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The "integration of faith and learning" is a notion which in recent years has become central to the thinking of many Christian educators, yet the possibility that we can find models for such integration in the biblical text itself has been little explored. In this essay Edward M. Curtis finds such a model in the Old Testament concept of wisdom, and he explores the implications of the model both for biblical studies and for Christian scholarship generally. Mr. Curtis teaches Old Testament at Talbot Theological Seminary.

By Edward M. Curtis

Old Testament Wisdom: A Model for Faith-Learning Integration

DURING THE PAST few years regular attention has been given by Christian educators to the concept of the integration of faith and learning. These discussions have produced a number of helpful suggestions including the significant observation of a Biola colleague, Dr. Bruce Narramore, that a basic barrier to the integration of faith and learning comes from the fact that the evangelical community tends to isolate God's special revelation from his general revelation.¹ One element that has been missing from the discussions thus far has been the establishment of a biblical basis or model for the process of integration. It is the thesis of this paper that the Old Testament concept of wisdom provides such a model, and establishes some essential guidelines for practicing integration.

Biblical Data

An understanding of wisdom in the Old Testament must take cognizance of two kinds of data. First of all it must consider the meaning of the primary Hebrew words for wisdom (*hakam*, "wise" and *hokma*, "wisdom"), and secondly it must take into account the themes, content and forms that are found in the Old Testament wisdom material.² The breadth of the data combined with the

¹ Bruce Narramore, "The Isolation of General and Special Revelation as the Fundamental Barrier to the Integration of Faith and Learning," (paper presented at the Biola President's Luncheon, October 22, 1984), pp. 1-23.

² This will include the books of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes and certain Psalms (identified primarily on the basis of vocabulary, themes and structure). It is generally recognized today that wisdom influence goes far beyond these books and can be found many places in the Old Testament. As Murphy ("Theses and Hypotheses," in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, ed. by John G. Gammie, et al. [Missoula, MT: Scholar's Press, 1977], pp. 39—40) points out, "It is not a question of direct influence of the sages or of the wisdom literature, but rather of an approach to reality which was shared by all Israelites in varying degrees. . . . Such an understanding was not a mode of

variety of ways in which the Hebrew words are used make it difficult to formulate a precise definition of wisdom³ though the general meaning of the term is clear. Some indication of the meaning of wisdom can be discovered by examining the synonyms that are used with the words *hakam* and *hokma*. Among the common synonyms are the words *nabon*, "perceptive," "skilled";⁴ *bina*, "insight," "understanding";⁵ *tebuna*, "insight," "skill";⁶ *yodea'*, "one who knows" (either in the sense of understanding, experience or skill); in addition several synonyms suggest the idea of doing what is right or what contributes to success and prosperity.

Especially instructive is Prov. 1:2–5 where the wisdom that the book of Proverbs offers is described using a number of these synonyms along with *musar*, "training," "discipline"; *haskel*, "wise behavior"; *mezimma*, "discretion" (or according to Toy "the ability to form plans"⁷); *'orma*, "shrewdness" and several moral nouns like "righteousness," "justice" and "equity." It appears that these synonyms are piled up in an attempt to define the broad concept that is wisdom. Von Rad says,

Presumably a comprehensive term, for which there is no longer any handy word, can be constructed here for the reader by the fact that, to a certain extent, into this prologue a number of known terms have been inserted so that by this cumulation the desired extension of the conceptual range is achieved. Certainly the individual terms used are differentiated from each other; but perhaps not in a way which can be precisely defined, for they obviously overlap with each other too. By the cumulation of many terms the text seems to aim at something more comprehensive which could not be expressed satisfactorily by means of any one of the terms used.⁸

The kinds of words that are used to draw this comprehensive picture of wisdom (skill, insight, prudent dealing, ability to form plans, shrewdness, knowing how to do, etc.) clearly suggest that the thing that is in view here is practical in nature rather than theoretical, and the way the words "wise" and "wisdom" are used confirm this conclusion. The words are used of craftsmen who made priestly garments according to the instructions given them by Moses (Ex. 28:3), of the chief artisans of the tabernacle (Ex. 31:3–6), of skilled weavers (Ex. 35:25–26), of various artisans (Ex. 35:36–36:1), of sailors (Ps. 107:27 ["their wisdom/skill was swallowed up," i.e., the conditions that confronted them were so severe that their unaided skill was not adequate to enable them to successful-

thinking cultivated exclusively by one class; it was shared at all levels of society that interpreted daily experience." In the present author's opinion this explanation best accounts for the wisdom emphasis found in many places in the Old Testament.

³ See for example the comments of James Crenshaw, "Prolegomenon" to *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, ed. by James L. Crenshaw, (New York: KTAV, 1976), pp. 3-5. Among the examples are Gen. 41:33, 39; Dt. 4:6; 1 Kgs. 3:12; Isa. 5:21 and 29:14; Prov. 17:28 and 18:15. The examples from Isaiah and Proverbs are particularly significant because the poetic parallelism clearly establishes the fact that the two words are virtual synonyms.

⁵ E.g., Deut. 4:6; Isa. 29:14; Job 28:12, 20, 28, 38:36, 39:17.

⁶ Ex. 36:1; 1 Kgs. 5:1 (Eng. 4:29), 7:14; Jer. 10:12; Job 12:12; Prov. 24:3.

⁷ C. H. Toy, *Proverbs*, International Critical Commentary, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899), p. 7.

⁸ Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (York: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 13.

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ly navigate the waters] and Ezek. 27:8-9), of military strategists and statesmen (Isa. 10:13) and of women skilled in lamentation (Jer. 9:17).

The practical nature of wisdom is reflected in the statement David made to Solomon from his death bed as he pointed out to Solomon the problem Joab would pose for his survival as king. David said, "Act according to your wisdom, and do not let his gray hair go down to Sheol in peace."⁹ David was simply acknowledging the fact that as long as Joab remained alive he would cause problems for Solomon; David was advising Solomon to "do whatever was necessary to solve the problem." The "practical result" orientation of wisdom is even more clearly illustrated in the story of Solomon at Gibeon in 1 Kgs. 3. Solomon acknowledged his inability to rule and judge the nation over which he was king and he asked God to give him "an understanding heart to judge the people, to discern between good and evil." Because he asked for discernment to understand justice, God gave him "a wise and discerning heart." The very next incident that is reported in 1 Kgs. 3 is the story of the two women who came to Solomon each of whom insisted that the other woman's child was suffocated during the night and that the child that remained alive belonged to her. Immediately after Solomon was promised a wise and discerning heart, he was confronted with an extremely complex problem to test whether he had been given wisdom. The means by which Solomon identified the mother of the living child was reported to the people and "when all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had handed down, they feared the king; for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice." Thus Solomon's ability to solve this problem convinced the people of his wisdom; the fact that it was such a complex problem convinced them that the wisdom must, in a special sense, have come from God.

Wisdom can be defined as the ability to succeed; it is the ability to form a correct plan to get a desired result. (The principles that enable a person to succeed in a particular endeavor would be called "wisdom" as well.)¹⁰ The fact that achievement of a desired goal is a prominent aspect of wisdom is suggested by the fact that this is a common element in many of the examples mentioned above: a craftsman or artisan is wise or skilled in that he is able to follow a plan given to him, or one in his mind, and bring the idea into reality; sailors are wise in that they can successfully navigate their ships to a desired destination and return safely; a political leader is wise in that he can successfully accomplish what the demands of his office require. An embryo that cannot find its way out of the womb at the proper time is called unwise (Hos. 13:13). God's wisdom enabled Him to create the world (Prov. 3:19 and 8:22-31).

The same conclusion is suggested by the fact that what the Bible calls

⁹ 1 Kgs. 2:6.

¹⁰ Von Rad (*Old Testament Theology*, v. 1, trans. by D. M. G. Stalker [New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962], pp. 418,428) has defined wisdom as "practical knowledge of the laws of life and of the world, based on experience." Crenshaw (*Prolegomenon*, p. 4) notes a variety of other definitions such as "the art of succeeding in human life, both private and collective" (Cazelles) or "the ability to cope" (Kenworthy).

wisdom does not always involve a moral dimension. Isa. 40:20 and Jer. 10:6 describe people who are wise or skilled in making idols, and certain wise men of Egypt and Mesopotamia were wise or skilled in magic and divination (Gen. 41:8; Isa. 44:25 and Dan. 2:10–12). This pragmatic (but not always moral) dimension of wisdom is evident in certain proverbs like Prov. 17:8 which says, "A bribe is a charm in the sight of its owner; wherever he turns he prospers"—though the moral evaluation of the use of bribes is also found in the same chapter in verse 23 which says, "A wicked man receives a bribe from the bosom to pervert the ways of justice." This same non-moral dimension of wisdom is clear in the incident related in 2 Sam. 13 where Jonadab is described as "wise" (though most English translations are reluctant to translate *hakam* as "wise" in this verse); his wisdom was used to devise a plan to enable Amnon to have sexual relations with his half sister Tamar. Thus it seems clear that, on one level at least, the primary element in wisdom is its ability to accomplish a goal rather than its moral character.¹¹

Israel recognized the presence of wisdom in other cultures. The wisdom of Egypt is acknowledged in Isa. 19:11–13; that of the Edomites in Jer. 49:7, Ob. 8 and perhaps in the book of Job (the setting of the book seems to be in Edom and the wise men mentioned in the book presumably were from Edom). The wisdom of the Phoenicians is mentioned in Ez. 28 and Zech. 9:2; that of the Persians in Est. 1:13 and 6:13; that of the Babylonians in Dan. 2:12–13 and 5:7. In some instances the wisdom associated with these other nations is viewed negatively because of their pride or because the wisdom was associated with divination and magic,¹² but often the wisdom is recognized and is acknowledged as legitimate. The wisdom of Solomon is, in fact, compared with the wisdom of the "sons of the East" (perhaps Edom) and Egypt and the point of the comparison in 1 Kgs. 4:29–34 is that the readers would be impressed by the fact that Solomon's wisdom surpassed that of the very people who were so well known for their wisdom.

When the wisdom literature of Egypt and Mesopotamia¹³ is compared with that of Israel, it is quite apparent that there are significant similarities in both content and form. Many of the same themes are found (e.g., the problem of the righteous sufferer) as well as similar forms (e.g., acrostics, maxims, etc.). In addition the content of many of the proverbs are very similar to those found in the Bible and while the question of dating is particularly difficult, there is the

¹¹ It would not, however, be correct to conclude that wisdom has no concern for moral values. In Egypt and in Mesopotamia wisdom shows an interest in moral values; in Israel, as we will see below, wisdom is embedded in a culture that is dominated by Yahwistic values, and those moral values are quite evident in the wisdom material.

¹² E.g., Ex. 7:11; Isa. 10:13 and 44:25; Jer. 50:35.

¹³ The designation of the Mesopotamian material as wisdom literature comes from the fact that in content and form it is similar to the biblical material which calls itself wisdom. As Lambert (*Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960], pp. 1–2) has pointed out the Babylonians and Assyrians applied the term wisdom (*nemequ*) to their {magical and divinatory traditions. Translations of the Mesopotamian wisdom literature can be found in Lambert; translations of some of the Egyptian texts can be found in Marian Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 3 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975, 1976, 1980).

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strong probability that at least some of these proverbs existed in Mesopotamia and/or Egypt before they found expression in Scripture; there is even the possibility that some of these proverbs were borrowed by the biblical authors.¹⁴

There are a number of passages that state that wisdom is a gift from God,¹⁵ yet when the content of the biblical wisdom literature (many of the proverbs, for example) is considered and compared with the similar material from Egypt and Mesopotamia it suggests that this material comes from God in what appears to us to be a secondary sense. Many of the proverbs articulate principles that can be identified by any insightful person who carefully observes the world around him, and it appears that Israel and her neighbors did, in fact, recognize many of the same principles that contribute to a person's success. It does not require direct revelation from God (what theologians have traditionally called special revelation) to realize the benefit of diligence and the way it contributes to a person's success; the same is true of the problems that a bad temper can generate for a person or the value of patience or the dangers involved in making rash judgments or commitments. It appears that this "secular" level of wisdom comes from God in the same sense as is affirmed in Isa. 28:23–29; there the farmer's knowledge of how and when to plant and cultivate his crop is said to come from God. This understanding, however, does not come as the result of direct revelation from God; rather the farmer carefully observes and calculates; he tries various techniques in order to improve his agricultural skill. His own experience with planting and harvesting, in fact, only supplements and refines the traditions that have been recognized by many past generations.

This kind of knowledge is possible for the farmer, in part, because God has created order and regularity in the world. There is a general consensus among scholars that wisdom presupposes the existence of "an all-embracing cosmic order . . . , which, served as the cohesive force holding together the various

¹⁴ Many of the proverbs from Mesopotamia can be dated to at least 2000 BC, but these do not seem to be the leading candidates for borrowing by the biblical authors—though Agur and/or Lemuel (both of whom are mentioned in connection with some of the collections of proverbs in the biblical book) may have been from the Mesopotamian region. Most scholars suppose that there is a much better possibility that some of the proverbs may have been borrowed from Egypt. There are striking similarities between Prov. 22:17–23:14 and an Egyptian collection called the Teaching of Amenemope; the question of the direction of the borrowing is still debated and will not be answered as long as there are questions about the date of Amenemope. Given the close relationship between Solomon and the Egyptian court (Solomon married a daughter of the Pharaoh), the borrowing could have taken place in either direction; studies based on the language of the two collections remain inconclusive. It is clear that there are some significant theological differences between the two collections and some have said that the Egyptian collection reflects a "higher" theology than one normally finds in Egypt; these kinds of arguments are seldom sufficiently objective to answer the question of the direction of borrowing. The fact that the book of Proverbs begins with the words "the proverbs of Solomon" does not resolve the question either, since at least some of the sections could have resulted from his choice of the proverbs rather than his authorship of the statements.

¹⁵ E.g., Ex. 28:3, 31:3,6, 35:31, 35:35–36:2 (all referring to the skill that God gave to certain craftsmen); 1 Kgs. 3:4–15 (referring to the wisdom to judge and rule that God gave to Solomon); 1 Kgs 5:9–14 (Eng. 4:29–34) (referring to the wisdom that Solomon had for scientific and literary endeavors); Ps. 51:8 (Eng. v. 6), 119:98; Job 35:11; Prov. 2:6; Eccl. 2:26; Dan. 1:7.

components of created order in a well-integrated, harmonious whole."¹⁶ Israel recognized, of course, that this order was created and maintained by Yahweh, and this order clearly provides the basis for systematic and repeatable observations about the natural world. As Hermisson has noted, Israel operated "from the conviction that the regularities within the human and the historical-social realm are not in principle different from the ones within the realm of nonhuman phenomena,"¹⁷ and thus no radical distinction was made between "nature wisdom" and "culture wisdom." Biblical wisdom literature is noted for its lack of explicitly theological themes; there is little mention of redemption, the covenant, God's deliverance of His people, etc. The dominant theme in the wisdom literature seems to be the theme of creation; this appears to be the case because creation constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for successfully perceiving truth by studying the world and the people in it.

Man is able to comprehend God's creation because he is made in the image of God. The literary context of Genesis 1 makes it clear that the creation of man is the climax of God's creative activity¹⁸ and man alone is said to be made in the image of God (or perhaps better "as the image of God"). It is clear that the image of God gives to man a pre-eminent position in the created order and sets him apart from everything else that God has made. Man's exercise of dominion over the rest of creation appears to be the consequence of his creation in the image of God and in all probability equips man for that task. It seems clear that man has been given faculties for comprehending his world as a part of his creation in God's image in order, among other things, to exercise dominion over the rest of creation as is described in both Gen. 1:26–28 and Ps. 8.

Level-One Wisdom

God's creation of the world with its order and regularity and God's creation of man in his image are essential prerequisites for perceiving the wisdom that we are suggesting should be identified as level-one wisdom. These ideas also provide a vital interface between the divine/human/created world. On the one hand, the image of God makes man able to relate to God (as the sonship analogy in Gen. 5 makes clear); on the other hand, it makes man able to comprehend the world and its order and this is an essential element in man's exercising dominion over the rest of creation.

¹⁶ Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, 30 (Missoula, Montana: Scholar's Press, 1977), p. 135. Waltke ("The Book of Proverbs and Ancient Wisdom Literature," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 136 (1979), p. 135) also notes that the "notion of a fixed, eternal righteous order does compare favorably with the biblical meaning of 'wisdom.' . . . [wisdom] is an eternal order existing for man's good. . . . Wisdom is God's fixed order for life, an order opposed by chaos and death." Note the similar statement of Hermisson, "Observations on the Creation Theology in Wisdom," in *Israelite Wisdom: Samuel Terrien Festschrift*, p. 44.

¹⁷ Hermisson, p. 44.

¹⁸ For a detailed study of the image of God see the author's 1984 University of Pennsylvania dissertation, "Man as the Image of God in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Parallels," available through University Microfilms. The final chapter of that work discusses the meaning and significance of the statements in Genesis.

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It appears legitimate—one might even say necessary—to conclude that there is a level of wisdom that comes out of the crucible of human experience; it can be recognized by man, even after the fall, as he carefully and perceptively studies his world and the people in, it. He is able to identify many of the principles by which the natural world operates; he is able to identify many things that contribute to success in living as well as many things that will prevent success. It appears that this is the way many of the principles in the biblical wisdom literature had their origin,¹⁹ and this probably accounts for the parallels in content between the biblical wisdom literature and that of other nations.²⁰ This may also account for some of the common moral values that Israel shared with her neighbors and for some of the ideas about god that are expressed in certain pagan hymns and which are similar to ideas applied to Yahweh in biblical texts.²¹

¹⁹ Some have described the different mechanism of revelation suggested here as "horizontal revelation" in contrast with the "vertical revelation" that appears to be the norm for the law and the prophets. Ronald Allen (*Praise! A Matter of Life and Breath*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1978], pp. 92–97) recognizes the same differences in the mechanics of inspiration that we are suggesting. He suggests that the prophets are characterized by God communicating new knowledge that man could not otherwise know through his messengers; many of the psalms are characterized, not by new revelation, but rather by the believer's response to earlier revelation; much of the wisdom material is characterized by the sage's reflection on the way God's world works.

²⁰ In pointing out the similarities and parallels between the biblical wisdom material and that of other ancient Near Eastern cultures and seeking to account for those similarities, it is important to recognize that there are fundamental differences as well. These differences are most apparent in the realm of moral values and theology, but the Yahwistic perspective produced by the covenant caused many of the "non-theological" principles (though this secular/theological distinction was not recognized in Israel) to take on a different character in Israel. Von Rad says, "What is surprising ... is that many of the most elementary experiences appeared quite differently to [Israel], especially because she set them in a quite specific spiritual and religious context of understanding" (*Wisdom*, p. 5).

²¹ This touches on a number of theological issues that continue to be debated vigorously, and obviously the questions cannot be resolved in one footnote. The principle that we have applied to explain the origin of what we are calling "secular" wisdom or level one wisdom—and which seems to be affirmed by Scripture—could apply just as well to other areas. This would suggest that man created in the image of God and living in the presence of God's general revelation can perceive certain moral truths. This is consistent with a number of Old Testament texts that recognize the moral responsibility of nations other than Israel (e.g., Amos 1-2), and it seems to be consistent with Rom. 1-2 as well. This would explain the fact that various laws that are contained in the covenant are known from Mesopotamia from a time that clearly predates the Mosaic covenant. As many have noted, the significant element in the covenant is not the originality! of the laws; rather it lies in the fact that Yahweh affirmed the truth of them in His revelation to Moses. In the same way, it seems plausible that man is capable of discerning certain truth about God as he is confronted by God's general revelation in the world. Many are reluctant to admit that unredeemed man is capable of discerning any moral or spiritual truth because they feel that this undermine the doctrine of the total depravity of man. It should be pointed out that Calvin recognized the fact that unredeemed man perceives truth in these areas and he attributed this to the revealing activity of God rather than to the ability of man. These issues are discussed at length by Berkouwer (*General Revelation* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955]). The question of how some of the religious parallels are to be explained is discussed by J. E. Jennings, "Ancient Near Eastern Religions and Biblical Interpretation," in *Interpreting the Word of God, Festschrift in honor of Steven Barabas*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), pp. 11–

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What we are calling level-one biblical wisdom generally reflects a different perspective than other biblical literature, though as Waltke has clearly demonstrated there is theological consistency between the wisdom material and the other biblical material.²² The wisdom material reflects man's struggle to perceive truth as he looks at life in the world God has created. Most of the proverbs involve observations about life and what contributes to success in living and what does not. Job describes his own struggle to square the reality of innocent suffering with the wisdom theology that he and his friends share. The book of Ecclesiastes involves Qoheleth's search for order and for something in life that is not vanity. The material is not characterized by theophanies (the significance of the theophany in the Book of Job will be noted later); it is not characterized by dramatic revelations or by "Thus saith the LORD." This material recognizes that because God created the world and maintains it there is consistent order in the world. An awareness of the order God has built into the world enables a person to live in harmony with those principles and contributes to his success, and much of the wisdom material reflects man's search for that order.²³

We have suggested that there is in the Old Testament a kind of wisdom that has its origins in human experience and observations about life in the world, and we have suggested that there are many similarities between this wisdom and the wisdom that Israel recognized among her neighbors. It is important to recognize the legitimacy of this wisdom; it is important to recognize as well that the Bible sees clear limits for this kind of wisdom. The inability of Job and his friends to explain why an innocent man would suffer is clearly expressed in Job 28, and his problem is finally resolved through a theophany. The conversation with Yahweh did not answer Job's questions; rather it emphasized the limited capacity of man to penetrate into such mysteries. Qoheleth's search for the key to life, for some profit that death cannot eradicate, demonstrates the limits of wisdom as well. He says in Eccl. 8:17, "I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, 'I know,' he cannot discover." The limit to the wisdom that can be discerned by man's observation of his world is clear from Isa. 19:11-12 where the

30. The question of natural law is discussed by John Barton, "Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the Old Testament," *Journal of Theological Studies* 30 (1979), 1-14 and by Alan F. Johnson, "Is There a Biblical Warrant for Natural Law Theories?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 25 (1982), 185-201.

²² Bruce Waltke, "The Book of Proverbs and Old Testament Theology," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 136 (1979), 302-17. See also the article by Waltke mentioned above in n. 16.

²³ In addition to the discussions of Crenshaw and Waltke see the discussion of H. J. Hermisson, "Creation Theology in Wisdom," in *Israelite Wisdom: Samuel Terrien Festschrift*, 43-57. It is possible that the desire to discover the patterns and order that God has created into the universe is programmed into mankind. This idea is perhaps expressed in Eccl. 3:11 in the statement that God has put 'olam in man's heart. The meaning of the word *olam* is a key for interpreting the verse, and a number of different meanings have been proposed. A number of commentators, on the basis of the context and use of the word elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, would translate the word "eternity" and would basically agree with Kaiser's conclusion that man

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inability of Pharaoh's advisors to discern the plans of Yahweh is declared. Man's limited capacity for wisdom is also evident from the fact that God's truth sometimes turns out to be the opposite of what appears correct to man (Isa. 8:11–15; or the statements of Proverbs that giving money to the poor actually contributes to a person's prosperity).

Man's wisdom is limited both because he is finite and because he is fallen. As a result "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Prov. 14:12). The result of following man's perception of what is right is described in the Book of Judges: "Every man did what was right in his own eyes," and this led to gross immorality and political disaster (e.g., the story of the Levite and his concubine in Ju. 19–21), as well as to religious practices that were gross distortions of God's intention (e.g., the story of Micah in Ju. 17–18). The historical context in which these incidents are placed makes it clear that the actions of the people in doing what was right in their own eyes were the exact opposite of the obedience to God's covenant revealed at Sinai which should have characterized God's chosen people.

Level-Two Wisdom

The limits imposed on man's understanding by his finiteness and his fallenness suggest that man's perception of reality and his identification of the principles of order God has created in the world will include both truth and error. This means that there are many things that man can know only if God reveals them to him. Scripture makes it clear that God has given such a revelation to man, and the Bible comes to us as the definitive statement of that special revelation. In that special revelation God has communicated to man much about Himself, His redemptive activity on man's behalf, His moral truth, and many of His purposes and desires for mankind and history. Clearly this is wisdom that has come to us from God and we would identify this special revelation as level-two wisdom.

The special revelation of Scripture contains numerous examples of what appears to be level-one wisdom, and this suggests several important conclusions. First of all, it suggests something about the mechanics of inspiration of this material; it appears that a major element in the Holy Spirit's work here involved filtering out the mixed material of empirical observations about life so that what comes to us in the biblical wisdom literature is both true and appropriate for God's intended purposes. As Jennings has pointed out a principle can be a part of both general and special revelation. He says, "the factors held in common between Near Eastern cultures, yet displayed in a 'Thus saith the Lord' context in Scripture, are to be understood as a part of general revelation, which are also special in that God chose to include their provisions in His specific revelation to the Israelites."²⁴

has "a deep-seated desire, a compulsive drive, because man is made in the image of God to appreciate the beauty of creation (on an aesthetic level); to know the character, composition, and meaning of the world (on an academic and philosophical level); and to discern its purpose and destiny (on a theological level) Man has an inborn inquisitiveness and capacity to learn how everything in his experience can be integrated to make a whole" (Kaiser, *Ecclesiastes: Total Life*, [Chicago: Moody Press, 1979], p. 66).

²⁴ Jennings, "Ancient Near Eastern Religion," p. 16. There is, of course, another

A second conclusion is also suggested by this situation; the inclusion of these level-one principles in Scripture clearly validates their truth. As Jennings suggests, truth revealed through general revelation is just as true as truth revealed through special revelation. He says, "A Babylonian or Egyptian idea, if borrowed and inscripturated under the divine inspiration of the Lord who created all men, is just as true as if it had fallen from the crystal air of Mt. Sinai and had been inscribed on its red rock by the finger of God."²⁵ It must be pointed out, however, that the only way that we know with absolute certainty that a principle is true is to have it validated by special revelation and thus we will always have to attach a different degree of certainty to principles learned from general revelation than to those communicated to us through special revelation. Different levels of certainty, will, of course, be connected with different kinds of observations in the world. Some principles such as laws of nature identified in the physical sciences have a fairly high degree of certainty attached to them because of the kinds and amounts of empirical data on which they rest; mathematical and theoretical models provide additional confirmation. In contrast, studies in the social sciences often involve a large number of variables many of which cannot even be identified much less controlled. In addition to the perspective of "absolute certainty," a category that we might call "pragmatic certainty" is much more at home in level-one wisdom. Certain observations and models are "validated" because they work, and pragmatically that is the only validation that they require.²⁶

The validation of the truth of man's observations about life and his world by their inclusion in the special revelation of Scripture does affirm the significance of man's abilities and his capacity to discern truth by studying his world and society. Goldingay says,

Wisdom reminds us that man's creatureliness is an abiding feature of him, and one of positive significance. Man is not just "lost," and the world is not just the sphere of Satan's activity. Man in the world is given life by God and called to live in accordance with his nature as God's creature, with the nature of the world as God's creation, and with the nature of his experience as God's gift. The wisdom tradition assumes that, living in and confronted by God's world, man as man is in the presence of and confronted by God himself. Inanimate nature, worldly experience, human reason, all reveal something of the truth of God in regard to man and the world.²⁷

possibility that may account for some of the parallels. We would explain parallels such as the flood story by suggesting that the accounts go back to the event itself. The biblical account is, as the result of inspiration, accurate in all its details and even includes an interpretive element to tell us what the significance of the event was. The accounts from other cultures have been modified and distorted in the course of history. It is possible that some of the common moral values may be explained in the same way. Patterson ("The Widow, the Orphan, and the Poor in the Old Testament and the Extra-Biblical Literature," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 130[1973],223-34) has suggested that the similar values concerning the protection of the widow and orphan that are found throughout the ancient Near East perhaps go back to a primeval revelation of God that was transmitted from generation to generation and which continued to be recognized as authoritative.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁶ If one wants to adjust his carburetor or find oil or build a bridge he is interested in whether a technique works, not in whether it can be validated in terms of absolute certainty. It would appear that various therapeutic techniques (either physical or psychological) that do not

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The complementary relationship that exists between the wisdom literature and the rest of Scripture also affirms the significance of level-one wisdom. The topics that are the major focus of attention in the wisdom literature are generally non-theological in nature. Rather, they come out of the daily experience of man, and for the most part deal with areas of life that are not emphasized in the law and the prophets. Kidner says, "there are details of character small enough to escape the mesh of the law and the broadsides of the prophets, and yet decisive in personal dealings. Proverbs moves in this realm, asking what a person is like to live with, or to employ."²⁸ Murphy says, "there were other areas of life not really touched by the decalogue: personal diligence, self-control, attitudes toward the poor, pride, trust in one's judgment, etc. In short the development of responsible character, over and above the goals of the decalogue, form the heart of wisdom teaching."²⁹ The model found in Scripture, with the level-one wisdom discernible by man in God's image affirmed by its inclusion in the level-two wisdom of Scripture, is perhaps intended as both an encouragement and an exhortation to the cultivation of level-one wisdom in order to gain understanding in many areas not directly addressed in Scripture.

One additional conclusion is suggested by the circumstance that we have observed in the Old Testament wisdom literature. It is clear that the level-one wisdom that we have identified is set in a Yahwistic context by its inclusion in Scripture. Some scholars have argued that this reflects the end of a process by which this originally secular wisdom was Yahweh-ized and brought into the covenant community.³⁰ Rather, it appears that these empirical observations found in Scripture came in fact out of the covenant community and were an essential element in it from the beginning. As Murphy has argued these observations were made "as worshipers of Yahweh, not merely as ancient Near Eastern tribes. The wisdom lessons and ideals were an essential expression of their understanding of the Lord and of life."³¹ This results in the biblical wisdom literature being superscribed by Yahwistic morality.³² The pragmatic element in wisdom that focuses on what works and 'what contributes to success is constrained and limited by a concern for what is right. As Kidner has noted, "Proverbs is concerned to point out that what is right and what pays may travel long distances together; but it leaves us in no doubt which we are to follow when their paths diverge."³³

violate principles or norms of Scripture would fall into this category; many principles applied in the physical sciences, engineering, business, etc., would belong in this category as well. Often the only validation that is either possible or that is needed is the pragmatic validation of whether it Works.

²⁷ John Goldingay, "The 'Salvation History' Perspective and the 'Wisdom' Perspective within the Context of Biblical Theology," *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 51 (1979): 202.

²⁸ Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1964), p. 13.

²⁹ Roland Murphy, "Wisdom and Yahwism," in *No Famine in the Land: Studies in Honor of John L. McKenzie* (Claremont: Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, 1975), p. 119.

³⁰ E.g. MdKane, *Proverbs*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970) and many others.

³¹ Murphy, "Wisdom and Yahwism," p. 119. See also the articles by Waltke (see notes 16

The context in which wisdom is set in Scripture suggests some essential parameters within which the effective search for truth in general revelation must take place. The fundamental condition for acquiring wisdom is given in Prov. 1:7: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction," and this essential principle occurs a number of times throughout the wisdom literature, usually at crucial points in those texts (e.g., Job 28:28). The fear of the LORD is essentially an attitude; it involves recognizing who God is and who we are and then living in the light of that understanding. (It is important to note that the Old Testament—and the New Testament too, for that matter—does not recognize a dichotomy between knowing and doing; knowledge that is not acted on is not wisdom, rather, it is folly.) The fear of the LORD is a worshipping submission to the God of the covenant who revealed Himself to Israel. The Hebrew word *resit*, "beginning," used in Prov. 1:7, can mean beginning in the sense either of the first principle or the most important principle. As Kidner suggests, the word has both meanings here; it is "the first and controlling principle rather than a stage one leaves behind."³⁴

This means that the search for truth in general revelation must take place under the awareness of who God is as creator and sustainer of all things; it must be done in full submission to the LORD, and this must include recognizing the instruction of God in Scripture as the decisive word on any matter. Thus even as wisdom provides a firm basis for research and inquiry into a wide variety of areas, it also provides clear parameters for the pursuit of truth: this pursuit must—if it is to be successful—be carried out in the fear of the LORD and in submission to His authoritative voice in Scripture. As von Rad has observed,

The search for knowledge can go wrong because of one single mistake at the beginning. One becomes competent and expert as far as the orders in life are concerned only if one begins from knowledge about God. . . . Israel was of the opinion that effective knowledge about God is the only thing that puts a man into a right relationship with the objects of his perception.³⁵

Thus our study must involve the integration of faith and learning, and our learning must always bow in humility before the authoritative voice of God in Scripture. This will, of course, never solve all the problems encountered in integration since what one believer perceives as a definitive statement of Scripture about a particular question may be understood quite differently by another equally committed believer. This results, in part, from the fact that level-one

and 22 above) and the discussion of Kidner, *Proverbs*, pp. 31-35.

³² As was noted above, the Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom material reflects an interest in what is right— though often it seems to be only a pragmatic interest. The unique dimension in biblical wisdom lies in the fact that it comes out of the covenant community and reflects the revealed morality of Scripture as Kidner (*ibid.*) has pointed out. It should be noted, however, that these moral principles (apart from sections like Prov. 1-9) are more implicit than explicit.

³³ Kidner, p. 31.

³⁴ Kidner, p. 59.

³⁵ Von Rad, *Wisdom*, p. 67. The New Testament also affirms that the effective search for truth must begin with submission to God's truth. Unbelievers are characterized by their refusal to acknowledge God (Rom. 1:28), and their minds are said to be defiled (Titus 1:15). It is clear that

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wisdom does—and should—influence our interpretation of the biblical data. One need only think of the examples of Galileo, Copernicus or Columbus to realize that there are instances where the dominant interpretation of a passage or the prevailing theological opinion about some matter has required revision in the light of accumulating evidence from non-biblical sources. Interpreters will sometimes disagree as to when and how level-one wisdom should influence interpretation of a particular text. This will produce differences of opinion regarding the meaning of that text, and it illustrates the careful balance that is essential for effective integration of faith and learning. The biblical data must be studied in full awareness of level-one wisdom, and, at the same time, the interpreter must stand fully and submissively under the authoritative and correcting voice of Scripture. This makes it clear that effective integration can, at times, be as much an art as it is a science.

This does, however, establish the attitude that is the *sine qua non* of effective integration; it also makes it clear that the Christian scholar must make as diligent an effort to determine the teaching of Scripture on a topic as he does in acquiring and evaluating data from his observations of the world and society. He must also acquire the kind of intimate familiarity with the truth of God that will enable him to evaluate data pertaining to areas apparently not touched by biblical revelation in a way that is fully consistent with biblical norms and values.

One example taken from the Old Testament wisdom literature suggests that the possibilities for discovery for the believer who works in the fear of the LORD may be very significant indeed. The Book of Job involves the attempt of Job and his friends to explain the reason for his suffering. All the men agree in the beginning with the wisdom doctrine of retribution which says that a man is blessed in proportion to his righteousness and punished in proportion to his wickedness (an idea that seems to naturally follow from the idea that God is just and sovereign over the affairs of men). This idea causes the friends to insist that Job must be wicked for this suffering to have come upon him. Job knows that he is innocent of sins of such magnitude as to account for his suffering, and for him the possibilities are much more disconcerting than for the friends. The fact that he is innocent and nevertheless is suffering suggests the conclusion that God is unjust.

The friends' recognition of the implications "if Job's suffering were innocent caused them to retreat with increasing insistence into the security of declaring Job a sinner. Part of Job's struggle came from the theological dilemma that was created by his awareness that he was innocent: he was unable to accept the obvious conclusion and yet he was unaware of how the problem could be resolved. As Job struggled with "creative alternatives" to the obvious conclusion

this attitude affects their ability to perceive truth, especially in the moral and spiritual realms (e.g., Eph. 4:17-18; 2 Cor. 3:1). Regeneration brings about a change in the believer's perception in these areas, in part because the believer's attitude toward the instruction of God is changed. He now accepts God's declaration of truth, and thus his understanding of the world and society will be decisively impacted. He understands moral and spiritual reality in a way not possible for the unbeliever who remains hostile to God's truth. This understanding will determine how the believer interprets the data he accumulates as he studies his world and society.

that God is unjust, he suggested the possibility that perhaps his vindication would come after death (e.g., Job 14:7–22 or 19:23–29); as Job demanded the right to argue his case before God himself, he realized the futility of such an encounter and perceived that a mediator or advocate would be needed in such a situation (e.g., 16:18–22). Job is never told why he suffered (he did not have the prologue), and the "answer" that Job is finally given is not a cognitive answer. The theophany did not provide any information that contributed to Job's understanding of why he suffered; rather the intimate knowledge of God that came through the theophany caused the questions of why he suffered • and of how God's treatment of him could be consistent with what Job knew of God's character to lose their significance. Job's ideas of vindication after death or of the possibility of resurrection do not contribute to a solution to the theological problems raised in the book (though some of them are resolved for the reader by the prologue) and they do not contribute in any way to the resolution of Job's own questions. The ideas are raised as possibilities and then they are dropped with neither rejection nor confirmation. It is only in the light of subsequent revelation that the ideas suggested by Job are validated as true and the ideas are integrated into the solution to the problem of injustice and suffering for the Christian.

Level-Three Wisdom

The book of Job also illustrates what we would identify, as level-three wisdom. Chapter 28 represents a lull in the arguments of Job and his "friends." It is evident that they are no closer to an answer to their questions than they were at the beginning of their discussions. Chapter 28 recognizes that wisdom is what is needed to resolve the questions. Man is capable of many impressive accomplishments, but the kind of wisdom that would solve this dilemma requires wisdom that God alone can provide. It is clear that God does not choose to reveal the answer to many problems like this, and Job 28:28 indicates that man's wisdom in the presence of the unanswerable questions of life is "to fear God and turn from evil." There is wisdom that belongs to God alone which He does not choose to reveal to man; man's wisdom—that which contributes to his success—is to respond in obedience to that which God has revealed. Even in the limit that is imposed on man by level-three wisdom, the practical nature of wisdom is evident. The wisdom that man is given is not meant to allow him to discover the plan of God in all its details; rather it instructs man how to respond to the varied circumstances of life in a way that will contribute to his success as God defines prosperity.

Summary and Conclusions

We have suggested that the Old Testament recognizes three different kinds of wisdom. The first kind is discernible to man made in the image of God as he lives in the world God has created and as a part of human society. This wisdom is affirmed as both possible and significant and provides the basis for research and the quest for knowledge and understanding of man and his world; these endeavors play an important role in the exercise of dominion over the world. Scripture also recognizes limits on what man can know in this way; the limits are

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imposed both by man's finiteness and his fallenness. The void imposed by these limits is partially filled through the special revelation of God (level-two wisdom), which informs man about God and tells man what he needs to know to have right standing with God and to be equipped for effective ministry. A third level of wisdom is recognized as belonging to God alone and is completely beyond the ability of man to penetrate. The presence of level one wisdom embedded in the level two wisdom of Scripture provides a model for the effective search for truth in God's general revelation; it must be done in the fear of the LORD, and must be done in submission to God's truth in Scripture. The possibilities for discovery are affirmed by the fact that in at least one case the creative struggle of a believer seems to have produced an insight that contributed to the revelation of truth concerning ultimate justice after death, the resurrection of the dead and the need for an advocate to plead one's case before God.

Finally, several implications for the Christian scholarly community are suggested by these ideas:

I. Effective integration of faith and learning requires each scholar to bow before the truth of Scripture and to accept its statements as decisive in his pursuit of truth. The Christian scholar must search the Scripture as diligently as he works at acquiring data from other sources. He must work at assimilating the truth of Scripture to such a degree that he is able to formulate theories and models that are fully consistent with biblical norms.

II. The Bible affirms the significance of level-one wisdom and confirms that truth can be perceived through man's observation of his world and society. While the scholar must be careful not to superimpose a non-biblical pre-suppositional grid onto Scripture so as to distort proper exegesis, he must at the same time avoid interpreting and applying the Bible in isolation from the insights of level-one wisdom. This suggests the necessity for a well-rounded and growing awareness of level-one wisdom on the part of the biblical and theological faculty.

III. The Old Testament idea of wisdom clearly places the burden for integration of faith and learning on each individual scholar. At the same time, the reality is that the effective and creative integration of faith and learning that produces significant breakthroughs for the Christian community will probably require a significant cooperative effort between scholars from biblical studies and a variety of other disciplines.