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A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_evangelical\\_quarterly.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php)

# The "Salvation History" Perspective and the "Wisdom" Perspective within the Context of Biblical Theology

by John Goldingay

*It has proved notoriously difficult to find an organizing principle for Old Testament theology which does justice to the "wisdom" contribution to the biblical canon. The difficulty, indeed, has made some students wonder if it is wise to think in terms of a single organizing principle. We are glad to publish Mr. Goldingay's treatment of this problem. He is Director of Studies in St. John's College, Nottingham, and author of the work Songs from a Strange Land which was reviewed in our July-September number.*

THERE is a wide divergence between the understanding of God, man, and the world which is prominent in the historical and prophetic traditions of the Old Testament on the one hand, and that which characterizes its wisdom traditions on the other. The former assumes that God's revelation of his nature and purpose was given especially to Israel in the course of a specific series of historical events through which that purpose (in which Israel as God's special people had a key place) was put into effect. Motifs such as the exodus, the covenant, and prophecy are central to this approach. In contrast, however, the wisdom tradition says nothing of particularly significant historical events, of an unfolding purpose, or of a particular people. It concentrates more on everyday life than history, more on the regular than the unique, more on the individual (though not outside of his social relationships) than the nation, more on personal experience than sacred tradition.

Although this contrast can be overdrawn,<sup>1</sup> it is real enough, as is

<sup>1</sup> Wisdom develops in history (cf. H. H. Schmid, *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit*, BZAW 101, 1966); it is linked with the salvation-history in the person of Solomon and in the ministry of prophets such as Amos and Isaiah. The salvation-history approach was put into writing by "wise men" (cf. J. L. McKenzie, "Reflections on Wisdom", *JBL* 86, 1967, 1-9), and preserved, when it was no longer very meaningful, by wise men (cf. H. H. Guthrie, *Wisdom and Canon*, Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, Evanston, 1966). See further D. A. Hubbard, "The Wisdom Movement and Israel's Covenant Faith", *Tyndale Bulletin* 17 (1966), 3-33; but also the warnings about "wisdom" coming to have so broad a meaning that it ceases to be meaningful (J. L. Crenshaw, "Method in Determining Wisdom Influence upon 'Historical' Literature", *JBL* 88, 1969, 129-42; cf. G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, ET London, 1972, 7-8; 287-96).

reflected in Old Testament study's difficulty over doing justice to both approaches at the same time. For a long period, until a decade ago, salvation-history<sup>2</sup> was over-emphasized and wisdom's theological significance rather neglected. More recently, the salvation-history approach has seemed discredited and interest in wisdom has increased. Within the Bible itself, however, both have a certain importance.

#### I. THE IMPORTANCE OF SALVATION-HISTORY

The difficulties inherent in the salvation-history approach became apparent in the 1960's.<sup>3</sup> Its importance had been overstated; it could not provide the comprehensive framework for understanding the Bible that had been attributed to it, and even the salvation events in themselves could not reveal God's purpose (the word of interpretation is needed for this understanding to be reached). Its basis seemed unsure; both tradition-historians and theologians questioned whether the events that the salvation-history described had actually happened. Its relevance no longer seemed self-evident: what meaning attaches today to the claim that God is "the God who acts"? Its uniqueness (compared with other religions) was questioned: did not all nations, after all, believe that their gods were active in their history?

It is, then, "time to say goodbye to *Heilsgeschichte*"<sup>4</sup>? This might be an over-reaction. It is worth noting that the salvation-history approach, as I have outlined it above, while not omnipresent, remains very prominent in the Bible. The first half of both Testaments, for instance, comprises narrative works which, while "pre-critical" rather than "twentieth-century-western" history, offer a series of connected interpretations of events of the past which were regarded as significant for the time of their writers; all of them assume that certain specific historical events in the life of one people were of key significance for the unveiling and effecting of the ultimate purpose of God. The same assumption is explicit in most of the non-narrative works (the prophets and the epistles) which follow; and it is not absent from some of the other remaining books (e.g. Psalms; Revelation).

<sup>2</sup> This expression is, of course, notoriously ambiguous: cf. D. G. Spriggs, *Two Old Testament Theologies* (London, 1974), 34-8, with particular reference to von Rad. But it is difficult to avoid. The preceding paragraph may be taken as a gloss on the sense in which I use it; see further O. Cullmann, *Salvation in History* (ET London, 1967), 74-8; 150-66; J. Peter, "Salvation History as a Model for Theological Thought", *SJT* 23 (1970), 1-12.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., B. S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia, 1970), Part I, with his references. A devastating critique of von Rad's understanding of salvation-history appears in Spriggs, 34-59.

<sup>4</sup> So J. L. McKenzie, *A Theology of the Old Testament* (London, 1974), 325.

The emphasis on salvation-history drew attention to the fact that Old Testament and New Testament faith is not characteristically a system of abstract truths but a message related to certain specific events. The events only become meaningful as they are understood within a context of interpretation, or are accompanied by words of interpretation. But the propositional truth itself is characteristically expressed in the form of comments on historical events.

It is expressed, in fact, as a story. But it is not a story like a children's tale or a western, which gives fictional embodiment to what we hope life is like (the goodies win in the end). It is an interpretation, but it claims to relate to real events: these things come to pass so that you will know that Yahweh is God; if Christ is not raised, then our faith is vain. It is crucial to the validity of the story that the events it relates actually took place. Thus, even though talk of "the God who acts" may now raise problems, this way of speaking is too prominent in the Bible for it to be easily side-stepped. Indeed, while this way of speaking can be paralleled elsewhere, no other people's literature gives the central place to their gods' involvement in their history that the Bible does. The religions of the ancient Near East, gnosticism in the hellenistic period, existentialism and other philosophies in the contemporary world, have all offered world-views which did not give prominence to once-for-all historical events. They contrast with the Bible's perspective. Thus an understanding of Christianity which underplays its historical orientation cannot at the same time reckon to represent the Bible's own approach to life.

Nevertheless, the notion of salvation-history has long been used uncritically in theological study. When, in the 1960's, theological thinking in general took a more philosophical turn, and "biblical theology" became the subject of vigorous critique, "salvation-history" along with "etymologizing" and the stress on "Hebrew thought" were the casualties of this development.

## II. THE EMPHASIS ON WISDOM

Scholarly interest in the wisdom approach, as expressed (for instance) in journal articles, increased in the 1960's. It may be that two factors led to wisdom becoming a *centre* of interest as regards the significance of the Old Testament for today. One is an appreciation of the radical facing of the question of meaning by Job and Qoheleth.<sup>5</sup> Both works speak to or for a situation in which the values of society are questioned (as they were in the decade which produced

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Crenshaw's enquiry (*ZAW* 82, 1970, 395): "Is the current emphasis on wisdom literature indicative of our inability to take revelation seriously anymore?"—in other words, of our being in the same position as Job and Qoheleth?

such books as *The Making of a Counter Culture*<sup>6</sup> and *The Greening of America*<sup>7</sup>), in which traditional ecclesiastical teaching is questioned (as it was in the decade of “the death of God” and of the abandonment of “biblical theology”), and in which there is an ever pressing awareness of the problem of human evil and suffering (as there was in the Viet Nam decade; and note John Hick’s book *Evil and the God of Love*<sup>8</sup>).

The second factor is that the methodology of wisdom is more closely akin to the more philosophical style of theology which succeeded “biblical theology”. As we have noted, wisdom is concerned with the general rather than the particular; it is empirical and experience-centred. It assumes that there is truth to be learned from looking at life with open eyes, at how people think, at ordinary human experience. It does not appeal to special revelation. Its congeniality to the mind of the 1960’s may be seen by comparing its approach with that of an important paperback from somewhere to the right of “the death of God”, Peter Berger’s *A Rumour of Angels*.<sup>9</sup> In this book Berger looks for a way of “starting with man” in doing theology without ending up merely “glorying in man” as secular theology does. He suggests that ordinary human behaviour and experience manifest certain “signals of transcendence”: phenomena within “natural” reality which point beyond that reality. For instance, men everywhere believe that there is an underlying “order” of the universe: it is only this that enables the mother to reassure her waking child, “Don’t cry, everything is all right”. Men everywhere believe in “play”: they assume that the ugly realities are not the final realities, and that to escape from these into creative beauty is not escapism. Men everywhere and in the most hopeless situations manifest a propensity for hope. Men everywhere periodically experience their sense of what is humanly permissible so fundamentally outraged that the only adequate response seems to be a curse of supernatural dimensions—a commitment to hell. Men everywhere laugh—and humour, like tragedy, is a commentary on man’s finitude and the expression of a belief that his imprisonment can be overcome. As Berger notes, his examples could be added to: I heard a preacher recently note how an atheist may sometimes feel grateful for life and the world—but he has no-one to express his gratitude to. Men everywhere desire to say Thank you.

The point about these experiences is that they presuppose belief in the transcendent. If God is not there, everything is not all right, play is escapism, there is no hope, evil may triumph, there is nothing

<sup>6</sup> By T. Roszak; first published in 1968-9.

<sup>7</sup> By C. A. Reich; first published in 1970.

<sup>8</sup> First published in 1966.

<sup>9</sup> First published in 1969; see chapter 3.

to laugh at and no-one has given us anything. But men do not believe this and they do not experience life like that.

My point here is that Berger's methodology is essentially comparable to that of the wisdom books. Both "start from man" and seek to do theology on the basis of how everyday life actually is in the world. And it is not surprising if increased attention is paid to the wisdom books at a time when the cultural and theological situation is open to their approach.

Walter Brueggemann has most systematically asserted that wisdom is *the* aspect of the Old Testament to speak to the modern world. In a series of articles he examined aspects of the wisdom literature's approach, against its background in the time of the united monarchy and of the parallel expression of essentially its approach to theology in the primaeval creation story. He expounded his perspective most systematically in his book *In Man We Trust*.<sup>10</sup> The title (with its implicit contrast with America's more familiar "In God We Trust") expresses his fundamental assertion, that God has committed himself to man, who is "the trusted creature", called to live life itself responsibly and enthusiastically, joyfully, openly, and positively. This attitude to life Brueggemann sees behind Proverbs, as well as in the story of David and in other literary productions of the united monarchy. The wisdom tradition is decidedly world-affirming in its attitude to life and learning, and although this characteristic has led to its being neglected by the world-denying church, it may enable it to be God's way in to a world-affirming world.

### III. DIFFICULTIES ABOUT THE EMPHASIS ON WISDOM<sup>11</sup>

Is it realistic to claim that wisdom is *the* approach for the present day? The following points of critique may be made.

(a) The wisdom perspective is only *one* strand of the Bible's approach to theology. To treat it as *the* approach, as far as we are concerned, is to presuppose that the diversity of the Bible's approaches offers a fund of theological resources, from which the interpreter may choose what suits and ignore what seems irrelevant. This is a questionable understanding, however hallowed by the church's actual practice. It allows the Bible to function merely as a reinforcement of what we already believe: by looking carefully into the right corner, we find our own face at the bottom of the hermeneutical well. But the way of learning involves eschewing a premature

<sup>10</sup> John Knox Press, Richmond, Va., 1972; with references to his other works. See also the references in H. D. Preuss, "Alttestamentliche Weisheit in christlicher Theologie?", in *Questions Disputées d' Ancien Testament*, ed. C. Brekelmans (J. Duculot, Gembloux, 1974), 165-8.

<sup>11</sup> See Preuss (and his earlier article in *Ev.Th* 30, 1970, 393-417) for a vigorous critique.

opting for one approach to the virtual exclusion of others, in favour of an openness to the whole of what these diverse works have to say to us, and an openness to discovering the interrelationships within this diversity. We will, in fact, be especially concerned to listen to what does not immediately seem congenial or relevant, for this may be exactly where the Bible actually addresses us. Thus it is a strength of the wisdom approach that it begins where current thinking is, but it may also be a potential weakness if this point of contact does not become also a point of departure.

(b) The development of the wisdom tradition reveals its own internal tensions and the final inadequacy of its resources to cope with the questions it asks. Proverbs is dominated by confident assertions about the way the world works, but the questionability of these assertions has to be granted by Job and Qoheleth. The Book of Job does find some solution to the problem it faces. But it does so through coming to a climax in an unexpected way, with a theophany, a special revelation. Without the theophany the story of Job is incomplete. Only this event brings Job to a trusting submission to Yahweh, even though the theophany brings no new data. Job's practical problem is in fact solved not through his acquiring new information concerning it, but through the experience of being specially confronted by God. But strictly speaking such a device has no place in a wisdom book. Theophany is a distinctly un-empirical, un-everyday phenomenon. So the Book of Job only solves the problem it examines by looking outside the tradition from which it begins.

Qoheleth, on the other hand, had a much more negative final atmosphere about it; and this fact is explained by the fact that the author refuses to bring in what he might call a *deus ex machina*. Qoheleth is Job without the theophany. The author is at the same time more rigorous in (and earns more admiration for) his unremitting insistence on a verifiable world-view, and also in the end more wrong (if taken as purporting to be the whole truth). Qoheleth takes the wisdom approach to its logical conclusion and proves this to be actually a dead end. He too shows that there is no escape from theological impasse within the wisdom tradition itself.<sup>12</sup>

A second pointer to wisdom's limitations may be identified within Job, and perhaps even more clearly in Proverbs 1-9. It involves a measure of paradox. The more developed forms of the wisdom tradition in these two works manifest an increasing theological sophistication. In Job, the wisdom tradition wrestles with the ultimate problem of meaning; in Proverbs, wisdom is not only a useful aid to living a successful human life, but the very companion of God himself at the creation (8: 22-31). Job recognizes how elusive wisdom

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Crenshaw's comments on Job and Qoheleth, 399-90.

is: and having recognized the problem, declares that its solution lies in "the fear of Yahweh" (28: 28). Similarly, it is the *latest* stratum in Proverbs 1-9 which is the most explicitly Yahwistic, and which repeats this motto (1: 7 and 9: 10 form a bracket round this collection). Even as Job and Proverbs 1-9 become more "philosophical" and more sophisticated, they come more to appeal to an act of faith in *Yahweh, Israel's God*.

A third pointer follows from this. The later products of the wisdom tradition in the Old Testament manifest a developing theological sophistication, but they do not take this development as far as it might go. Wisdom remains a minority report within the Old Testament itself, but post-canonical writings saw it take a more central place. *Hokmāh* comes to be identified with *tôrāh*; God's eternal wisdom is seen as embodied in Israel's law; general revelation is identified with special revelation. From the wisdom tradition's own perspective this is a step forward; wisdom comes to the centre of the stage. But a wider view suggests that it may be a retrograde step if either wisdom is limited to the contents of the torah, or if salvation-history becomes only an instance of a generalization. Wisdom's value lies partly in its independence of testimony to God and his truth. Thus it may be significant that the identification of wisdom and torah is a post-canonical development; in such a development, which is paralleled by our letting wisdom have the centre of the stage, wisdom overreaches itself.<sup>13</sup>

(c) The wisdom approach manifests certain built-in dangers. Wisdom easily goes wrong, as the outspoken critique of wisdom in other streams of Old Testament thinking point out.<sup>14</sup> The wisdom of the wise men of Judah who advise her on how to cope with the threats to her security (Is. 29: 14) is no less contemptible than the wisdom of the wise men of Egypt who advise her on how to look after her interests (Is. 19: 11-13). Isaiah makes no difference between them. Both leave Yahweh out of account (perhaps the former have less excuse). Admittedly the teaching of the wise itself warns him against the mistake (Pr. 16: 1, 9). Perhaps the warnings about trusting in horses and failing to allow for Yahweh's own wisdom (Is. 31: 1-3) are meant to recall what the wise men were themselves committed to teaching (Pr. 21: 30-31). But the occupational hazard of the wise man is to walk by calculation rather than by faith.

(d) In the Old Testament, it is the wisdom books which are least unlike parallel writings of other peoples. All ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature asserts the link between behaviour and reward; all apparently go through a crisis in which the dubiety of that assertion is faced. It is only as the wisdom tradition looks to the revelation

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Hubbard, 24.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. W. McKane, *Prophets and Wise Men* (London, 1965).



of Yahweh that it begins to say what we could not find outside the Old Testament. Its links with other cultures are no reason for refusing to learn from it, but they are reason to hesitate over letting it seem to be the heart of what the Old Testament has to say.

(e) It is noticeable that the New Testament did not give a central place to wisdom, though it does take up wisdom themes.<sup>15</sup> Now the New Testament cannot be assumed to abrogate all that it does not mention; if we again live in a day when the wisdom approach provides a way in to a grasp of God's truth, the New Testament's silence here should not be taken as a barrier placed on this way. Nevertheless, the New Testament does represent a revival of certainty about the truth, in the light of the Christ event, which contrasts with the tentativeness and uncertainties of wisdom's insights and advice; it represents, indeed, a revival of salvation-history. This aspect of the New Testament again makes one hesitant about giving a central theological place to wisdom. It seems doubtful whether wisdom's answers offer an adequate gospel. To put it in Brueggemann's terms, wisdom calls man to live like David not like Solomon.<sup>16</sup> But can the call be heeded? Is there not an inevitability about man's failure to live up to the trust placed in him? And what is to be done about this?

#### IV. THE COMPLEMENTARITY OF SALVATION-HISTORY AND WISDOM

Salvation-history and wisdom both have a place in the canon. Neither can stand on its own; neither can be abandoned. We have to ask how we can relate special revelation, in connection with once-for-all redemptive acts on behalf of God's particular people Israel, to the undated, international, individualistic, empirical, prudential, everyday, practical outlook of the wisdom tradition.

W. Zimmerli has observed that "wisdom thinks resolutely within the framework of a theology of creation",<sup>17</sup> and this suggests that the issue we are involved with is the question of the relationship of creation and redemption, about which three observations may be made.

(a) The man God redeems is a man who was created by God and is living in God's world.<sup>18</sup> Now one is wary of too sharp a disjunction between God's creating work and his redeeming work.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. von Rad, "Christliche Weisheit?", in *EvTh* 31 (1971), 150, with the comments of Preuss, 167-8.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *In Man We Trust*, chapter IV.

<sup>17</sup> "The Place and Limit of the Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament Theology", *ET* in *SJT* 17 (1964), 148. See further his "Erwägungen zur Gestalt einer alttestamentlichen Theologie", *TLZ* 98 (1973), 81-98; and *Grundriss der alttestamentlichen Theologie* (Stuttgart, 21975), § 4.6; 18.

<sup>18</sup> On the theme of this section, see especially von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, chapters 4-7, 9, and 15.

The Bible speaks of the two in terms of each other (for instance, in its use of the "victory over the chaos monster" motif). Luther remarked somewhere that "in created things lies the forgiveness of sins". G. Gutiérrez speaks of creation as "God's first salvific act."<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless there are two concepts, creation and redemption, which correspond to two aspects of man's understanding of his position in the world. We normally express the relation between these chronologically (man was first created, then redeemed), but this formulation is one that unequivocally takes its terms of reference from the salvation-history approach.<sup>20</sup> Wisdom reminds us that man's creatureliness is an abiding feature of him, and one of positive significance.<sup>21</sup> 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 this life 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 addressed by God himself. Inanimate nature, worldly experience, human reason, all reveal something of the truth of God in regard to man and the world.<sup>22</sup>

Part of the content of this revelation is that there is an activity of God expressed in the regular and the interrelated, as well as that embodied in the irregular, the "miraculous", the "acts of God"

<sup>19</sup> *A Theology of Liberation* (ET Maryknoll, New York, 1973), 153. He is paraphrasing von Rad.

<sup>20</sup> R. E. Murphy observes that even Zimmerli's understanding of wisdom, referred to above, is "dominated by the orthodoxy of 'revelation in history'" ("The Interpretation of the Old Testament Wisdom Literature", *Interpretation* 23, 1969, 292). If we avoid suggesting that wisdom's framework is the Genesis story of creation (as opposed to a theology of creation which is expressed in or derived from both Genesis and wisdom), we can allow for the force of this comment, which is supported by the consideration that the two major stages of the development of Israel's wisdom literature, in the united monarchy and post-exilic period, are contemporary with and independent of, rather than subsequent to, the two major stages of the development of the Genesis creation story (cf. A. M. Dubarle, "Où en est l' Étude de la Littérature Sapientielle", in *Donum Natalicium J. Coppens* Volume 1, J. Duculot, Gembloux, 1969, 257). Cf. H. W. Hertzberg's striking but, if taken literally, misleading remark, "Qoheleth is written with Genesis 1-4 before its author's eyes; Qoheleth's view of life is built on the creation history" (*Der Prediger*, Gütersloh, 1963, 230).

<sup>21</sup> Murphy (loc. cit.) goes on, "We must move into theological anthropology if we are to do justice to the wisdom literature."

<sup>22</sup> Cf. as well as von Rad's (becoming over-lyrical?) chapter on "The Self-Revelation of Creation", R. B. Y. Scott, "Priesthood, Prophecy, Wisdom, and the knowledge of God", *JBL* 80 (1961), 1-15; J. Lévêque, "Le Contre-point Théologique", in Brekelmans, 183-202; and, from well before present debate, H. W. Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1946), Part VI.

which “break natural laws”. God is the God of the normal chain of cause and effect, who is involved in every historical event.<sup>23</sup> And experience indicates (so the wisdom tradition generally claims) that this involvement results in the everyday world working in a moral way.

It is in the context of this conviction, that God is making the world work out, that wisdom’s practical teaching about life may be seen. Its content is similar to what we call ethics or what the salvation-history calls keeping the covenant, but its context, its framework or motivation, is very different. This is found in the challenge presented by life itself, to live in a way which works, which is in conformity with life as it is and with the world as it was created. It is a question of “coping with reality”.<sup>24</sup> The salvation-history itself expresses this in terms of a subduing of the world in God’s name by man made in God’s image. Again, to put it in our terms, there is a basis for ethics in creation, in reason, and in experience, as well as in salvation-history or in the kingdom.

The wisdom tradition assumes that, because this understanding of God, man, and the world comes from creation, reason, and human experience to man as man, it is not confined to a particular people. This tradition is thus open to the thought of other peoples in a more overt way than other streams of Old Testament thought (e.g. Pr. 30: 1; 31: 1; Job). And in actual fact the content of Israel’s wisdom is not very different from that of other nations. If wisdom were all there were in the Bible, this might well make it difficult to justify the ascription of a unique status to the Bible, though the appropriateness of wisdom appearing as one element, in the much more complex whole that the Bible is, may be less questionable. It encourages us to be open to what there is to learn from all of human endeavour and insight.

Two further implications of the wisdom tradition’s understanding of creation, which were not, as far as we can tell, drawn in Old Testament times, may be referred to briefly. First, God’s creation relationship with man as man implies his concern about all men, including those outside his people.<sup>25</sup> The wisdom tradition’s uni-

<sup>23</sup> The link between wisdom and philosophical theology is illustrated by the taking up of this theme in the debate on *Heilsgeschichte*: e.g. by L. B. Gilkey (*JR* 41, 1961, 194-205), S. M. Ogden (*JR* 43, 1963, 1-19), G. Kaufman (*HTR* 61, 1968, 175-201). Cf. also the affinity with wisdom detected in W. Pannenberg by M. J. Buss (*Theology as History*, ed. J. M. Robinson and J. B. Cobb, New York, 1967, 148-9); I am grateful to my colleague Graham Davies for drawing my attention to Pannenberg’s own discussion in this connection in *Gerhard von Rad: Seine Bedeutung für die Theologie* (three addresses by H. W. Wolff, R. Rendtorff, and Pannenberg, Munich, 1973), especially 43-6, 51-4.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. von Rad, chapter 7.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Dubarle, 256-8.

versalist implications may, indeed, be clearer than those of salvation-history. And, as we have already noted, man's position as a creature in God's world suggests a basis for conversation about the truth of God, for instance in the form of discussion of the "signals of transcendence" that created human experience manifests, which does not have to start from salvation-history presuppositions. The man whom God saves is not one without prior contact with him.

(b) Man is, however, a being in need of redemption, after he is a created being. Even as a creature, he has to accept limits.<sup>26</sup> He is not God. The salvation-history expresses this in terms of the original prohibition of access to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Proverbs recognizes its limits by declaring, first, that a grasp of wisdom depends upon a prior commitment to Yahweh (e.g. 1: 7), and then by acknowledging that it cannot by thinking and observation and analysis solve all the questions and problems which its experience of life raises. There remains an element of ambivalence and unpredictability about life, before which the wise man can only acknowledge the hand of God, or the "act of God" (e.g. 16: 1, 9). Job and Qoheleth set the question of a total understanding in the centre of their work, and confess even more clearly that they cannot reach the tree.

Man's need of redemption arises not merely from the intrinsic limitations of his creatureliness, however, but from the added limitations that stem from his being involved in sin. As the salvation-history puts it, he is not only created, but fallen; not only denied access to the tree of knowledge, but cast out of the garden altogether. Job and Qoheleth may then be seen as attempts to cope with the reality of life East of Eden; Qoheleth, in particular, describes the world to which man was committed by the curse placed upon him in his rebellion. To oversimplify, if Proverbs (and the Song of Songs?) describe life in its Genesis 1-2 aspect, Job and Qoheleth remind us that life also has to be seen in its Genesis 3-4 aspect.<sup>27</sup>

The salvation-history declares that, as a matter of fact, the tension between these two aspects of human existence arose in history and was (or has begun to be) solved in history. The wisdom books explicitly neither affirm nor deny this conviction, but they offer no alternative. It seems that here we have to listen to the salvation-history tradition, therefore, and grant the key importance, to a biblical theology, of the assertion that the fulfilment of man's longing for a resolution of the tension between Proverbs/Song of Songs and

<sup>26</sup> Cf. von Rad, chapter 6; Lévêque, *passim*; Zimmerli, "Place and Limit", 157-8.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Murphy, 299. It is an over-simplification: Proverbs recognizes ambiguities and limits; Job (by including the friends' speeches, and by ending the way it does) and Qoheleth (by including much proverbial material) acknowledge the truth in the traditional teaching, as long as it is not absolutized.

Job/Qoheleth, between David and Solomon, has come about, or is coming about, through a particular sequence of historical events beginning with Abraham and coming to a climax with Jesus of Nazareth.

So the salvation-history relates how man's needed redemption was achieved. As a minimum, this view involves the assertion that the whole of history is the act of God, but that certain events were of particular importance in the achievement of this redemption. “The whole of history is the act of God”: the concept of God's relationship with history is one characteristic of the wisdom approach, however! Have the teeth of the salvation-history approach's concept been drawn? Does it still demand that we go further and accept that at the crucial point of the resurrection, for instance (and if there, why not elsewhere?) there occurred events which were acts of God not merely in the sense that they were his particularly important or particularly character-revealing acts, but which could not have been explained in terms of the cause-effect nexus? Perhaps this point is not essential to the one being made here, that the canon sets the wisdom books within the context of a larger whole, which is dominated by the salvation-history approach. It seems thereby to encourage us to read them within this context; and, indeed, we have seen that the wisdom books themselves implicitly invite such a contextualizing.

This conclusion is confirmed if one looks on into the New Testament. There wisdom appears in several contexts that are reminiscent of the Old Testament. In 1 Corinthians Paul both utilizes wisdom motifs and polemicizes against a concern with *gnosis*, as Isaiah both utilizes and opposes the wisdom approach. In the prologue to the Fourth Gospel the evangelist, in the notion of the *logos*, takes up ideas and terms from the wisdom tradition, ideas which indeed had become progressively more independent of salvation-history ideas, but firmly re-connects them with salvation history in declaring that “the word became flesh”. Most strikingly, Q may be claimed to represent a collection of the wise teachings of Jesus: but the New Testament firmly earths it in salvation-history by incorporating it within a gospel.

Thus a concern for a biblical theology will not prevent us from beginning with what can be learnt from creation, from reason, from experience, for the Bible at this point encourages us to do that; but we remain obliged to go on to what the Bible alone can tell us of the working out of salvation in history which was the *skandalon* of New Testament times and remains so today.<sup>28</sup>

(c) Man is redeemed, however, to live again his created life

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Cullmann, 19-28.

before God.<sup>29</sup> The climax of the salvation-history is only the beginning of ours, and thus the salvation-history tradition cannot stand on its own. Its concern with one-for-all redemptive events achieved by God is salvation-history's strength, but also its limitation. The redemptive event has to be earthed and applied, its consequences for ordinary life worked out. Most people do not live at a moment when one of the great redemptive events occurs; they have to learn to live their lives before God, nevertheless, They have to live historically not only in Pannenberg's sense, but also in Bultmann's. And the wisdom tradition exactly seeks to enable a man who has bowed down before Yahweh to live his life as a creature in God's created world.<sup>30</sup> Indeed the "worldliness" of the Old Testament as a whole reflects its conviction that man's redemption by God releases him to live life *in* the world which God created, not out of it.<sup>31</sup>

Although the New Testament is not so "worldly", it, too, sees that man has to live his everyday life even when he has been redeemed. Christianity needed the parenthesis at the end of Paul's letters, it did preserve Q albeit in its new context, it developed the "new law" of Matthew, it accepted James for all its lack of specific Jesus-content. It is all very well for Luther, at a moment when the Pauline gospel comes to life again, to inveigh against James, but life—Christian, redeemed, but created life—has to go on.

Wisdom also encourages us to use our minds to analyse, understand, and test the salvation-history. It will refuse to let the salvation-history keep its head in the clouds, but insist on clear thinking even in the area of faith's response to the "acts of God". Characteristically, however, the wisdom-writer or philosophical theologian will still find at this point that he is confronted by limits. For he still lives his life East of Eden. Here we find a further reason why we cannot end discussion with a simple declaration that the salvation-history has solved the problem described by Genesis 3-4, for the ambiguity of human life East of Eden remains after Christ's coming. Something of the tension between Proverbs/Song of Songs and Job/Qoheleth remains, for we live as children of two ages: of this age and of the

<sup>29</sup> On this section, see Hubbard, 20-33.

<sup>30</sup> Perhaps it is appropriate to refer here to the links between the wisdom tradition and the laws incorporated into the salvation-history narrative (summary and references in Hubbard, 11-13; Murphy, 291), which are its own way of working out its consequences for everyday life.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Zimmerli, *The Old Testament and the World* (ET London, 1976).

age to come, or of this age and of the age that is lost.<sup>32</sup> We find that Job and Qoheleth did not cease to speak when Christ came; indeed we find (especially in as far as the salvation-history events are for us, too, rather remote) that they speak as powerfully today as they presumably did in post-exilic times. The questioning of Job and Qoheleth, the reading of earlier parts of the canon through wisdom's eyes, may still facilitate a survival of faith which would otherwise be impossible.

So Proverbs shows a man how he may live before God the everyday life of a redeemed creature; as I heard another preacher put it, "As the Psalms show you the believer on his knees, Proverbs shows you the believer on his feet"—and, one might perhaps go on, Job and Qoheleth show you the believer wrestling with questions of ultimate meaning, with the doubts that come even within the context of the working out of God's saving purpose.<sup>33</sup> There is a dialectic and a complementarity about the relationship between salvation-history and wisdom, and it is to be hoped that an appreciation of wisdom's significant role, within a biblical theology that is bound to give an important place to salvation-history because of the latter's dominance in the canon and its distinctiveness over against what lies outside the canon, will be an abiding fruit of recent interest in wisdom.

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32 Note Barth's linking of the Song with Gen. 2: 18-25, and (in the context of the need to see these in the light of the limits of life East of Eden), his suggestion that it is because of the fall that the note struck in these two places does not predominate in the canon (*Church Dogmatics* III-1, ET Edinburgh, 1958, 312-29). His broader treatment of the Song and Genesis 2 in the chapter as a whole, however, very thoroughly subordinates creation to salvation-history; the covenant between Yahweh and Israel is the original of which the relationship between man and woman is a copy (e.g. 297).

33 Cf. R. Davidson, "Some Aspects of the Theological Significance of Doubt in the Old Testament", *ASTI* 7 (1968-9), 41-52.