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# The Pedagogy of Sexual Morality in Proverbs Five

by Kojo Okyere

## Abstract

*The book of Proverbs is an ancient testimony to the subject of education in ancient Israel. Several scholars have explored this interesting, yet relatively new current in biblical scholarship on the book of Proverbs. Scholarly interest in the pedagogy of Proverbs includes discerning the general pedagogical principles that lie within the book's sayings. Few studies have examined how these principles apply to specific topics in Proverbs. This paper examines the teaching and learning of sexual morality in Proverbs 5. The paper argues that several pedagogical principles, such as the need for attention on the part of the learner, the good relationship between the teacher and the student, the commitment to acquire knowledge and make it practical, and openness in teaching about sexual morality, are relevant for modern teachers and students who struggle with the subject of sexual morality, including in Africa.*

## Introduction

Over the last few years, several articles and books have drawn attention to the pedagogical strategies contained in the book of Proverbs.<sup>1</sup> Using Proverbs 2, Fox reveals the intricate demands on both the teacher and the student in the learning process.<sup>2</sup> Believing that the pedagogical elements in Proverbs are scattered throughout the book, Estes uses Prov. 1-9 as a base to explore its pedagogical categories in order to synthesize the pedagogical theory embedded in the text.<sup>3</sup> Bland analyses the formation of character in ancient Israel as testified by Proverbs.<sup>4</sup> Jones also compares the pedagogy of Prov. 7 with that of the Qumran text, 4Q184.<sup>5</sup> Yoder uses repetition and contradictions to illustrate the nature and process of pedagogy in Proverbs.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, M.V. Fox, "The Pedagogy of Proverbs 2," *JBL* 113 (1994): 233-243; James L. Crenshaw, "The Acquisition of Knowledge in Israelite Wisdom Literature," *Word and World* 7:3 (1987): 245-252; C.F. Melchert, *Wise Teaching: Biblical Wisdom and Education Ministry* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Fox, "The Pedagogy of Proverbs 2," 233-243.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel J. Estes, *Hear My Son: Teaching and Learning in Proverbs 1-9* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Dave Bland, "The Formation of Character in the Book of Proverbs" *Restoration Quarterly*, 40.4 (1998): 221-237.

<sup>5</sup> Scott C. Jones, "Wisdom's Pedagogy: A Comparison of Proverbs 7 and 4Q184" *IJIM Magazine*, October 29-November 4, (2001): 1-20.

<sup>6</sup> Christine Roy Yoder, "Forming 'Fearers of Yahweh': Repetition and Contradictions as Pedagogy in Proverbs," in *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of his Sixty-fifth Birthday*, eds. R.L. Troxel, K.G. Friebel; D.R. Magary (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 167-184.

These studies lay bare what perhaps is the obvious goal of Proverbs: to teach its readers what is right and should be done and what is wrong and should be avoided. However, this is no mean target, since what Proverbs ultimately aims at is the moral character of the student. But as Fox rightly points out, “moral character comes down to desiring the right things, and how can we teach desire?”<sup>7</sup> Prov. 5 is a good example of teaching students about how to learn to control desire. This paper examines how the teacher of Prov. 5 seeks to convince the student to rightly manage his sexual desires. While several studies on Proverbs explore general principles of pedagogy as discernible in the book, this paper concentrates on how the pedagogical principles are typified in the specific case of teaching about sexual morality.

### Pericope and Structure of Proverbs Five

Proverbs 5 falls under the larger pericope of Prov. 1-9, which is an introduction to the entire book of Proverbs. Fox divides Prov. 1-9 into two main parts: lectures and interludes.<sup>8</sup> Prov. 5 is a lecture and dwells on the topic of the threat of the seductive woman, a topic first raised in Prov. 2:16-19. However, in Prov. 5 the topic receives extensive attention because of the degree of temptation offered by the seductive woman. It is the eighth wisdom lecture and the most extensive lecture after Prov. 2:1-22. McKane questions its literary unity by positing that vv. 21-23 are loosely attached to the preceding units.<sup>9</sup> Others such as Scott, Skehan and Goldingay have also put forward suggestions for rearrangements within the chapter, but these are not compelling.<sup>10</sup>

Each lecture has three main divisions: exordium<sup>11</sup>, lesson, and conclusion. However, each lecture uses unique features to present its message. In Prov. 5, for instance, the address to the audience “my son(s)” is used three times.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, each of the three divisions contains one occurrence and this points to the central place of attention in any pedagogical act. The design of the text is as follows:

<sup>7</sup> Fox, “Ideas of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9.” *JBL* 116 (1997), 620.

<sup>8</sup> Fox, “Ideas of Wisdom,” 614.

<sup>9</sup> William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 313.

<sup>10</sup> R. E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 22 (Dallas: Word Books, 2002), 31.

<sup>11</sup> The *exordium* is the first of seven parts of a classical oration and is designed to introduce the subject and catch the hearers’ attention. In this it is comparable to some Pauline introductions, such as Gal. 1:6-10. F.B. Huey, Jr. and Bruce Corley, *A Student’s Dictionary for Biblical and Theological Studies: A Handbook of Special and Technical Terms*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 77.

<sup>12</sup> In the ten lectures, it is only in lectures three, eight and ten that more than one use of the address to the audience occurs.

**Exordium**

vv. 1-2: an exhortation to the son to pay attention

**Lesson**

vv. 3-6: teaching about the seductress<sup>13</sup>

vv. 7-14: an exhortation to avoid the seductress

vv. 15-19: an encouragement to love one's own wife

**Conclusion**

vv. 20-23: the fate of anyone who refuses wisdom

Prov. 5 advances one basic argument about the seductress: that she is tempting and has to be avoided. The best way to avoid her is for the son to find pleasure in his own wife. Chisholm has subjected vv. 15-23 to an exhaustive literary analysis and reveals the rich diversity of Hebrew prosody at work in the text.<sup>14</sup> This paper examines the entire text in order to ascertain the ingenuity of the Israelite sages as revealed in their literary heritage in addressing the issue of sexual morality.

**The Teaching and Learning of Sexual Morality****Exordium**

Like all lectures, the exordium of Prov. 5 is tripartite. The address, "*my son*", is followed by an exhortation for the son to be attentive to wisdom, "*pay attention to my wisdom and incline your ear to my understandings*" (v.1). Third is a motive clause indicating the value of the teaching to the son, "*that you may be able to exercise discretion and guard knowledge with your lips*" (v.2).

Here, *attention* emerges as a primary ingredient in teaching and learning. Fox explains that the father's exhortation demands from the son "not only attention but a certain attitude, an eager receptivity toward the teachings."<sup>15</sup> What Fox means is that the son must become interested in learning. Attention and interest are inter-connected and mutually dependent, since the motive governing one's attention is interest, and that can only be satisfied if one attends to the object of interest.

However, we wonder what the object of the son's interest is, since the subject matter is not raised until v.3. When the exordium is closely observed, it posits interest in the acquisition of knowledge as an elementary step in learning. Thus the son is exhorted to pay attention to the immediate instruction, as well as to take an interest in the general quest for knowledge.

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<sup>13</sup> The choice to translate the word "*zārāh*" as "seductress" is because of the inappropriateness of the choice "stranger" or "strange woman", which is indeed closer to what the Hebrew means. While the meanings "stranger" and "strange woman" carry a broad meaning that does not necessarily indicate moral laxity, the meaning "seductress" is specific and direct in its reference.

<sup>14</sup> R. B. Chisholm, "'Drink Water From Your Own Cistern': A Literary Study of Proverbs 5:15-23" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (2000): 397-409.

<sup>15</sup> Fox, "The Pedagogy of Proverbs 2," 237.

This explains why the motive clause of v. 2 gives a generic motivation, and is not specifically focused on sexual morality. The clause posits a practical guideline in that it requires the son “to judge a situation and discern the proper course of action ... and to act according to what he or she has spoken.”<sup>16</sup> The exordium, therefore, establishes the claim that learning (in this case acquiring wisdom) is not limited to theoretical knowledge. Instead the student has to put what he or she learns into practice and be successful at it. Then the goal for teaching and learning is achieved.

Another important pedagogical element in the exordium is the figure of the father or teacher. He is the agent of control as he works within a hierarchy of control (i.e. father > son/sons > strange woman > wife).<sup>17</sup> He bears the responsibility for the pedagogy with which he instructs his son.<sup>18</sup> Thus he begins the lesson; and his instructions contain the volitives “pay attention” (*qāšav*) and “incline” (*nātāah*). He also claims possession of the wisdom he is imparting to the son - “my wisdom” and “my understanding” (v.1). His pedagogical rhetoric seeks to guide the son’s desire by fostering the right ones, and suppressing the wrong ones.<sup>19</sup>

### Lesson

The lesson forms the greatest part of the text (vv.6-19). It also has a tripartite division (vv.3-6; 7-14; 15-19) and introduces two characters, the seductress and the wife. While the first two divisions focus on the son and the seductress, the last dwells on the son and the wife. Here again, McKane finds a disjunction between the exordium and the lesson, as he believes the subject matter of the lesson is not hinted at in the exordium.<sup>20</sup> However, this observation is not entirely correct because a careful inspection reveals a link between the two. First, the particle “for” (*kī*) which begins the lesson links it to the exordium. In this case the particle introduces reason or motivation and signals emphasis. In this function, *kī* initiates the student to the issue at stake, the lesson to be learnt. Second, the word “lips” (*sāfāh*), which appears in vv.2-3, implicitly links the exordium to the lesson. When the word first appears in v.2, it is the lips of the son that are to guide him to proper speech (or possibly proper response or answer). In v.3 it is the lips of the seductress that drip with honey. While the seductress uses words to entice the son, the son is called upon to use words of wisdom to protect himself against her.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Leo G. Perdue, *Proverbs. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2000), 119.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Jones, “Wisdom’s Pedagogy,” 4.

<sup>18</sup> McKane, *Proverbs*, 313

<sup>19</sup> Fox, “Ideas of Wisdom,” 621.

<sup>20</sup> McKane, *Proverbs*, 311.

<sup>21</sup> Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Downers Grove: IVP, 1964), 69. T. Habtu, “Proverbs” in T. Adeyemo, ed., *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi and Grand Rapids: WordAlive and Zondervan, 2006), 754, also links *lips* in vv. 2-3.

The first part of the lesson (vv.3-6) dwells on the seductress. It begins with her superficial offer (v.3), then moves to the deadly effects of her offer (vv.4-5), and ends with a commentary that gives the rationale for her fatal ways (v.6). The opening of the unit begins with the particle “for” (*ki*). This introduces the argument and prompts the student to pay close attention to the teaching.

Right from the beginning, the teacher appeals to the sensuality of the student through the use of words such as “lips” dripping with “honey” and “palate” smoother than “oil” to describe the seductress (v.3). Her lubricious and seductive speech, as the teacher points out, draws her victim irresistibly towards mystery and excitement. Thus one easily enters into her company. The language used is explicitly erotic and probably functions as a double entendre. Watson, for instance, thinks that “lips” most likely refers doubly to lips with which she speaks and to her pudenda.<sup>22</sup> Clearly the teacher does not shy away from engaging the student in a frank and open manner.

V.4 opens with the conjunction “but” alerting the student to the fact that there is more to the story of the seductress. Her end is “bitter” (*mārāh*) and the bitterness is as grave as “wormwood” (*la’ānāh*).<sup>23</sup> Again, she is as sharp as a double-edged sword. Thus the “honey” she offers becomes “wormwood” and her smooth “oil” entraps. Eventually, she is a bundle of deceit. The emphasis given to the phrase “but her end” (*wē’ahārītāh*) by its primary position, signals the teacher’s interest in the repercussions one is likely to face after submitting to the seductress. Fox rightly explains that the “teacher in Prov. 5 is concerned not with the end awaiting the woman - that would be no deterrent to the audience - but with the bitter fate she brings upon the youth who gives in to her lures.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, v.5 focuses on death as the ultimate end she offers. The teacher rounds off the first part of the lesson in v.6.<sup>25</sup> Here he explains the rationale for the ways of the seductress - she does not chart the path of her life wisely and her ways wander because of her ignorance. However, her ignorance cannot be attributed to naiveté or true ignorance of guilt. She deliberately chooses evil courses, but she does not give thought to where they lead.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 247.

<sup>23</sup> Wormwood is a plantlike shrub with a bitter taste growing in Palestine, (cf. Murphy, *Proverbs*, 32).

<sup>24</sup> Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 192.

<sup>25</sup> V.6 can be read as the student being the subject of the verbs “lest you ponder” (*pen’ tēfallēs*) and “you know” (*tēdā’*) or the seductress as the subject. I follow the reading of Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 193, who explains that the strange woman has been the object of discussion in the unit and remains so in the verse, see also McKane, *Proverbs*, 315 who shares similar views.

<sup>26</sup> Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 194.

Temptation and destruction emerge as the main concern in the above unit. This information on the seductress is an important step in the learning process. It is the base from which the student extracts the lesson. Accordingly, it provides the basic elements of the lesson as well as the interrelationships among such concepts as life and death. Such a foundation is needed in order to acquaint the student with the subject matter. It is worth noting that the teacher does not demand here an avoidance of the seductress or an application of what has been communicated. He avoids the explicit use of imperatives because the student is at the acquisition stage of learning. Thus, although the exordium placed emphasis on the practical ends of learning, the teacher also understands learning as a process. Therefore it would be wrong to demand application when presentation of knowledge and its comprehension have not taken place.

The second unit in the lesson (vv.7-14) begins with the repetition of the exhortatory formula, “*And now my sons listen to me and do not depart from the words of my mouth*” (v.7).<sup>27</sup> The opening “*and now*” (*wě’atāh*) serves as a transition from the description of the seductress to the call for attention. It introduces a shift in the argument, although there is continuity in the subject and reference.<sup>28</sup> The use of repetition reminds the student that learning includes imbibing and absorbing the words of the teacher. However, the teacher is not only interested in having the student memorize oral instruction. He is also interested in having the student engage his mind, and learn the art of discernment. Since the discerning student is the one who develops a “listening ear” (cf. Prov. 25:12), the teacher repeats the call to attention.

Another import of the repetition is to emphasize the gravity of the lesson to follow.<sup>29</sup> This accounts for the change in the nature of instruction from v.8 onwards. While the first part of the lesson (vv.3-6) was primarily informative, this time the teacher combines directives with information. In v.8, for instance, he demands a definite course of action from the student; “*Keep far your way from her*” and “*do not go near the door of her house*”. The noun “your way” (*darkekā*) represents, on one hand, the road one travels on (Gen. 3:24; Ex. 23:20), and on the other, the course of human conduct or the manner of life that one lives (cf. Ex. 18:20; Num. 22:32). Both nuances are intended in the teacher’s instruction. The student is directed to avoid and possibly flee from the loose woman. We see here an allusion to the encounter between Joseph and Potiphar’s wife, where the former ran away from the latter as fast as he

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<sup>27</sup> The change from “my son” to “my sons” means that the message is intended for all young men; see Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 194.

<sup>28</sup> B.K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1-15. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 311.

<sup>29</sup> R.N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs, The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 36.

could (cf. Gen. 39). The piling up of imperatives in this unit signals that the student is now at the stage where he can apply what has been learnt.

Vv.9-14 details the consequences of the failure to avoid the seductress. Unlike the warnings in vv.3-6, the thoughts of vv.9-14 are concrete.<sup>30</sup> They specifically address two things - the personal losses of the student and his state of regret. On the losses, the teacher lists four consequences. The first is dishonour, "*lest you give your honour to others*" (v.9a). The second is wasted labour, "*and your years to the cruel one*" (v.9b). The third is loss of wealth and possibly debt, "*lest strangers be filled with your strength and your labours go to an alien's house*" (v.10). The last is disease, "*and you groan in the end when your flesh and body are consumed*" (v.11). These losses are all personal and derived directly from associating with a woman who is "strange" (*zārāh*), here with the meaning of being forbidden to the student.

After enumerating the personal losses, the teacher moves on to the psychological turmoil the student goes through. The teacher's strategy is to intensify the bitter end in store for the young man who listens to the seductress. The device of imagined soliloquy clearly dramatizes the student's regret.<sup>31</sup> This device, in which the student speaks in the first person, makes the student the direct agent for the negative actions enumerated; "*I hated instructions ... my heart despised reproof*" (v.12); "*I did not listen to the voice of my teachers nor incline my ear to my instructors*" (v.13). Like an epiphany, the "I" comes to terms with his self-destruction (v.14).

It is important to note that the shift from the second person to the first is a technique the teacher uses not to only heighten the interest of the student, but to also accentuate his sense of personal responsibility. For instance, the imagined soliloquy coalesces the persona in the speech ("I") with that of the student. In this way, the student understands how he holds the key to his fate. Accordingly, the instructions in vv.9-14 carry a powerful appeal and they encourage the student to weigh the transient pleasure against its terrible consequences. The student cannot help but ask: "Is it worth it to go after the seductress?" If wisdom is about prudence, then the wise person will weigh up the consequences of an action before acting.

While the first two parts of the lesson focus on the bad behaviour the student needs to avoid, the last focuses on the proper behaviour he should embrace. Thus vv.15-19 serve as the climax of the lesson.<sup>32</sup> The teacher uses

<sup>30</sup> Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs*, 36.

<sup>31</sup> Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 71.

<sup>32</sup> There is no consensus on the meaning of vv.16-17. In this paper, the position of Chisholm is taken. He reads "springs" and "streams" as representing the sexual satisfaction provided by the wife. This reading is preferable, since it makes the entire water imagery of "cistern", "well", "springs" and "streams" represent one thing, that is the sexual satisfaction of the wife. This meaning also requires less change to the text.



a number of images such as water, cistern, spring, and fountain to persuade the student that right sexual behaviour takes place only within the context of marriage. In v.15 the teacher urges the student to “*drink water*” from his own “*cistern*” and “*well*”, a metaphor which refers to “satisfying one’s sexual desires by acts of lovemaking with one’s wife.”<sup>33</sup>

The student is then encouraged to look to his wife because she is a fountain that produces continuous sexual satisfaction (vv.16-17).<sup>34</sup> The message in v.16 is unclear - it could be read as a question or a statement of consequence.<sup>35</sup> But as McKane cautions, whatever reading we take, there is the suggestion that “the dissemination of the springs outside in the streets is something to be avoided.”<sup>36</sup> For Chisholm, the “*springs*” (*ma’yān*) and “*streams*” (*palgē māyim*) of v.16 refer to the wife. They indicate the wife’s ability to provide endless sexual gratification. The words “*street*” (*hūṣ*) and “*city square*” (*rēhov*), Chisholm continues, are public places where promiscuous women prowl. In this sense, the teacher cautions the student that “the wife is capable of attracting and satisfying many men just like a prostitute or adulteress,” but as v.17 points out, “her streams of sexual satisfaction belong to the son.”<sup>37</sup>

Further motivation for the student to seek sexual pleasure with the wife alone is given through the prayer offered for the wife (vv.18-19). Likening the wife to a fountain, the teacher seeks blessing for her. The act of blessing the wife covertly introduces God into the picture. God’s blessing signals his approval of the wife. Why should the student abandon what God approves (the wife) for what he disapproves (the seductress)? Also the teacher uses the animal imagery of a female deer (*’ayyālāh*) and female goat (*ya’ālāh*) to heighten the erotic language and to direct the student’s erotic desire to the wife (v.19). Thus he urges the student to be “wrapped up” (*šāgāh*)<sup>38</sup> in his wife’s affection, and he can do that continuously without any reservation.

The pedagogical technique in the third part of the lesson is straightforward. The teacher does not attempt to veil in any way his message to the student who needs to safely navigate his way in a world filled with the latent danger of the seductress. Several images permeate the instruction, but

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McKane and Clifford think otherwise by taking “cistern” and “well” to represent the satisfaction of the woman, but “springs” and “streams” as representing the man’s sexual potency. See Chisholm, “Drink Water From Your Own Cistern,” 401-403, for an overview of the arguments.

<sup>33</sup> Perdue, *Proverbs*, 121.

<sup>34</sup> Chisholm, “Drink Water From Your Own Cistern,” 399.

<sup>35</sup> See Clifford, *Proverbs*, 71, and Murphy, *Proverbs*, 32 for an overview.

<sup>36</sup> McKane, *Proverbs*, 318.

<sup>37</sup> Chisholm, “Drink Water From Your Own Cistern,” 400.

<sup>38</sup> The Hebrew means “to err” or “go astray”. In its present context, the word suggests an infatuation or the process of losing one self in an act.

they make the message clearer rather than obscuring it. They appeal to the student's cognitive and emotional faculties that are needed to discern the comparisons between human behaviour and nature.

### **Conclusion**

The conclusion presents the teacher with a final opportunity to teach the student right sexual behaviour. Thus he begins with an important rhetorical question; "*Why should you be infatuated, my son, with a stranger and embrace the bosom of a seductress*" (v.22)? The question is significant because we know that thinking is stimulated by questions. But the teacher deliberately uses a rhetorical question to emphasize the continuous danger posed by the seductress. The immediate instructions before the rhetorical question focused on the student and his wife. The language was strong on erotic sentiments and the teacher's aim was to direct the student's libido towards his wife. However, the teacher suddenly switches back to the seductress to remind the student of the danger and risk she poses even when one is in the safe hands of his wife.

It is important to note the third use of the address "my son" (v.20). Again the teacher strives to connect with his student at each stage of the teaching process. This develops a positive relationship between the teacher and the student, an important ingredient in the learning process.<sup>39</sup> A good relationship motivates the student to learn and to engage actively in the process.

Another significant pedagogical move in the conclusion is the overt introduction of God (v.21). God sees and knows every action under earth, the teacher explains. Thus if the student ever embraces the seductress, although others may not see his clandestine action, it will surely come to the notice of God. The appeal to God signifies a higher tone in the process of teaching. In the lessons, the motivations for right sexual behaviour were focused on principles that regulate fidelity on the basis of personal attraction. Now, the teacher appeals to higher principles that bring the student's conduct into relation with the duty he owes to God. However, the teacher does not make duty his only motivation. Indeed, he intentionally reserves the overt appeal to God to the conclusion in order to place emphasis on the personal and social reasons for right behaviour. Nonetheless, the two motivations stand hand in hand in persuading the student to restrict his sexual advances to his wife.

The last two verses (vv.22-23) end the lecture by pointing out the inner contradictions of sin. Sin has a "karmic" effect, that is, the sinner is destroyed by his own sins because they become a snare for him. Although the language

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Subhas Chandra Ghose, *Teacher Student Relationship And Its Impact on Student Unrest* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1989); Toni Noble and Helen McGrath, "Wellbeing and Resilience in Young People and the Role of Positive Relationships," in *Positive Relationships: Evidence Based Practice Across the World*, ed. by Sue Roffey (London/New York: Springer, 2012), 109-126.

in the conclusion appears generalized, thus prompting scholars like Plogér and McKane to suggest that vv.20-23 are not original, it should be understood within the immediate context.<sup>40</sup> God's moral administration is appealed to so the wicked cannot escape justice. Indirectly then, the teacher likens moral infidelity to wickedness. Just as the wicked sinner is ensnared by his own sins through the administration of God, so will the adulterer face a similar fate. Again, through the play on the word "wrapped" (*šāgāh*) we see the ingenuity of the teacher in closing his teaching. In v.19, the student is to get wrapped up with the love of the wife. In v.20 he is not to get wrapped up with the loose woman, for that will get him wrapped up in death (v.23).

### **An Evaluation of Pedagogical Strategies in Proverbs Five**

Wisdom as depicted in Proverbs could generally refer to discipline and the formation of human character through virtue.<sup>41</sup> The primary goal of Proverbs is to help students grasp this wisdom and to acquire the means to attain it. Accordingly, the process of teaching and learning is very explicit in the text. Prov. 5 demonstrates this pedagogical intent of the book on the subject of sexual morality. It reveals that the teaching and learning of sexual morality is a process that calls for skills on the part of the teacher and maturity on the part of the student. Prov. 5 aims at encouraging the student to avoid the seductive advances of the loose woman, or face destruction for foolishly disregarding words of wisdom. This aim explains the patient and thoughtful manner in which the teacher instructs the student. An evaluation of the pedagogical insight of the text can be done from two broad perspectives - the elements in the teaching and learning experience and the manner or process involved in teaching and learning.

Three elements in the teaching and learning experience emerge as central to the pedagogy of the text. The first is the teacher or instructor. He is basically the transmitter of knowledge: it is his wisdom the student is to heed. This portrait is at variance with current pedagogical principles, where teaching and learning is student/learner centred, giving students the opportunity to construct their own knowledge. However, there is more to this function of the teacher in the text than meets the eye. We need to understand that the teacher is ultimately trying to train the student in virtue.<sup>42</sup> In Proverbs, the character of the teacher is not questioned: it is assumed that he epitomizes the values he teaches. Thus his personality is a model for the student. This explains why he employs the first person - "*listen to my wisdom, incline your ear to my understanding*" (v.1); "*listen to me and do not depart from the words of my mouth*" (v.7).

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<sup>40</sup> Clifford, *Proverbs*, 72, refutes this suggestion of Plogér and McKane by citing the several connections between the conclusion and the rest of the text.

<sup>41</sup> Perdue, *Proverbs*, 75-76.

<sup>42</sup> Fox, "Ideas of Wisdom," 620.

The import for the pedagogical strategy of making the teacher the centre of knowledge stems from the challenges involved in teaching moral character. Although moral character is the greatest goal of education, it is difficult to teach. Moral character comes down to desiring what is right; but how can desires be taught?<sup>43</sup> Proverbs compensates for this difficulty through the student's faith in the figure and authority of the teacher. The student desires to become like the teacher.

The second element is the student. The text puts the student in a passive role because he is the addressee. We do not hear him speak or engage with the teacher. On this basis, it is difficult to assess the student's role in the learning process. Nonetheless, there are clues in the text that indicate an intricately complex engagement of the student in the learning process. For instance, the verbs in the exordium are directed at the student. He is supposed to first "*listen*", then "*incline the ear.*" In v.7 he is again told to "*listen*" to and "*not depart*" from the wisdom of the teacher. Thus, although the recipient of the instructions, the student is required to be an active agent in order to stay on the right path. In this sense, the wisdom of right sexual behaviour does not only lie in religious devotion, but rather through the student's ability and commitment to absorb the teacher's wisdom and his preparedness to apply what has been taught.

The third element in the teaching and learning experience is knowledge. Knowledge here refers to the content or the problem that is the focus of the instructional experience. The primary goal of the teacher is to dissuade the student from choosing the foolish path of listening to the loose woman's words. Accordingly his message is a means of addressing the menace posed by the strange woman and not as an end in itself. As a result, rather than taking the student through a journey full of abstractions, the teacher places his wisdom within the sphere of life. For Prov. 5, the threat posed by the strange woman is a real and concrete challenge that young men face in their lives. Therefore, the knowledge imparted to the students should produce understanding and equip them with the ability to solve this practical problem.

Equally important to the pedagogy of sexual morality is the manner or process involved in teaching and learning. The text places a premium on the need for attention and interest as primary and important ingredients for right pedagogy. The onus thus falls on teachers to first get the attention of their students, and then to ignite the students' interest in the teaching. Inversely, students need self-motivation in their quest for wisdom. This is especially true for learning values. To detach the students' will from the teaching of values will result in the mere assimilation of contents, but static cognition is not what Proverbs aims at. The word *šāma'* (listen) is not limited to mere cognition, but translates knowledge into action. Fox explains that wisdom is not simply

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<sup>43</sup> Fox, "Ideas of Wisdom," 620.

knowing “what is good to do ... but also wanting to do what is right to avoid sin.”<sup>44</sup>

In this respect, the teacher employs different motivations (v.2; vv.15-20) to dissuade the student from following the loose woman. He also employs the strategy of warnings (vv.3-6 and vv.9-11). He further uses imperatives (v.8) to spell out clearly what the student is required to do and what he is required to abstain from. Thus the binary rhetoric of sexual behaviour leaves the student with only two choices, either to commit sin with the seductress and face the repercussions, or to stick to his wife in order to please God.

### Conclusion

The goal of Proverbs is to help the student discern the way of wisdom amidst the bewildering array of choices and desires presented in daily life. Prov. 5, together with the other lectures, specifically touches on the subject of sexual morality. The main concern of the teacher for the student is the danger posed by the seductress. Knowing the struggles young men go through in controlling their libido, the teacher employs several pedagogical skills to dissuade the student from heeding the advances of the seductress. For instance, the teacher places a premium on the principles of attention and interest, which are important ingredients for the learning process. He also draws closer to the student to establish a good relationship between the instructor and the learner. The lesson is plain and unambiguous, indicating clearly the dos and don'ts for the student. The student needs to take on an active role in applying the knowledge. He is required to make concrete decisions based on what has been taught. These and several other pedagogical insights lie within Prov. 5. In this respect, even though not all of its teaching and learning strategies will be followed in modern classrooms, Prov. 5 still has much wisdom to share with modern teachers and students on the subject of sexual morality.

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<sup>44</sup> Fox, “The Pedagogy of Proverbs 2,” 243.

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