others, perhaps

even a majority, are less obvious. For example, while some verses do not mention God at all, they do discuss the moral and ethical issues typically addressed in the God-oriented verses; and while many scholars believe that the more practical verses have their antecedents in Egyptian Instruction, even that literature, while primarily devoid of references to a deity, does often contain the very piety that would tend to place it in the God-oriented rather than practical type of verse. In many instances, therefore, verses cannot be classified by using these guidelines.

As discussed above, representative of the verses that elude classification are those relating to an ishah zarah [foreign woman]. Should the reader avoid her merely because God forbids such a relationship or rather because wisdom dictates that such relationships lead to disaster? It is difficult to judge from the text.

In a similar vein, it is not always easy to classify a verse according to the stated motivation for following the advice set forth in it. Many verses are clear in stating the reward for compliance with the advice set forth either in terms of material gain or, in contrast to this, in terms of merely being in compliance with God's wishes. Others, however, are less clear in this regard. Again, the verses relating to an ishah zarah are a good example. In at least one instance, punishment is described very practically in

terms of vengeance by the woman's husband.[23] However, in most of verses dealing with this subject, the punishment for involvement with the ishah zarah or nochriah is stated in terms of death or She'ol. While this can be seen in material terms as the ultimate punishment, it is also the sanction for violating God's laws. For these reasons, I have chosen not to classify the majority of these verses in either category.

In addition, many verses, especially those in the first nine chapters of the book, cannot be viewed individually and can only be considered as a group. Again, the verses relating to an ishah zarah, offer the best example. Very rarely is that subject addressed by only one isolated verse. Instead, advice relating to her is almost always imparted in long discussions covering a series of related verses. It is therefore impossible to reach anything other than general conclusions as to whether one theme or another is dominant in Proverbs based upon an individual verse count. A similar problem stems from the fact that certain subjects and even verses are repeated in Proverbs, making any conclusion based upon numbers of verses difficult.

Even with these caveats, however, it is still possible to show the extent of the diversity in the messages present in Proverbs. Approximately 44% of the verses of the book deal with only the most practical type of advice without any reference to God or God's ethical and moral rules. Another

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[23] Prov. 6.29-35.

26%, are expressly God-oriented. The balance are difficult to classify one way or the other. Conceding some variance in the numbers, it is still safe to conclude that neither type of verse is dominant in the book, and it is impossible to classify Proverbs in that way.

The greatest concentration of groupings of verses are located in Chapters 1-9, where they include the vast majority of verses. They are also located in Chapters 22-23, and to a less extent in Chapters 24-30, but those are, for the most part still dominated by the single verse expressing one independent thought.

In Chapters 1-9, classification of two thirds of the groupings of verses is difficult either because of the subject matter itself or because they contain a mixture of old wisdom and God-oriented verses. Of the verses that can be classified, two thirds are clearly old wisdom and carry some material return while one third are clearly God-oriented without any utilitarian message. In the balance of the verses, the groupings are overwhelmingly old wisdom.

By bunching these verses and counting them each as a unit, one could conclude that the make up of the verses is more even balanced between old wisdom and God-oriented. Nevertheless, we are still left with the conclusion that neither classification is dominant.

Not surprisingly, therefore, Biblical scholars present us with conflicting views as to whether any reconciliation

between the diverse parts of the book can be accomplished. In some verses, the success of a human being during his lifetime is expressly tied to his compliance with God's wishes. Thus:

> The fear of the Lord tends to life and he who dwells in it will be satisfied and will not be visited with evil. (19.23)

In the same vein, other verses attribute punishment for evil directly to God:

> Do not rob the poor, because they are poor, nor oppress the afflicted at the gate, (22.22)
>
> For the Lord will plea their cause and rob the life of those who rob them. (22.23)

In others the prayer of the righteous is answered while God's protection is removed from the wicked.

> The Lord is far from the wicked but hears the prayer of the righteous. (15.29)

In contrast, however, many of the verses in the book seem to have very little to do with God at all, but rather impart only practical advice seemingly with little value judgment beyond the fact that a certain type of conduct either will or will not bring material success or failure.

The most common advice throughout the Book is that hard work will bring material rewards and security while laziness will bring poverty and ruin:

> Go to the ant, you sluggard: consider her ways, and be wise. (6.6)
>
> She who has no guide, overseer or ruler, (6.7)
>
> Provides her bread in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. (6.8)
>
> How long will you sleep, o sluggard; when will you arise out of that sleep? (6.9)
>
> A little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep, (6.10)
>
> So shall poverty come like a marauder and your want like an armed man. (6.11)

Sometimes the advice is more specific, often in the area of human relations:

> There are friends who merely pretend friendship, and there is a true friend who is closer than a brother. (18.24)

And many of the verses relate to economic and business matters:

> The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a servant to the lender. (22.7)

Other verses relate to members of society's elite in the management of their underlings:

> As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him. (10.26)

Scholars, while differing on many aspects of Proverbs, seem to agree on the basic premise that the book contains two

systems of authority to which humans on Earth are subject. One authority rests directly in God and is expressed in those sentences which are characterized by God-centered language discussed above. God may respond to human conduct by bestowing favor, dispensing punishment, or by merely being pleased or displeased, but whatever the response, the authority in these verses rests in God.

The second type of authority is expressed in those verses that have be described as the old wisdom in which a natural order functions on Earth without the express assistance of divine intervention. The term "old wisdom" reflects the conclusions reached by numerous scholars that those sections which impart only practical advice and are devoid of references to God or God-oriented piety are older than those sections which do contain such God-oriented or pietistic themes. The use of that term in this essay, however, is not to imply agreement with such conclusions relating to the dating of such sections but merely to distinguish them from the other verses of the book. In addition, the use of "old wisdom" reflects the necessity to exercise caution in regard to words such as "utilitarian" or "secular" which imply a state of mind for the authors of those verses, whenever they may have lived, which mistakenly imply that they were not religious men. As was asserted above, such a secularity in the modern sense of the word would have been unlikely in those times.

Even assuming, however, some religiosity for even the authors of the old wisdom, the thematic differences between verses are clear evidence that what we know today as the book of Proverbs represents the final stage of a merger in which contrasting sections were fused together into one work. Most agree that the editors who produced the final text of the book tried to bring both systems into line with each other and with Israel's religion, but prefer to stress the contrasts in the various themes in the text rather than to evaluate the nature and success of the redactors' attempt at constructing one unified God-centered system of authority. However, in evaluating the proposition that there exists in Proverbs one unified system of authority linking God to the most mundane human conduct, it is first necessary to determine how such a system may be construed from the text.

In fact, it is difficult to overlook the obvious presence of the contrasting themes in the book, each presenting its own distinct approach toward an order governing human life on Earth. Even within the context of what has been called old wisdom, there are signs of at least two distinct genres of literature. R. N. Whybray found in the first nine chapters alone, evidence of an original work similar to Egyptian Instruction in which even wisdom itself did not play an important part. In that earlier work the wisdom instructor laid down the basic rules necessary for the student to live a successful life, but with little reference to either Wisdom or

certainly God.[24]

To the original work, according to Whybray, pieces were later added introducing wisdom as a basic concept equated with the words of the wisdom instructor. As Whybray states, "...in some of these passages wisdom is represented as an object of infinite value to be obtained at all costs..."[25]

Thus:

> Receive my instruction and not silver, and knowledge over choice gold; (8.10)
>
> For wisdom is better than rubies and nothing to be desired can be compared to it. (8.11)

In still other sections, wisdom is "... personified and portrayed as a female figure, sometimes as a teacher and sometimes as a bride, who offers the secret of life to any young man who will accept her invitation."[26] Thus:

> Wisdom cries aloud in the streets, she raises her voice in public places. (1.20)

Later, again according to Whybray, editors added still another group of passages to an already amended original text,

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[24] R. N. Whybray, The Book of Proverbs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 14-15.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

making "...Wisdom an inseparable attribute of God himself."[27] While raising the status of wisdom to the level of an attribute of God may be an exaggeration, there is no doubt that these verses present the concept of the fear of God as the most important aspect of wisdom. Thus:

> My son if you will receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, (2.1)
>
> In order to incline your ear to wisdom and apply your heart to understanding, (2.1)
>
> For if you summon discernment, lift up your voice to understanding, (2.3)
>
> If you seek her like silver, and search for her like hidden treasures, (2.4)
>
> Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. (2.5)

In these verses wisdom in its fully developed form is merged into and made subordinate to the concept of fear and knowledge of God. In this way the two types verse, God oriented and old wisdom, are linked to each other and anchored to God's authority. In the above verses, knowledge of God seems to be the final goal of mastering wisdom, so while Whybray's assertion that wisdom becomes an attribute of God may be extreme, there is no doubt that God and God's law are an essential part of wisdom.

While God is clearly the authority in those portions of

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[27] Ibid.

the book where God is mentioned, the authority in those verses which can be characterized as old wisdom is the wisdom instructor, and there are parallels between the two: while the fool ignores the instruction of the wisdom instructor, the wicked do not fear God. But, again, the separation between God and the wisdom instructor may be illusory. In fact, wisdom also encompasses the teachings relating to God, and the instructor is vested with the task of disseminating even that God-related wisdom to his students. Foremost among the pieces of wisdom which he will disseminate is the fear of God. In a way, this invests a great amount of authority in the wisdom schools and their instructors. After all, if God's word is encompassed in the wider area of wisdom, and, as was mentioned above, wisdom can only be received through instruction, then the role of the wisdom instructor takes on an added authority as an agent of God. How the priestly class as tenders of the cult may have viewed such a notion is beyond the purview of this paper, but it is clear that the wisdom instructors themselves would have seen nothing offensive in it. Further, by grafting God's authority onto their own, the problem of two contradictory centers of authority is, at least superficially, resolved. Assuming that von Rad is correct in his conclusion the many character and conduct types present in the verses of Proverbs can be grouped under the broad headings of "good" and "evil," then there is evidence in the text itself that a God-oriented super-authority was in fact grafted on top of the

sentence structure, while leaving the vast majority of sentences within the main body of the text in tact.

The strongest evidence of this all-encompassing super authority vested in God rests in the first seven verses of the book:

> The proverbs of Solomon son of David, King of Israel: (1.1)
>
> To know wisdom and instruction, to comprehend words of understanding; (1.2)
>
> To take instruction in prudence, righteousness, justice and equity; (1.3)
>
> To give prudence to the ignorant, knowledge and discretion to the young; (1.4)
>
> A wise man will listen and increase learning and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel; (1.5)
>
> To comprehend a proverb and an allusion, the words of the wise and their allegorical sayings. (1.6)
>
> The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. (1.7)

There seems to be a consensus among scholars that these verses represent an introduction to the entire book. If there was an attempt by redactors to construct one unitary system of authority uniting the two diverse themes described above, it would have been appropriate to have introduced the idea here, and in fact that appears to be the case.

In the opening verse, authorship of the book is attributed to King Solomon. This is in keeping with the

practice with regard to wisdom literature throughout the Middle East, where typically the work was attributed to the ruler under whose tutelage it was composed.[28] Although actual authorship by Solomon is not ruled out, the significance of the reference lies in the fact that this genre in all the cultures of the region was officially sanctioned by the crown and was used among the educated elite.[29]

The six verses following the introductory ones contain a sampling of vocabulary clearly representing both the old wisdom sentence and what might be called the God-oriented or pietistic tradition. The words used in verse two: "To know wisdom and instruction [musar], to comprehend words of understanding," are typical of old wisdom and according to McKane are "...indicative of a strenuous educational discipline which is productive of rigorous intellectual attitudes.....Musar is commonly correlated with Egyptian Instruction."[30] Maintenance of the discipline of instruction is clearly in the hands of parents and wisdom instructors rather than any higher religious authority.[31]

In contrast to this is the language in verse 3: "To take instruction in haskel [prudence], tsedek [righteousness],

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[28] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

[29] William McKane, Proverbs, p. 262.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid. p. 264.

mishpat [justice] and mesharim [equity]." The words tsedek, mishpat and mesharim are more closely associated with God's moral and ethical demands throughout the rest of the book. Although Whybray notes that they are qualities which are also stressed in the old wisdom of other Middle Eastern cultures, he and McKane attribute their presence here to the addition of a more religious element to the text.[32]

McKane interprets the presence of terms representative of both the old wisdom and religious traditions, as an example of how redactors had attempted to impose a pietistic interpretation of what originally had been an essentially utilitarian and primarily secular work. While this may be true, it does not tell us whether that reinterpretation was successful, for while the terms may have come from different literary traditions, the new text resulting from the combination is not necessarily intrinsically inconsistent.

What is clear is that the opening verses function like a preamble to the entire book, much in the same way as the introductory sections of a modern legal code. The verses set out the subject matter for the book and give examples of the types of persons and conduct which the book will cover. While the list, especially of types of individuals covered, is not exhaustive, it does cover the range. In the terms which have been employed above, the verses have included personality types and areas of concern from both the old wisdom and God-

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[32] Whybray, Proverbs, p. 16.

oriented traditions of the text. The general subject matter is chochmah [wisdom] and musar [instruction] and to comprehend imrei vinah [the words of understanding]. This is further elaborated with the inclusion along with wisdom of righteousness, judgment and equity, all terms which can be attributed to the pietistic themes in the book. The derivative terms tsadik [righteous person] and yashar [upright person] will continue to form the bulk of the God-oriented personality types throughout the text. Wisdom, therefore, will include both types of knowledge, secular as well as god-oriented. In verses five and six, the text refers to the discipline of wisdom instruction and the various literary forms which the wise one will have to master. "A wise man will listen and he will increase learning, a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel." He will be required to master the cryptic literary forms, the mashal [proverb], the melitsah [allusion] and the chidot [allegorical sayings or riddles]. Having included both types of wisdom, God-oriented and old wisdom, under the general category of chochmah, the text then tells us that the individual may only acquire this through the discipline of the instruction. The wisdom instructor, therefore, becomes the sole source and purveyor of all information essential to not only a materially successful life but also a moral and upright one consistent with God's wishes.

Having constructed a unified system with the wisdom

instructor as the conduit for all knowledge to humankind, that system is ultimately vested with God's authority in verse 7:

> The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools scorn wisdom and discipline. (1.7)

The fear of the Lord means obedience to the will of God made known through the religion of Israel.[33] Such fear is the most important aspect of wisdom and the sine qua non for acquiring it. But in addition to anchoring the entire system to the authority of God, the verse expressly by use of negative parallelism, again ties together both genres, old wisdom and God-oriented. The fools, evvilim who scorn wisdom and instruction, are clearly within the realm of the old wisdom where evvilim and peta'im are used interchangeably in contrast to chacham [wise man]. But here the term is expanded to include those who in contrast to the fools are in "fear of the Lord." This notion is repeated and further elaborated upon in verse 19.3:

> A man's foolishness perverts his way, and his heart rages against the Lord.

The expansion of wisdom to include the concepts relating to God probably represented not only a merger of the two parallel streams of thought, but possibly the extension of the realm of the wisdom schools to include material formerly under

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[33] Ibid.

the exclusive control of religious authorities. Whybray finds in the melding of the two concepts evidence:

> ...that the wisdom schools had now succeeded in their endeavor to unify the two systems of education. It was now possible in those schools to make the bold assertion which stands at the beginning of the book (1-7) that the very essence of knowledge - such as formed their traditional curriculum (1,2-5) - is the fear of Yahweh, that is, the practice of the religion of Yahweh in all its aspects. The Preface in its revised form (1.2-5, 7) announces the syllabus of the wisdom school in its two distinct yet now inseparable aspects.[34]

The development of a wisdom concept in the context of one unitary God-centered authority is reflected in the use of the phrase yir'at adonai [fear of the Lord]. While the term "fear" in context with Adonai refers throughout the Bible to a standard of moral conduct known and accepted by men in general, its use especially in the wisdom literature is closely associated with the concept of education.[35] More important for our purposes here, the term represents one way that the origin of wisdom's authority is placed in God, even for those verses where God is not mentioned.

To ensure that the merger between the two systems would not be merely a superficial grafting through a general introductory section, the term yir'at adonai is distributed throughout the book in strategic places covering a variety of

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[34] Ibid. pp. 97-98.

[35] Ibid. p. 96.

themes. Thus in verses 2.4-5, the fear of God is equated to the pursuit wisdom:

> If you seek it (wisdom) like silver and look for it like fine gold, you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

In verse 3.7, the concept of wisdom is expressly subordinated to God's authority:

> Be not wise in your own eyes, fear the Lord and turn from evil. (3.7)

Consistent with his interpretation of the addition of God-related references as a corruption of a wisdom genre "..more firmly grounded in reality," McKane reads into the above verse, an attack by religious forces on the old wisdom massage. The phrase "wise in your own eyes," is, according to him, a specific refutation of wisdom devoid of religious influence:

> The point of view of this verse is the same as that of Isa. 5.21: "Woe to those who are (chachamim) in their own eyes and are (nevonim) in their own estimation." It may be that the (chachamim be'einechah) is wisdom terminology, but its use here is distinctive as compared with its other occurrences in the Book of Proverbs (26.5, 12; 26.16; 28.11...) It is not directed against instances of unwisdom, but against the claims of those who practice (chochmah).[36]

This reference could, however, just as easily represent

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[36] McKane, Proverbs, pp.292-3.

an accommodation by the wisdom schools with religious authorities or even a supplanting of them through the appropriation of their teachings. Such an explanation would be more consistent with the presence in the book of numerous verses representing the old wisdom in its original form devoid of any religious content at all. Other verses raise similar issues without the use of language that could represent influence from some school of thought hostile to the wisdom instructors:

> The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom and humility precedes honor. (15.33)

McKane, consistent with his interpretation of the above verse, asserts that this represents a "...substitution of a new discipline, the fear of Yahweh, for the educational discipline exercised by the wisdom teacher...The goals are still those of the old wisdom, but a new regimen has been prescribed for attaining them."[37] In contrast to this view, Whybray finds that this verse represents an acceptance rather than a supplanting of wisdom:

> This saying belongs to the latest material in the book, in which the training in wisdom offered by the wisdom teacher has been accepted as fully in accordance with the fear of the Lord, that is, the religion of Israel.[38]

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[37] Ibid. p. 487.

[38] Whybray, Proverbs, p. 91.

By inclusion of the concept of wisdom and the mode of teaching it encompassed in the term chochmah, both systems of authority are joined together. To accept the McKane's assertion that verses 3.7 and 15.33 constitute thought essentially hostile to much of the rest of the book is to conclude that the redactors while completely opposed to the concept of wisdom nevertheless allowed it to remain intact alongside the newer religious sections. A better explanation is that in its final form, the book, while containing pieces of different kinds of literature, represented what was assumed to be a philosophically consistent work.

The text, however, does not leave the definition of yir'at adonai for conjecture, for elsewhere in the book it is described in purely pietistic terms devoid of any reference to wisdom at all. Thus:

> By loyalty and by truth iniquity is atoned, and in the fear of the Lord is the avoidance of evil. (16.6)
>
> Let not your heart envy sinners but rather those who fear the Lord all day long. (23.17)[39]

In the sense that wisdom is clearly subordinated to a God-defined piety, McKane may be correct in his assumptions, but not to the extent that wisdom or the schools which dispensed

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[39] McKane, Proverbs, p. 387: G. R. Driver has argued (Biblica 32, p. 196) that the abstract Yirat is here a collective term for a concrete subject, is equivalent to yir'e (cf. BH) and is the antithesis of hatta'im.

it have actually been supplanted by some outside religious authority. The persistent importance of wisdom in and of itself is reflected in those verses of the book which justify wisdom theologically, and this fact would further refute McKane's implication that wisdom as represented in other parts of the book has been somehow pushed aside.

If the "fear of the Lord" is the "beginning of wisdom," how then did it come to be so? In yet another set of verses, wisdom as an independent concept is legitimatized theologically. Three passages, all located in the introductory first nine chapters of the book, assert that wisdom was created by God. Thus:

> For the Lord gives wisdom: knowledge and understanding are from his mouth. (2.6)

This concept of God's creation of wisdom is further expanded in two other passages.[40] Verse 3.19 relates to the role of wisdom in the creation of the world:

> By wisdom, the Lord established the earth, by understanding he established the heavens. (3.19)

In commenting on this verse, McKane apparently concedes the continued dominance of the wisdom school rather than their subjugation:

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[40] Whybray, Wisdom, p, 98.

> The wise men became the editors and curators of the sacred writings (citation omitted). They made their bow to Yahweism, but they brought some part of their literary heritage to their new tasks. They made amends by reinterpreting the language of wisdom and stressing the derivative character of all human wisdom. Men are wise only as they participate in the wisdom of Yahweh.[41]

In a similar vein, verses 8.22-31 also weave the origins of wisdom into God's plan of creation:

> The Lord created me at the beginning of his way, the beginning of his works of old. (8.22)
>
> Since time everlasting I was installed, from the first, since the beginnings of the Earth. (8.23)
>
> When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains abounding in water. (8.24)
>
> Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth. (8.25)
>
> He had not yet made the Earth, or the fields, or the first of the earth particles of the world. (8.26)
>
> When he established the heavens, I was there, when he set the horizon over the face of the deep. (8.27)
>
> When he formed the clouds above, when the fountains of the deep grew strong. (8.28)
>
> When he set a limit for the sea so that the waters would not transgress his command, when he laid the foundations of the Earth. (8.29)

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[41] McKane, Proverbs, p. 297.

> I was a craftsman[42] by his side, I was a daily delight, playing at all times before him, (8.30)
>
> Playing in the world, his Earth, my delight was with humankind. (8.31)

Implied in the above verses is the personification of wisdom found elsewhere in the book. This is supported by its position just before such a passage where personification is even clearer. (8.32-9.13) But for our purposes it is sufficient to say that verses 8.22-31, serve primarily to stress the antiquity of wisdom and its prominence in God's creation and management of human affairs. Far from reflecting some mythological image of wisdom as a separate deity, the personification of wisdom here and elsewhere is best understood metaphorically as having originated with God. In accord with this Whybray states:

> The hypostatization of wisdom as an attribute of Yahweh was carried out here not in order to bridge the gulf between God and man which had been created by the increasing tendency of orthodox Judaism to regard God as wholly as transcendent, but to bridge another gap - that between wisdom tradition and the main Israelite religious tradition - by emphasizing that all wisdom comes from God.[43]

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[42] Whybray, Wisdom, pp. 101-102. There is disagreement among scholars relating to the translation of amon. Some would use "craftsman" from an Akkadian word meaning the same, but in context with "play' and "delight," others believe that the concept of "a nursling" seems to be more appropriate to stress the antiquity of the concept and its connection with God as one of God's creations.

[43] Whybray, Wisdom, p. 104.

However, as with regard to the assumption by other scholars that wisdom is portrayed here as a deity, Whybray's own description of wisdom as an "attribute of Yahweh" is, itself, probably an exaggeration and not supported by the text. While the verses do equate wisdom with the "fear of the Lord," Whybray's point that the expression, at least in the context of wisdom, is closely associated with education is probably more on point. It is, therefore, likely that those references are to a knowledge of God, as the essential form of wisdom and, more important, serve to merge the two potentially competing systems of authority, Earth-oriented and God-oriented, into one headed by God.

II

Wicked and Evil - Wise and Foolish: Reconciling the Tsadik-Rasha Antithesis with the Old Wisdom Verse

The presence of language which serves to graft the power of God over the entire structure of authority expressed in the old wisdom verses allows the reader, at least superficially, to view Proverbs as containing one system of authority, headed by God, linking both categories of verse, old wisdom and God oriented, without changing the substance of the verses themselves. This is accomplished through the expansion of the concept of wisdom expressly to include fear of the Lord as the most important aspect of wisdom, as well as the inclusion of a theology of wisdom under which it became the most ancient of God's own creations, predating even the Earth, itself. Even in the context of this structure, however, because the old wisdom remains, for the most part, separate and identifiable, the superficiality of the God-oriented language remains readily apparent, and the reader is still tempted to view each type separately and possibly with varying degrees of importance. The similarity in the structure and literary styles of verse, however, offers still another way of viewing both types of verse as one unit.

In both types of verse, the book of Proverbs gives us two categories of person, one good and one bad. Under each

category there are a number of subcategories including the wise and the righteous under the category of good, and the wicked, the evil, sinners and fools under the category of bad. Often but not always the personality type is attached to a certain type of behavior, so the fool loves his foolishness and hates knowledge:

> How long will simple ones love being simple, scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? (1.22)

The wicked, in several places identified specifically as an ishah zarah [alien woman], mislead the young who are unschooled in wisdom; thus:

> For at the window of my house I looked down through the lattice work, (7.6)
>
> And I saw the simple ones; I discerned among the youths a young man lacking understanding, (7.7)
>
> Passing through the street near her corner, and he made his way to her house, (7.8)
>
> In the twilight, in the evening, in the midst of the night and darkness, (7.9)
>
> And behold, a woman, wily of heart and in harlot's garb met him. (7.10)

The wise and righteous, however, fear God, are kind to the poor and do a number of other desirable things:

> The righteous man is one who acknowledges the cause of the poor...(29.7)

It is also important to note that the person is not merely characterized by the act. In fact, personality type and conduct seem to be inexorably tied to each other, and a particular type of conduct is usually a natural outgrowth of one type of personality. The evil one, therefore, seems to be inherently evil, and rather than being characterized by an evil act, he tends to act according to his evil nature. An exception to this is the one with a clean slate, i.e. the unschooled, the na'ar [young man] and in some cases the peta'im [simples ones]. In the case of the latter, there is the possibility of return before they are ensnared in evil by evil persons. By at last turning to wisdom, they are able to avoid the permanent status of wicked or fool. This is not the case with the wicked ones or fools who seem to be inherently so and permanently trapped by the consequences of their deeds. This pattern pervades both the old wisdom and God-oriented verse, but some scholars have asserted that the types of categories are different according to whether they fit into one type of system of authority or the other. Invariably, therefore, the wise man and the fool are given as examples in those versions of the book which can be characterized as the old wisdom, while the tsadik and the rasha are the most common examples in those portions which can be characterized as God-oriented.

In asserting that references to the rasha and the tsadik are almost exclusively limited to the God-oriented sections of

the book, McKane has concluded that they represent an attempt by later redactors to introduce a doctrine of theodicy which was never effectively integrated into the other sections. We could conclude from McKane's argument then that both sections, God-oriented and old wisdom, retain their separate and sometimes contradictory identities.

If that is true, in order for us to connect the old wisdom portions of the book to the authority of God, we must find some connecting point between one order and the other using this system relating to personality and conduct. Gerhard von Rad would employ the more general terms of "good" and "evil" to encompass all of the categories in both types of sentence:

> The good man is the one who knows the constructive quality of good and the destructive quality of evil and who submits to this pattern which can be discerned in the world. He is the righteous man, the diligent, the temperate, the one who is ready to help, the one for whom this goodness of his itself turns out to be good. Being "good" and the worldly "goods" are, in this type of teaching, closely related to each other. Thus, in reality, the good is that which does good. Goodness, was, therefore, always something public, never something merely internal; it was a social phenomenon.[44]

The "good" man is the one "...who behaves correctly and at the same time...is successful in life." The term tsadik is the one who best encompasses this role with all of its ramifications. Von Rad describes him as follows:

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[44] Von Rad, Wisdom in Israel, p. 78.

> Wherever a man recognized and fulfilled claims made upon him by the community to which he belonged, that man was "righteous". But the wise men (particularly in Prov. 10-15) never tire of expressing anew the idea that everything emanates from such a righteous man also supports him and brings him - one is tempted to say - into a sphere of blessing. To speak of a "doctrine of retribution" is, therefore, highly misleading because this was not a question of ideological postulates but of experiences which had proved true over a long series of generations. The "tzadik" is a man who, as we also sometimes express it, is "in order".[45]

To von Rad, the wise man is also the righteous man, and perhaps this is best illustrated by the wise man's opposite, the fool. The fool is best characterized as one who does not internalize the teachings of wisdom and his life is not "in order." He does not recognize the limits of life and as a result is not respected. The most important part of that set of limits is the authority of God.[46]

> A man's folly subverts his way and his heart rages against God. (19.3)

Similarly, others have found in the parallel uses of righteous and wicked, and wise man and fool, the same fusion of the two systems of authority apparent in the book. Zvi Adar who identifies those two systems as wisdom and morality, attaches significance to the fact that both are mentioned in the opening verses of the book:

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[45] Ibid., p. 79.

[46] Ibid., p. 65.

> Already in the opening sentence of the book, wisdom and morality appear together: "to know wisdom and instruction" (Prov.1,2). Though the word "musar" in the Bible is not identical with the modern meaning (morality), the modern meaning is to a certain extent implicit in it....Since wisdom leads to morality, its words are not only "counsel" but also "reproof" (Prov. 1:23,25,30).[47]

As discussed above, however, the presence of terms from both types of literature in the opening verses of the book, may be significant for a different reason. While it is true that those verses mix old wisdom and God-oriented words and seem to use them interchangeably, that phenomenon is, with very little exception, limited to the first nine chapters of the book, and even there, common only in the opening few verses of chapter one. This phenomenon is significant more for its uniqueness than as a reflection of trends elsewhere in the book. As already mentioned, it is more likely that these opening verses are evidence of an attempt to reconcile sets of verses representing two distinct themes, one practical and secular and the other God-oriented.

With regard to von Rad's grouping of all of the character types into the general categories of good and evil, while it is true that such an approach links the two types of verses together, this approach merely avoids the issue. In fact, with very few exceptions the verses in Proverbs employ one category of character to the exclusion of the other, and only

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[47] Zvi Adar, Humanistic Values in the Bible (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1967), pp. 367-8.

very rarely are the two combined to express one thought. Invariably, therefore, the tsadik will be contrasted to the rasha, or the chacham to the kesil, but not both characters together. It is in those verses where what might called a crossover occurs where the evidence of another attempted fusion of the two systems can be found. Further, while it maybe correct to define the good man as one who is in order and is aware of the limits placed upon him, the nature of those limits varies. As already observed, while the tsadik and the rasha are subject, often expressly, to limits set by God, the chacham and kesil are most often subject to the limits of that Earth-bound order. The redactors of the text may have intended for the chacham and the tsadik to be subject to God as well, but support for this is absent in the vast majority of verses where these character types appear.

The old wisdom sentence with very little exception uses the following character types: chacham [wise one], or charuts [diligent one] as the positive paradigms, and kesil or evvil [fool], peti [simple one], lets [scorner], and atsel [sluggard], among others, as the negative ones. Thus:

> A wise son causes his father to rejoice, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother. (10.1)
>
> Wise men store up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool is imminent ruin. (10.14)
>
> With the punishment of the scorner, the simple one is made wise, but in teaching the wise one, he receives knowledge. (21.11)

> The soul of the sluggard desires but lacks, while the soul of the diligent prospers. (14.4)

In addition to the above character types, old wisdom sentences often use words derivative of those character types to describe the behavior that each displays, thus the use of words such as evvilut [foolishness] and, of course, chochmah [wisdom], itself.

In the God-oriented verses, a completely separate set of words describe character and behavior traits. Thus the personality types include: tsadik [righteous one], rasha [wicked one], ra [evil one], chata [sinner], yeshar [upright one], tam [pure or innocent one], chasid [pious one], and bogeid [disloyal one]; and the following words describe behavior: ra [evil], tsedek [righteousness], mishpat [justice], mesharim [equity], resha [wickedness], chata'ot or chata'im [sins] and avonot [iniquity]. Thus:

> What the wicked one dreads will come upon him, but the desire of the righteous shall be granted. (10.24)
>
> The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight. (15.8)
>
> Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not advance in the way of evil men, (4.14)
>
> Avoid it, do not advance on it, turn away from it and pass on, (4.15)
>
> For they will not sleep if they have not done injury, and their sleep will be stolen if they have not caused others to

stumble, (4.16)

For they eat the bread of wickedness, and
they drink the wine of violence. (4.17)

While there are exceptions, the division into word groups is remarkably pronounced. The word bogeid [disloyal one] appears in nine verses of the book of Proverbs[48], but with the possible exception of one, 25.19, all of the verses can be classified as God-oriented. Even in regard to 25.19, while there is nothing to tie it specifically to God or piety, neither is there anything to indicate that it belongs among the old wisdom verses:

Confidence in an unfaithful man in a time
of trouble is like a broken tooth or a
foot out of joint. (25.19)

In contrast to this, the word lets [scorner], appears in fourteen verses, but only in verses 9.7 and 24.9, is there language inconsistent with the old wisdom.[49] Verse 24.9 contains the word chatat [sin] and is more often associated with the pietistic or God-oriented type of verse.[50] However, the message of the verse is clearly more in line with old

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[48] Prov. 2.22;11.3;11.6;13.2;13.15;21.18;22.12;23.28;and 25.19.

[49] Prov. 1.22; 3.34; 13.1; 9.7; 9.8; 14.6; 15.12; 19.25; 19.29; 20.1; 21.11; 21.24; 22.10 and 24.9.

[50] There are ten verses in which the word in one of several forms appears: 1.10; 5.22; 10.16; 13.6; 13.21; 14.34; 20.9; 21.4; 23.16 and 24.9. Of those, only 24.9 contains typically old wisdom language.

wisdom, and the presence of chatat is exceptional:

> The devising of folly is sin, and the scorner is an abomination to men. (24.9)

Verse 7, however, contains the word rasha which, according to this approach, would place it among the God-oriented verses:

> He who corrects a scorner brings shame on himself and he who rebukes a wicked man brings on himself his blemish. (9.7)

Although the following verse, 9.8, also contains the word scorner in a context with old wisdom language and relates a similar theme, the verse represents an exception to the general rule and may represent what might be called a crossover verse where the vocabulary of both authorities were used to imply a unity of the two.

While we can separate verses according to whether one set of characters or another is used, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish verses based upon the subject matter, itself. It is true that the old wisdom verses tend to impart practical advice relating to everyday life while the God-oriented verses, even if they does not specifically mention God, deliver a primarily moral and ethical message. But that is not to say that old wisdom is devoid of a moral or ethical theme. In fact, there is an important moral and ethical massage in the old wisdom, specifically with regard to the ishah zarah [strange woman] or the nochriah [alien woman].

There is considerable debate among scholars even as to the identity of this character in the several forms in which she appears in the opening chapters of the book: foreign woman, strange woman, adulteress, and harlot. There is also disagreement as to whether she is borrowed from the wisdom of other Near Eastern cultures or rather whether she is closer to the image of the adulteress or harlot elsewhere in the Bible. Verses 16 and 17 of Chapter 2 contain language that expressly relates to God and follows naturally from earlier verses containing language typical of the God-centered verse:

> To deliver you from the strange woman, the smooth words of the alien woman, (2.16)
>
> who forsakes the friend[51] of her youth and who forgets the covenant with her God. (2.17)

Whybray's commentary reflects the confusion regarding the identity and source of these verses:

> Warnings against sexual immorality are characteristic of this section; compare 5:3-23; 6:24-35; 7:4-27. As in similar passages in the non-Israelite wisdom literature, the author of these passages probably intended his warnings to be taken literally. But elsewhere in the Old Testament adultery is used as a symbol for Israel's unfaithfulness to God; and the editor of this book may have had this idea in mind: after the appeal by Wisdom in 1:20-33 it is natural to think of the adulteress as Wisdom's opposite - that is, as a

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[51] Francis Brown, D.D., D.Litt, The New Brown - Driver - Briggs - Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon (Lafayette, IN: Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc., 1978), p. 48; "friend or intimate, i.e. a woman's husband; see Jer. 3.4."

symbol of the "unwisdom" of abandoning the "fear of the Lord" in favor of the worship of other gods.[52]

Despite the strong possibility that this section carries with it a strong pietistic or God-oriented theme, the language of the verses in chapters 5, 6, and 7, dealing with the strange woman in her various forms, is more typical of what we have described above as old wisdom. Furthermore, the response to the forbidden relationship in chapter 6, is remarkably devoid of any reference to God or God's authority. Rather, the admonition against the involvement with an adulteress carries with it the very practical advice that her husband will return and take his revenge:

> So he who goes to his neighbor's wife, whoever touches her will not go unpunished. (6.29)
>
> Do men not despise a thief, even if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry? (6.30)
>
> And when he is found, he shall repay sevenfold, he shall give all the wealth of his household. (6.31)
>
> He who commits adultery lacks understanding, he who does that destroys his own soul. (6.32)
>
> He shall find wound and dishonor; his disgrace shall not be wiped out. (6.33)
>
> For jealousy is a man's rage, and he will not be sparing on the day of his vengeance. (6.34)
>
> He will not give favor in exchange for a

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[52] Whybray, Proverbs, pp. 22-23.

> bribe, he will not relent though you give many gifts. (6.35)

In verse 31, the crime of adultery is compared to theft which carries the payment of damages, sevenfold, a fine for theft similar to a case in Exodus 21.37[53]. From this we might conclude that the subject matter of this section is clearly pietistic, and this would be further supported by verses 23-24 which lead into this section:

> For the commandment is a lamp, and the Torah is a light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life, (6.23)
>
> To guard you from the woman of evil and from the smoothness of tongue of the alien woman. (6.24)

While one could conclude that the use of the words torah and mitzvah clearly remove these verses from the old wisdom category, such may not be the case. McKane states in regard to this issue:

> In v. 23, where the role of (mitzvah) and (torah) is further described with reference to the preceding verses, it looks as if figures of speech which are redolent of the piety inspired by the Law have been imported into the Instruction. In a psalm written in praise of the Law, Yahweh's words are described as a lamp(ner) to the feet and a light(or) to the path (Ps. 119.105; G. Vermes, VT viii, 1958, pp. 436f.). I have pointed out, however (see on 4.11-12, above pp. 307f.), that (mitzvah) and (torah) belong to both Law and Wisdom, while (tochechot musar), "corrective discipline" (literally, "reproofs of discipline"), is a concept

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[53] Ibid., p.42.

> of educational discipline which is native to the Instruction, so that, even if the two metaphors are borrowed from the milieu of legal piety, this verse formally (motive clause) and materially has firm associations with old wisdom.[54]

The presence of both pietistic and old wisdom language rather than reflecting some later accommodation between the two schools of thought, may instead reflect the fact that both traditions shared an interest in the subject of foreign or alien women as snares for innocent young men. In fact, admonitions against an involvement with such women are present not only in Egyptian wisdom but in the Babylonian wisdom as well.[55] The presence of both categories of terms set forth above, does not mean that these verses represent the kind of crossover and merger between the systems described above. Rather, this may be an example of a section of the book where both types of verse were already in agreement and not in need of any substantial change.

As stated above, the opening verses of the book often mention God and wisdom in the same verse, either to expand the concept of wisdom to include the fear of the Lord, or to state that God is the source of wisdom. Thus in 2.4, a search for wisdom will also yield an understanding of the fear of the Lord and in 2.6, "the Lord gives wisdom..." While verses containing both references to wisdom and to God are not

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[54] McKane, Proverbs, p. 327.

[55] Ibid. p. 339-40.

uncommon, they were probably not intended to make the tsadik equivalent to the chacham, or the rasha equivalent to the kesil or evvil. For that process to occur, it would have been necessary for them to refer specifically to those character types, and it is clear that examples of this are rare.

While 5.21-23 do not mix both types of terminology together in a verse, it is clear that it was intended for them to be read as a unit. When they are read together, the pietistic concept of sin is merged with the old wisdom concept of folly:

> For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he scrutinizes all of his goings. (5.21)
>
> His own iniquities shall entrap the wicked man, and he shall be seized in the cords of his sins. (5.22)
>
> He shall die for lack of instruction, and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray. (5.23)

The rasha [wicked man], is the subject of both verses 22 and 23. In verse 22, the language is consistently pietistic: he will be trapped by avonotav [his iniquities] and seized in the cords of chatato [his sins]. In verse 23, however, continuing with the wicked man, he will die for lack of musar [instruction] and go astray through ivvalto [his folly]. The wicked man by an expanded definition lacks instruction, and his folly is the equivalent of sin and iniquity. The wise man is not mentioned, but the instruction which he receives is

mentioned, and by implication, he is in contrast to the wicked man.

As stated above with regard to the lets [scorner], verses 9.7 and 9.8, present another crossover set of verses in which the wicked man is contrasted to the wise man. In verse 9.8, the wise man is contrasted to the scorner, both of which are old wisdom terms. Thus the wise man profits from correction but the scorner does not. In the preceding verse, however, there is instead a comparison between the scorner and the wicked man. Like the scorner, the wicked man is rebuked at the rebuker's own peril. The scorner is similar to the wicked one (9.7), and is the opposite of the wise man (9.8), so the wicked man is the opposite of the wise man.

Verse 10.21 offers an example of the crossover verse where the first half introduces the tsadik [righteous one] and then contrasts him to what is an old wisdom character, the evvil [fool]:

> The lips of the righteous give guidance to many, but fools die for lack of wisdom. (10.21)

The righteous man is in contrast to the fool who lacks wisdom, and like wisdom, his words give guidance to others. The concept of wisdom is thereby expanded to include the words of the righteous, and the tsadik is thus made equivalent to the chacham. The fool, in contrast to this, is defined by his lack of wisdom, and is, by implication, not righteous.

Similarly, verse 10.31 equates wisdom to the words of the righteous, but this time, expressly rather than by implication:

> The mouth of the just bear the fruit of wisdom, but the perverse tongue shall be cut off. (10.31)

What the mouth of the righteous one produces is the direct result of his obtaining wisdom and his character becomes inexorably tied to and defined by such wisdom. In contrast to the righteous one who possesses wisdom, is the one who does not possess it. His tongue produces perversity and will be cut off.

In verse 11.30, again the fruit mouth of the righteous is, like wisdom, a tree of life.[56] More important, the righteous one is expressly made equivalent to the wise one through parallelism:

> The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and the wise man wins souls. (11.30)[57]

The righteous one and the wise one are linked by the nature of their behavior. Both do equally desirable things: the

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[56] Used in an Old Wisdom context: see Prov. 3.18.

[57] McKane, Proverbs, p. 432. There is disagreement as to the reading of lokeach naphshot chacham. In that lokeach naphshot means taker of life, some have read chamas, [violence] in place of chacham [wise man]. The parallel would then become a negative one: (the fruit of) the taker of life is violence.

righteous one by his acts promotes life, while the wise man wins souls. Although it is not clear what both types of conduct encompass, the use of the terms nefesh [soul] and chayim [life] probably imply an equivalency betweeen the two. Accordingly, the wise man is the righteous man.

The exact meaning of verse 14.9 is unknown and are there is considerable disagreement as the exact translation. What is clear is that evvilim [fools], a term more commonly found among old wisdom is in parallel with yesharim [upright ones], a term more commonly found among the God-oriented verses. Asham, which means guilt or guilt offering in a cultic context, may either be the subject or the object of the clause, thus it may read, "Guilt mocks fools," or, "Fools mock guilt,"(or perhaps, the guilt offering). Because the verb is expressed in the singular, an emendation [yalitsu] would be necessary. Since this is not a desirable solution, it is more likely that asham is the subject, but even this assumption is not certain. Because of the difficulty with regard to the exact nature of the word asham, conclusions as to any translation are speculative. Regardless of the reading, however, the analysis remains the same: fools are the opposite of the upright, and one cannot be an upright fool, for such a thing does not exist.

In verse 15.19, the atsel [sluggard] is also contrasted to the yesharim [upright]:

The way of a sluggard is like a briar

> hedge, but the path of the upright is a highway. (15.9)

Many, however, have inferred from the meaning of the verse that instead of yesharim, a more appropriate word would be charutsim [diligent ones], thus: "...but the path of the diligent ones is a highway." This would be consistent which a similar parallelism in verse 13.4:[58]

> The soul of the sluggard desires but lacks, while the soul of the diligent ones prosper. (13.4)

The substitution in 15.9 of the pietistic word, yesharim, however, could represent an attempt as elsewhere to integrate the two systems of authority. The diligent ones are by expanded definition, upright, while the sluggard cannot be.

Verse 19.3, equates ivvelet [foolishness] with raging against God. The behavior of a fool is thus equated with that of the wicked one. Folly, which is the result of the lack of wisdom, leads one away from God whom the fool, like the wicked one, then rages against.

Verses 21.25 and 26, when read together, similarly expand the concept of the atsel to include covetousness, a concept carrying more of a moral or ethical value judgment. While sloth may be unwise in the sense of lacking productivity, covetousness carries with it the connotation of evil. The concept is further developed when the verse then contrasts the

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[58] Ibid. p.482.

sluggard to the righteous man who, because he is diligent or industrious is willing and able to give freely to others. This reading assumes that the sluggard, mentioned in verse 25, is the subject of the first half of the verse 26:

> The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to do work,(21.15)
>
> He desires greedily all day, but the righteous one gives and spares not. (21.26)

Finally, it is in verse 23.24, that the strongest case is made that the chacham and the tsadik are equivalent and joined in the personality of one single positive paradigm. Interestingly, the context chosen to express this is in an old wisdom setting in which the teacher, probably the parent, gives the proper wisdom instruction to the child. According to this verse, the goal of every parent is to have a child who is not merely wise, but righteous as well:

> The father of a righteous one will greatly rejoice, and the one who begets a wise child will have joy in him.(23.24)

The above instances in which the language of both traditions are combined to express one thought are in stark contrast because of their rarity to the vast number of verses which express their messages using terms restricted to one tradition or the other. That rarity, plus the fact that they function to fuse the character types and traits of both systems into one, tend to support the conclusion that they

were added by editors. Perhaps, as with the expansion of the concept of wisdom to include fear of the Lord and the establishment of wisdom as the first of God's creations, this represents an attempt to bring two contrasting systems into accord with each other. But the rarity of this type of verse belies this argument, and leaves us with the conclusion that the vast majority of both old wisdom and God-oriented verses remain unchanged, are separate and still express contrasting messages.

III

The Motivation to do Good Deeds as Reflected in the Book of Proverbs: Reconciling Material Reward with Pleasing God

It is also possible, however, to divide the verses of the book along different lines. While there clearly exist two distinct orders of authority in Proverbs, one God-centered and one Earth-centered, there are also two apparent types of response by those authorities to human conduct on Earth, whether good or evil. Virtually all of what we have called the old wisdom verses as well as a minority of those expressly relating to God or God-related piety, speak of responses to a variety of human acts in terms of material reward or punishment. But a majority of the God-oriented verses speak only of pleasing or displeasing God without describing any affirmative response by God. Those verses typically employ language like sodo [his intimacy] to describe God's relationship with those who are good, and to'avat adonai [abomination to the Lord], to describe his attitude toward those who are bad. The nature of God's relationship with the human actor, in and of itself, seems in these verses to be the main motivation to be a certain type of person or to act in a

certain way.[59] The question then becomes for the reader: is the motivation to do good deeds for the sole purpose of pleasing God, to obtain material reward or both?

Because virtually all of the old wisdom verses either explicitly or implicitly give some material motivation for acting wisely, the contradiction in motivation is most evident in the God-oriented verses. Although, as stated above, it is difficult to classify precisely which type of motivation is present in a given verse, it is safe to say that approximately two thirds of the God-oriented verses speak in terms of either pleasing or displeasing God as the motivation to act or refrain from acting in a certain way. In contrast, the balance of those verses offer a material reward or punishment.

Typical of the first type of verse are the following:

> Do not envy the violent man, and do not choose to go his way, (3.31)
>
> For the devious one is an abomination to the Lord, but he is intimate with the upright. (3.32)
>
> He who insults a poor man slanders his creator...(17.5)
>
> Variances in (standard) weighing stones are an abomination to the Lord... (20.23)

These and similar verses make demands of individuals

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[59] Walther Zimmerli, "Concerning the Structure of Old Testament Wisdom," In Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom, ed. Harry M. Orlinsky, selected by James L. Crenshaw (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1976), p. 186.

without promising any material reward, save God's approval or disapproval. Elsewhere, however, among the verses that employ the God-centered language, a second motivating factor beyond that of either pleasing or conversely displeasing God, enters into the motivation formula. That factor relates to the concept of God's ratson [favor]. Sometimes the concept is expressed only in very general terms, thus:

> One who is good elicits favor from the Lord... (12.2)
>
> One who has found a wife has found good and he has obtained favor from God. (18.22)

Walther Zimmerli sees in the use of the word ratson, a shift with regard to man's motivation to act in accordance with God's wishes. In these and other more specific references, acts by human beings go further than merely pleasing or displeasing God. The term "favor from God" "...steps out of the theocentric orientation..." and "...into man's intelligibility and valuation." "Pleasing to God", which bore absolute character in theocentric consideration, becomes in human perspective a very great value, with which man reckons and which he regards as something he receives from God..."[60]

Pleasing God, according to Zimmerli, becomes part of the order on Earth whereby every human act carries with it either

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[60] Ibid. p. 184.

punishment or reward in this life. In this way, while retaining the transcendent nature of God, the consequences of one's acts on Earth become immediate and imminent. Further, this aspect of material reward or punishment is common to both types of verse, God-oriented and old wisdom alike, so although we are presented with two contrasting types of verse, one whose authority rests in God and one which rests in an order functioning more or less on its own on Earth, both systems speak of consequences experienced by the actor in his own lifetime. Obtaining God's favor, therefore, takes its place among a number rewards that come as a direct result of certain conduct on Earth. According to this approach, therefore, even with regard to the apparent contrast between those verses that mention a particular reward or punishment and those that speak merely of pleasing or displeasing God, there may be less of a contrast than seems apparent on first examination.

But the reader is still left with the question of why one should act properly: is it merely to please God or is it to obtain material reward? And if one motivation is more important than another, scholars disagree as to which motivation that is. McKane would ascribe a positive value to what might be called the realism of the old wisdom in its preoccupation with the observed condition of the Earth and the natural forces that govern it, and he implies that the addition of God-centered motivation for human conduct represents a retreat from that realism. Similarly, by

observing that the gaining of God's favor rather than merely pleasing him implies a move away from "theocentrism," Zimmerli also seems to view the shift toward some material response to man's conduct positively. It is important to note, however, that in view of the fact that only a minority of the God-oriented verses seem to retreat from that theocentrism, Zimmerli's point with regard to a move away from it is probably exaggerated. Furthermore, other scholars would disagree that such a move was positive, holding that by expressing man's acts so overwhelmingly from the standpoint of the positive or negative response that such acts bring, Proverbs implies a subordination of God to human will and human conduct. What McKane refers to condescendingly as "Yahweistic piety" represents to others the presence in Proverbs of an ethical and moral motivation for man to act in accord with God's wishes that transcends a mere desire for materialistic gain. Walther Eichrodt comments as follows:

> How powerfully the motive of obedience to the Law dominated ethical thinking, and gradually excluded other motives, is illustrated especially clearly by a development observable in the wisdom literature. Originally instruction for life, of an international character, its earliest examples in Israel exhibit the same predominance of considerations of expediency of motivation as do non-Israelite writings of the same genre. This may be appropriate enough, so long as the rules of practical cleverness are concerned; but it imports into the moral exhortations an element which is bound to be disastrous for the unconditional character of the of the ethical demand. Even the hint of a religious tone, more marked in some passages than in others, remains for the most part dominated by the idea of reward by God. Only rarely

> is the bare fact that God's will has commanded such and such a thing mentioned as sufficient reason for human conduct. Nevertheless, the Israelite wisdom teaching is saved from lapsing into a superficial eudaemonism by the fact that it still knows of a personal God-Man relationship, and more and more clearly it roots the conduct of the wise in this.[61]

Conceding the existence of some motivation other than a materialistic one, it is still clear that it is that materialistic one that dominates a majority of the verses in the book. While Proverbs offers us two distinct systems of authority which the redactors of the book may have fused together in the creative ways discussed above, the two approaches to reward or punishment are and remain sharply distinct and different.

Still, the overwhelming majority of verses in Proverbs attach some form of material reward or punishment to a broad range of human conduct, and this strongly utilitarian message extends through the old wisdom verses and into the God-oriented ones as well. This is apparent in verses 3.1-10 which form one unit but which contain aspects of both the old wisdom and God-oriented genres. In 3.1-2, the wisdom instructor asserts that in reward for not forgetting the "my teachings" and for keeping "my commandments," the student will be granted "length of days," "years of life" and "peace." Although the term torati [my Torah] is used, it is likely that

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[61] Walther Eichrodt, translated by J. A. Baker, Theology of the Old Testament (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1967), p. 375.

the verse refers to the teaching of the wisdom instructor rather than the Torah itself, and when coupled with the rewards of a long and peaceful life mentioned in verse 2, it is clear that the verses are in keeping not only with Egyptian Instruction, most notably Amen-emopet, but also with other sections of the Bible.[62]

In verses 9 and 10, however, by satisfying the cultic demand of dedicating one's first fruits to God, one will be appropriately rewarded with "storehouses filled with plenty" and "wine vats bursting with new wine." (3.9-10) It is, of course, important to note that while most of the verses seem to offer only the most utilitarian motivation to act in accordance with the wisdom instructor's or God's wishes, verses 3.4-5 are less clear in this regard:

> Do not let kindness and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck and write them on the tablet of your heart, (3.4)
>
> So that you will find grace and good insight in the eyes of God and man. (3.5)

There are other examples in which the strong utilitarian message continues even among the God-oriented verses. The Lord will not allow the righteous to go hungry, but he will deny the wicked what they crave. (10.3) Similarly, as the righteous receive their due on Earth, all the more so will the

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[62] McKane, Proverbs, p.290; Whybray, Proverbs, p. 24. See Deut. 3.40. Andre Barucq, Le Livre des Proverbes (Paris: Libraire Leoffre, 1964.), p. 61.

wicked and the evil receive theirs as well. (11.31)

The contrast among the God-oriented verses, with regard to the motivation to act or refrain from ceratin behavior is, by definition, not present in the old wisdom verses which are strongly utilitarian; thus:

> Poverty and shame come to one who refuses instruction...(13.18)
>
> A crown for the wise is their wealth... (14.24)

As McKane observes, "The sentence means that wealth is a fitting adornment of wisdom and is an aspect of the general recognition of his worth to which a wise man is entitled. His wealth is not an extraneous factor nor an alien intrusion, but is a confirmation of his intrinsic merit as a sage and the position of commanding influence which he has attained."[63] Invariably throughout the book, to the one who follows the dictates of the wisdom material wealth and physical well-being will usually accrue.[64]

In contrast to the above verses which speak generally of rewarding those who trust in the authority wisdom instructors, most of the old wisdom verses in Proverbs concern themselves specifically with one type of behavior or another. Typical of

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[63] McKane, Proverbs, p. 466.

[64] See Prov. 5.22-23; 8.10-11; 8.18-19; 8.21; 8.32; 8.35-36; 10.2-3; 10.9; 10.27-28; 11.3; 11.8; 11.23; 12.2-3; 12.5-6; 12.12; 12.14; 12.21; 12.28; 13.18; 13.21; 13.25; 14.11; 14.14; 14.24; 14.32; 15.6; 15.29; 19.16; 19.29; 20.20; 21.7; 21.20; 21.21; 22.4; 22.8; 24.3-4; 24.10-13; 24.19-20; 28.14; 28.16.

this are the numerous verses in the book extolling the virtues of hard work and, conversely, warning of the hazards of sloth.[65] The message is simple: the one who works hard will reap the material benefits while the sloth will bring nothing but poverty and want. Thus:

> The soul of the sluggard desires but has nothing, while the soul of the diligent shall be mad fat. (13.4)
>
> He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, but he who pursues vain things will have poverty aplenty. (28.19)

The verses are illustrative of the virtue of hard work which will yield material results. They also touch upon the closely related concept of the importance of choosing a pursuit which is worthy rather than one which is vain. Hard work yields real results while laziness encourages flight into fantasy which can produce only want and poverty.[66] Further, in 28.19, the book implies that virtuous work is that which relates to the land while "vain things" may imply financial or commercial speculation which may yield instant riches but in fact will produce nothing meaningful for society.[67] This is consistent with the numerous warnings in the book regarding

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[65] See Prov. 10.4; 10.5; 10.15; 10.16; 12.11; 12.24; 12.27; 13.4; 13.11; 14.4; 14.23; 15.19; 16.20; 18.9; 19.24; 20.4; 20.13; 21.17; 21.25; 22.13; 24.30-34; 26.13-16; 27.23-24; 28.19.

[66] McKane, Proverbs, p.458.

[67] Ibid.

the borrowing of money.[68] It is also an example of how by its nature the behavior will bring either reward or punishment without intervention of God or another authority.

The verses give advice relating to a variety of other types of behavior, as well. Anything that will dull the senses will lessen efficiency and therefore must be avoided if one is to live successfully. The verses, therefore, warn against imbibing in wine. (20.1; 21.17) They also warn of the dangers of associating with the wrong type of person. This includes a lawless or violent man, ish chamas, who will lead one astray, (16.29) or the angry man, ba'al af, or the ill-tempered one, ish chemot, who will mislead innocents and ensnare them through their destructive ways.(22.24-25) It is also true of contentious persons (15.18;18.8), and ones who lie. (17.20) This is especially true when employing someone. (10.26) Generally speaking, however, one should always try to get along with others:

> A kind man benefits himself while a cruel
> one makes trouble for himself. (11.17)

Those who are prudent, even tempered and act in moderation in all matters will be successful (19.11), while those who are not will fail(19.19). More specifically, one who controls his tongue will prosper, while one who talks too much will not. (10.19; 17.27-28) This is especially true when

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[68] See 6.1-2; 11.15; 22.7; 22.26-27; 27.13; 28.8.

dealing with powerful people, such as kings. (25.6-7)

In addition to those verses that attach material reward or punishment to one kind of behavior or another, still others describe the value of wisdom, both old and pietistic, using materialistic imagery. Thus:

> The tongue of a righteous man is like choice silver, the heart of the wicked is of little worth. (10.20)
>
> Happy is the man who finds wisdom, the man who obtains understanding, (3.13)
>
> Its value in trade is better than silver, her yield, greater than gold. (3.14)

On one hand, in 3.13, wisdom is held up to silver and gold as something superior to both of them. But that is not to say that wisdom is important and gold, silver or other precious things are not. By setting up wealth as important, but not as important as wisdom itself, the verse reflects a major caveat in the book, that is, wealth is the product of and perhaps the reward of living the upright or wise life, but not the sole purpose for it. Interestingly, this is not necessarily a reflection of some pietistic rewriting of old wisdom by the forces in ancient Israel who sought to ensure that all wisdom was consistent with God's moral and ethical dictates. The same theme was present in the Egyptian Instruction in which the accumulation of wealth while possibly representing the sign that one has lived a moral and ethical life, should not be set as a goal in and of itself. McKane

comments on this verse and those that follow:

> Wisdom is more precious than jewels and there is no delectable thing which stands comparison with her. Kayatz points out that there are a large number of representations of the goddess Maat in which she holds a symbol of life in one hand and a sceptre symbolizing wealth and dignity in the other, and urges that the portrayal of Wisdom in v. 16 is modeled on these representations of Maat.
>
> All this recalls the attitude to wealth and success in the Egyptian Instruction, where the man who is in a hurry to get rich is contrasted with the truly successful man whose prosperity is a measure of his intrinsic worth...This is what Wisdom does for a man; he becomes a weighty person in his community, a man of substance who exercises power and influence and commands respect.[47]

In an overwhelming number of verses in Proverbs, the message is clear that by doing good deeds one will accumulate respect and wealth. In other verses, however, it is also clear that wealth must not be an end in and of itself but rather the product of a moral, ethical and wise way of life. As the above would indicate, this is consistent even with the attitudes expressed in the earlier wisdom literature. This mitigating message, however, is never present in the verses expressing the theme of a materialistic reward or punishment for a particular deed, but rather is set forth separately in other verses. While those other verses are clear in their message that the accumulation of wealth is not a goal but rather only a by-product of living a wise and moral life, their relative paucity in number could, on the surface, lead

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47 McKane, Proverbs, pp. 295-96.

one to believe that they were added to a previously existing book to counter an exclusively materialist message. The evidence, however, that Egyptian Instruction countered such a message in a very similar manner leads to the more logical conclusion that from its inception Proverbs never expressed such an exclusively materialistic theme, and that the attitudes expressed in the verses subordinating wealth to the living of a wise, moral and ethical life were always dominant.

Certainly this theme of placing wisdom on a higher plane is present in the type of verse discussed above where wisdom is compared to wealth. As stated, this serves to place a value on wisdom, but equally, it tends to place riches and wealth in their proper place beneath wisdom. Thus:

> Take my instruction and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold. (8.10)
>
> For wisdom is better than rubies, and nothing desirable can be compared to it. (10.11)

In these verses, wealth is compared rather than contrasted to wisdom, and there is nothing in the verses implying that wealth is necessarily evil. On the contrary, it is used to emphasize the value of instruction and knowledge. Despite this, however, the verse implies that wealth divorced from wisdom, morals or ethics is without honor and of little value.[70] Other verses are less equivocal, describing ill-

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[70] Ibid., p. 346.

begotten wealth as fleeting, thus:

> Do not toil to gain wealth; because you have understanding, cease! (23.4)
>
> When your eyes are upon it, it takes flight and is no more, for it has grown wings; like an eagle it has flown skyward. (23.5)

The message is clear: if one sets the accumulation of wealth as the goal, such wealth is not lasting because it is not in response to wise or moral living. As with the above verse, these also have parallels in Egyptian Instruction which carries that same theme. Verses 4-5 are very similar to chapter VII of Amen-em-opet, which contains the following:

> Do not set your heart on the pursuit of riches, for it is impossible to ignore Fate and Fortune (VII 9.10-11)
>
> They have made themselves wings like geese and have flown away to heaven. (VII 10.4-5)

As Whybray states, "There is no disparagement of wealth here, but a warning not to slave (literally, "wear yourself out") in an attempt to acquire something which is notoriously ephemeral."[71] This is also further evidence that the pursuit of wealth was never the purpose for doing good deeds in Proverbs, despite the frequency with which verses connect the two, for while wealth as a sign of having lived properly was never seen as an evil, its role in the book was always

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[71] [71] Whybray, Proverbs, p. 135.

subordinate to living a upright and moral life.

If it is true that wealth pursued for its own sake is ephemeral, wealth pursued through wickedness is all the more so. Thus:

> Treasures acquired by a lying tongue are like a fleeting vapor; they lead to death. (21.6)

There are difficulties with the language in this verse. Gemser would read po'el for po'al, i. e. "the one who acquires treasures" rather than the "acquisition of treasures"; rodef for nidaf, i. e. "pursues vapor (or vanity)" rather than "fleeting vapor;" and bemokshei for mevakshei, i.e. "into the snares of death" rather than "lead to death." The translation would thus read: One who acquires treasures through a lying tongue is like one who pursues vanity into the snares of death.[72] Whatever the case, the evil one will not find any solace in the wealth that he obtains through wickedness, but rather will suffer the fate of all evildoers. While wealth may be a reward for good deeds, therefore, it can also provide the motivation for bad ones.

In a similar vein, while wealth may be a reward for wise and moral living, the book makes clear that the possession of wealth does not necessarily mean that one is good, or conversely that poverty is an indication that one has lived an

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[72] McKane, Proverbs, pp. 551-52. quoting B. Gemser, The Instructions of Onchsneshonqy and Biblical Wisdom, VTS vii (1960) pp. 102-128.

unwise or evil life. It is better to live a blameless life and be poor than to be rich but live in crooked ways.(28.6) By and large it is better to be rich than poor. (22.6)[73] But, while wealth is in most ways desirable, it does have its drawbacks. Rich men often are arrogant. (18.23)[74] In fact, the book makes clear that wealth is a mixed blessing causing on one hand all to be solicitous of the rich man, but making the acquisition of sincere friends difficult. Thus:

> Wealth makes many friends, but from the poor man his neighbor keeps himself separate. (19.4)
>
> Many entreat a prince's favor, and every man is a friend to one who gives gifts. (19.6)

Conversely, being poor does not necessarily mean that one has led an immoral or unethical life.[75] In fact, the poor man often is a vehicle by which the righteous among the rich and powerful are judged. Those who are kind to the poor will be rewarded by God, thus:

> He who is generous to the poor makes a loan to the Lord, and he will give him his recompense. (19.17)

In contrast to this, the rich or powerful one who

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[73] "The rich rule over the poor..."

[74] "...the rich man's answer is harsh."

[75] Prov. 16.8; 16.19; 17.1.

oppresses the poor will be punished. Usually, the punishment will come directly from God himself, thus:

> The one who mocks the poor, reproaches his maker, he who rejoices in calamity will not go unpunished. (17.5)

Being poor, then, does not necessarily mean that one has sinned or is out of favor with God. References to those who suffer without moral blame imply that all who are virtuous do not prosper, and conversely all who sin do not necessarily become poor. Contrary to the simple cause and effect message elsewhere in the book, therefore, Proverbs cautions that a particular fate is not necessarily an indication of God's favor or disfavor. In at least two verses, misfortune may reflect God's caring through rebuke, thus:

> Do not reject the discipline of the Lord, my son; and do not abhor his rebuke. (3.11)
>
> For the Lord rebukes the one he loves, and as a father, the son he favors. (3.12)

It has been suggested that these verses, reminiscent of the theme in Job, were added to acknowledge the obvious problem of the suffering of the righteous.[76] It is not unlike the language in which God's attitude toward the Davidic kings is expressed in terms of discipline which, no matter how

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[76] Whybray, Wisdom, p. 42.

severe, is always beneficent and an expression of his love.[77] But if these verses were added the question becomes: added to what? In fact, as with the mitigating verses discussed above, there is evidence that this thought also may have been imported along with much of the book from Egypt, and was therefore present in Proverbs from the beginning, whenever that beginning was; thus, it was stated in the late Egyptian Instruction known as Papyrus Insinger:

> Recognize the hand of God in misfortune
> when it comes upon you. (XVII 20.13)[78]

In conclusion, while observing that living prudently and morally will by and large improve one's lot on Earth, it is unlikely that Proverbs ever stood for the proposition that good deeds will always bring material reward. Throughout the book, which the redactors certainly intended to be read as a whole, there is a strong caveat that man's control over his own life has its limitations. This would be consistent with similar themes expressed not only in Egyptian Instruction, but elsewhere in the Bible as well. God presides over an order which governs all human conduct and which links God to even the most mundane human act. The workings of that order can be, as a general rule, mastered by man through wisdom. The most important part of that wisdom is living according to God's

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[77] McKane, Proverbs, p. 294.

[78] Whybray, Proverbs, p. 25.

moral and ethical rules. By doing so, man will be rewarded, but to make the material reward the goal is to step out of God's order and thus act unwisely. Finally, there is no way to master completely God's plan, and the individual should accept misfortune as a rebuke from God as a child from his parent.

But is this model viable in practice? Is it possible to balance the importance of pleasing God with the parallel motivation to act in a way that will ensure material success? A possible answer to this question lies in the development of the Protestant work ethic in the decades following the Reformation in Europe in the Sixteenth Century.

IV

The Practical Application of the Wisdom of Proverbs among the Early Protestant Sects: Reconciling the Glorification of God and the Receipt of Material Reward

In the preceding three chapters, I have attempted to show how the varied and often contradictory verses of the book of Proverbs may be viewed as a whole in the context of one order of authority headed by God, although much of that authority is administered by and large through a natural order functioning on Earth. The recognition that individuals can determine much of their fate by acting prudently but also in conformity with God's ethical and moral laws is, not surprisingly, consistent with the Egyptian Instruction from which much of Proverbs was probably borrowed. Although like Proverbs, Egyptian Instruction is remarkable for its paucity in references to a deity and typically describes act and consequence as a natural process independent of any direct divine intervention, the concept of ma'at places the Egyptian gods at the head of that order and makes them an integral part of it.

Of course, it is undeniably true that when read out of this general context, many and perhaps a majority of these verses offer only the most practical advice often accompanied

by a purely materialistic formula for success on Earth. But the patterns described in the chapters above where the creation and administration of wisdom are both attributed to God, lead to the conclusion that such a secular or materialistic message was not intended by the redactors of the book. Nevertheless, by isolating a large number of verses, one could conclude that the receipt of material reward is at least one, if not the only motivation for man to do good deeds, and that the receipt of such reward is a sign of God's favor.

Whatever the case, the question remains as to the significance of attaching God's authority to the performance of the mundane commonplace acts of life. How would a religious community for whom God's will is the only motivation to do good deeds assimilate the apparently utilitarian message of much of the book of Proverbs? How would such a community that attaches God's authority to the advice set forth in Proverbs relating to the virtue of hard work manifest itself, and how would it reconcile the very utilitarian message carried by many verses in the book with the ethical and moral one carried by others?

A possible answer to this question was provided by Max Weber in his work dealing with the rise of capitalism as it relates to the religious doctrines of the early Calvinists and other reform Protestant communities. Most notable among these works was The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,

published in German in 1904, and in English translation in 1930.[79] Weber argued that the early development of modern capitalism in the countries of Europe and America where the new Protestant sects predominated rather than in the mostly Catholic lands of southern Europe was not coincidental. In his forward to Weber's book, R. H. Tawney stated Weber's proposition as follows:

> The question which Weber sought to answer is that of the psychological conditions which made possible the development of capitalist civilization. Capitalism in the sense of great individual undertakings, involving the control of large financial resources, and yielding riches to their masters as a result of speculation, money lending, commercial enterprise, buccaneering and war, is as old as history. Capitalism, as an economic system, resting on the organization of legally free wage-earners, for the purpose of pecuniary profit, by the owner of capital or his agents, and setting its stamp on every aspect of society, is a modern phenomenon....The pioneers of the modern economic order were, he argues, parvenus, who elbowed their way to success in the teeth of the established aristocracy of land and commerce. The tonic that braced them for the conflict was a new conception of religion, which taught them to regard the pursuit of wealth as, not merely an advantage, but a duty. This conception welded into a disciplined force the still feeble bourgeoisie, heightened its energies, and cast a halo of sanctification round its convenient vices.[80]

Before discussing Weber's theory, however, it is important to give several caveats. First, while it is true

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[79] Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

[80] Ibid., pp. 1b,1c, and 2.

that the book of Proverbs was with Psalms a popular source for the expression of Calvinist doctrine, especially in the homily, it was by no means the only Biblical source used.[81] Even when Calvinist (or in England and America, Puritan) ministers cited the verses of Proverbs, they always placed them in what was for them the proper Christian context, drawing more often from Prophets and, of course, the New Testament, itself. To base a theory relating to their doctrine solely on Proverbs, therefore, would be to ignore centuries of evolution in Christian thought which preceded and contributed to early reform Protestantism.

Secondly, while Weber traces the roots of the Protestant work ethic to the Calvinists, even he concedes that the full development of a profit motivated modern capitalism could not have occurred without a secularization process which separated early capitalists such as Ben Franklin from their religious roots. As will be discussed, the Calvinists took seriously the Proverbial reverence for moderation and modesty in all things including wealth, virtues which are quite inconsistent with the penchant of the capitalists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for accumulating vast fortunes. This secularization, however, may be an indication of the very dichotomy in motivation to do good deeds reflected in Proverbs and should be considered with regard to the Calvinist-capitalist connection.

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[81] Ibid., p. 123.

Finally, although it is not the purpose here to examine the soundness of Weber's sociological theories, it must be stated that few scholars would attribute the development of modern capitalism solely to the rise of Protestantism in northern and western Europe. Most, of course, would consider it as only one of several factors that contributed to that development.[82]

Having acknowledged these limitations, however, it is safe to make the following observation. Among the early reform church members, the act of going about ones daily tasks carried with it some measure of God's sanction. The attention paid to this life and all of its mundane aspects finds considerable parallel in the book of Proverbs. The central place given that book by Calvinists and kindred Protestant sects in Europe and America, as well as the prominent place given its verses in the secular writings of the descendants of those Protestants, therefore, lead one to the logical conclusion that the connection between the two was not mere happenstance. While as discussed above, modern scholars may wish to divide the Proverbs into practical Earth-centered and pietistic or God-oriented sections, it was their apparent ability to find some unity in the two strains in the book that probably drew these early Protestants to it. It is my purpose here to describe how they viewed the very contradictory messages in Proverbs in a way that would fuse them into one

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[82] Ibid.

God-centered work enabling them to attach God's authority to the most mundane aspects of life.

Weber believed that the shift from the traditional belief that the unlimited pursuit of profit was an evil to "a system based on the deliberate and systematic adjustment of economic means to the attainment of the objective of pecuniary profit," found its beginnings in the religious revolution of the sixteenth century in Europe. That revolution "canonized as economic virtues habits which in earlier stages had been denounced as vices." "Labor (became) not merely an economic means: it (was) a material end. Covetousness, if a danger to the soul (was) less formidable than sloth."[83]

Historically, it was clear that by the middle of the seventeenth century the contrast was already apparent between the conservative economies of Catholic southern Europe and the "strenuous enterprise of the Calvinist communities" of the north. Thus a pamphleteer wrote in 1671:

> There is a kind of natural ineptness in the Popish religion to business, whereas, on the contrary, among the Reformed, the greater their zeal, the greater their inclination to trade and industry, as holding idleness unlawful.[84]

In the northern countries a unique type of capitalism arose. That capitalism was made possible by essentially two

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[83] Ibid. pp. 2-3.

[84] Ibid., p. 6.

factors: (1) the separation of business from the household and, (2) rational bookkeeping. Weber attempts to answer the question of what propelled business activity out of the home and expanded it to the point where a rational approach to its administration was necessary.

Important to the first factor was the vigor with which the modern capitalist pursued profit. Something had to push the individual into a work pattern with a goal beyond that necessary merely for his own maintenance. Weber was quick to note, however, that if greed had been the only element necessary for the development of capitalism, not only would it have existed sooner but in the very countries whose social conditions are known to have discouraged it. Rather, Weber observed, it was necessary for labor to be performed "as if it were an end in itself, a calling," and he noted:

> But such an attitude is by no means a product of nature. It cannot be evoked by low wages or high ones alone, but can only be the product of a long and arduous process of education.[85]

Weber formulated a theory connecting the rational ethics of ascetic Protestantism to the development of that modern economic life, but in doing so he rejected a commonly expressed theory which attempted to explain the apparent differences in the economic successes of Protestants and Roman Catholics. That theory alluded to the so-called "other

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[85] Ibid. p. 62.

worldliness" aspect of Roman Catholicism, and the "ascetic character of its highest ideals which (had), according to the proponents of the theory, brought up its adherents to a greater indifference toward the good things in this world."[86] If the popular proverb was correct that one could "either eat or sleep well," the Protestant preferred to eat well while the Catholic to sleep well,"or so theory went.[87]

Weber pointed to the obvious flaw in this argument by observing that the early Protestant communities in Holland, England, and America were themselves characterized by the very asceticism and avoidance of the joys of life which the old theory had given as the prime reason that the Catholic countries had not developed into modern capitalist economies.[88] He noted, however, that Protestant asceticism, unlike its Catholic counterpart, rather than encouraging the abandonment of this world for life in the cloister, demanded a full time participation in life. Weber states:

> The only way of living acceptably to God was not to surpass worldly morality in monastic asceticism, but solely through the fulfillment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world. This was his calling.[89]

Martin Luther, himself, came to view monasticism as a

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[86] Ibid., p. 40.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid., p. 80.

renunciation of the duties of this world, as a product of selfishness, and as a withdrawal from temporal obligations.[90] The fulfillment of worldly duties was to him under all circumstances the only way to live acceptably to God. It and it alone was the will of God, and hence every legitimate calling had, according to him, exactly the same worth in the sight of God.[91] Luther, however, would have been horrified by the highly utilitarian views of those such as Ben Franklin who represented to Weber the roots of the spirit of capitalism; for as Weber points out:

> To Luther, the pursuit of material gain beyond personal needs must thus appear as a symptom of lack of grace, since it can apparently only be attained at the expense of others...[92]

For the Calvinist, all toil on the Earth was for the glory of God. Although characterized by a rigid individualism that would become the hallmark of the faith, ironically, the Puritans developed a prowess for social organization. Despite the isolation of the individual and his ascetic rejection of worldly joys, he was at the same time obliged in his sole calling to serve the glorification of God in this world to organize his society according to God's commandments. All those mundane acts that were necessary for the support of the

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[90] Ibid., p. 81.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

community, therefore, became also an important part of that calling:

> Brotherly love, since it may only be practiced for the glory of God and not in the service of the flesh, is expressed in the first place in the fulfillment of the daily tasks given by lex naturae and in the process this fulfillment assumes a peculiarly objective and impersonal character, that of the rational organization of our social environment.[93]

To this factor must be added the concept of predestination. Either one was elect or not, and the Calvinist spent a lifetime attempting to find evidence of his own election. Weber described that process of constant self-examination as follows:

> ...in practice, God helps those who help themselves. Thus the Calvinist, as it is sometimes put, himself creates his own salvation, or as would be more correct, the conviction of it. But this creation cannot, as in Catholicism, consist in a gradual accumulation of individual good works to ones credit, but rather in a systematic self control which at every moment stands before the inexorable alternative, chosen or damned.[94]

In fact, one had to have confidence in one's own election to combat all the doubts as temptations of the devil. In order to attain that self confidence intense worldly activity was recommended as the most suitable means. The Calvinist

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[93] Ibid. p. 109.

[94] Ibid. p. 113.

believed that it and it alone dispersed religious doubts.[95]

The shared concentration on everyday work activity reflected in both Calvinist doctrine and in the book of Proverbs was not coincidental, according to Weber:

> It is important to note that the well-known bibliocracy of the Calvinists held the moral precepts of the Old Testament, since it was fully as authentically revealed, on the same level of esteem as those of the New. It was only necessary that they should not obviously be applicable only to the historical circumstances of the Hebrews, or have been specifically denied by Christ... The influence of the God-fearing but perfectly unemotional wisdom of the Hebrews, which is expressed in the books most read by the Puritans, the Proverbs and the Psalms, can be felt in their whole attitude toward life. In particular, its rational suppression of the mystical, in fact the whole emotional side of religion, has rightly been attributed by Sanford to the influence of the old Testament.[96]

To the early Calvinists and their cousins in England and America, the Puritans, there was no separation, therefore, between the everyday acts of hard work and the Calvinists' sole purpose on Earth for the glorification of God. But while it is evident that the book of Proverbs provided a ready Biblical source and basis for their adherence to the principles of hard work and avoidance of sloth, one is still left with the question as to how they viewed the utilitarian verses regarding work, which so often offered material gain as the sole reward for compliance with those verses'

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[95] Ibid., p. 113.

[96] Ibid., p. 123.

recommendations. While we as moderns should probably detach ourselves from the ancient redactors of Proverbs in considering how they may have viewed concepts which to us are obviously contradictory, this is not necessarily the case when considering the ideas of persons who lived only three centuries ago. In fact, there is evidence in their sermons that the early Puritan preachers did see a possible problem in the utilitarian message in much of the text and attempted to rectify it.

In contrast to the Protestant preachers of the nineteenth century who had by that time embraced the materialistic message of the spirit of capitalism, the early preachers tended to reinterpret the most utilitarian verses by imposing a religious theme upon them. The Rev. Mr. Simmons in Seventeenth century England asks in the title of his sermon: "How may we get rid of spiritual sloth, and know when our activity and duty is from the spirit of God?" The answer is anchored in the very verses discussed regarding the virtue of diligence and the vice of sloth, thus;

> ...Spiritual sloth is threefold: (1.) Resolving sloth. (2.) Delaying sloth. (3.) Disturbing sloth.
>
> (1.) Resolving sloth is, when a soul is settled upon its lees, and resolves to lie still, and never to stir in that momentous concernment of its own eternal salvation. Solomon excellently deciphers this: "as the door turneth on its hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed." (Prov. xxvi. 14) As the door turns upon the hinges and never stirs from his place, so the slothful turns upon the bed of security, and never turns from his purpose...

> (2.) Delaying sloth; when a person doth intend to look after soul-concernments, but not yet, they will borrow a day, a little time. Much like that sluggard: "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of hands to sleep." (Prov. vi 10.) When the sluggard is called to arise in the morning, he resolves to do it; only entreats one little, one short nap more, and then he will arise So when some are called to awaken, arise, and walk with God in his way, in the morning of their age, they crave one short nap more...[97]

And the Rev. Thomas Watson:

> He who makes religion his business, every day casts up his accounts to see how things go in his soul. (Lam. iii. 40.) - Solomon saith, "Know the state of thy flocks." (Prov. xxvii. 23.) A man that makes religion his work is careful to know the state of his soul: before the Lord brings him to trial...[98]

The above sermons sidestep the issue by utilitarianism, but from the fact that they did so, we may infer that they were aware of the dichotomy presented by those verses. There are other examples, however, where the virtue of work within limits was expressed. In this context, however, the limits were as important as the work itself. Unlike their successors in the decades to follow whom Weber credits with the creation of the spirit of capitalism, the Puritans of the Seventeenth Century feared excessive wealth as much as poverty, both of

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[97] Rev. Mr. Simmons, "How may we get rid of spiritual sloth, and know when our activity in duty is from the spirit of God?" Puritan Sermons 1659-1689, vol. I, (Wheaton Illinois: Richard Owen Roberts, Publishers, 1981), p. 435.

[98] Rev. Thomas Watson, "How must we make religion our business?" Puritan Sermons 1659-1689, vol. I, (Wheaton, Illinois: Richard Owen Roberts, Publishers, 1981), p. 475.

which they felt were an impediment to pursuing God's work. The optimum position for obtaining God's grace was what the Rev. John Oakes referred to as the "middle worldly condition," neither rich nor poor.[99]

One worked in order to ensure that one could devote full effort toward Godly matters rather than toward obtaining life's necessities. But extreme wealth, like poverty could also be an impediment for obtaining God's grace for it leads to an attitude of self-satisfaction and a reluctance to busy oneself in Godly matters. The motivation to do good deeds therefore remains in pleasing God, and for the early Puritans, at least, while both poverty and wealth are bestowed by God, wealth is not a proper goal.

Still, a basic premise of Puritanism remained that every man should have a calling and work hard in it. Cotton Mather wrote in a discourse in 1701:

> A Christian should follow his occupation with industry....young man, work hard while you are young: you'll reap the effects of it, when you are old. Yea, how can you ordinarily enjoy any rest at night, if you have not been well at work, in the day? Let your business engross the most of your time....[100]

William Ames confirmed that there was a role for the

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[99] Rev. John Oakes, "Wherein is a middle worldly condition most eligible," Puritan Serman 1659-1689 (Wheaton, Illinois: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), p. 408.

[100] Cotton Mather, "A Christian at His Calling," in Puritanism and the American Experience, ed. Michael McGiffert (Reading,MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1969), p. 124.

accumulation of wealth in Conscience with the Power and cases thereof.[101] Ames worked it out syllogistically: God is absolute lord of all things; hence private property is only a temporary "dominion"; therefore the temporal possessor must enhance what is entrusted to him. Division of property "is founded, not onely (sic) on human, but also on naturall (sic) and divine right." The laborer is worthy of his hire, and fidelity in one's occupation, if performed in the fear of God, must lead to reward.[102] As the ministers dealt with the phenomenon around them of a developing entrepreneurial class, therefore, their attitude toward the accumulation of wealth became less clear as they accommodated themselves to the reality of it. The temporal welfare of a people, said Jonathan Miller in 1667, required safety honesty, orthodoxy, and also "Prosperity in matters of outward Estate and Liveleyhood."[103]

To Weber the accommodation among the Puritans and their successors to the reality of the capitalist pursuit of wealth reflected a secularization of American society without which the spirit of capitalism could not have come into fruition. The essence of that secular movement is embodied in the person

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[101] Perry Miller, "The Protestant Ethic," Puritanism and the American Experience, ed. by. Michael McGiffert (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1961), p. 129.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid., p. 128.

of Benjamin Franklin, descended from Puritan parents and a product of that upbringing, but at the same time a confirmed deist. In Franklin's writings, Weber found the necessary break with the Puritan imposed restraints on the unbridled pursuit of wealth. In Franklin's sayings the two concepts of piety and the accumulation of wealth as a desirable end are combined:

> Remember, that time is money...
>
> Remember, that credit is money...
>
> Remember, that money is of the prolific, generating nature. Money can beget money, and its offspring can beget more...
>
> The most trifling actions that affect a man's credit are to be regarded. The sound of your hammer at five in the morning, or eight at night, heard by a creditor, makes him easy six months longer; but if he sees you at a billiard-table, or hears your voice in a tavern, when you should be at work, he sends for his money the next day; and demands it, before he can receive in a lump.[104]

Weber observes that the above quotes reflect "not simply a means of making one's way in the world, but a peculiar ethic. The infraction of its rules is treated not as foolishness but as forgetfulness of duty." Weber also notes that the motivation to act properly has shifted from the God-oriented language of the Puritans to moral attitudes colored by utilitarianism:

> Honesty is useful because it assures credit; so are

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[104] Weber, Protestant Ethic, pp. 48-49.

> punctuality, industry, frugality, and that is the reason they are virtues.....According to Franklin, those virtues, like all others, are only in so far virtues as they are actually useful to the individual, and the surrogate of mere appearance is always sufficient when it accomplishes the end in view.[105]

Weber cautions that what appears to be pure utilitarianism is, in fact, a new ethic based upon the accumulation of wealth for its own sake, and not for some hedonistic end. Weber elaborates:

> If we thus ask, why should "money be made out of men", Benjamin Franklin himself, although he was a colourless deist, answers in his autobiography with a quotation from the Bible, which his strict Calvinistic father drummed into him again and again in his youth: "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings" (Prov. xxii. 29).[106]

Irvin G. Wylie, in his essay God and Mammon, disputes Weber's assertion that the sanction for the pursuit of wealth found in Franklin's writings represented a secular departure from Protestant church doctrine in America. In fact, he claims, "(v)irtually all the leading Protestant denominations, with the exception of the Lutheran, produced at least one nationally known clergyman who honored the wealth-through-virtue theme."[107] Because all wealth is bestowed by God, or

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[105] Ibid., p. 52.

[106] Ibid., p. 53.

[107] Irvin G. Wylie, "God and Mammon," Puritanism and the American Experience (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1981), p. 199.

so the logic went, the accumulation of wealth is a sign of God's favor and thus was given sanction by the church. Ministers noted that Abraham, Solomon and other Old Testament heros received wealth as a sign of God's approval, and thus, one Unitarian minister told his congregation in 1885: "It is a blessing from the Lord. It is a sign of divine approval."[108] Similarly, William Lawrence, Episcopal Bishop of Massachusetts, observed: " in the long run, it is only to the man of morality that wealth comes...We, like the Psalmist, occasionally see the wicked prosper, but only occasionally....Godliness is in league with riches."[109]

While there is no license in these quotes nor in the earlier ones from Franklin's to pursue wealth dishonestly, neither is there any doubt that the accumulation of that wealth has become one of the goals of life. The combination of viewing hard work as a commandment from God with viewing the bestowal of wealth as God's reward for an upright life under God's laws synoptically tends to create a unity of goal and reward. The early restraints placed on the accumulation of wealth to ensure that it was only the product of the hard work commanded by scripture were impossible to maintain, and, as many of the verses of Proverbs promise a sure reward for proper living, the reward of wealth became a sign of that proper living. Under those circumstances, in defining the

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[108] Ibid., p. 204.

[109] Ibid., p. 205.

actual goal for doing good deeds, the goal and the reward tended to become indistinguishable.

In grappling with the apparent contradiction between the belief that all human acts were for the sole purpose of glorifying God and the parallel belief that rewards for hard work were the will of God, the early Protestants may have provided an indication as to how the ancient readers of Proverbs viewed these same contradictions. After all, if, at one point of time in history, the prominence of Proverbs in one religious community led to the described result, it stands to reason that the book in its own time and society may have had the same effect.

As important, however, is the fact that such contradictions may not have been viewed as such in either society. In fact, there is no indication in any of the writings of the early Protestants to suggest that they viewed the two identifiable authorities and the ways in which they functioned in human affairs as conflicting. As stated above, it may be possible to infer a sense of conflict from the tendency discernible among the early Calvinist homilies to reinterpret the more practical verses so that a religious message could be found. However, this may not have meant that the Calvinists themselves were conscious of any profound philosophical problem. In fact, it is more likely that the abundance of references to these verses in sermons that were, after all, delivered from the pulpit publicly is an indication

of the opposite attitude, that is, that the speakers, themselves, were quite comfortable with the old wisodm passages and the messages they carried. Similarly, it is likely that while the modern reader may find conflicting messages in the verses of Proverbs, those who were contemporaries of the book may not have done so. While the motivation to do good deeds as expressed in the Proverbs may have been multifaceted, it probably did not create any profound religious or philosophical conflicts for its early readers.

CONCLUSION

To the modern reader, the verses of the book of Proverbs present a number of contradictions relating to the motivation for human beings to do good deeds. On one level, the book offers very practical advice on the best approach for living one's life successfully based upon an observable order that governs the world. The reward and apparent motivation for living according to the principles of that order are material prosperity and physical well-being. One of these principles forms the basis for the Protestant work ethic: the one who is diligent in his work reaps material reward, but the one who is slothful suffers material ruin.

On a second level, however, the book gives another way of living, this time based upon God's moral and ethical principles. The motivation for living by this second set of principles is also in some places stated in terms of a material reward or punishment, but more often is couched in terms of either pleasing or displeasing God.

While the modern reader may view the presence of two orders and two motivations as contradictory, those for whom the book was an important guide for living would not necessarily have thought so. For the students of the Israelite wisdom instructors in ancient times as well as the Puritans who, centuries later, frequently referred to Proverbs as a practical guide for living, the knowledge imparted in the

verses of the book was cumulative and supplementary rather than contradictory, and single verses were viewed as containing complex sets of truths for living the kind of life that God had intended. For them there was no one reason for doing good deeds, but many, and that fact only served to strengthen the motivation to do so.

To the modern reader, however, the two distinct approaches to living life on Earth remain separate and distinct and the practical application of the principles underlying both is objectively difficult. This is evidenced by the apparent difficulty over the centuries for reform Protestants to separate the means of hard work from the goal of glorifying of God. The work itself became a religious ethic, an end in and of itself, and the material reward for that work came to be viewed as a sign of God's approval for his elected ones.

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