

Let the Simple Learn Wisdom: Difficulties in Constructing a Biblical Theology of the Proverbs

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KEY WORDS

| Biblical Theology | Wisdom Literature | New Testament use of the Old Testament |
| Old Testament Theology | Inter-Textuality |

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that a robust Biblical theology of the book of Proverbs is lacking, even amidst the swelling Biblical theology literature of recent decades. A survey of contemporary trends in Biblical theology with respect to the Proverbs reveals two broad approaches, both of which struggle – in distinct ways – to deal precisely with the text of Proverbs as it is situated within the canon. This paper will offer a limited critique of these broader trends before focusing on the foundational issue of how to establish inductively-derived categories in Biblical theology. The paper concludes by outlining the steps towards the construction of a Biblical theology of the Proverbs which is both robustly exegetical and richly inter-textual.

INTRODUCTION

Biblical theology has enjoyed a resurgence in recent decades, with much being built upon the foundations laid by Vos¹ and Childs². The significance of this has been enormous, at both academic and popular levels. What is perhaps less clear is the impact and influence Biblical theology has had upon the study of the wisdom literature. In this paper we will identify and consider two broad contemporary trends in Biblical theology with respect to the book of Proverbs. We will explore the shortcomings of each trend, before outlining the process for constructing a robust Biblical theology of the book of Proverbs. We will revisit the importance of inductively derived categories in

the Biblical-theological method, along with by the importance of tracing inter-textual canonical connections. We conclude by summarising further steps in the construction of a robust Biblical theology of the Proverbs.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

The Biblical-theological method, which starts by receiving the canon as a unified and organic³ whole, meets with significant difficulty when it seeks to integrate the book of Proverbs, or indeed 'wisdom literature' in general. Difficult questions are raised: what does this text have to do with the rest of the Bible? Where does it fit in our framework of Biblical theological

1 Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (East Peoria, Illinois: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975).

2 Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974).

3 Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (East Peoria, Illinois: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975).

categories? In what *inductive* way can I demonstrate that this text ‘fits’ into and develops the storyline?

To some degree these difficulties can be lessened by recourse to key themes which are, without doubt, prominent in the New Testament. Jesus is the ‘true Wise Man’; he has become for us wisdom from God (1 Corinthians 1.30), and in him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2.3). We might recognise Lady Wisdom as a type of Christ, as she calls people to turn and receive life—rather than turn in to the counterfeit feast which leads to death (Proverbs 9)⁴.

Nevertheless, much of what follows in Proverbs 10-31 challenges and strains many tidy Biblical theological categories. Immediately after the ‘two feasts’ of chapter 9, chapter 10 begins,

‘A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother. Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death’ (Proverbs 10.1–2).

How does this relate, for instance, to the in-breaking of the kingdom of God? The Proverbs of chapters 10-31 cannot be absolutised as single verses here and there; not least of all since there is some deliberate juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory phrases (e.g., Proverbs 26.4–5). Drawing a distinction between the situationally absolute (i.e., always holding true, given the right application to a situation) and the universally absolute⁵ simply pushes our problem one logical step back; how are we supposed to know the ‘right’ situational application of a Proverb?

4 Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2004), p131.

5 For a helpful summary of interpretive approaches, see Richard P. Belcher, *Finding Favour in the Sight of God: A Theology of Wisdom Literature* (IVP Academic, 2018).

At a pastoral level, Christians sometimes find themselves frustrated with Proverbs, since it does not fit neatly in the category of ‘promises to trust’, nor of ‘commands to obey’, nor of ‘examples to follow’. These understandable frustrations stem from the interpretive difficulty of when, how, and if individual Proverbs function in an absolute way. And since it is an interpretive difficulty, it is at root a Biblical-theological issue. Similar difficulties face those attempting to integrate the Proverbs into counselling⁶. The translational uncertainties associated with parts of Proverbs⁷ yield further interpretive difficulty at both popular and academic levels⁸.

One response to this is for the Proverbs to be viewed in pragmatic terms, as an ancient collection of broad truisms serving as a kind of buffet for choosing moralistic maxims that seem to ‘make life work’. In consequence, the overriding and unifying theology of the book is ignored, along with its epistemological and covenantal stance, that wisdom and knowledge flow only from the fear of YHWH. Certainly, much helpful material has been written to aid a robust grammatico-historical approach to the Proverbs⁹. In the ‘final analysis’ the book of Proverbs is a ‘book of education’¹⁰; but quite

6 John W Hilber, “Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling Sources of Authoritative Knowledge Wisdom as a Voice of Moral Authority,” *Bibl. Sacra* 620.Oct (1998): 411–22.

7 See for example, Ted Hildebrandt, “Proverbs 22:6a : Train Up a Child?,” *Grace Theol. J.* 1.Spring (1988): 3–19.

8 Douglas K Stuart, “‘The Cool of the Day’ (Gen 3:8) and ‘the Way He Should Go’ (Prov 22:6),” *Bibl. Sacra* 171. September (2014); Ronald L Jr Giese, “Dualism in the LXX of Prov 2:17 : A Case Study in the LXX as Revisionary Translation,” *J. Evang. Theol. Soc.* 36.September (1993): 289–95.

9 Greg W Parsons, “Guidelines for Understanding and Proclaiming the Book of Proverbs,” *Bibl. Sacra* 598.Apr (1993): 151–70.

10 Daniel P Bricker, “The Doctrine Of The ‘ Two Ways ’ In Proverbs I . The Constraints Of Hebrew Poetry,” *J. Evang. Theol. Soc.* 4.December (1995): 501–17.

how extensive is this education, and how does this education relate to the rest of the canon? The biblical-theological question is rarely confronted head on. How are we supposed to read the Proverbs, if we are believers in Christ Jesus? And what difference, if any, does it make to have been incorporated into the Lord Jesus Christ for how we receive the Proverbs? How does it 'fit' into the categories which the NT gives us? For instance, it is not immediately apparent how—if at all—the New Testament conceives of Proverbs within the eschatological vision of living in the 'last days', concurrent with the in-breaking of the life of the age to come and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God. So how seriously should we take the Proverbs?

For these reasons, Kennard calls the wisdom literature the 'reef' of Biblical theology¹¹; the reef which wrecks otherwise tidy biblical-theological frameworks. The image of the 'reef' implies that the Proverbs are a 'test case' for assessing the rigour of various Biblical theology models and perspectives. Should we conclude with Barr¹² that 'the theology of the Bible, as most modern scholarship has envisaged it, is something that has still to be discovered'?

What Kennard terms a 'reef' is in fact a microcosm of the wider tensions within Biblical-theological methodology¹³. One such tension is between unity and diversity within the canon; has Biblical theology been 'found guilty' of reducing diversity in its quest for

unity¹⁴ when it comes to the Proverbs? Another tension is between the historical (or descriptive) and the theological (or prescriptive). Both these tensions are manifested in Proverbs research: does Proverbs represent a unified theology? Are the Proverbs prescriptive for Christians today, or merely of historical and academic interest? Are these tensions insurmountable? Should we arrive at despair?

We can make the preliminary remark that, purely at the level of reception theory, the New Testament writers did not appear to think so. If anything, Proverbs texts appear to be handled by the NT as axiomatic presuppositions from which to exhort the Christian community. This paper will argue that the tensions are not insurmountable, but that it is necessary to construct a Biblical theology of the Proverbs which is yet more exegetically robust and inter-textually rich. Let us begin by surveying contemporary trends in Biblical theology with specific respect to the book of Proverbs.

1. 'CRITICAL-REALIST' APPROACHES

This approach is characterised by a rejection of the assumption that Proverbs sits squarely within a covenantal or canonical context. Rather, the Proverbs are cast chiefly as 'creation theology'. This has been the approach of Kennard¹⁵, Penchansky¹⁶, and others¹⁷. Kennard, whose

11 Douglas Kennard, "The Reef of Biblical Theology: A Method for Doing Biblical Theology That Makes Sense for Wisdom Literature," *Southwest. J. Theol.* 55.2 (2013): 227–51.

12 James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (London: SCM Press, 2003).

13 Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Zondervan, 2012).

14 Karl Möller, "The Nature and Genre of Biblical Theology," in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew (Grand Rapids Mich.: Zondervan, 2004), 56.

15 Kennard, "The Reef of Biblical Theology".

16 David Penchansky, *Understanding Wisdom Literature: Conflict and Dissonance in the Hebrew Text*, vol. 53 (Grand Rapids Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2012).

17 Roland E. Murphy, "Can the Book of Proverbs Be a Player in 'Biblical Theology'?" *Biblic. Theol. Bull.* 31.1 (2001): 4–8.

‘reef’ metaphor has already been highlighted, adopts a ‘critical-realist’ approach:

‘there is one clear passage through this reef and that is with critical realism surfacing creation theology, so this creation theology will be developed to position the wisdom program within.’¹⁸

Indeed, whilst Kennard insists with Childs¹⁹ that it is foundational to the task of Biblical theology that the Biblical text is ‘taken seriously in its canonical form’, his subsequent outline seems to overlook certain features of the canonical text of Proverbs. We revisit some of these later in this paper.

Kennard makes the point that ‘center does not communicate clearly as does the message’, arguing that the search for a ‘center’ continues to prove elusive in part because a word or phrase requires significant investment with meaning before it can be fairly considered, and in part because no scholarly consensus has yet emerged. His preference is to summarise the ‘message’ of a book or section of books, which (he asserts) can be derived inductively and can then in turn inform the construction of a broader Biblical theology. My chief interest at this point is not to engage directly with Kennard’s methodology or conclusions, but to note his position regards a Biblical theology of Proverbs.

Penchansky²⁰ holds that there are two distinct wisdom traditions preserved in the book of Proverbs, along with a third ‘Hokmah’ component; the ‘Lady Wisdom’ texts particularly prominent in chapter nine. Penchansky asserts that Hokmah is a ‘Hebrew goddess, the daughter of Yahweh’, whilst the distinct wisdom traditions make ‘their

18 Kennard, “The Reef of Biblical Theology”.

19 Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*.

20 Penchansky, *Understanding Wisdom Literature*.

precarious theological position more certain by avoiding any challenges. One advises trusting God and giving up on figuring things out. The other has everything figured out and imposes a rigid system to understand the messiness of human life...they provide half-baked explanations, and that becomes an offense.’ He concludes,

‘Is there anything one can say about this entire book without ignoring an important part? Since the largest unit of meaning in Proverbs is the single verse or couplet, is there anything intelligent that one can say about the entire book? ...Therefore I surrender to the formlessness of the book that has successfully resisted my efforts to impose any kind of shape.’²¹

In addition, Penchansky argues that the Proverbs present at most a redefined, ‘de-centred’ covenant to us, one which contained considerable diversity. Once again, the purpose of this paper is not to offer a detailed critique of Penchansky’s methodology and conclusions, but to survey and note the contours of the scholarly perspective he represents.

The work of James Barr, whilst not focused specifically on the Proverbs, remains of huge significance in Biblical theology, and sits in close relation to our first category of consideration. ‘Any truly biblical theology must address how to relate the OT and NT without forcing either out of shape;’²² Brevard Childs said this was ‘the heart of the problem of biblical theology’²³. Barr’s insistence was that BT can only really exist when we are looking for a ‘theology that

21 Ibid.

22 Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Zondervan, 2012).

23 Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflections on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

existed back there and then’²⁴. With the wisdom literature in view, one of Barr’s chief critiques appears valid:

‘Barr points to a number of OT theologians that do not include the NT as an integral part of their work. Barr concludes that because such OT theologians have managed to handle accurately the content of OT theology without reference to the NT, this necessarily “points towards the intrinsic separateness of the two fields.” He continues, “I suggest that this should be accepted, rather than that vast amounts of further energy be poured into a task that has proved to be neither necessary nor salutary.”’‘[Old testament theologians]..while insisting on a necessary connection to the NT in practice, fail to engage with the NT or provide evidence of its theological relevance for OT theology. This failure actually proves Barr’s point—even those who claim that the NT is necessary for a full account of OT theology fail to demonstrate this connection.’²⁵

As I will argue in this paper, such critiques are more fair than evangelical scholarship may like to admit when it comes to the Proverbs. A preoccupation with redemptive-historical readings can leave certain texts rather forgotten in practice. A dogmatic insistence on unity may in practice ignore much of the empirical diversity of the canon, especially the wisdom literature. Nevertheless, Barr’s position rests upon assumptions which do not withstand scrutiny: the dogmatic assertion that Biblical theology can and must only be descriptive and historical ignores the Bible’s own assessment of itself to being united, and indeed united with the Proverbs – hence the importance of intertextuality to the Biblical theological

method. The New Testament’s reception of the Old Testament – including, for instance, Jesus’ own self-awareness as the ‘wisdom of God’²⁶ - provides ample basis for expecting the product of careful Biblical theology to be robustly prescriptive.

If Biblical theological scholarship has been prone to be, in practice though not in principle, prescriptive with some of the canon, and descriptive with wisdom, then the necessary conclusion is not despair at the entire project, but the construction of a deeper, richer, more textured biblical theology.

Summary of category one

We may summarise ‘category one’ approaches to Proverbs and Biblical theology as quite simply the rejection of the possibility of a unified Biblical theology which might integrate the Proverbs in all their diversity. An initially evident weakness of this approach is that it begs the question as to how creation has been observed and interpreted in such a way as to produce the theology of the Proverbs. In other words, there is already a *lens of some kind* in place through which ants and leeches are being considered and evaluated. Further, to identify apparent dissonance within the book of Proverbs and attribute this to a diverse – even conflicting – community of sages smacks of hasty post hoc deductive reasoning. Even if we were to limit ourselves to the perspective of reception theory, it is far from clear that the New Testament writers viewed the Proverbs as a mixed bag of non-covenantal sage material. The need for careful inductive reading, along both exegetical and inter-textual lines, is highlighted.

24 James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (London: SCM Press, 2003).

25 Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Zondervan, 2012).

26 E.g., compare Luke 11.49 with its parallel in Matthew 23.34.

I suggest that this category of approach is both insufficient and unwarranted with regards to the book of Proverbs. Insufficient, since – as this paper will argue – covenantal language is plentiful in the book of Proverbs. And unwarranted since – if it can be demonstrated that the book is built upon covenantal architecture, and that the inter-textual connections within the canon affirm this – then it must be concluded that creation theology is not the whole of the story.

2. STORYLINES AND FRAMEWORKS

Goldsworthy's immense contribution to biblical theology, at both academic²⁷ and popular levels²⁸, must be applauded. His legacy, built upon Vos' methodology and soundly applied within both academy and local church, is inestimable. According to Goldsworthy, wisdom literature is, 'a theology of the redeemed man living in the world under God's rule.'²⁹ His biblical-theological method for the wisdom literature is as follows:

- (1) Begin with the Christological clues that surround the person and work of Jesus as Israel's wise man.
- (2) Move back to the most prominent antecedents to this in the Old Testament, in this case in the messianic narratives of Israel's kingship.
- (3) Capitalize on the links between Solomon and the wisdom literature in order to gather criteria for identifying the distinctive characteristics of wisdom theology and literature.
- (4) Identify the antecedents to this in the pre-Solomonic

narratives. (5) Move forward to identify wisdom theology in the three main stages of revelation, while also making any lateral thematic connections between wisdom and other aspects of biblical theology. The three stages of revelation are: a) biblical history and especially covenant history from Abraham to its zenith with Solomon; b) prophetic eschatology as it recapitulates salvation history and predicts its future fulfillment in the Day of the Lord; c) the fulfillment in Christ of the typology of the previous two stages... We do not have a wisdom Jesus who is different from a salvation history Jesus.³⁰

The above methodology helps immensely to orientate us within the storyline. But does it help us make sense of the texts themselves? We are alerted to the category that Jesus is the 'One greater than Solomon', but what then are we to do with Solomon's texts? Are they to be archived since one greater is now here? Or, is there a Christological hermeneutic which somehow integrates and even 'unlocks' them? To put it differently, is the treasury of hidden wisdom in Christ (Colossians 2.3) the same wisdom as Solomon's, made more clear; or is it a different wisdom altogether?

Biblical theologians Wellum and Gentry have made a tremendous service to evangelical scholarship in their volume, *Kingdom Through Covenant*³¹. Their respectful critique of Goldsworthy is insightful, noting both an overly hasty dismissal (on Goldsworthy's part) of the possibility of literary unity within the Bible (leading him thus to build his methods upon historical unity); and a covenantal framework which is, in their assessment, not as exegetically

27 Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Apollos, 2012).

28 Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2012).

29 Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Wisdom: Israel's Wisdom Literature in the Christian Life* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995).

30 Graeme Goldsworthy, "Wisdom and Its Literature in Biblical-Theological Context," *South. Baptist J. Theol.* 15.Fall (2011): 42–55.

31 Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018).

robust as it might be³².

In Goldsworthy's Biblical-theological approach to 'wisdom' then, one domain is largely lacking; that of inter-textuality. In other words, textual connections (especially those between the testaments) are confined to 'antecedents' for 'Christ our wisdom'. Whilst as a framework this is satisfying, and no doubt the 'big picture' of orienting the Proverbs within the OT storyline is helpful, this approach does not address the actual textual data available to us as we approach the Proverbs. A very similar criticism can be made of Vos' classic methodology³³; beyond broad historical orientation, we soon reach a limit in how helpful an 'epochal' approach is in constructing a theology of the Proverbs which integrates into the whole canon. As we will consider below, some Proverbs texts at least are directly handled by the NT in categories that are not simply or directly Christological. Conversely, it is far from obvious what the Christological connections are to much of the book.

Kaiser's Biblical theology is refreshing in its explicit structural attention to the wisdom literature³⁴, though this amounts to only a few pages. Particularly helpful are the connections he draws out between the 'fear of the LORD' and 'life', thus strengthening the continuity between the Mosaic covenant and wisdom on the basis of the invitation of both, 'do this and you will live'.

However, there remains the question, how are we to read Old Testament wisdom in light of the New Testament, and vice versa? Does Paul have the 'fear of the LORD' in mind, when he writes that Jesus has become for us wisdom?

32 Ibid.

33 Vos, *Biblical Theology*.

34 Walter C. Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids MI.: Zondervan, 2009).

Does Kaiser think that the New Testament regards Jesus as the Wise Man who learns, teaches, and does the fear of the LORD, and thus obtains life, honour, and riches? We might say that Kaiser is more helpful in integrating the Proverbs, with the theme of 'life', to an Old Testament theology, than to a Biblical theology.

Belcher³⁵ gives much weight to the conception of Jesus as the 'true wise man', and argues that 'wisdom' thus relates to the Kingdom of God as follows:

Jesus use of proverbs is dependent on his mission to proclaim and establish the kingdom of God. The proverbial sayings of Jesus must be understood in relationship to the character of the kingdom as submission to the rule of God embodied in the person and work of Jesus. They must also be understood in the light of the urgency of the moment of decision that comes with the kingdom. Entering the kingdom must be a person's highest priority. This parallels the emphasis in Proverbs of seeking wisdom and getting wisdom at all costs, except now it is seeking Jesus and following him at all costs.

We are left with the same unresolved question: is Christ's wisdom the 'same but better' as Solomon's? Or is it a different kind of wisdom altogether? And how can we know? This seems to be of enormous importance for how we then handle the specific Proverbs texts. Similarly, van Gemeren, in his chapter on Proverbs within van Pelt's volume³⁶, devotes a few concluding paragraphs summarising the New Testament's 'wisdom' texts, yet without addressing the specifics of how the Proverbs material is therefore to be interpreted by the New Testament. Waltke's magisterial commentary on Proverbs includes a very lucid

35 Belcher, *Finding Favour in the Sight of God*.

36 Willem Van Gemeren, "Proverbs," in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, ed. Miles Van Pelt (Wheaton Ill.: Crossway, 2017).

sub-section on the ‘superiority’ of Jesus Christ to Solomon’s wisdom³⁷ (likening them to five and twenty dollar bills respectively); however, whether this ‘superiority’ is of type or extent is not elucidated.

We may push the criticism of this second category a tentative step further. Yarborough has suggested that an inadvertent consequence of an ‘anti-dogmatic dogmatism’ stemming from ‘biblical theological reductionism’ is a reduced centrality of the cross³⁸. Could it be that biblical-theological exegesis of the Proverbs is one such casualty? In other words, dogmatic biblical-theological frameworks (such as ‘Christ the Wise Man’) imposed upon the diversity and ambiguity of the Proverbs may have the unintended effect of silencing individual texts, and thus of silencing their wider canonical connections, and thus possibly hindering the task of inductive Biblical theology.

A number of excellent Biblical-theological volumes have been published recently which, broadly, take a ‘storyline’ approach. These include G.K. Beale’s New Testament volume³⁹ and Stephen Dempster’s Old Testament volume⁴⁰. There is also a resurgence of ‘storyline’ volumes at the popular level, such as Crossway’s ‘Studies in Biblical Theology’ series, or Roberts and Wilson’s volume on the Exodus theme⁴¹. These ‘storyline’ approaches make a tremendous contribution to Biblical

theology at both scholarly and popular levels. For the purposes of this study, however, it is worthy of remark how little the wisdom literature features, generally, in the framework Beale draws upon in order to demonstrate the numerous points of end-time fulfilment of the Old Testament in the New. Similarly, the space given to the wisdom literature generally in Dempster’s theology of the Old Testament is limited, and to the Proverbs in particular extremely short. Christopher Wright’s Biblical theology, which endeavoured to encapsulate the ethical texture of the redemptive storyline, gives scant attention to the wisdom literature⁴². Understandably then, some scholars will concur with Kennard that the wisdom literature is indeed a ‘reef’ on which otherwise robust Biblical theologies are wrecked, the relative silence on Proverbs in recent leading volumes being tacit acknowledgement of this. Seifrid’s precise critique of ‘storyline’ and ‘narrative’ approaches to Biblical theology merits much reflection. He warns that the construction of whole-Bible narrative theologies ‘involves a forgetfulness that we do not speak from above, but from within the ongoing story of God’s dealings with the world.’⁴³

Whilst the above survey is by no means exhaustive, it does illustrate the broad tendency of evangelical scholarship to regard redemptive-historical readings as functionally co-extensive with Biblical theology⁴⁴. In contrast, the handling of the Proverbs by the New Testament appears to beg that there is an undistributed middle. The adherence to a

37 Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, p132.

38 Robert W. Yarborough, “The Practice and Promise of Biblical Theology: A Response to Hamilton and Goldsworthy,” *South. Baptist J. Theol.* 12.4 (2008): 78–86.

39 G. K. (Gregory K.) Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011).

40 Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove Ill.: Apollos, 2003).

41 Alastair Roberts and Andrew Wilson, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing Themes of Redemption through Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018).

42 Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006).

43 Mark A Seifrid, “Story-Lines of Scripture and Footsteps in the Sea,” *South. Baptist J. Theol.* (2004): 88–106.

44 Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Zondervan, 2012).

redemptive-historical paradigm can mean that texts which do not easily align within a storyline get less attention. If texts ‘must be interpreted as a discernible segment of a forward-moving narrative whole’⁴⁵, what happens to texts which don’t seem to move the narrative forward, like pedagogical ones?

Summary of category two

In summary, a characteristic of ‘category two’ approaches to the wisdom literature is that they are prone to rely too heavily on heuristics and frameworks which ‘work’ with other categories of the canon, but are less satisfying under scrutiny with the book of Proverbs, in particular when inter-textual relationships are considered. An underlying unresolved question is that of the relation of the New Testament ‘wisdom’ category to Solomonic wisdom. Are they quantitatively or qualitatively different? A difference of extent or a difference of kind?

Limitations of both categories

What both trends of approach have in common, in this author’s opinion, is that they fail to attend in sufficient detail to the inter-textuality of the book of Proverbs. That is, they either overlook the covenantally-loaded language of the Hebrew text, and the way in which the New Testament handles the Proverbs (a shortcoming of trend one in particular), or they rely upon theological models, assumptions, and structures placed upon the text of Proverbs, without being inductively constructed or justified from within the text itself (a particular tendency of the second trend). In addition, the second model may tend to choose one or two New Testament categories of relation to the Proverbs (such as,

45 Ibid.

above, ‘Jesus the wise man’), and expand that model so as to be a uniform category for all of the Proverbs text. Thus both methods fail to attend in sufficient detail to the actual Proverbs text and inner-canonical connecting texts of Scripture.

To summarise then; if Biblical theology is whole-Bible theology, then why does Proverbs not feature much within our leading formulations? Or, if Proverbs has little to add to our leading Biblical-theological formulations, why does the New Testament quote and allude to the Proverbs on several instances? We have considered two broad trends of biblical theology in approach to the book of Proverbs. In the first, no hope is held for such whole-Bible theological integration. In the second, trusted frameworks are found wanting. There remains significant theological reflection and ‘biblical-theologically-oriented exegesis’ to be done in order to tease out the connections between a robust whole-Bible theology and the particularities of the Proverbs.

INITIAL STEPS TOWARDS CONSTRUCTING A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF PROVERBS

We must begin with the canon. Whilst there is a rich sapiential tradition surrounding the Qumran community⁴⁶, ‘the direct evidence for Proverbs is sparse for the most part’⁴⁷ in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The low profile of the Proverbs in the

46 Géza Xeravits, “Discerning Wisdom: The Sapiential Literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *J. Study Jud.* (2009); Charlotte Hempel, Armin Lange, and Hermann Lichtenberger, *The Wisdom Texts from Qumran and the Development of Sapiential Thought* (Leuven; Hadleigh: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2002).

47 Elisa Uusimäki, “The Proverbs Tradition in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Crossing Imaginary Boundaries: The Dead Sea Scrolls in the Context of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Mika Pajunen and Hanna Tervanotko (Helsinki: The Finnish Exegetical Society, 2015).

DSS means that our consideration of a Biblical theology of Proverbs must necessarily be conducted along canonical lines. With this in mind, we suggest that the foundational question of categories requires greater precision in order to begin constructing a Biblical theology of Proverbs.

What are our categories?

Since Biblical theology takes the canon as the methodological starting point⁴⁸, axiomatic to the procedure of Biblical theological construction is establishing inductively received categories – i.e., reading the text in light of the categories which the canon gives us⁴⁹. We can consider ‘categories’ to include both units of text and theological concepts. Are our received categories basically ‘functional’ (however thematic), or canonical⁵⁰?

Since we are striving here to do Biblical theology - to trace the Bible’s unity according to its own terms and categories-, two theological assumptions will be challenged at the outset. Firstly, this project does not begin by assuming a clearly defined distinction between ‘creation’ and ‘covenant’. Secondly, this project does not begin by assuming the legitimacy of the category of ‘wisdom literature’. Categories such as creation, covenant, and wisdom literature may all too readily become subtle assumptions which distort Biblical theological method into a deductive, rather than inductive, endeavour.

48 Charles H. H. Scobie, “The Challenge Of Biblical Theology,” *Tyndale Bull.* 42.1 (1991): 31–61.

49 Vos, *Biblical Theology*; Richard C Barcellos, “Analysis Of Geerhardus Vos’ Nature And Method Of Biblical Theology,” *Reform. Baptist Theol. Rev.* 06.2 (July) (2009): 55–79; Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*.

50 D. A. Carson, “Current Issues in Biblical Theology: A New Testament Perspective,” *Bull. Biblic. Res.* 5.1 (1995): 17–41.

1. Covenant or creation, or covenant through creation?

The reason for challenging the first distinction is that, whilst the theological categories of creation and covenant are enormously rich when articulated in atemporal terms (‘what does the Bible have to say about creation’, ‘what does it have to say about covenant’ etc), we do not find such a category distinction within Biblical literature itself. Indeed, to insist on creation and covenant as being separate – and separable – is something of a *circulus in probando* when it comes to reading the text of, for instance, Genesis. The words and narratives of covenant come to us fully integrated into the language of creation. Indeed, the Pentateuch as a whole – sometimes called the book of the covenant, and clearly containing the origins of God’s covenants - begins with creation itself, and creation language adorns it at key turning points. This is of significance for Proverbs research since – if it is the case that the Bible does not tidily separate creation and covenant, we cannot set them against one another. Scholars in our first category have advocated approaches which effectively argue that Proverbs is about creation, not covenant. Why do we feel we must choose? Where is the warrant for such a distinction, especially for scholars involved in Biblical-theological exegesis? Such an argument reveals an underlying deductive (rather than inductive) approach to the canonical text.

That Proverbs appears to understand creation and covenant as inseparable realities should not surprise us; the Hebrew Bible presents this same worldview at numerous points. Dempster, for instance, points out that in the very structuring of the Psalter we find at one key ‘seam’ - Psalm 89 – the integrated realities of creation and covenant:

[In Psalm 89.3] the solidity of the created order, rooted in God’s love, is the reason for praise. History is then introduced, as well as creation, to make the same point: ‘I have cut a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant. For ever I will establish your seed. For ever I will build your throne’ (89.4). It is no accident that the word ‘establishes’ refers back to God’s faithfulness established in the heavens in v3, and the word ‘build’ refers to the securing of God’s mercy in the same verse. In other words, the pre-historical creation and the historical covenant with David are virtually cut from the same cloth. They are supreme manifestations of God’s mercy.⁵¹

Furthermore, whilst scholarly consensus does not yet exist on the significance of the toledot formula in the book of Genesis, it is apparent from their very form – even if their function is debated – that the creation of the heavens and the earth is inextricably linked to the election and blessing of a covenant people. If we read Genesis on its own terms and through its own categories, we must acknowledge that the toledot form seams which link Joseph, through his fathers, to Noah, Adam, and the created order itself. All this to insist that creation and covenant cannot be hermetically separated, and thus must not be pitted against one another in Biblical theological method. Rather, as we consider the book of Proverbs, the canon gives us covenant within, or through, creation.

Covenant through creation in Proverbs

At the very least, those who would dispute the covenantal lens of the book must provide a more robust argument than the mere (apparent) ‘absence’ of sufficient covenantal terms. Is the problem an absence of evidence (i.e., ‘insufficient’ covenantal referents -

according to whose standard of sufficiency?), or a demonstrable evidence of absence? Furthermore, we might pursue their own suggestion – that the Proverbs are mere creation theology – and ask, is this actually what we would expect if it was mere creation theology? Why does YHWH’s name appear at all? Why is the book so robustly monotheistic? Why is there such a consistent moral framework? Why such a view of ultimate future consequences for actions, and so on?

We can go further, and argue that the Proverbs, read carefully and on their own terms, contain plentiful linguistic markers of a deeply ‘covenantal’ outlook. The very simplest argument for a covenantal perspective in the book of Proverbs – or, at least, a covenantal ‘lens’ through which observational theology is being carried out – is surely the presence of the name YHWH. In the book of Proverbs, the name of YHWH occurs eighty-seven times. Moreover, the syntagm or compound noun⁵² ‘fear of YHWH’ is the organising principle of the book⁵³. The ‘fear of the LORD’ is a construct which occurs twenty-five times in the Old Testament, in several clearly ‘covenantal’ contexts⁵⁴. Of particular note is Isaiah’s prophecy that the ‘delight’ of the servant of the LORD will be in the ‘fear of the LORD’ (Isaiah 11.2-3).

In contrast to the ‘fear of God’ in Scripture, the ‘fear of the LORD’ refers to “the LORD’s special revelation, whether through Moses or through Solomon. By this term Solomon traces his wisdom back to the LORD’s inspiration.”⁵⁵

52 Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990).

53 Henri Blocher, “The Fear Of The Lord As The ‘Principle Of Wisdom,” *Tyndale Bull.* 28.1 (1977): 3–28.

54 See the cluster in 2 Chronicles (14.14; 17.10; 19.7; 19.9); also Job 28.28; Psalms 19.9; 34.11; 111.10; Isaiah 33.6.

55 Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, p. 100.

51 Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, p197-198.

The term encapsulates both the objective revelation of the character and works of YHWH, alongside personal, subjective, response to that knowledge. Deuteronomy treats ‘love of the LORD’ and ‘fear of the LORD’ as synonyms⁵⁶. In Proverbs 15.33, ‘humility’ is a parallel term to ‘fear of the LORD’. In further relation to this personal response, ‘fear of the LORD’ is associated with ‘delight’ (Isaiah 11.2-3).

There are no explicit references to the redemptive event of the Exodus in the book of Proverbs. There are, however, clear references to sacrifice and the turning away of guilt. One such example occurs in Proverbs 16.6;

“By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the Lord one turns away from evil...”

בְּחֶסֶד וְאֱמֻנָה יִכָּפֵר עֲוֹן וּבְיִרְאַת יְהוָה סוּר מִרָע:

This verse links the covenantally loaded terms ‘steadfast love and faithfulness’; ‘atone for iniquity’; ‘fear of YHWH’, and ‘turn from evil’. Whilst these may be ambiguous in isolation, in that they may be translated variously, our purpose here is simply to articulate that the cumulative weight of loaded words and phrases in the Proverbs, read on their own terms, within the Tanakh’s own framework of the inseparableness of creation and covenant, should persuade us of the underlying covenantal outlook of this book.

Proverbs 3, which features multiple covenantal referents, in addition to the fear of the LORD (3.7), illustrates this well:

1. Linguistic allusions to Deuteronomy, in particular Deuteronomy 4, 6, and 8. The themes of ‘do this and you will live’ (Deuteronomy 4); ‘binding the commandment’ (Deuteronomy 6) are

alluded to in verses 2-3, while the charge to ‘keep the commandment’ (v1) alludes to Deuteronomy 8. Furthermore, the theme of ‘blessing and curses’, found in the string of pithy dichotomies in the concluding section of Proverbs 3, may be a cryptic distilling of Deuteronomy as a whole.

2. ‘Tree of life’; The repeated appearance of the ‘tree of life’ (3.18, 11.30, 13.12, 15.4) surely roots Proverbs to its covenantal beginnings, in the book of Genesis. In fact, the tree of life is perhaps the canon’s earliest, simplest, most irreducible symbol of the inseparability of creation and covenant. In Proverbs 3.18, wisdom is referred to as a ‘tree of life’. We must surely count it as significant that the ‘tree of life’ motif occurs explicitly elsewhere in the canon only in Genesis (2.9, 3.22) and Revelation (2.7, 22.2)⁵⁷. Some time ago Marcus⁵⁸ made the observation that the canon’s concept of the ‘tree of life’ sits in sharp distinction to the ‘tree of life’ motif found in later Jewish wisdom literature or other ANE (e.g., Akkadian) sources, in that it is eschatological at root, rather than a kind of synonym for ‘health’.

3. ‘Steadfast love and faithfulness’ (3.3) – these are clearly metonymies, though not simply for ‘the father’s teaching and commandments’⁵⁹, but are ‘loaded’ referents for loyalty in covenant with the

57 ‘Tree of life’ features in later Jewish extra-biblical literature; 4 Esdras 8.52.

58 Ralph Marcus, “The Tree of Life in Proverbs,” *J. Biblic. Lit.* 62.2 (1943): 117.

59 Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, p. 241.

56 Cf. Deuteronomy 5.29 with 6.2, and 6.5 with Joshua 24.14; cf. 10.12, 20; 13.5.

LORD, as passages such as Exodus 34.3-9 make clear. These referents appear together thirty-nine times across the OT.

In summary, we maintain that the categories of ‘creation’ and ‘covenant’ must not be deductively viewed as separate and separable. To do so is to sabotage the Biblical-theological method. When considered inductively, the book of Proverbs contains much ‘covenantal’ material.

2. ‘Wisdom literature’ - a Biblical category?

Secondly, Biblical scholarship has long used the category ‘wisdom literature’ for certain books of the Hebrew Bible – especially, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job. Although a clear rule for inclusion does not exist, it is often argued that some of the Psalms, some or all of the book of James, and some of the gospels should also be included in the category, along with – possibly - the Song of Songs. Some would also then add books from the Apocrypha; Wisdom Ben Sirach (also called Ecclesiasticus) and the Wisdom of Solomon. Thus, whilst the central books are agreed upon, there is not a clear agreement upon where the boundary set lies; of how far the actual category ‘wisdom literature’ extends. This difficulty stems from the fact that ‘wisdom literature’ is a functional category – leaving it therefore up to scholars to assess the extent of a ‘wisdom function’ that a given text performs. Clearly at this point we are not doing Biblical theology, by bringing a pre-conceived category (‘wisdom function’) to the canon and seeing what fits.

Rather, the Bible’s own categories of the Old Testament are the ‘law, the prophets, and

the writings’⁶⁰ – hence the Hebrew acronym Tanakh. There has been a renewal of interest in the significance of the ordering of the books of the Old Testament, once they are ‘returned’ to their original three categories⁶¹. When the books of the OT are placed in their Hebrew OT sequence, we may find fruitful connections at the ‘seams’ between adjacent books, and also between adjacent categories. One example is the connection between Proverbs 31.10 and Ruth 3.11 (which follows immediately after Proverbs in the Hebrew OT ordering). Our purpose in this study is simply to clarify and establish the Biblical-theological warranted categories within which to orient Proverbs research. The significance for this project, then, is as follows:

1. The book of Proverbs comes to us within the canon as a discrete unit.
2. The canon views the larger unit to which Proverbs belongs to be the ‘writings’.
3. The ‘seams’ of both the book of Proverbs and the writings may hold Biblical-theological significance. These are, specifically, Job (immediately prior to the Proverbs) and Ruth (immediately after); and, for the writings as a whole, Psalm 1 (which opens them) and 2 Chronicles 36 (which closes them).
4. Moreover, in considering ‘what are

60 E.g., Luke 24.44, where ‘Psalms’ is a shorthand for the writings.

61 Miles V. Van Pelt, ed., *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised* (Wheaton Ill.: Crossway, 2017); Patrick Schreiner, *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross* (Wheaton Ill.: Crossway, 2018).

our categories' in Proverbs and Biblical theology, we can add that chapters 1-9 form a discrete unit⁶² within the book, serving both as prologue and hermeneutical lens⁶³ for the entirety of what follows⁶⁴. In addition, there are explicit subsequent sections; the 'Proverbs of Solomon' (chapters 10-24), 'More Proverbs of Solomon' (chapters 25-29), the 'Words of Agur' (chapter 30), and the 'Words of King Lemuel' (chapter 31). These internal given categories of text in turn drive the pedagogical function of the book as a whole.⁶⁵

In summary, we argue that the Bible's own categories of 'writings', the book of Proverbs itself, the 'seams' of these categories, and the explicit internal sections of the Proverbs, should provide the interpretive framework from which to construct a canonical Biblical theology. This represents an inductive approach.

CONCLUSION: NEXT STEPS FOR BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL PROVERBS RESEARCH.

This paper has argued that a more robust, exegetically-constructed Biblical theology is needed for the book of Proverbs. After first highlighting the shortcomings of the two broad approaches already in existence, we

have outlined the necessity of inductively-derived theological categories. In concluding, we highlight the significance of this project for both church and academy, and outline the next steps of this broader project.

The significance of recovering a Biblical theology of the Proverbs lies in the subsequent capacity for the right application of wisdom within home, church, academy, marketplace, and state. In other words, if a solid foundation can be established for how to read and apply the Proverbs, then wise living can be built upon that foundation. The book of Proverbs claims to hold out wisdom pertinent to all these spheres – home, church, academy, marketplace, state – and more. Axiomatic to constructing this foundation is to arrive at clarity upon how Solomon's wisdom relates to the Christ and his Kingdom. We have argued in this paper that such a Biblical theology can only be constructed by careful articulation of inductively-derived canonical categories. We can conclude by outlining the subsequent steps as we see them.

1. Systematic study of inter-textual connections between the Proverbs and the rest of the canon, and a subsequent synthesis of this material. This would take as its starting point explicit quotations of the Proverbs in the New Testament (e.g., Proverbs 3.34 and James 4.6, 1 Peter 5.5), and then move onto allusions (e.g., Luke 2.52 and Proverbs 3.4).

2. As an extension of this, studying NT lexical allusions to the LXX text of the Proverbs. For instance, the NT's use of a term such as παιδεία, (Ephesians 6.4, Hebrews 12.5-11) appears not as a referent to a Graeco-Roman category, but to the LXX of Proverbs, where it appears 26 times, often translating מִוּסָר ('discipline/instruction'), and also functioning as a 'shorthand' or dominant term for wisdom⁶⁶.

62 Rick W. Byargeon, "The Structure and Significance of Prov 9:7-12," *J. Evang. Theol. Soc.* 40.3 (1997): 367-75.

63 There is some evidence that Proverbs 1-9, as a unit, formed a basis for sapiential re-interpretation at Qumran. Uusimäki, "The Proverbs Tradition in the Dead Sea Scrolls."

64 Daniel J. Estes, Hear, *My Son : Teaching and Learning in Proverbs 1-9* (Leicester: Eerdmans, 1997).

65 Christopher B. Ansberry, *Be Wise, My Son, and Make My Heart Glad : An Exploration of the Courtly Nature of the Book of Proverbs* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011).

66 For instance, Proverbs 25.1 of the LXX renders παιδεία

Even on this preliminary detail much hangs, since it would appear that Paul has the book of Proverbs in mind when he urges fathers in the church in Ephesians. Thus, further study of NT allusions to the LXX text of Proverbs is merited.

3. This then gives rise to a broader consideration of Jesus' own self-awareness as the 'wisdom of God'. In comparing Luke 11.49 with its parallel in Matthew 23.34, we find an insight into Jesus' self-awareness as 'the wisdom of God', which can serve as the starting point for this consideration. In the former text he refers to 'the Wisdom of God' saying, and in the latter text he says 'I say to you'⁶⁷. Furthermore, earlier in Luke 11, Jesus has referred to himself as 'something greater' than 'the wisdom of Solomon' (Luke 11.21). This would appear to strengthen the case for seeing the inter-textual fabric of the 'fear of the LORD' as leading directly towards the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth (cf. Isaiah 11.2-3). Recent renewal of interest in Proverbs 8 and its relation to texts such as 1 Corinthians 1.24 and Revelation 3.14, in light of eternal generation⁶⁸, has much relevance to this area of study. Thus, further consideration of the degree to which Jesus conceived of himself as the 'key' or fulfilment of the book of Proverbs, is merited.

4. Whilst reception theory is a field of research distinct to Biblical theology, studying the historical reception of the book of Proverbs would serve as a very useful adjunct to this study. The significance of this may be as follows: if the predominant historical

in plural form for 'proverbs' of Solomon.

67 Belcher, *Finding Favour in the Sight of God*.

68 Matthew Y. Emerson, "The Role of Proverbs 8: Eternal Generation and Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern," in *Retrieving Eternal Generation*, ed. Fred Sanders and Scott R. Swain (Zondervan, 2017).

understanding of the book of Proverbs has been pedagogical⁶⁹ (even in part) – i.e., concerned with the teaching of axiomatic life-principles, and if the predominant NT use of quotations and allusions is (even in part) pedagogical, then our Biblical theology must be sufficiently deep and rich to integrate both this pedagogical material and its relation to the Kingdom of God inaugurated in Christ the Wise Man.

5. This then gives rise to the final stage of this project, which is extensive reflection and integration with respect to the wider discipline of Biblical theology; in particular relation to dominant themes, such as the Kingdom of God⁷⁰, and union with Christ⁷¹. This final stage will synthesise all the prior material to answer the basic question, how does Proverbs relate to the Kingdom of God? If believers are united to Christ, the true King and Wise Man, what implications does their union hold for how they read Solomon's Proverbs? Do they now have the complete 'lens' through which to read and apply them? Or do the Proverbs not apply to them at all?

Klink and Lockett⁷² outline five distinct Biblical theological methods, distinguished in particular by their assumptions and prior commitments, and represented by a particular scholar; namely, BT1, historical description (James Barr); BT2, history of redemption (D.A. Carson); BT3, worldview-story (N.T. Wright); BT4, canonical approach (Brevard Childs); and BT5, theological construction (Francis

69 Christopher B. Ansberry, *Be Wise, My Son, and Make My Heart Glad: An Exploration of the Courtly Nature of the Book of Proverbs* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011).

70 Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, *The Kingdom of God* (Wheaton Ill.: Crossway, 2012).

71 Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2015).

72 Klink III and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice*.

Watson). These five, located across a spectrum from 'purely historical' to 'purely theological', provide a helpful heuristic to illustrate, in conclusion, the 'robust exegesis and rich synthesis' which I am advocating for.

Whilst Klink and Lockett's goal was to trace and describe the various contours of Biblical theology, I suggest that these five approaches can in fact map our process for construction, from historical and textual through to prescriptive and applied. BT1's great strength lies in its insistence on dealing with the text in its historical setting. This provides the necessary tethering for Biblical-theological construction. BT2 is concerned with redemptive-historical movement. With this perspective solely in view, much of Proverbs can fall into a blind spot, as this paper has shown. Yet without BT2, key interpretive poles may be missed altogether. BT3 is concerned with narrative and meta-narrative, and again the Proverbs may be prone to being overlooked from this exclusive perspective. BT4 is concerned with canon, which yields a significant richness with Proverbs in mind, and BT5 with confession and prescription for the church.

I am advocating for a progression through these 5 perspectives, along the spectrum from descriptive to prescriptive, historical to theological. I suggest that this is the template which the canon itself gives us. In a subsequent paper I intend to demonstrate this at greater length by considering a specific case study of New Testament inter-textuality with the Proverbs. Here, a sketch will surmise. The reader (exegete, scholar, or preacher etc) finds herself puzzling over a particular Proverbs text. She does her best to understand it, taking into account all historical information, and working only with the categories which emerge from the text (BT1). She is well oriented regarding the

Bible's redemptive storyline and its coherent narrative framework (BT2 &3) from her ongoing reading and reflection upon Scripture. Her consideration of the canon (BT4) leads her to trace inter-textual connections, further clarify the trajectory of inductive categories, and thus to receive the New Testament's assumption of the Proverbs as normative for Christian life:

the canon preserves a collection of "tradition shapings", which maintain fidelity to the original material and simultaneously promote the adaptation of the material for a new setting and situation...the canon itself becomes the overarching context for handling history and theology and for determining the meaning of the Bible.⁷³

Our reader is now positioned in the locus of BT5 to engage in a reflective exercise where she is able to read her text both 'forwards' and 'backwards', the product of which is robust and rich theological construction. Forwards, since she conceives of her Proverbs text as landing ultimately in New Testament categories; that is, landing with the 'mind of Christ', forming part of the treasure chest of wisdom stored up 'in Christ' and available to his people. Understanding Jesus to be the climactic Wise Man gives her warrant to read the Proverbs as his words, authoritative for decisions in real life in real time. And our reader reads backwards, returning to Solomon's Proverbs and able to receive all of them as earthy, real-life, dynamic wisdom for living. It provides her with the pedagogical toolkit for education and discipleship; a toolkit which Paul appears to have in mind in Ephesians 6.4, from his allusion to the LXX text of Proverbs.

A further tension manifested when we attempt to move from the Proverbs text to theological construction is the existential

73 Ibid.

tension between the application of wisdom in necessarily situated 'real time and place', and the abstracted, static nature of written theology. We want to 'boil down' the Proverbs to a tidy framework which can be written, integrated and taught, whilst the Proverbs seem to want to be lived in real time. Whilst beyond the scope of this paper, we can in brief note that inherent to the literary style of the Proverbs – the cryptic ambiguities and so on – is the capacity to draw the reader or listener into thoughtful, personal participation in the understanding and application of wisdom. Thus, wisdom's 'forms' promote wisdom's 'functions'. This point proves tremendously rich for Biblical theology; Jesus the Wise Man appears, pedagogically, to prefer such forms, in order to draw his listeners and followers into participation in the way of wisdom. This then means that our process, outlined above of moving from historical description to existential prescription, is warranted in so far as we trace both inter-textual content and forms. That is to say, if Jesus, or James, teaches in a 'wisdom style', that must be incorporated into our Biblical theology of Proverbs whether or not an explicit allusion or quotation is present.

6. Finally, a related but distinct area for research will be to consider the book of James with regard to Biblical theology, with a similar insistence on inductive categories and intertextuality. It may be that many of the critiques articulated in this paper, with respect to an incomplete integration of the Proverbs into Biblical theologies, can also be seen to parallel with biblical-theological treatments of the book of James. A starting point could be the quotations and allusions to Proverbs within the text of James, thus establishing an inductive (rather than functional) connection.

The resurgence of Biblical theology in

recent decades has been tremendously rich and fruitful. Richer and more fruitful still will be the construction of Biblical theologies which robustly integrate the wisdom of Solomon, since 'all that you desire cannot compare with her' (Proverbs 8.11).

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